

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOL ORGANISATION ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SCHOOL ORGANISATION ADVISORY BOARD HELD AT SESSIONS HOUSE, COUNTY HALL, MAIDSTONE ON THURSDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2008 COMMENCING AT 2.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Mr R B Burgess (In the Chair), Mrs C Angell, Mr A D Crowther, Mr M J Northey and Mr G Rowe (substitute for Mr M Vye).

Cabinet Member: Mr M C Dance, Cabinet Member for Operations, Resources and Skills (CFE) was in attendance.

Church Representative : Canon J Smith

Other Members Present: Mrs V J Dagger.

Officers: Mr I Craig, Director – Operations and Mr C Jones, Area Education Officer Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling.

The Proposed Relocation of Grange Park School, Leybourne, West Malling to the Wrotham School Site

(Item 4 -)Report by Director – Operations)

(1) The School Organisation Advisory Board at its meeting on 12 June 2008 supported a recommendation to consult on a proposal to relocate Grange Park School, Leybourne to a site within the grounds of Wrotham School. Mr Jones reported on the consultation process which had since been undertaken which included a public meeting being held as well as a consultation process with approximately 2,400 copies of the consultation document being circulated. In all 75 responses were received of which 72 were in favour. One was undecided and two were opposed to the proposal. The proposal was also supported by the Governing Bodies of both schools, The Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, the Wrotham Parish Council, Borough Green Parish Council, the two local members Mrs Hohler and Mrs Dagger and the Local Member of Parliament.

(2) Mrs V J Dagger attended the meeting as the local Member for Wrotham School. Mrs Dagger said that at the public meeting there was warm support for this proposal and it gave an excellent opportunity for the two schools to share good practice. Mrs Dagger also spoke about the importance of the siting and design of the new buildings which would need to be of high quality and design because of their location within the Green Belt. Mrs Dagger said that the current buildings at Wrotham are poor and therefore she hoped KCC would make every effort to get the new buildings constructed as soon as possible.

(3) Mrs Angell asked a question related to the gender mix at Grange Park School on which the Head Teacher who was present gave a reply. Mrs Angell spoke about the issue of building within the Green Belt and also about the timing of the proposals so both schools could plan ahead with some certainty. Mr Jones said that the planning application did not have to be accompanied by an environmental appraisal but that

because the new buildings would be in the Green Belt the County Council had employed consultants to give expert advice on their design and construction. With regard to the timetabling of these proposals Mr Jones said that there was not sufficient funding within the current financial settlement to proceed immediately but he would hope that the next settlement would see sufficient resources allocated in order to proceed with the proposal in 2011. Mr Jones also said that the land at Grange Park was leasehold and so it would depend on negotiations at the time how much the County Council would get for the remaining value of the lease.

(4) Mr Rowe said that in his view the proposals should be taken forward as soon as possible but at the same time steps needed to be taken to ensure the minimum of disruption to the current cohort of students both at Grange Park and Wrotham and that would need careful management. Mr Rowe also said that the Leybourne Grange site was designated for housing development and therefore that would need to be supported by appropriate infrastructure. He also asked whether this expansion in housing would at some stage in the future lead to there being a need for new education provision being provided in the area. In reply Mr Jones said that disruption to pupils was something that the Council was very conscious about and he recognised the need for this to be very carefully managed. He also said that the current housing proposals for the Leybourne Grange site was for 700 to 800 units but it was difficult to calculate at this stage to say exactly how many pupils that would generate. However the current view was that it was likely that any increase could be met by expanding existing schools.

(5) Dr Craig said that the County Council recognised the good quality of education at Wrotham and its central role in the community. At the same time it was also recognised that the current buildings were of poor quality and therefore the Council would do all it could to bring forward their construction through the Building Schools for the Future programme. Mr Dance said that he would like to put Wrotham at the top of the programme but that at present that was not possible. However he would look at its needs very favourably as soon as he possibly could. Mr Dance also said that with regard to the Grange Park this was held by the County Council on a long lease and it was likely it would wish to retain that for the foreseeable future and to see what could be done to maximise income from the site.

(6) Mr Northey said that given the overwhelming support that there was within the community for these proposals the only question that remained in his mind was the actual location of the new buildings within the Wrotham site. He therefore proposed, supported by Mr Crowther that the recommendations in the report should be accepted with the Council then proceeding on the basis of Option 1. Mrs Angell and Mr Rowe both said that they agreed to the relocation but had reservations about expressing at this stage a preference for one option over another as that could cause problems at detail design stage.

(7) At the conclusion of further discussion the School Organisation Advisory Board decided to unanimously support the proposal to issue a public notice for the relocation of Grange Park School to a site within the grounds of Wrotham School as detailed in paragraph 12 of the report. However in reaching this decision Mr Burgess, Mr Northey and Mr Crowther wished it to be recorded that they expressed a preference for the relocation to be in accordance with Option 1.