

Proposal to expand St John's Church of England Primary School, Maidstone

Public Consultation Meeting - 10 October 2012

Panel:	Tim Robinson (Chair)	Chair of Governors – St John's CEPS
	Tim Harrington	Headteacher – St John's CEPS
	Paul Carter	Local Member for Maidstone Rural North
	Quentin Roper	Director of Education – Diocese of Canterbury
	David Adams	Area Education Officer (Mid Kent) KCC
	Gary Cooke	Chairman – Education Cabinet Committee

Mr Robinson opened the meeting.

Purpose of the Meeting

- To explain the proposal to enlarge St John's
- To give you an opportunity to ask questions
- To listen to your views and opinions

The meeting was opened with a prayer.

Tim Robinson- Chairman of Governors

Welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the panel. The Governing Body have agreed, in principle, to the proposed expansion and Mr Robinson expanded on the reasons for this decision. St John's is regularly oversubscribed serving only 178 of the 404 children in the priority area. The purpose of the school was to provide high quality education with a Christian ethos for all children. KCC will fund the new, high quality, permanent buildings which includes not just classrooms but a larger hall, office space, etc. The proposed expansion would allow St John's to serve more or all of the community.

David Adams – Area Education Officer KCC

The role of KCC as Commissioner of places was to ensure there were sufficient places available. Background information for place planning was given and detailed data on the admissions for September 2012 where some local children had not been offered a place at their local school. In April/May local parents petitioned KCC to increase the intake of reception class children at schools in the locality. KCC conducted a survey amongst parents in St John's priority intake area which showed that 64% of parents wanted their children to go to their local community school. St John's had not met local demand for many years and the schools within one mile would not be able to accommodate all local children in 2015-16. Mr Adams went on to explain the proposal in detail and the decision making process.

Quentin Roper – Director of Education – Diocese of Canterbury

Mr Roper gave a brief resume of his role. The proposed expansion would allow the school to maintain its distinctive and inclusive atmosphere whilst sustaining its ethos and serving the community. The school's family atmosphere would be maintained and the Diocese had seen and been involved in expansions at other schools where this had worked very well. He confirmed that the Diocese were in favour of the expansion of St John's.

Tim Harrington – Headteacher

Spoke with passion about the school not just being about buildings and classrooms; it was about standards, ethos and values. There would be no compromise on standards and St John's would continue to achieve high standards, be it as a small school or a large school. St John's was about pastoral care, a place where children are happy, reach their potential

and develop as individuals. The school will work hard to maintain and strengthen its ethos, with or without expansion, and is not frightened by the challenge. Understandably parents were concerned about disruption due to building works – the school will work hard to minimise this; we’ve done it before! There were some advantages to a 2FE school; teachers can plan together and help each other with ideas, it may be possible to employ more teachers. The budget will increase which may mean more staff expertise – the school may be able to offer Spanish, hockey, music. Mr Harrington concluded by saying that he was positive that if the school expanded it would march forward under the banner of high standards and continue to thrive.

Question	Response
<p><u>Local Resident:</u> We’re talking of an increase of 100% or more - two different figures given 420 and now 444. I appreciate the need to have the catchment area covered and probably by the time this comes to fruition, we’ll have snuffed it. I’m concerned about the infrastructure; we already have the TV studios and the parking problem three times a day. When you increase the traffic over this number of pupils, it will be enormous. Have you got the space for people to park? There will be more teachers, is there space on the premises for them to park?</p> <p>The Local Resident responded that once planning permission was given, infrastructure was supposed to follow but this was not always so.</p>	<p><u>Tim Robinson</u> - clarified pupil numbers. Currently the official roll was 210. The school takes an additional 12 children in KS2 bringing the total to 222 – 100% expansion. Those 12 children are admitted at the discretion of the Governors.</p> <p><u>David Adams</u> - we recognise that there are always difficulties outside of every school and people driving when you might expect them to walk. KCC wants local children to be able to attend a local school. There is an argument that there might be some reduction in traffic where families are not transporting children out. St John’s already holds the platinum travel award, encourages walking and parents parking away from the school. Ultimately this is a planning issue that will be considered by the Planning Committee. The school will need to submit a revised travel plan to demonstrate how traffic can be reduced as much as possible.</p>
<p><u>Parent:</u> Going back to the maps you showed – how do we know an expansion will not expand that circle and take children from further away?</p>	<p><u>Tim Robinson</u> - went back to the map and the designated area. The yellow circle showed the furthest distance offered. He reinforced the criteria the school use if they are oversubscribed. The rules were in place and published.</p>
<p><u>Parent:</u> Talking about the infrastructure and timescales – what happens if you don’t get planning permission?</p>	<p><u>Paul Carter</u> - explained that it would go before the Planning Committee of KCC for their independent decision. As Leader of KCC I cannot fetter the judgement of that independent body of members. The school site is capable of being 2FE and was planned this way a number of years ago. If planning permission was not given, the school would have the right of appeal to the Secretary of State but this would delay the programme for 2013.</p>
<p><u>Parent:</u> What if the timescales are not enforced?</p>	<p><u>Tim Harrington</u> - responded that the school could not take children it could not accommodate.</p>
<p><u>Local Resident:</u> I am the grandparent of one of the 3 that got in this year. My daughter still has to drive to different schools. I have worked at local schools and I would say to all parents - the school will work exactly the same except that it’s bigger. For the children that didn’t get in 20 are scattered around Maidstone. Can you guarantee when this goes ahead they will get Y1</p>	<p><u>David Adams</u> - I cannot honestly guarantee that although I am optimistic that it is a distinct possibility. Tim Robinson has already explained the over-subscription criteria. At some point in this academic year we will have to look at who has applied for a place in that Y1 class, if more than 30 the over-subscription criteria will apply.</p>

Question	Response
<p>places?</p> <p><u>Local Resident:</u> Looking at design – you mentioned a two phase approach?</p> <p>On the issue of parking, the school should do more to address this.</p>	<p><u>Tim Robinson</u> -I have more than sketches on paper but no detailed plans exist – it is work in progress. There will be two phases and there is a natural split as to how we can do this. To the front of the school and to the right of the path there is an unused green area. This can accommodate two classrooms creating space for September 2013. The second phase will be classrooms, a larger hall and SEN rooms etc using space by the side of the school – again draft footprints.</p> <p><u>Tim Robinson</u> - The school already do an enormous amount of work to encourage children out of cars and I must pay tribute to the work that has been done. The school prefers children to walk and this all links to safety, and healthy schools. It is a never ending journey.</p>
<p><u>Governor of Local School:</u> I am concerned about the opening of the Y1 class as we have offered a place to some of the local children who did not get in here. I would hope it would not be for only one year. We have funding to work out. Where is the funding coming from for the buildings?</p>	<p><u>David Adams</u> - KCC is the commissioner of places and this is funded from the Basic Need Allocation. Kent determines how to use that money to increase provision to meet basic need demand. It will be funded from Capital Allocation. Revenue funding will come through Kent in the first year to fund the staff for classes. With regard to St Paul's - Kent recognises it will be a challenge. Your budget will be driven by the October headcount and your budget 2013/14 will be based on higher numbers. An answer as to whether St John's is going to expand is needed as soon as possible in order to discuss with St Paul's a budget reduction.</p>
<p><u>Parent:</u> My Y3 daughter has had the same class all the time. My concern is how will the Y1 children be integrated into the school?</p>	<p><u>Tim Harrington</u> – difficult to answer it will depend on numbers. We will do whatever we can to stabilise existing classes.</p> <p><u>David Adams</u> – I understand about the relationships youngsters have formed. Staff will always debate possible changes to class structures. Sometimes it is sensible to alter relationships for a variety of reasons. Staff at the school will continue to work with families on this issue.</p>
<p><u>Local Resident:</u> Going back to your catchment plan, have you considered the alternative of building a new school, north of Grove Green?</p>	<p><u>Paul Carter</u> - We have a duty to make best use of public resource and a new school would cost probably double the amount – frankly that money is not around. This is the best option and best value for money.</p> <p><u>Tim Robinson</u> – this site was designed to accommodate 2FE – there is a lot of space here available for expansion.</p>
<p><u>Parent:</u> I am the mother of a Y1 pupil. You would have known back in 2007 what the forecast birth rates were – why has it taken five years to address this problem?</p>	<p><u>David Adams</u> - I started my presentation reflecting on past practice and in effect, at that time, there were sufficient school places although for some families this would have been some distance from their home. This goes back to the 1944 Education Act which defines walking distance to school as 2 miles distance from the home address for children under 8 years of age and 3 miles for children over 8. The Local Authority would have seen the spike in places, but there were sufficient places in neighbouring schools. We are now in a different era. We need to know what parents want, use</p>

Question	Response
	<p>school organisation to drive up standards and ensure there are sufficient places at the right time. The administration has set new targets of 5% surplus capacity; we don't have that at the moment in many of the districts. Is it good enough that half the children in the community cannot attend the local school? We need the right provision in the right place and decide how are we going to address this in the future.</p> <p><u>Paul Carter</u> - This year has been quite extraordinary in servicing this area. I have represented at appeal, 15/20 sets of parents whose children did not get into local schools. The disruption and misery that has been caused by this situation confirms to me that we need to act and act quickly. At the end of the consultation I hope you will agree that this proposal is the right way forward and it will then be up to KCC to ensure that the contractors are on site to meet deadlines.</p>
<p><u>Parent:</u> You take pupils from outside the priority area; will that be a continued practice?</p> <p>The school was always intended to be a 2FE site. Has any survey work been done to determine what the ultimate capacity of the school is? Will there be any further development?</p> <p>In relation to the development, the two YR classrooms will be the first phase, the hall etc later. Will the additional YR children be using existing facilities or will these be improved?</p> <p>When will there be a model for us to see?</p>	<p><u>Tim Robinson</u> – yes, we are regularly oversubscribed and children are taken from outside the priority area. All admissions are strictly in accordance with our oversubscription criteria.</p> <p>Planning/facilities – the footprint I have includes facilities for the YR classes, access, coat hanging, toilet facilities etc. The classes will open with these complete and permanent. The hall will be the area that is not expandable in time, it is not ideal but it is manageable.</p> <p>Future development – Governors have agreed, in principle, to expand to 2FE and nothing beyond that has been discussed.</p> <p><u>David Adams</u> – under current guidance a 2FE school site requires 2 hectares. Kent's preference is for 2FE primary schools, they are better value for money with educational advantages. I would not envisage this site growing any larger. If there is further housing development the Local Authority would discuss with the Borough Council the need for further school places.</p> <p><u>Tim Robinson</u> – We are an academy and decisions are made by the Governing Body. Nothing beyond 2FE has been discussed.</p>
<p><u>Local Resident:</u> You say you have a footprint, could you not have brought this along to the meeting?</p> <p>A single storey expansion would, I imagine, be more in keeping with the existing school.</p>	<p><u>Tim Robinson</u> – I only have an outline. Nothing has been decided and I can't make a commitment to either exact position or single storey. Many things are happening side by side. I don't have draft plans yet and these would need to go before the Governors first. I have a reasonably good idea about the plans for the front, single storey, but the second phase is more uncertain. The timing is not ideal, it's quick, we're not hiding that, but equally it's the right thing to do.</p> <p><u>Paul Carter</u> – there will need to be planning detail, and another consultation will take place within that process.</p>
<p><u>Local Resident:</u> It would have been nice to see plans. I hope it's true that the expansion will be in keeping with the rest of the school. I note what you say about infrastructure, parking and</p>	<p><u>David Adams</u> – There is a lot of work to do, the classrooms at the front and then the second phase. There are tests required, eg bore holes, it may be the proposal isn't feasible. Traffic impact is considered in the planning process. We will need to satisfy the</p>

Question	Response
<p>traffic. I hope this will be the case, to drive out of Shearer's Close you have to edge out onto the main road, it can't be much worse! Will this be considered as part of the planning process?</p>	<p>highways authority and the planning authority that the building is appropriate in planning terms, and the impacts of traffic are acceptable or mitigated. We are trying to get it right, ensure we make the best of it and minimise issues all within a capital envelope.</p> <p><u>Gary Cooke</u> – this proposal will come back to the Education Cabinet Committee of which I am Chair. I share those problems with you and I will make certain it's OK.</p>
<p><u>Parent and Local Resident:</u> What happens if there is no demand for the Yr 1 class? Regarding the accommodation build – the Government are down-sizing space.</p>	<p><u>Tim Robinson</u> – Kent set high standards for buildings and there has been no push back about the things the school are asking for. The Governors are happy with all the conversations around buildings. We are confident that what we are going to be offered will be at least very good and beyond that.</p> <p>With regard to demand for the second Y1 class we will need to see proven demand. This links to the question from St Paul's.</p> <p><u>David Adams</u> – Governors have had a lot of debate to this issue. Local schools for local children. We can't guarantee anything. We know we have 15 children on the waiting list and that is where we are.</p> <p><u>Tim Robinson</u> – we are responding to community demand, we couldn't do anything about it this year but we will do something about it next year. It's about serving the community.</p>
<p><u>Local Resident & Parish Councillor:</u> The community has been mentioned many times but there is a community as well that is not connected with the school. I am concerned how the building works will be completed, out of hours, evenings and weekends? I'm talking about noise and disruption.</p>	<p><u>Tim Robinson</u> – I am also a resident in this community and I agree that the community is much wider than the school. I accept your point about building. Some of the ideas we have will allow us to do a lot of work without impacting on existing classrooms. There will be an impact on residents and there might be weekend working, it's a balance. The school will be respectful of this and there will be an end.</p> <p><u>David Adams</u> – planning conditions will be attached to the build restricting hours of work. It is all about a balance, also around the school in terms of safety.</p>
<p><u>Local Resident:</u> There will be two phases of build, 2 classrooms at the front, the rest in the second phase. I hope this wont mean one classroom a year, constant building. Year 1 – will there be two classes?</p>	<p><u>Tim Robinson</u> – If we assume all the funding has been agreed the first phase will be ready for September 2013. The second phase includes five more classrooms, larger hall, SEN rooms to be ready for September 2014. There will not be 7 years of build.</p> <p>Regarding the Y1 class there has to be enough demand, the school is funded per pupil but we can't run a class on 5 pupils. It is also problematic to have too much accommodation if it is not being used.</p> <p><u>Gary Cooke</u> – This is a difficult area, we don't want to see adverse impact on other local schools.</p>
<p><u>Parent:</u> The expansion has the approval of the Governors. There are applications from only 15 people – will the class go ahead? How will you find out how feasible this is? Parents should contact you and let you know what they want.</p>	<p><u>Tim Robinson</u> – The decision has to be made before then. We have a waiting list of 15; some will want the place, some wont. It is very difficult; we can't run a class of 5 or 10 – that's why we're consulting.</p> <p><u>David Adams</u> – we are talking to local schools and it's something we need to be convinced on. Yes, we need to hear from parents, let us know. It's about how we</p>

Question	Response
	keep the information flowing and admittedly the timescales are not helpful in this respect. Neighbouring schools will need to plan and the more information we have from parents about their desires, the better. As parents you have networks that work very well and I suggest you use these to ensure we know what parents want.

Tim Robinson thanked everyone for coming along and for the questions that had been asked. He encouraged everyone to send in their comments by the closing date – 26 October 2012 - and referred to the consultation document that gave all the details of how this could be done.

94 people attended the meeting.