

NOTE OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2015 AT KILMAURS PRIMARY SCHOOL

In Attendance

Graham Short, Executive Director of Educational and Social Services
Andrew Kennedy, Acting Head of Facilities Management
Alan Ward, Acting Head of Schools
Irene Hall, Project Manager
Councillor Eoghann MacColl
Councillor Ellen Freel
Councillor John McGhee

Graham Short introduced himself and the officers in attendance at the meeting. He explained the format of the presentation to encourage discussion and understanding of the full consultation process.

Andrew Kennedy provided an overview of the consultation process by powerpoint and then invited questions from the meeting.

The following points were raised:

- It was stated that the proposal document does not mention Parent Council or Community Councils.
In response, officers pointed out that in fact Parent Councils and Community Councils are mentioned as consultees in the preface of the document, and have been sent a copy.
- A parent asked 'why move the boundary so far at this point'?
Response – Andrew Kennedy explained that specific points were used to draft the new catchment area, taking account of the local development plan.
- The point was made that in the future, there may be further building developments around Kilmaurs.
Response – Andrew Kennedy responded that although the local development plan does feature areas of housing round Kilmaurs, then there is no clarity yet about how this would expand in the future. It was also explained that in relation to school roll projections, that only areas of buildings for which there had been a committed project could be counted.
- A parent expressed the view that this was all part of a plan for Kilmaurs Primary School to be run down and closed.
Response – Graham Short emphatically denied this. He gave a categorical assurance that the future of Kilmaurs Primary School was guaranteed into the future. The Council had no present or future plans to close Kilmaurs Primary School. The future of Kilmaurs Primary School was further safeguarded going to its status as a rural school which gave it protection under the School Consultation Act of 2010. Here the presumption against any rural school closures.

- A parent raised the issue of the distribution of funds across the Authority, it being her impression that little money was spent in the Kilmarnock area.
Response – officers pointed out that there is considerable investment across East Ayrshire and although there is money being spent in the south of the Authority and a number of new school developments, that Kilmarnock and the surrounding area had benefitted from significant investments not least in the Kilmarnock Learning Campus.
- A parent raised the matter of the general condition of Kilmaurs Primary School and asked for future investment of the fabric of the school. In response, the general state of the presentation of Kilmaurs Primary School was acknowledged. It was also pointed out that in terms of the Scottish Government classification on condition of building, Kilmaurs Primary School was listed as a B building, in other words one that the condition was deemed to be satisfactory. In amplification, Andrew Kennedy explained how plans for future work would be managed and described how component renewal programmed into the scheme of refurbishment of educational establishments. Up until now the priority had been to take C and D categorised buildings, into category B. In all of this, best value solutions were applied, in other words, where the Council was required to spend money, and where significant differences would be made.

In response to that, a parent said that nobody could remember any investment in Kilmaurs Primary School. Andrew Kennedy acknowledged that up until now, investment had been largely in terms of maintenance, rather than capital refurbishments.

- There was a feeling amongst a number of parents that Kilmaurs village lacked any general facilities, particularly for young people. In response, officers acknowledged the challenge of providing further facilities for young people particularly in the present economic climate. It was pointed out that the programme of community asset transfer was designed to reconcile the competing budget pressures with the needs of communities in a way that was both imaginative and would safeguard facilities in the future.
- One parent observed that in order to access facilities, it was necessary to travel to Glasgow.

In response, an officer from Vibrant Communities gave a short presentation on how her service was looking to support communities in the development of facilities.

A parent observed that the problem was that CAT buildings are not in a good condition. In

In response, it was highlighted that the arrangements for Community Asset Transfer would enable communities to access funding and sources of funds that were not available to the Council. The commitment was for education and the Leisure Trust to work together and certainly to ensure that facilities such as school buildings were available for community use.

- The view was expressed that the size of space being allocated would detract from the village of Kilmaurs. In other words, that the school population would go to Kilmarnock rather than to Kilmaurs.

Andrew Kennedy responded by showing maps to illustrate the reasoning behind the new boundary line. It was agreed that any houses south of that boundary line in the areas of Northcraigs and Southcraigs, would result in children going to Onthank Primary School. However, it was also pointed out that one of the key issues that featured in the local development plan and indeed the views of communities, is that they wanted to retain the rural integrity of Kilmaurs and this line would help achieve that aim. It was pointed out to the meeting that if parents were seeking a different boundary line they could suggest that giving their reasons and alternative lines as part of the consultation. The Council would require to respond to that. However, it was pointed out that any new line would have to be the subject of a new statutory consultation.

The matter was also raised about the road infrastructure in support of housing areas and one should have been built to allow residents to access Kilmaurs. It was felt that the absence of such a road meant that parents whose children would be entitled to come to Kilmaurs had indeed opted for Onthank.

In response it was acknowledged that the main road access from the Southcraigs and Northcraigs areas was eastward towards the A77 and this would create a long drive time to Kilmaurs. That was nevertheless a feature of these housing developments. By way of further amplification, how the Council projected school rolls was described to the audience, making it clear that unlike in earlier times, there was no easy way of projecting with any certainty the roll projections for a school. This was because of demographic changes and the increasing market on placing requests.

- One parent raised the point that Kilmarnock is urban and Kilmaurs rural, so that is why the boundary should be closer to Kilmaurs.
- One parent was unhappy that farms would be split in two by the new boundary line.

In response, it was pointed out that it wasn't the farm land that was important in designating a school boundary, but the location of the houses since this is where school aged children would be located.

It was also observed that the new line did not follow any geographic feature such as a stream or a road and that therefore some of the present problems for example at the Cardhu area, might reoccur in the future because of the absence of such a geographic feature.

In response, this issue was acknowledged, however it was pointed out that the new line had been drawn to take account of the local development plan. It was therefore not anticipated that in the immediate future, any houses would spread over the new boundary line owing to the general planning conditions.

- One parent asked if the catchment change was about saving future costs on travelling to Stewarton.

In response, it was pointed out the central issue here was one of keeping communities together with the school that were nearest to them and for which there was a safe walking route. It was acknowledged also however, that in the middle to long term, the Authority would incur additional costs that were avoidable in relation to transporting children and young people. It was also pointed out that the Council had set a target of 85% occupancy for the overall school estate. The further point was made in that unlike in earlier times, school catchment areas and capacities would require continuing and ongoing review on annual basis.