

Appendix 3

Consultation on Draft Proposal to Amalgamate
Clunbury School and Lydbury North School

Introduction

This Appendix selects and responds to the main points raised during the consultation, including at the meetings with staff, governors and the community. The minutes of the meetings at each school are also attached to the report as appendices 2a and 2b. The actual responses received are available for inspection in the Members Library and will be available to Members at the Cabinet Meeting on 19 May 2008.

Points Raised and Response by Officers

Ref.	Point Raised	Response
1	The Council have made their mind up already	Shropshire County Council has entered into the consultation process with no predetermined outcome. All options have been and will continue to be considered. Councillors do not predetermine issues but take decisions on the basis of the information available to them.
2	The Council has been inconsistent in proposing the amalgamation rather than closure of Lydbury North School	It is accepted that there is no legal process of amalgamation. The proposal provided three options and sought alternatives. The amalgamation of Lydbury North and Clunbury schools was proposed as a way of maintaining a viable network of rural schools.
3	Has the Council followed Statutory Guidance on school organisation changes?	Yes. The Council is in phase two of a three phase consultation and decision making process. In the first phase, the Council undertook consultation on principles to form a new school vision and organisation policy. There is no statutory consultation process or timescale for such a consultation. However, the DCSF allows for a minimum six week period for consultation on formal proposals on school organisation. The Council's consultation and discussion on the proposed school organisation principles lasted from 28 September to 6 December, the day before publication of the report to the Council meeting which adopted the

Ref.	Point Raised	Response
		<p>new policy.</p> <p>The second phase is that of formative (or pre-statutory) consultation. In this most recent phase, the council takes a further period of time (again, a minimum of six weeks) to consider comments on a draft proposals related to specific communities. During this phase, although a proposal is for the focus discussion, the Council can listen to and amend details of the proposal, or decide to withdraw the proposal. Members will take the decision whether to pursue or withdraw the draft proposal on 19 May.</p> <p>If Members decide to pursue the proposal, they will decide on the details and publish the formal (statutory) proposal in the form of a public notice. The third phase of consultation then follows, once more for six weeks, before members make their final decision. It is to this third step of consultation that many of the statutory provisions apply, and Shropshire County Council will ensure that any proposals which reach this step will follow all the relevant statutory guidance.</p>
4	You're only doing this because of the Primary Capital Programme	There has been some misunderstanding about the Primary Capital Programme. The development of a new Primary School Organisation Policy and consultation on draft proposals are not part of or driven by the government's Primary Capital Programme. However, the Primary Capital Programme is an opportunity to invest in schools which will be more sustainable and viable as a result of school organisation proposals.
5	You won't make any savings anyway.	There will be real savings from amalgamation. There are significant efficiency savings in operating a single site. Federations involving split site solutions do not achieve the same level of savings. Another key saving is the cost (including on costs) of employing a headteacher rather than a classroom teacher. Some of the savings will need to be recycled to transport pupils, but this will only be a small proportion of the savings and will not affect the educational benefits of amalgamation.
6	Amalgamation will be bad	At first, it seems obvious that the level of carbon emissions will go up. However, detailed

Ref.	Point Raised	Response
	for the environment.	<p>calculations have shown that this is not the case. Even without investment in the sustainability elements of the buildings providing alternative places, the reduction of one site, including the vehicle journeys to service that site, can more than balance the additional journeys to deliver children to school. The savings are even greater if children use shared transport such as buses and multiple occupancy cars.</p> <p>Further savings can be made if, as is proposed at Lydbury North and Clunbury, there is significant investment in the continuing school's buildings. This will improve energy performance through better insulation, windows, etc. and consideration would also be given to specific sustainability measures such as solar heating, wind power, etc.</p>
7	Why not delay the decision until the policy commission reports?	<p>The schools at Lydbury North and Clunbury are already part of the reorganisation process. To delay the decision on the outcome would leave these schools under a planning blight. In the meantime, children would not benefit from the advantages which amalgamation could bring, and the Council would have to find money from the Dedicated Schools Grant to meet the costs of maintaining separate schools in the two villages.</p>
8	Aren't these two schools viable as separate schools?	<p>Unfortunately not. Lydbury North is in Ofsted's category of a "very small" school (see below), despite the fact that over 40% of its pupils come from outside the catchment area. The costs of educating children at the two schools were £3,180 and £3,484, substantially above the average for the county of £2757, in 2007/8. The buildings at Clunbury lack some basic requirements, despite recent investment, and the buildings and site at Lydbury North are unsuitable for 21st century education.</p>
9	Lydbury North already has a high quality learning environment.	<p>The staff of Lydbury North School, as at Clunbury, work hard to create a high quality environment, and both schools are bright and cheerful with good resources. However, compared to the facilities and environment of a modern school, the indoor and outdoor environment is a major limitation on learning, as well as being inefficient and</p>

Ref.	Point Raised	Response
		unsustainable.
10	What alternatives to amalgamation have been considered?	Alternatives to amalgamation have been and are still being considered. Consideration has been given to making no changes, closing one or both of the schools (which was discarded in favour of bring the two schools together as equals), hard and soft federation and creating a split site school. The main report continues this consideration.
11	Ofsted has said that these are good schools.	<p>Both schools have received overall grades of “good” in recent Ofsted reports, and the schools should be congratulated for this outcome. However, in each report there are elements which are graded satisfactory. There are also ratings of “outstanding” for the behaviour in both schools, for personal development as a whole and for the curriculum in Clunbury. The strengths of the two schools are complementary. A new school can draw on the strengths of both. Significant investment can focus efforts towards securing an “outstanding” outcome overall.</p> <p>On the other hand, although standards in both schools are currently good, Ofsted has set out its concerns that very small schools (those with less than 50 pupils) are more vulnerable to rapid changes in standards, and are over represented in categories of concern. This might be linked to factors uncovered through research conducted in Lydbury North School and other schools as part of the workforce reform national pathfinder, which recognised the higher administrative and leadership burdens on small school headteachers.</p>
12	How would a new school drive up standards?	An amalgamated school would be more sustainable in a number of ways set out in the main report. In summary, these are: resource flexibility; better support for professional development and leadership; and investment in physical resources and the learning environment. However, a key driver for improving standards is the ability of a new, slightly larger school to build on the strengths of the two existing schools.
13	Would a new school be too large?	An amalgamated school would still qualify as a small school in Ofsted’s terms. It would also still be

Ref.	Point Raised	Response
		a rural school.
14	Would pupils with Special Educational Needs be lost in a larger school?	Research in Shropshire and elsewhere shows that the additional staffing resources and larger peer groups of children with similar needs mean that pupils with special educational needs often do slightly better in larger schools.
15	What about travel? Will children be safe? What if they are ill during the day?	Each day, thousands of children are transported safely on home to school transport, including many very young children. Children look after each other, and drivers have overall responsibility for safety. As noted above, a large proportion of children in Lydbury North, and a smaller proportion of children in Clunbury already come from outside the catchment areas. A further number of children in each school come from homes outside the villages. Parents should be reassured that schools are used to thinking about arrangements for children who live some distance away and each school will have procedures in place in the event that children feel ill or there are other emergencies.
16	What about early years services?	Shropshire County Council would continue to work with existing providers to provide services. Consideration would be given to including early years services on the site of the new school.
17	What will happen to church school places?	If the two schools are amalgamated, there would be a small reduction in possible Church of England school places. However, these places are currently unfilled. The Council's policy is to maintain or improve the proportion of faith school places across the county and not to make major reductions in any particular area, but the effect in this case would be minimal.
18	What will the impact be on the community	Clearly, if the schools are amalgamated, one village would no longer have a school. There would undoubtedly be an effect on the community. However, this is often portrayed as much more serious than it has proved to be in practice. There are many vibrant villages and hamlets in Shropshire where the settlement has looked to a school in another village for education. Some of these settlements were too small to qualify as a village in modern terms, but others, such as Aston on Clun or

Ref.	Point Raised	Response
		Clungunford have retained the identity and are thriving communities in their own right. Some concern has been expressed about families with no car. It should be remembered that most current pupils would qualify for free home to school transport.