

Questions sent to the Children's and Young Peoples Service about Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and their response.

These questions were sent from the Lowton and Golborne Township Forum in May 2009 - we only received their answers on 26th November 2009 - after 6 months!!

1. Why had only one option been put forward to replace four schools during the consultation process? It would seem likely that given no choice, prospective parents would have to opt for the only scheme on offer.

In order to qualify as stage 1 consultation, as determined by School Organisation Regulations 2007, the LA has to consult on one option only.

2. There were no disadvantages put forward by the Council in the brochure for the large school site. Advantages, however, were put forward. There are disadvantages, why were they not mentioned?

The option put forward for consultation represents the Council's preferred option. Any perceived disadvantages of the site were voiced during stage 1 consultation and were reported to Cabinet for its consideration.

3. Minutes from Cabinet meetings show BSF as a Press Excluded Item. Why have the reasons behind such an important decision affecting many people in the Wigan area been kept secret?

The Cabinet report dated 30th July was not press excluded. The earlier report requesting permission to consult was press excluded on the basis that it contained commercially sensitive information.

4. What other options were considered and why were they rejected? The fact that this question has not yet been answered is very worrying.

The Council considered the options for Lowton and Golborne together with options for all other townships. For Lowton and Golborne, there are insufficient pupils in the area to maintain two secondary schools of a viable size in the future, hence the proposal for one new build school.

5. Parents and pupils of Y9/10 upwards will have left school by the time the new school opens in 2/3 years and may think they are not affected by this decision. Will the figures for these parents still be taken into account?

Figures across all year groups at the time that the school is scheduled to open in 2011 will be considered prior to Cabinet taking its final decision in March 2010, as will predicted pupil numbers at the time the school becomes single sited.

B: Future Proofing:

The Council are recommending knocking down Lowton High School after only 35 years and at great expense.

1. What is the life span of the proposed school?

We are proposing a design life of 60 years or more.

2. How are the numbers of people moving into the area and new housing on the old school and colliery sites been taken into account when projecting pupil numbers for the schools' catchment area of Lowton, Golborne, Pennington and Abram? There are rumours of 1000 houses on the Bickershaw site alone in the next 5-10 years.

We only take into account new housing on sites that have already commenced. Housing on sites with planning permission that have not yet started are not included because they may never materialise; and the timing and phasing of the development is not known. Very often, new housing in Wigan is populated by people that live in Wigan and the housing often does not generate many "new" children to the system.

3. How far into the future have pupil projections for this school been calculated? The years 2014/15 were mentioned by Janet Newton in the Township meeting; that is only 5/6 years in the future.

Pupil numbers have been projected to 2019/20.

4. At what point will the new secondary and primary school in Lowton have to expand to accept more than 1500 and 315 pupils respectively?

It is not anticipated that the schools will have to expand. They are of sufficient size at least up to 2019/20 - the furthest ahead pupil numbers can be projected for secondary pupils. The new primary school will be for 210 pupils-not 315.

5. If the money from Building Schools for the Future is some kind of loan will this affect the Council's decision to build the school? How will such a large loan be paid back?

Without the financial investment provided through the Building Schools for the Future initiative the school could not be built. The cost of the project is paid back on an annual basis using funding credits provided by central government.

D: The Traffic Issues:

1. Will you take into account the increase traffic from new developments such as new housing and the extended Pennington Flash facilities that hope to attract 1/3 million visitors per year?

Increase in background traffic growth is accounted for in each case of development.

2. The Norwood Avenue estate and Oaklands Road are already rat runs. How would the Council prevent these routes from being used by pupils coming from Golborne and Abram?

Norwood Avenue and Bradwell Road has traffic calming and is partially covered by a 20 mph zone adjacent to St Catherine's School. The residents in this area have to be consulted over a number of traffic matters and unfortunately the majority cannot agree to further measures. At the present time there is no intention to consult further with the residents. If further measures to restrict traffic through this estate can be justified they will be considered at the appropriate time and the residents will be formally consulted. Oaklands Road will be considered for inclusion within the 20 mph zone strategy for the new school development along with the private school and nursery which resides within the estate. Traffic calming measures may be requested as part of the new development, all subject to residents consultation.

3. How will the Council stop the tail back at the St Luke's Church traffic lights?

Improvements are proposed at St Lukes Church as part of the Bickershaw South development. It will not lesson the queues but capacity will be improved. The new school will require a robust school travel plan and active travel plan to encourage sustainable travel choices.

4. How will the Council stop the tail backs at the Lane Head traffic lights?

Improvements are proposed at Lane Head. The improvements will not lessen the queues but capacity will be improved. The new school will require a robust school travel plan and active travel plan to encourage sustainable travel choices.

5. How will Hesketh Meadow Lane/Newton Rd cope with 1815 pupils and many teachers, administration, cleaning, catering staff and visitors to Sure Start?

The traffic appraisal carried out informs that this junction operates with spare capacity and will be subject to some improvement works.

1. When will the preferred bidder become the contract holder for the school building?

Upon the completion of Financial Close which is programmed for Autumn 2010.

2. There will be a conflict of interest when the Council applies to the Council for planning permission. How will this process be monitored to be seen as fair?

The planning application will be submitted by the Council's private partner, Transformational Learning Partnerships (TLP), not the Council.

3. The replacement for the Civic Hall and playing fields will be within the school area. How will this limit the current public access to them?

The public will be able to gain access to the playing fields through prior arrangement with the school and the facilities management provider.

4. Other new facilities will include a 0-4 Sure Start and a school/public library and medical centre. What is the estimate of people using these facilities in addition to the school pupils?

There is no public library being proposed, the Children's Centre has an estimated number of 20 users and discussions are still being held with the PCT to determine the extent of the health provision on the site.

5. How can all this planning, infrastructure and building be done in three years'? Yes (The booklet stated pupils start school in 2012) How will building site traffic be managed? Will a 9am to 5pm work restriction apply in a residential area even if deadlines are not met?

This detail will form part of the planning application and require approval from the planning officers and planning committee. Local residents will be able to comment on the proposals as part of the planning consultation process.

6. Will trees, wildlife and public rights of way be preserved?

Yes. Ecological assessments and surveys will be required and any proposals will require planning approval. There are no public rights of way on the site.

7. Where will residents be able to run their dogs?

The proposal is for a new school facility hence the exercising of dogs on the playing fields will not be acceptable. The new playing fields will be a much improved provision than existing and free from dog fouling.

F: EDUCATION: Large schools have a high risk of being impersonal places that are difficult to manage. Why are schools being merged if pupil roles are expected to increase in the next 5-10 years?

In order to ensure that the large school building is not at risk of being an impersonal space we are exploring design and educational delivery around a school within a school, such as a house system or mini schools. Pupil numbers in the secondary system are currently falling and will continue to do so for a number of years making some schools unviable.

Please can we ask Janet to confirm the new community facilities before the next stage in September?

Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust and PCT.

Can Janet confirm the facilities for the pre-school?

Sure Start Children's Centre

Please can you also confirm that the answers will be shared widely? The one other thing I asked is that we put the BSF and consultation in the next Borough Life.

We have been and will continue to have regular updates in Borough Life.