

Parents Council 24/11/09

Minutes of Parents' Forum Tuesday 24 November 2009

Chair: Dave Wood-Griffiths

Minute Taker: Sarah Shortt.

Speaker: Councillor Tim Metcalfe, who represents the Purley-On-Thames Ward, which includes Denefield School.

Apologies: Liz Woodhouse, Levki Webster, Caroline Drew, Debby Palmer and Sam Sale.

Dave introduced Councillor Metcalfe to the parents. He had already advised the Councillor of the aims and objectives of the Parents' Forum and given him copies of the minutes of the meeting attended by Margaret Goldie and Ian Pearson.

Cllr. Metcalfe began by commenting on the marked improvements to the school, which he said were a testament to Mr Whiteford and the staff. He has been impressed with the improved behaviour of the students and their appearance, noting the more orderly fashion in which they leave the school grounds. He was also impressed to see members of staff outside at the end of the school day, keeping an eye on the students' behaviour. Andy Tubbs at the L.A. had provided him with a statement on the following post Ofsted improvements to the school; improved quality of teaching, particularly in the Science Department, improved Leadership and Management, including Middle Leaders, Governors are now fully involved, Attendance has improved and the GCSE and A Level results have improved. The academic side of the school has improved greatly, and we now need to focus on the premises.

Dave asked Cllr. Metcalfe about the budget allocated to the school and also the speed at which improvements can be made to the existing buildings, in order to benefit the current students. Cllr Metcalfe advised the meeting that the TLC plan had never really been feasible – the cost of the project had spiralled to around £65M at a time when land costs were high. Then the price

of land plummeted, there was no political will to build on council land and the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) money dried up. Cllr. Metcalfe advised that the £12m allocated to the area has been allocated to Denefield and Brookfields to promote inclusion. More feasibility studies and consultations have taken place as well as in-depth road studies. To date approximately £1M has been spent on these studies and the survey fees. The remaining £11M must be shared between the two schools and Cllr. Metcalfe advised that Long Lane also want a small share of the funds, which another councillor has promised them. Representatives from both Denefield and Brookfields are on the TLC Project Board, which meets regularly and also includes Margaret Goldie, Ian Pearson, Barbara Alexander, as well as four other local councillors and Dave Solis, the Project Manager.

Cllr Metcalfe advised the meeting that the Council has supported the school in undertaking some major Fire Remedial Works over the summer holidays. The initial works budget for this was £150K, but a full survey was never done to ascertain exactly what was needed, and so the works were done reactively, causing the costs to spiral to £450K. This included fitting new fire doors and alarm systems as well as the removal of asbestos from the site.

The latest meeting of the TLC Project Board identified the Technology and Science Block as the main priority for rebuilding. Procurement has to be done according to EU Regulations, taking into account IESE (Improvement & Efficiency South East) standards and a Project Manager and Quantity Surveyors are already lined up. A parent asked about the tendering process, as Margaret Goldie had confirmed at the September meeting that the Council were looking into buying in services from Hampshire County Council. Another parent asked Cllr. Metcalfe for more info on the OJEU Procurement route. Cllr. Metcalfe confirmed that the consultancy process is underway and should be completed by January/February 2010, when a contractor can be appointed. He advised that a project brief is currently being drafted and the school is undertaking an audit of its needs and approximate costings. A parent asked who would draft the project spec – Cllr. Metcalfe confirmed that the design and the appointment of the architects will have to go to tender.

Another parent asked how the proposed new Technology Block would meet the requirements of co-location and whether this issue would be resolved before any building work started. Cllr. Metcalfe advised that that the facilities would have to be made available for the use of Brookfields in order to ensure that both schools benefit from the facilities. Any new buildings will have to be fully accessible. The new Head Teacher at Brookfields has been consulted, although she is not actually on the main Project Board. Brookfields have their own board and have drafted a wish list for their needs.

Any new buildings on the site will have to be open to community use and built using the BRE Environmental Assessment Method, which is an eco standard adopted by West Berks to ensure a standard of energy efficiency. This building standard has higher costs but as West Berks have already lost two appeal cases against the standard Cllr. Metcalfe advised that they will stand by this policy on all future builds. A parent asked Cllr. Metcalfe if he knew the estimated cost of a new science/technology block and if more funding would be available in the future for further new blocks. The next project board meeting should provide more information.

The Chair asked if the Council had both the will and wherewithal to support the rebuild. Cllr. Metcalfe advised that Denefield has been the Council's priority for around three years, but that they were convinced that the TLC money would materialise. A parent asked how the rebuild of St Barts had been financed. Cllr. Metcalfe advised that the rebuild was made possible with BSF funding and the selling off of some of the school's land.

Cllr. Metcalfe informed the parents of his work for the Eastern Vision Group, which he leads. The group is investigating the lack of leisure facilities in the eastern fringe of the county. This group of local councillors are looking to support infrastructure in the area, ie road works and Youth Programmes like Adventure Dolphin. The group has a £4M budget set aside for sports/swimming facilities in this area, but this sum is not sufficient and they will need an outside partner to bring in more funds.

It is vital that any new buildings are built to a high quality standard. A parent asked if the Council were aware of how poor quality the existing buildings and facilities are and stressed the importance of some of the budget being put towards refurbishing the other existing buildings.

Another parent asked how much co-operation there is between West Berks and Reading B.C. Cllr. Metcalfe advised that WB have approached Reading Borough to ask for their assistance with the rebuild but that Reading declined to be involved. Whilst Reading Borough pays for each of its students through the AWPU (Age Weighted Pupil Unit) this money does not cover any infrastructure costs.

Cllr. Metcalfe advised that there are other possibilities to obtain funding and suggested that parents consider forming some sort of separate Parents' Organisation like a PTA, in order to apply to outside organisations. He also advised that there should be some Section 106 money for infrastructure from local building developments. One of the parents asked him if would be possible to find out how much interest has been accrued on the initial sum of £12M over the last couple of years since it was set aside for the project. Cllr Metcalfe said he would endeavour to find out and let us know.

The Chair thanked Cllr. Metcalfe for his time. The meeting continued briefly just to update the parents on the actions from the previous meeting in October.

AP1. Some parents had reported problems using the Myvoice system to contact the school via the website. The IT Manager was not aware of any problems with the mailing system, although the school's Servers had been down for a few days which could have been the issue. He asked that if parents have any further problems using the system that they contact the school and give the error code provided.

AP2. Parents had asked for an update on progress at the last meeting. Mr Whiteford was unable to attend this meeting as the HMI Inspectors had

arrived that morning, so an update will be given at a later date, including a report on this latest Monitoring Visit.

AP7. Parents had asked for an update on the Technology Specialism. Sarah confirmed that the school will need to re-apply for Specialist Status once it is out of Special Measures. There is a Medium Term Action Plan in place to re-secure our Technology College Specialism, overseen by two of the school's Assistant Heads, one of whom is responsible for the Community & Extra-Curricular aspects and the other for the Technology Subjects. The plan includes the use of APP (Assessing Pupils' Progress) and AfL (Assessment for Learning), both of which will drive forward improvements; the introduction of Personalised Learning and Thinking Skills; the introduction of web-based Learning Zones to allow students to access their learning from home and targets in place to look at past trends and forecast results in the Technology Subjects. We are working closely with our Gaining Ground Partner School, Cirencester Deer Park, which is a Technology Specialist College.

The format of the homework diaries is being amended following feedback from and consultation with the students

The Sixth Formers have been banned from using the Tesco Store on Knowlsley Road, following a decision taken by Tesco, not the school. The store has decided to ban students from all schools from the shop during school hours.

The next Parents' Forum will be on Tuesday 26 January at 7.30pm.

Margaret Goldie and Ian Pearson will be attending this meeting to inform parents on the outcome of the decision about funding new buildings and refurbishment of the existing ones.