

PRIMARY PLACES REVIEW: REPORT ON PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council consulted over the following options

Option One

- Closure of Upton St James CE Primary School in July 2006.
- Reduction in PAN at Ellacombe from 60 to 45 with effect from September 2006.
- No change at St Margaret's Primary School.

Option Two

- No change at Upton St James CE Primary School.
- Reduction in PAN at Ellacombe from 60 to 30 with effect from September 2006.
- Reduction in PAN at St Margaret's Primary School from 60 to 45 with effect from September 2006.

Option Three

- No change at any school

The consultation also invited respondents to suggest other options for change and these are contained within the body of the report below.

Responses were invited on a questionnaire with space to add comments. Respondents were also able to make written representations and attend consultation meetings arranged for different groups.

This report includes

- An analysis of the questionnaire responses
- A summary of the responses from School Governing Bodies
- A comment on the position of the CE Diocese
- A summary of main points raised in responses to consultation
- A record of the three consultation meetings

Analysis of Questionnaire responses

Group	Yes to Option One	%	Yes to Option Two	%	Yes to Option Three	%	Totals
Upton parents	28		134		113		275
Upton staff	2		7				9
Upton gvs			2				2
Upton totals	30		143		113		
Other parties	228		33		20		281

Notes

1. Whilst two governors responded by questionnaire, Upton's governing body responded in writing expressing a unanimous view against option one (see below).
2. A total of 23 respondents expressed no preference for options, but used the space on the questionnaire to make comments known. It was not always possible to interpret the comments as support for any particular option, so these were excluded from the figures above.
3. The response rate was very high among Upton parents (275 parental responses from a school with around 180 pupils). A large number of the "other parties" who responded are parents of pupils at Ellacombe or St Margaret's

Responses from School Governing Bodies

There was direct consultation with the governing bodies at Upton St James, St Margaret's and Ellacombe.

Upton St James governing body have written to unanimously oppose closure of their school. The governors recognise a problem with surplus places but suggest that the Council should spread a reduction of places more widely across several schools, so that a greater number of schools felt a small impact rather than a few schools face a severe impact.

Ellacombe governing body has written to support Option One. The governors consider that this is the best option to enable improvements at their school and achieve best return on investment at St Margaret's. The governors recognise the feelings of those connected with Upton, but question whether in the long term there can be any improvement in the facilities at the school.

St Margaret's governing body has written to oppose Option Two (which would involve a reduction in the Planned Admission Number of St Margaret's from 60 to 45). Among the reasons given are that governors consider a change of this nature could threaten the viability of the neighbourhood nursery and that it would be a poor return for the investment in new buildings at St Margaret's.

The position of the CE Diocese

The CE Diocese of Exeter were one of the parties directly consulted since Upton St James is a CE Voluntary Controlled School. The Diocesan Board expressed a “willingness to co-operate with the Council and to consider the closure of Upton St James subject to evidence for closure providing a compelling case”.

The CE Diocese will be interested in the outcome of this consultation and, of course, is one of the four votes at the School Organisation Committee that would decide any Statutory Proposal concerning Upton St James. It is likely that the Board would need to meet to consider how it should cast its vote and, at this stage, the Diocese does not appear to have determined its position on this matter.

Summary of main points raised in responses to consultation

The majority of comments made surrounded that part of Option One concerned with the possible closure of Upton St James Primary School. Most of the comments were opposed to closure. There were also a few comments made in support of changes, including some in favour of closure.

The Consultation was unsatisfactory

The main criticism is that the Council has not conducted a broad enough consultation. Those consulted directly were those who stand to be most affected by closure of Upton i.e. the parents, staff and governors. This is in line with statutory guidance. The Council made public the consultation through the media and its website.

A number of individuals asked the Council to broaden the consultation with the aim to capture the views of a particular group to support their particular point of view. This would have been inappropriate action for the Council, but officers gave appropriate assistance to individuals who wished to broaden the consultation.

The Council produced a fair and balanced consultation document with a great deal of factual information and meetings for staff, governors, parents and the public. These meetings were well attended. There has been a good response to the consultation document, which suggests that it has reached a wide audience.

The Council's forecast figures are incorrect

Anecdotal evidence of a "baby boom" has been put forward which is not evidenced and should be discounted. Some hard statistical evidence was provided during consultation concerning birth rates per 1000 females and live births at Torbay Hospital.

It is not in dispute that Torbay has a very high birth rate per 1000 females, but the crucial figure is the actual number of live births, which is as stated in the consultation document.

It is not in dispute that the number of live births at Torbay Hospital is higher than the number of live births quoted for Torbay. This is simply because Torbay Hospital is the maternity unit for a large swathe of territory outside the Bay. Many babies born in Torbay hospital live outside the Bay and will enter schools outside the Bay.

Subsequent to the consultation, it has been clarified with the Health Trust and the Registration Service that "home births" are included in the official live birth statistics.

Respondents also pointed to the growth in the Bay's primary school age population between 2000 and 2003, though this consultation has been triggered by forecasts of falling rolls in the next few years.

The Council has made poor decisions on the supply of school places in the past

Respondents complain that the Council has only recently expanded the number of primary school places (e.g. through the construction of Homelands Primary School). The fact is that pupil numbers fluctuate and there is an expectation that the Council is constantly active in managing school places.

In the past, the Council has been criticised (most notably by OFSTED in 2001) for not acting swiftly enough to cope with rising rolls. The same criticism could be levelled if the Council does not act in a time of falling rolls.

Pupils Numbers might rise in future

This is possible given the demographic curve and it is not possible to forecast beyond 2008. The Council could decide to make no changes in the hope that pupil numbers rise, or postpone changes for several years. This would require the Council to fund surplus places in the meantime.

If rolls rose in a few years to the extent that additional places were needed, then, based on past experience, the Council would receive capital funding to carry out new building works. Such new build projects would be for the most part better quality than any existing accommodation "mothballed" during a time of low rolls.

Several respondents suggested that the Council should wait 5 years before making any decisions on adjustments to school places. This is understandable, but forecast figures suggest that in 5 years time, the problem will be very serious and that surplus places will be costing a significant amount of money.

Upton St James is being singled out for closure unfairly

Options to reduce the supply of school places include school closure. There is an argument that can be put forward that with significantly fewer pupils, the Council should maintain fewer schools. In order to pursue this idea, a school, or schools would need to be identified for closure. Upton has been suggested for a number of reasons, all of which are open to debate and are a matter of judgement. It is acknowledged that these factors also apply to varying degrees at other schools.

Difficult physical environment.
Proximity to other alternative schools

Some respondents suggested that the Council should target other schools for closure and suggest those with the poorest standards of teaching and learning, or with the highest number of surplus places.

Upton is not an unsuitable learning environment

A number of respondents have pointed out that Upton has achieved good inspection reports and examination results despite shortcomings in accommodation. Some respondents believe that Upton is a superior environment for learning, due to its ethos and its intimate size.

It has also been pointed out that the school has well-established arrangements to overcome some deficiencies, such as sharing playing fields at Torquay Community College.

The comparative data about Torquay schools' physical environment is not claimed to be conclusive. It cannot be argued that Upton is an isolated case of a school with condition and suitability issues surrounded by others with no such issues. If Upton were closed then the Council would still be maintaining other schools with difficulties that need to be rectified.

That said, Upton is a school with a number of suitability impacts and DDA issues that would need to be addressed at significant expense. It is possible to advance an argument that closing this school "saves" the cost of having to rectify these deficiencies.

Some respondents have commented that there is no reason why the school cannot be developed and improved. This is no doubt the case, but it would be much more difficult and more expensive than most other sites. Some problems are insurmountable; there is no scope to increase play area for example.

Closure of Upton would adversely affect the local community

This is a matter that requires careful judgement, as clearly the school is a valued resource among a significant part of the local community. It is a frustration that the school site will restrict its potential to serve the community as a fully extended school, whilst alternative schools are not considered to be part of the community.

Some pupil scatter graphs are available in the Members' Room and these show the home location for pupils attending St Margaret's, Homelands, Ellacombe and Upton. This suggests the pattern of attendance is complex and that local children do not all attend Upton.

Upton should not be closed since it has a special ethos

Respondents drew attention to the connection with the Church, the school's Christian values and its reputation as a caring environment.

Clearly some parents have chosen Upton because of its CE connection, but it is fair to say that this is not a factor for other parents.

If Upton is unsuitable it should be improved or rebuilt

Some respondents suggest that if the number of roll at Upton falls, this will create scope for the school to shrink to a 5 or 6 class school. This would provide an opportunity to concentrate teaching on the main school site, or to develop spare classrooms for and ICT suite, or a pre school.

A new 210-place primary school would cost around £2.5million to build and a new, larger site would need to be identified and, if not owned by the Council, purchased at further expense. Lymington Road Coach Station has been suggested as a site for a new school and this is Council-owned land. The Council would need to provide an alternative coach station, which would add to the cost of the school project.

Replacing the school would not adjust the supply of places. A sensible new build arrangement would be to close two or three schools and open a new school with fewer places overall. The barrier is the lack of capital finding.

In March, the Chancellor's budget statement which suggested there would be new investment in primary schools over the next 15 years. In the autumn, the DfES plans to consult LEAs over options allocate funding for primary school reconstruction.

Upton St James has very high standards of teaching and learning.

That this is the current situation is not in dispute. However, schools are vulnerable to changes in leadership and management that can swiftly affect performance. Current success is no guarantee of future success.

Upton itself is a good example of rapid positive change. The March 2001 OFSTED inspection concluded that the school was "under-achieving", but by the time of its re-inspection in 2003 it had "improved significantly" and had "many good features". Schools can also experience rapid negative change.

As a planning authority, the Council needs to consider how it can create the best pre-conditions for success and what it should with regard to school place planning in order to foster success.

A school closure will be expensive

It is acknowledged that there will be costs that arise through possible staff redundancies, officer time to manage closure and other transitional measures. On the other hand, there will be savings too from maintaining fewer schools. The saving is recycled within the schools' block budget.

It will also be expensive for the Council to maintain a large number of surplus places.

Some respondents consider that the revenue cost of closure would be better invested in modernising Upton.

Other options should be used to manage the supply of places and no schools should be closed

There are other options. Across the Bay, a number of schools could be reduced in size through the removal or conversion of accommodation and adjustment of Planned Admission Numbers (PANs). Pursuing this option would introduce PANs that in some cases are not conducive to sound class organisation and financial management.

Some respondents counter this argument by pointing out that mixed aged teaching has worked successfully in the past and is in place at some schools at present. Others consider that the Council can overcome difficulties with primary school finances by adjusting the funding formula to siphon money away from secondary schools.

It is generally acknowledged by those who argue in favour of this option that this is in order to “share the pain” of falling rolls among all schools. A judgement is required as to whether this is a price worth paying to preserve the current number of schools maintained by the Council. Several commented that the preservation of schools was more important than “saving money”.

One respondent suggested that Upton could reduce its roll and remain open through “Federation” with another local school under the leadership of a single headteacher, thereby saving revenue costs. Federation is an arrangement under the Education Act 2002, but the relevant guidance advises that “Federation does not generally result in significant financial savings” and that “there are unlikely to be savings.....to offset the loss of resources through falling rolls.”

Other respondents suggested that Upton could reduce in size, so that it became, for example, a 5-class school for 150 pupils based on the main site and that improvement to the main site could be funded from the sale of the Echo Building. However, it is unlikely that the sale would raise enough to significantly improve the main site and a 5-class school would most likely require mixed key stage teaching for Years 2 and 3, which might be detrimental.

The Education of Pupils will be disrupted if Upton closes.

This is acknowledged as a risk and a number of parents have mentioned their concerns. The Council would need to work closely with Upton and alternative schools to ensure smooth transition both educationally and socially. There would be a need to be support work to prepare Upton pupils for transfer and prepare pupils at schools receiving pupils from Upton.

If Upton closes transfer to other schools will be a problem

Whilst sufficient places are available for pupils at alternative schools, there will be more choice for some than others. This is because of the varying sizes of year groups and, generally, older pupils will have fewer alternative schools to choose between. Some parents have drawn attention to this lack of choice.

Most parents with more than one child would, in the event of closure, wish to transfer their children to one school, but in practice this will restrict the scope for choice to one or two alternative schools.

There is a practical limit to the Council scope to act in the area of pupil transfers and admissions, since at some schools, the governing body and not the Council, is the admitting authority. The Council would attempt to broker a voluntary agreement over managed transfer across Torquay in the event of closure.

Some parents might require assistance from the Council to purchase items of distinctive school uniform for a new school. A concern over uniform has been raised by some respondents.

In exceptional cases, the Council might need to provide home to school transport if there were special reasons why local alternatives were unsuitable.

If Upton closes, alternative schools are unacceptable

Concern centres around four issues.

Firstly, there are few places available at CE Primary Schools. Whilst the long-term effect on the balance of provision is negligible (see below), for pupils who would need to change schools, relatively few will be able to enrol at a CE school.

Secondly, there is dissatisfaction with standards of teaching and learning at some alternative schools, including those where most vacancies exist.

Thirdly, the physical environments at some of the alternative schools with places available are little better than Upton.

Fourthly, the journey to alternative schools is difficult given the local terrain.

Closure of Upton would alter the balance of denominational provision

The Council is proposing changes to the supply of school places across the Bay in such a way that there is a negligible effect on the balance of provision.

Before changes began with the review in Brixham, the balance of provision in the Bay was

- 73.3% Community schools
- 7.4% RC schools
- 19.3% CE schools.

If Option One is pursued for Torquay (which is the Option that would make the largest adjustment to CE places) and the suggested changes are made to Curledge Street and Foxhole in Paignton, the picture across the Bay will be:

- 72.4% Community schools
- 8 % RC schools
- 19.6% CE places.

In Torquay, the picture is currently

- 65.7% Community schools
- 7.4% RC schools
- 26.9% CE schools

Adopting Option One would change this to

- 67.2% Community Schools
- 8% RC schools
- 24.8% CE schools.

Closing Upton would create a demand for unsustainable journeys

Respondents have drawn attention to the high proportion of pupils who walk to Upton and how some of these parents will travel to alternative schools by car.

This is the ideal time to make changes

Some respondents commented that they expected the Council to seize the opportunity brought about by falling rolls to make improvements to some schools and close other schools with relatively poor facilities.

Upton is not a suitable environment

In contrast to comments noted above, some respondents contend that the school is not suitable, poorly located and a difficult teaching environment. Some commented that the local children deserve a better school environment even if this means they have to attend other schools.

OFSTED has criticised the accommodation at Upton

Attention was drawn to the comment in the 2003 report that identified accommodation as an area for improvement.

Record of Consultation Meetings

Meeting with Staff at Upton St James CE Primary School

9 March 2005

In attendance:

Staff

Cllrs Jennings, McHugh

Tony Smith, Director for Children's Services

Tony Jordan, School Organisation Manager

Peta Harper, HR Advisor

Meeting opened at 4.00 p.m. with an introduction by Tony Smith.

Staff member: it feels as if Upton as a community is being singled out; that the pupils are being singled out.

Staff member: Upton St James is a unique school and the Council could not recreate Upton St James whatever improvements it might make in future. The option to choose Upton could be lost forever.

Staff member: Why has the Council built a nursery and new classrooms at St Margaret's? Was it a mistake to build Homelands?

Tony Smith: The Council built a neighbourhood nursery at St Margaret's to meet government targets and to provide a type of provision not available previously. The new classrooms are to replace mobiles and the site at St Margaret's is a good one and worthy of investment. Homelands was built to meet rising demand and now the Council must consider changes to meet falling demand.

Staff Member: when did the review of places begin?

Tony Smith: About 18 months ago the Council realised that there was a problem brewing and begun its work to review places in Brixham.

Staff Member: but what if there is an upturn in numbers?

Tony Smith: this is possible, perhaps in 15 years given the demographic curve, and then the Council would need to expand provision where it was needed.

Staff Member: why is Upton the first in the firing line? There are other schools with difficult sites.

Tony Smith: the reasons include geographical factors, the type of denominational provision, condition of buildings, proximity to other schools

Staff member: Upton is a faith school, do alternative options for parents involve faith schools?

Tony Smith: possibly not, as the Council would need to consider whether to support parents to access faith schools through e.g. the provision of transport.

Staff Member: there is already congestion around alternative schools, whereas at Upton most pupils walk to school.

Staff Member: personally, I find older schools are nicer to work in than new schools. Modern schools soon seem outdated.

Staff Member: what exactly is the basis for saying that the buildings are not suitable for the 21st century.

Tony Smith: there are issues over the split site, DDA compliance, ICT links between buildings.

Staff Member; well, actually, the ICT links work perfectly and I think it wrong to take a decision on the buildings alone. The achievements of this school need to be recognised.

Staff Member: what is meant by space for specialist teaching?

Tony Smith: in other schools we are creating dedicated spaces for ICT, libraries and small group work.

Staff Member: maybe the notion on an ICT suite is outdated. Perhaps we should be thinking of laptops for children.

Cllr McHugh: I detect a strong support for the ethos and values of this school from what staff are telling us.

Staff Member: what about the 400 homes to be built on the old SDC site?

Tony Smith: this development will generate some children new to Torquay, but there will be sufficient places at other schools.

Staff Member: think about the effect on the local community. The school is at the centre and this is where parents come to get support.

Staff Member: it is difficult to expect staff to choose between options. There is a lot of emotion involved in all of this for staff.

Tony Smith: I acknowledge that planning is a desktop exercise and that changes are bound to have an impact on individuals. We realise this.

Staff Member: what is the position of staff who could be at risk.

Tony Smith: the LEA would try to secure an agreement with governing bodies of other schools to offer priority interviews for staff at risk. This will be difficult and it may not be possible to achieve a 100% agreement. We can persuade but not decide for governing bodies.

Peta Harper: this will be a Bay wide issue in any case for all schools as rolls fall, so it would be in their interest to reach agreement.

Staff Member: it seems that the recruitment drive for new teachers is a paradox then.

Tony Smith: this is partly to offset demographic factors with older teachers choosing to leave the profession.

Staff Member: closing a school makes everyone redundant, whilst sharing reduction across schools seems fairer.

Staff Member: part of the problem is that the threat of closure has triggered a redundancy situation at Upton.

Staff Member; communication with parents has been unsatisfactory leading to this problem.

Staff Member: Upton is not performing near the bottom of the league tables.

Staff Member: what exactly are suitability issues?

Tony Jordan: these are listed in the school's Asset Management Plan which is available at school. A suitability problem is something about the physical environment that has the potential to impede teaching and learning e.g. poor sound insulation between rooms.

Staff Member: are there any plans for the buildings?

Tony Smith: The CE Diocese of Exeter own the main school; the Council owns the Echo building. There are no plans at the moment.

Staff Member: what is the position of the Diocese.

Tony Smith: the Diocese are a party to the consultation and its Board will consider the issue in due course and express a view. Until then we have only the view of Diocesan officers and they can only speculate on what the Board might say.

Meeting closed at 4.50 p.m.

Meeting with Governors at Upton St James CE Primary School

9 March 2005

In attendance

Governors

Cllrs Jennings, McHugh

Tony Smith, Director for Children's Services

Tony Jordan, School Organisation Manager

Peta Harper, HR Advisor

The meeting began at 5.00 p.m. with an introduction by Tony Smith

Governor: we feel very strongly about the prospect of losing a CE school. The ethos of this school is worth preserving. Parents feel very strongly about the CE connection.

Governor: the consultation paper does not mention anything about the supply of CE places.

Governor: Can you explain a little more about "suitability impacts"

Tony Jordan: these are listed in the school's Asset Management Plan which is available at school. A suitability problem is something about the physical environment that has the potential to impede teaching and learning e.g. poor sound insulation between rooms.

Governor: are home births included in the totals. I understand Torbay has a high number of home births.

Tony Jordan: yes, they are included.

Governor: are the Torquay figures part of the Torbay totals in the consultation paper statistics?

Tony Jordan: yes.

Governor: we do not think the DDA figures are realistic. We have educated disabled pupils before without difficulty. We cannot see where this figure comes from.

Tony Jordan: we can share this information with you. We hired some experts to assess all Torbay schools and report to us on what needs to be done to meet the DDA requirements. The experts also costed out the work. These changes would make the school fully compliant and some would argue that we do not need to go that far.

Governor: why is Homelands not DDA compliant; it's a new school!

Tony Smith: regulations change almost as quickly as new schools are built. This is the simple answer.

Governor: we have prepared some questions, but we need to refine them before we submit them to the Council.

Tony Smith: fine. We will be happy to answer any questions when you are ready.

Governor: why is Upton in the firing line?

Tony Smith: it's a combination of factors, but Upton is a difficult site to improve and there are alternative schools nearby.

Governor: but there are no alternative CE schools with room available nearby.

Governor: this school is part of the community and provides good teaching. The league tables show this.

Governor: the ethos at Upton is better than any other school I have been involved in. This is worth preserving.

Governor: closure will reduce parental choice.

Tony Smith: to have choice we must have spare places, so it is difficult balance to achieve. Too many spare places and there is wasteful competition.

The meeting closed at 5.37 p.m.

Meeting with Parents and Public

Date: Wednesday 9th March 2005
Time: 7pm
Venue: St Cuthbert Mayne School, Torquay

1.	<u>Attendance</u>
1.1	Present on the top table Tony Smith (TS) – Director of Children’s Services Tony Jordan (TJ) – Manager, School Organisation and Policy Councillor McHugh - Member for Children’s Services Councillor Hayman – Member for the Tormohun Ward Councillor Jennings – Deputy Leader Samantha Poston – Policy & Planning Officer
2.	<u>Introduction</u> TS led an introduction of persons on the top table and then gave a brief introduction to the meeting outlining its purpose and role within the consultation process.

	The floor was then opened for questions.
3.	<p><u>Questions</u></p> <p>Grandparent – Attacked the figures in the consultation paper which indicate a falling birth rate. The figures that he found on the internet suggest there are around 2000 births per year in Torbay, far higher than the figures provided by the LEA, he questioned whether the LEA had included home births in the forecasts pointing out that Torbay has a large homebirth rate which has risen to 11%.</p> <p>TJ – confirmed that the birth rate figures had been supplied by the Primary Care Trust and that these do include home birth figures. He also pointed out that caution must be taken when getting the figures directly from the hospitals as they would include those births to parents who live outside Torbay. He confirmed that he would confirm with the trust that the figures quoted were accurate.</p> <p>Parent – What will the cost of redundancies be to the Council and could not this money be better spent on schools?</p> <p>TS – Confirmed that with falling rolls redundancies were unavoidable</p> <p>Parent – Queried why the LEA had recently expanded some primary schools and replaced accommodation.</p> <p>TS/TJ – Confirmed that the LEA had responded to a bulge in population that required an expansion in provision. Also that the LEA does have a rolling programme of improving school accommodation and removing temporary accommodation and took advantage of capital funding available from central government to move this programme on.</p> <p>Parent – Couldn't we address the issue by removing places at larger schools?</p> <p>TS – Acknowledged that whilst there other options such as this, closing Upton also addressed other identified issues such as the limited split site, the location, the accommodation, etc.</p> <p>Parent – Concerned about the loss of a good head and good teaching staff – Upton is a good school with high achievement.</p> <p>TS – Acknowledged this comment and reiterated that the standard of education at Upton was not disputed.</p> <p>Grandparent – Upton is a local school for local people, removing it is tearing the heart out of the community. The distance to alternative schools is not acceptable, some parents don't have the transport to ferry their children to other schools most of them walk. Also the fact is that there are vacancies at Ellacombe for a reason - parents don't want to send their children there.</p> <p>Parent – it is no mystery why there are empty places at Ellacombe. The school is not very good.</p> <p>Audience – Looking at the data provided, the amount of money needed for remedial works at St Margaret's and Ellacombe is higher than that needed at</p>

Upton – seems the LEA is closing this school to save money to spend on other schools.

TJ – Confirmed that Upton is not outstandingly worse than other schools, the data is there to show that there are difficulties at other schools.

Parent – The reference to £208,000 of DDA work required is misleading – requested access to the survey.

TS – Confirmed that the survey would be made available and that all those interested should contact TJ for a copy.

Parent – Pointed out that the arguments seem to be revolving around money when the main issue should be the quality of education.

TS – Acknowledged this point

Parent – Stated that parental choice is being taken away. Parents are being expected to send their children to schools that are not as good as Upton.

Parent – Could not the Echo Building be closed and the whole school downsized?

TS – Agreed that this is an option but that there would still be redundancies and further reductions would be needed elsewhere.

Former pupil – Did not feel deprived by attending this school. By closing the school the LEA will be taking the heart out of the community – the size and accommodation had never affected her education and has the LEA taken into account effect of the new housing development in Torre?

TS – Confirmed that the development at the site of South Devon College had been taken into account. He pointed out that it is expected to generate 75 new pupils.

Audience – The fact that this proposal became public just before Christmas leaving parents little chance of contacting anyone had resulted in approximately 25% of a reduction in NOR just before the January pupil count. This then compounded the issue of a falling roll at Upton and reduced the school's funding.

TS – Confirmed that the LEA had tried to manage the situation and avoid widespread panic, but unfortunately in situations like this it is inevitable. He reiterated that the decision to consider this proposal had not been taken lightly.

Audience – Doesn't believe that the development at South Devon College has been fully taken into account. The proposal is to provide 450 houses for families this will surely generate more than 75 pupils.

TJ – Confirmed that he had spoken to the planning department who had confirmed that 330 houses were going to be built and that there would be a mixture of 1 – 4 bedroomed properties. The LEA took this information, broke the numbers down into the different types of housing and then applied the formula for calculating the number of pupils this would generate. This led to the figure of 75. He also pointed out that no developer contributions might not be

forthcoming from this development, as there are surplus places within local schools.

Parent – Arguments are all about money and not education – the school is not failing.

TS – Pointed out that it is a fact that with falling numbers the LEA will receive less money from central government. There is no choice it is ultimately about money and more importantly best value for money. The LEA is thinking about all pupils and all schools.

Audience – Queried why this site been chosen? Was it for Capital receipt? Where is the diocesan representative? What is their involvement?

TS – Confirmed that should the proposal go ahead then the school site and the buildings would revert to diocesan ownership. He pointed out that the proposal has come from the LEA and that the diocesan office would be consulted as an interested party.

Parent – Pointed out that according to the figures the LEA needs to remove 900 places in Torquay – closing Upton will only remove 200.

TS – Confirmed that that the review of school places would be ongoing.

Audience – Asked why the LEA had spent money at St Margaret's?

TS – Pointed out that the money spent was from central government specifically for projects such as mobile replacement which had happened at St Margaret's,

Parent – Asked whether the headteacher had been asked not to get involved and where the proposal came from?

TJ – Outlined the process that had lead to this proposal - A briefing paper had been taken to the Executive Committee in June 2004 outlining the issue of surplus places within Torbay. As a result the LEA was commissioned to set up 2 working groups to consider the issue within Torquay and Paignton. The groups looked at all the statistical evidence and then put forward proposals to address the issues. This work was undertaken in the Autumn term 2004.

Parent – Pointed out that funding per pupil had risen by 20% and with pupil numbers dropping by less than 20%, schools are still more or less at status quo. It won't cost any more money to keep the school open. The fact is that the LEA is trying to save money.

TS – Confirmed that all monies received for schools is passported to the schools.

Parent – Expressed surprise over the fact that the LEA states there is a fall in the birth rate as she was on a 6 month waiting list for a childcare place and that 18 months ago she was unable to find a place for her 7 year old.

TJ – Clarified that the LEA does not control the supply of childcare places and it is recognised that there are shortages in this area. However, there are 500 empty places in primary schools at this present time. He reiterated the LEA's commitment to manage the closure and assist parents wherever possible in relocating their child.

Audience – Pointed out that you cannot effectively manage a closure, there will be an influx of parents wanting to send their children to certain schools and not others.

Parent – Asked if the LEA will be able to keep siblings together?

TS – Confirmed that whilst the LEA cannot guarantee this it will certainly aim to.

Parents – Reiterated the impossibility of taking children to different schools particularly when they have no transport. Parent choice is being taken away. They are being forced to send their children to schools they don't want to.

TS – Confirmed that the LEA has a duty to ensure best value for money and will at the same time offer parental choice as much as possible, however, it is inevitable that there will be restrictions.

Parent – Pointed out that this change will have a dramatic effect on their child's education. 'Our children are going to pay the price for the sake of others'.

Parent – Pointed out that trends can change dramatically and that in 5 years time the LEA could be facing a totally different picture.

Parent – Asked if anybody had spoken to the children to see how they feel about their school closing.

Parent – Asked if there would be any grants to help parents with the cost of new uniforms.

TS – Confirmed that there would be.

Parent – Asked why the LEA had not looked at the projections at a ward level instead of at a town level to more clearly ascertain where the need and decline is.

TS – Stated that the projections are done at a town level as there is no certainty that parents use their most local school. For example, some will take their child to a school near their place of work.

Parent – could the Council close two schools and open one new school instead ?

Parent - Will the alternative schools be able to offer the extended facilities that are available at Upton ?

Parent – Pointed out that TS had stated when he first joined the LEA that his vision was to see local children in local schools. The majority of pupils attending Upton come from local families.

Parent – Enquired as to whether she would have form of redress under the Human Rights Act. The fact that the LEA is offering pupils counselling in the transitional period indicates that they will need counselling.

Parent – Complained about the lack of support from elected members to keep the school open and posed the question as to whether any of the elected members against the proposal.

Councillor Harris asked to speak in response – He confirmed that all 3 elected members for that area, Councillor Faulkner, Councillor Hayman and himself had pledged support to the parents and school. And had confirmed that they would endeavour to attend all meetings concerning the proposal. He pointed out that in fact Cllr Faulkner had put forward the alternative option that was being considered as part of the consultation.

Cllr Harris declared that he does have an interest in the outcome of the proposal with one of his children attending one of the schools that could be affected and therefore would be unable himself to vote on this proposal.

He acknowledged the passionate and strong feelings of those present and confirmed that the points made had been noted and would be discussed further.

Parent – Asked if there was any funding that went straight from the Council to schools. Stating that they would be prepared to pay more if it meant the school could stay open.

Cllr Harris - Confirmed that some of the Council Tax went to schools and that in fact that amount agreed was 3% more than advised by central government.

TS – Concluded the meeting confirming that consultation was open until 31st March.

He thanked all for attending and for their contributions.