

APPENDIX 2

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION CULTURE & SPORT SERVICE

REPORT ON THE CONSULTATION MEETING TO CONSIDER THE PROPOSAL TO BUILD A NEW WICK HIGH SCHOOL ON EITHER THE EXISTING HIGH SCHOOL PLAYING FIELD SITE OR ON BIGNOLD PARK AND TO DETERMINE WHAT COMMUNITY FACILITIES SHOULD BE INCLUDED WITHIN THE NEW SCHOOL CAMPUS

Consultation Meeting, Assembly Rooms, Wick

Monday 13th September 2010 from 19:00 to 20:50

Present – Cllr. Bill Fernie (Chairman), Cllr. Drew Millar, Ron MacKenzie (Head of Support Services, Education Culture & Sport), Graeme Ross (Area Facilities Officer, Education Culture & Sport), Robert Ferrier (Consultancy Manager, Housing & Property Service) and Gordon Craig (Principal Project Officer, Housing & Property Service) and Bob Barfoot (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education)

There were approximately 180 members of the local community present at the meeting.

**Appendix 1 provides details of the Chairman’s introduction and closing remarks
Appendix 2 contains the slides presented in advance of the meeting by Ron MacKenzie, Robert Ferrier and Gordon Craig**

There is below a transcript of the questions and answers taken from the recording of the meeting. In some instances the quality of the recording was poor as a result of operational problems with microphones.

Question - Richard Gordon: Appendix D in the proposal document - seeking clarification on the differences between the various options, in particular options 2 and 4

Answer – Gordon Craig: Option 2 was originally a new school on the existing site without the community facility. Option 3 was a new school on the Bignold Park site with community facilities. Following the meeting (with stakeholders) in June , Option 2 was enhanced to include community facilities. On this basis, Option 3 was a new school with community facilities on the Bignold Park site and Option 4 was a new school with community facilities on the existing High School playing field site.

Question - Professor Baikie: You have according to this document ground surveys on the two sites and you have according to reports in the Courier last week legal opinion but (in relation to Bignold Park). Why haven't you presented it now?

Answer – Ron MacKenzie: This information will actually be published as part of the consultation report. Normal practice during a statutory consultation is that this information will be published along with all other information ingathered during the consultation process.

Question - David Watson, Vice Chairman of “Save our library action group” (SOLAG): I would like to ask a question about the library. We have this document here which is in the hands of the Highland Council and in the hands of UNISON and a community library based like the flagship, Dingwall, does not work. There has been no consultation about the library services. What happens to the community library? Will the Carnegie Library be closed?

Answer - Bill Fernie: If we no longer require the building for a library, it will be closed.

Further question from David Watson – that is what it says in this document that when the community library is built in the new school then the (existing) community library will close.

Question - David Moore: Chairman of SOLAG: We are not against the new school. I don't think you can duplicate the library, the public area and the swimming pool. We have those already in the centre of Wick

We can save the money by having these facilities kept where they are.

Questioner's name unknown: What other (school) sites did you look at? Or was Bignold Park the only alternative site considered?

Answer – Gordon Craig: The problem is the Council don't own much land around Wick but we looked at the site across the road from Tesco on the far side of town and we looked at the site down here at the 'Heads' and we didn't think these were appropriate, but the obvious one to us at the time was Bignold Park

Question - Laurel Bush: The new school should be built as soon as possible on the grounds of the existing school and plans for a new library, a new swimming pool and a new performance venue should be put on a back burner

The new school could be built with the grounds earmarked for other facilities which might be built after the school has been built, but seeking agreement now on actual building of these facilities seems premature in extreme.

Wick and the area that it serves as a town has no great need for a new library and no great need for a new swimming pool. The proposed performance venue would undermine the viability of the Assembly Rooms and there are numerous other issues which should have been clearly resolved well before any firm proposal to actually build these facilities was actually brought forward.

Do we want to see the closure of a perfectly good swimming pool that I believe is only 15 years old? Do we want to see the library being moved out of one of Wick's most attractive architectural features with no notion what might become of the building as a consequence. I don't think so...

Also at this stage I do not think that we are at any stage to know what the implications might be in terms of restricted access for adults if replacements are built on grounds within a school

To close I repeat, the new school should be built as soon as possible on the grounds of the existing school and plans for a new library, a new swimming pool and a new performance venue should be put on the back burner. Sufficient space should be made available within the site of the new school in order that these additional community facilities could be accommodated at some point in the future. To include these facilities within the new school at this time seems premature in the extreme.

Figures quoted – there are slight differences from the figures quoted in the clarification. There are slight differences. Could we please have some clarification?

- Quoted £18.4M from the Scottish Government, £15.8M from the Highland Council, making a total of £34.2M
- In the proposal document £18.3M from the Scottish Government, £16M from the Highland Council, making a total of £34.3M

Answer – Ron MacKenzie: Thank you for the extensive question. In summary the proposals to include the community library and the community pool in the new school are only proposals at this time. I think that you need to understand that the Council is taking a 60 year view and it is an opportunity that comes along very rarely to invest significant sums in community facilities. On this basis the proposal is that during the next 3 years we would create a bigger and better swimming pool and we would create a library which is fit for purpose. The Carnegie library building, as is, would be made available to the local community. I suggest that if you want an example of something similar that has worked very well than I suggest that you look at the example of Portree where the former community library and community swimming pool were closed and new and greatly improved community facilities were built within the new Portree High School campus. As a result, usage of both the community library facility and the community swimming pool has increased significantly (details of the actual uptake figures will be published in the Consultation Report). I would ask that you have vision and the courage to take a 60 year view of this project. I take the point that swimming pool is only 20 to 25 years old (corrected to 17 years), however it should highlighted that significant investment will be required in the (existing) swimming pool over the next 60 years.

Think of the project in those terms (the 60 year view)

In relation to the funding the correct figure is £18.4M from the Scottish Government and £15.8M from the Highland Council making a total project budget of £34.2M

Questioner's name unknown – in relation to community schools you mention Portree, can I provide another example, Aboyne Academy. In both cases these are places that did not have a community swimming pool or public library prior to this and therefore they were integrated into the actual schools. Can I now speak about Scottish vernacular buildings,

the Carnegie Library, the Assembly Rooms and also Wick High School, these buildings have dignity and presence and have lasted for over a 100 years and some closer to 200 years, especially Telford's buildings. In a town dedicated to conserve its heritage and vernacular buildings through Historic Scotland I cannot understand why no thoughts has been given to the integration of the original building and any creative work undertaken to develop a school of distinctive character that does justice to the town. You state that the building will only last 60 years – that is a limited lifespan and does not invoke confidence or that imaginative thinking has been undertaken. After all the building that I went to is still standing. In 1961 the new buildings were put up and had structural faults at the very beginning that were never attended to because of flat roofs. The new building, a new design, has the same structural flat roof problems. Why then as representatives of acknowledged architectural firms, would you wish to limit your ability and not create a stone building of renown that shows credit to pupils of the future, present pupils and ex-pupils and be the beacon in the community?

Answer - Robert Ferrier: It has been said of the New Town in Edinburgh that has some of most magnificent buildings designed by Robert Adam that if they knew how much it was going to cost to build that they would never have done it. In the modern era, we have a budget to work with and it costs approx £2,200 per m² to build a school. If we cover it in stone, the budget will not bear that kind of luxury.

Answer - Bill Fernie: If we don't build these facilities, the Scottish Government will cut the funding to match what we decide to build. I would have thought the community would have wanted to pick up the type of money that's being offered which includes a library and a swimming pool. In relation to the comment on flat roofs, there will be no flat roofs in the new school.

Questioner unknown: If we have a community library in the school, the adults can only use it when the pupils are not using it. Why can't we have the pool and library in the school and have our own in the town?

Answer – Bill Fernie: One of the pressures facing the Council are the cuts cutting across Govt and local government for up to 10 years that government departments will face cuts and we have an opportunity here to consolidate our running costs and to reduce the costs of running many of our buildings. We have nigh on 2,500 buildings many of which of which are similar to Wick High School, they are not fit for purpose and difficult to dispose

of because we can't move things easily. If we do not start to address the issue of costs, and some of these are hidden from the public. For example we face additional costs arising from the carbon tax, any organisation employing more than 5,000 people is obliged under law to pay a levy in relation to the energy consumed by that organisation. In future years if the Council does not reduce its output of carbon we face paying charges imposed via Europe and the Scottish Government. One of the ways of reducing the payment of carbon taxes is by reducing outputs in relation to fuel usage, heating, diesel, petrol for vehicles. Buildings are a big issue, with 2,500 buildings across the Council and when an opportunity arises to consolidate buildings, as in this instance in Wick, we have the possibility of reducing our running costs and therefore avoid future carbon levy charges. In relation to the pool it will be bigger than the existing pool – a 6 lane pool with seating which the current pool doesn't have. With regard to libraries, for those of you who attended the budget consultation meetings in Caithness you will be aware that there are severe cuts coming. One of the ways of assuring a library service in future in Wick is to have a consolidated library service in one place within the new school.

Interjection by David Walker: Dingwall Library (within the new school) has 6.34 full time equivalent staff and is open 56 hours per week. Why it is open 56 hours a week I do not know? Wick community Library has 2 full time and 2 part time staff. Wick High School library has 1 full time member of staff

Interruption by Bill Fernie: We are straying off the issue. However I understand where you are coming from. There were lots of suggestions received about the future of Library services during the recent budget consultation process. There are a number of serious issues in relation to the future of Council Services and unfortunately I think that it is likely that there will be cuts to the Library Service as a result of the overall budget savings that will have to be found by the Council.

Question – John Inkster: What we have to remember is that we are building a modern building for pupils for (at least) the next 60 years and it should include all facilities. It should have a library and therefore it should be the biggest and best library possible, it should have an assembly hall and it should be the best facility possible. It also has to be built with a swimming pool as it needs to be built on a like for like basis and if you don't build a swimming pool then you are likely to lose £2.0M. Why should Wick lose £2.0M? Let's have the swimming pool, let's make use of the 2 swimming pools. When is the actual start date for the new school?

Answer – Gordon Craig: The start date for construction is September 2012 when funds are available from the Scottish Futures Trust (Scottish Government) for this particular tranche of the new school project.

Question – John Inkster: What does it mean in the consultation paper ‘the visibility of the school is important’?

Answer – Robert Ferrier: It's to do with the presence of the school that it is a school of some note

Question - John Inkster: Are you meaning that it's got to be visible to the people of Wick to see it? What are we talking about?

Answer – Gordon Craig: I think that we felt that Bignold Park was slightly more visible, more in the heart of the community

Questioner's name unknown: In the proposed school design the library's at the top. Do the public have to walk all the way though the school to get to it?

Answer – Robert Ferrier: The proposed school design in front of you tonight was prepared to high-light that it was physically possible to accommodate a new school and community facilities on the site. The detailed design of the school will be produced after the outcome of the statutory consultation is known. At that time there will be detailed consultation with a range of stakeholders, including practitioners from the school, community library and the community pool.

Question – Professor Ian Baikie: Firstly I would like to say that the Parent Council has consulted with 780 households in Wick and that 95% of the respondents do not want a new school built in the Bignold Park. I was on the stakeholder group (as was Julie) and we told them that within the first minutes of it being proposed. Brian Hemming proposed it and we said that local people do not want this and our survey shows that this is true. Parents never wanted the Bignold Park (site). In relation to the school site plans, the plan, relating to Bignold Park, that Mr Craig showed us was different. In the one that we saw the school was further in and not next to Hood Street. We didn't see this diagram. In fact I think that they have been very selective with information. In fact to the extent that when

they did not like the stakeholder group comments they stopped having them and I can prove that. I am very sceptical of this team giving you accurate information. At the start of the meeting what did Mr Fernie say about the legal position? Can you legally build a school in Bignold Park, he did not answer that question? The legal opinion cost money Mr Fernie, when will we see it as the taxpayers have paid for it?

Where are the readable documents for the new school? Have you looked at the documents on the internet? They are rubbish. If that cost £25,000 then it is a pretty poor spend for £25,000

LDN Architects have never built a school. They keep fobbing us off by saying that this is a feasibility study. This document is the only document that we can comment on as we do not have any other information. In the Bignold Park site plan the swimming pool is at the top of the Park as is the library. If it is a consultation they should have the information that we could comment on and we do not have it and I do think that was a poor answer sir.

Mr Hugh Fraser, head of ECS, in a policy document called future decision making said that there would be no duplication of facilities, accommodation facilities at the new pool, accommodation provided through the Pulteneytown People's Project community building project. I have never heard of that before. So what is going to be built at the school? I wish that they would be clear. Are we sacrificing the Assembly Rooms for another hall? So where is the accommodation that will be provided by the PPP, what is its relationship to the school?

Is Caithness Heat & Power being considered for the new school?

What conflicts of interest are you aware of between directors of Caithness Heat & Power and regional councillors who will make this decision?

Is the carbon tax the reason for the site in Bignold Park?

In the original plan the Assembly Rooms were to be axed. Can you clarify the use of the assembly rooms – will they be available for the public in the future as it is now?

What access will the public have to the new swimming pool and new library during hours of operation? John your idea of running 2 (pools) seems to be the most sensible idea. I will quote Mr Craig.." there will be a riot if we close this pool".. You really like our pool don't you Mr Craig?

All schools have to be “secured by design”. It comes back to a comment by LDN Architects at the last meeting that was not answered adequately. Will there be shutters on the windows of the new school. Will there be a 2 metre high fence around the school? What rating will the new schools have? Where is the “secure by design plan”? What risk rating exists for both designs as this rating will affect the appearance of the school.

Question – Kate Farmer: Would you have done 2 plans at exactly the same time of 2 different schools (the recording of this question was extremely faint and not all of the points raised were audible on the recording)

Answer – Robert Ferrier: The plans were generated to meet certain deadlines and the architects may have not had as much time as they would have liked. Both sites will accommodate a High School with community facilities and there are advantages and disadvantages to both. In terms of feasibility it sounds like a lot of work, but it's a due diligence that we have to go through to ensure we are on robust and solid footings.

Comment by unidentified female: There is nothing wrong with our pool, we do not need another one.

Question – Alistair Trill: The stakeholders voted overwhelmingly against siting the school in the Bignold Park also in a survey by pupils and staff the results were overwhelmingly against the school in Bignold Park.

Answer – Bill Fernie: I'm sure that the Councillors will take a lot of weight from these sort of comments.

Question – Andrew Grant: I have been associated with the East End Boys Club for over 30 years. As the biggest users of Bignold Park we would be the biggest losers if the new school was to be built there. We have 3 full sized adult pitches, 1 juvenile pitch and 1 training pitch

The plans show 2 adult pitches so where are we going to play our games? We have 150 boys on a Saturday morning – are we going to be accommodated within the school? We have spent £40,000 in the last year building an extension and we have £20,000 worth of equipment – where will that be stored? Could you answer that please?

Answer – Bill Fernie: Until that decision is reached we can't say what would happen to the facilities, but obviously these factors would have to be taken into account before we reach a decision, but I can't say where that would move to.

Question – Jackie ?: You mentioned in your presentation that an alternative site would have to be found. Where is an alternative site for the youth and the people of Wick to play football etc?

Answer – Bill Fernie: That is a major problem and that will have to be taken into account when making a decision.

Question: Have you anywhere in mind at the moment?

Answer: No, there's nowhere in mind at the moment.

Questioner unknown - : Can you expand upon your comments at the start of the meeting that you will have to find potential alternative community amenities to Bignold Park if the decision is taken to site the new school there and that these amenities have to be available immediately from the point when construction starts.

Answer – Bill Fernie: The Bignold Park is still an option but it becomes a more difficult option because of the legal opinion we've got, which suggests that it would be possible to build there, but it would be subject to a legal challenge and a legal challenge would probably end up going to the High Court and who knows how long that would take? That is something Councillors would have to consider when making a decision and we don't want any delay built into this decision so it will weigh heavily on how we decide it.

Question - Alistair Traill: Is there an issue of the right of way through the Bignold Way and would there be a challenge on that issue?

Answer – Bill Fernie: We're not aware that there is a legal right of way. There is a path across it now.

Questioner unknown: You've already closed the pathway down the side of the football pitch so if you take that one away in the Bignold Park where would you go?

Answer – Bill Fernie: It's an issue that would have to be looked at.

Response from questioner: I thought they went to the site and looked at these things.

Answer – Ron MacKenzie: That information will be taken into account. There are no decisions being made tonight. In relation to everything that is said tonight we are legally obliged to respond to in writing (this will be included within the Consultation Report to be published in early December). Your point will be addressed.

Questioner not identified: The Bignold Park site is on a very steep slope – where is the new school building going to be? Will it be further up the slope, or at the bottom near the South Road end?

Answer – Gordon Craig: The current site plan shows it to be at the top

Response from questioner: Comments in relation to potential flooding on the lower part of the site towards the South Road.

Answer – Robert Ferrier: Once we have a site, we will look at the technical issues.

Question - Alistair Traill: What I read was that the proposed building on the Bignold Park site would be £1m more than the corresponding building on the existing school playing field.

Concerns in relation to access problems for people with mobility problems on a sloping site?

Question - Les Gunn: Whether building on the Bignold Park would cause problems in relation to being able to keep to the time schedule? We were assured at previous meetings that this would not be an issue. Now we are being told that it might.

If there are potential legal difficulties with the Bignold Park site and the school site is therefore the only option, what would be the requirements for the acquisition of additional land to facilitate the building?

Answer – Ron MacKenzie: The timescale for the project has not changed. The timescale presented tonight was the original timescale.

Follow up from Mr Gunn: If the Bignold Park site becomes embroiled in a legal challenge it may well prove impossible to bring it in on time.

Answer – Ron MacKenzie: If this situation arises then this would be taken into account when making recommendations to Members.

Further question from Mr Gunn: What can you tell us about the requirements of gaining additional land to facilitate building on the existing school playing field site. I can tell you that access issues are a problem

Answer – Ron MacKenzie: I mentioned at the outset we are looking at 3 things: a legal opinion; a site survey and a traffic impact assessment, including access to both sites.

In relation to access to the existing school site – the brief to the consultant includes the identification of an alternative route into that school site.

Further question from Mr Gunn: My concern would be that the Bignold Park site plan may be disappearing off the agenda to be replaced by another site. Could we have simply have acquired sufficient land to allow building on the playing field.

Answer – Ron Mackenzie: We are looking at options in relation to the ownership of the land on the surrounding existing school site area and that will be part of the Consultation Report published in early December.

Questioner not identified: Seeking clarification to the various options, in particular the difference between Option 2 and Option 4 Is it an option to acquire additional land adjacent to the existing school site?.

Answer – Gordon Craig: In response to the comments that were made at the last meeting, the general feeling of the meeting was that the school site as it stands at the moment is quite adequate for a school so Option 4 is the existing site with a school on it. That is a direct response to your comments at the last meeting. Some of us are not

entirely comfortable with it, but that's a direct response. A school could be built on it, access is not terrific, but it could be built on so that's why the Option 2 moved on to Option 4 following the last meeting.

Follow up question: Is it also attractive because there is a lot of fields out there that perhaps can be used to extend the site. Is that an option?

Answer – Gordon Craig: Of course it's an option.

Question - : It seems with this quote you are losing the playing field and cramming everything on the embankment rather than selling off the existing building and buying fields further out. You should consider selling the existing site and buy land further out. If you cram it on to a too small site, you will lose out on everything.

Answer – Ron Mackenzie: This is why we are looking at 2 sites. This was always the danger with the existing school site and why Bignold Park became an alternative option.

In relation to the existing school site, one concern is the existing Edwardian facade of the building at the front. It may be listed and therefore our options for future use of that building may be limited. That is another restricting factor which will be brought out in the Consultation Report.

In relation to the site itself and the adjacent land, we are exploring that.

Questioner - unidentified: During the school day no member of the public will have access to the swimming pool or library because there are huge issues with child protection.

Answer – Robert Ferrier: It's resolved in 2 ways usually – firstly we try and lay out the facilities so that the public and the kids don't cross over – there are separate approaches and separate entrances where practical. Equally it is a managed situation; the library or other facilities are not needed all the time and neither does the school need them all the time and it is usual to find a way to manage the process and there are a number of very successful models there. There seems to be a body of thought that the uptake of use tends to increase when facilities are co-located with the school. We are trying to promote something that is good practice and done routinely in other areas.

Question – John Inkster: The starting date is September 2012 as an absolute so will the project be managed such that the starting date will actually be achieved? If it is not achieved then I think that the person running it should be sacked.

Answer – Robert Ferrier/Gordon Craig: That's what we are all aiming towards. Of course it will be managed, that's when the funds become available. We will be ready to start on that date as soon as we get the community's agreement as to where we go from here.

Questioner - unidentified: You skirted round your legal opinion and you stated that you would have to find a new park to replace Bignold Park, if you chose that option. That presumably would be a town centre park. What would the cost of that land be and the development of it and is that included in the budget for the Bignold Park build?

Answer – Bill Fernie: I think the general intention was to use the school site as the playing fields, but that's a suggestion at the moment. Whether that comes to pass or whether that would be acceptable is another matter.

Questioner – unidentified: I am concerned at the loss of amenity if we lose Bignold Park (reference to historical context). Of the new build schools recently built within the Highland Council area, how many Primary and Secondary schools have been built on recreational ground?

Answer – Bill Fernie: I don't know of any because many have been built on land beside the school.

Follow up question: Or has ground been sourced independently by Highland Council and they have found funds to purchase on another site.

Answer – Gordon Craig/Bill Fernie: Most of them have been built on playing fields of the existing school and then the school has been demolished and the land becomes the playing field. That's not so easy at Wick because we have to retain the older part of the building as it is likely that it will be listed and we cannot demolish it.

Questioner unidentified: - Commenting on the fact that the panel has not done its homework and is ill-prepared. Are you really taking us seriously?

Answer – Ron MacKenzie: All questions that have been raised tonight are being recorded, a transcript of the meeting will be produced. The Council is legally obliged to each of these questions in the Consultation Report that will be published in early December. This is the purpose of the statutory consultation

Question – Mr Grant: How many other towns in the Highlands have lovely green playing fields in the middle for everyone to use?

Answer – Gordon Craig/Bill Fernie: None

Question - unidentified: We talked about the number of Council buildings throughout the Highland Council area. Why not do a similar project as they did at Drummie in Golspie when they took an old building, and refurbished it – why not do that with the front building of the High School and put in the housing, council offices in Market Square which they are intending to put up to the DSS building. You've got Rhind House and you've got Social Work. Why not consolidate the whole lot and put them in that building?

Answer – Ron MacKenzie/Bill Fernie: That's a very good suggestion, but one of the problems is that when it was proposed that the Highland Council moved out of the town centre, many people were opposed to it because of the damage it would do to the town centre

Follow up question: There's no point in the public going into the council offices because you are closing down the Service Points.

Answer – Bill Fernie: We haven't done that in Wick. It is being looked at.

Question – Mr Jones: At the last meeting you said the swimming pool would have additional lanes and I understood you to say that the public would then have access to the pool. Could you say yes or no to that question?

The timetable for Dingwall pool shows that the public are excluded from the pool for 7½ hours a day despite you saying it would have the same advantages as the Dingwall Pool. There doesn't appear to be any cost saving here.

The front page of the consultation document, bullet point 2 of paragraph 1.2 ensured BV for the public purse. Building a duplicate pool doesn't seem to do this

Answer – Bill Fernie: My assumption was that if the pool were one third bigger with 2 extra lanes there would be more access for the public.

Follow up question: Surely you cannot have children and adults in at the same time?

Answer – Bill Fernie: That happens in public swimming anyway. Children and adults are in at the same time.

Questioner - unidentified: Why has the Council wasted time and money looking at Bignold Park when there is obviously so much local feeling against the idea? Will there be 2 real choices for people to look at? (summary of question as the detail was not fully picked up on the microphone)

Answer – Bill Fernie: I don't think it's proposed to look at any other sites just now.

Comment – David Watson: Reminding those in attendance that the SOLAG had produced a document that highlighted that the local community and library practitioners should be consulted in relation to any proposed change to library provision (note – this is a much wider issue relating to budget savings proposals)

Answer – Bill Fernie: Assurance was provided that this would happen.

At this point Bill Fernie, in response to a request from the floor, asked for a show hands in support of the 2 options under consideration. There was unanimous support for the existing school playing field site

Questioner – unidentified: How long did you spend in Wick HS on the actual site looking at the existing ground and also Bignold Park? You spoke about haste...

Answer – Robert Ferrier: I spoke about haste towards the end. The studies had been carried out and a technical assessment had been made about the re-use of the existing building. A number of things came out of this exercise. If we had squeezed the school in behind the existing building, it would have been squeezed in and the spaces around it not

pleasant at all. My understanding is the consultation group rejected the idea and this is why it was taken off the table at that time.

Follow up question: You have not answered my question. How long did you actually spend looking at the building?

Answer – Gordon Craig: The guys doing these drawings would have been here for probably 5 days.

Follow up question: Definitely?

Answer – Robert Ferrier: Yes they went round the entire school.

My understanding is the architect team went round the entire existing building as did a Services Engineer and a Structural Engineer to carry out technical analysis to see what could be saved and what not before coming up with sketch layouts to see if it would be possible to do something in that rear court. While we could have got the accommodation in, it just wouldn't have resulted in a good school.

Follow up question: Why not?

Answer – Robert Ferrier: Because it would have been squeezed in, the natural light would have been compromised.

Follow up comments: Lack of decent designs to comment on...

Question – John Inkster: What I want from this meeting is an assurance that you begin the school on time, the school is to the best design possible and has all the facilities that children will need for the next 60 years. I assume you will be taken lessons learnt from the Scottish Futures Trust publication on how to build schools and what lessons have been learnt from the new schools that have been built. And everyone will be consulted about how the corridors have been designed, where the toilets and placed and the dining areas etc.

Answer – Ron MacKenzie: Can I make a general point in response to some of the issue raised tonight. The Scottish Governments' policy on school estate buildings is to create a

community hub. There are educational benefits, community benefits and that's what we are trying to achieve in Wick. The benefits of having a community pool and a community library have been spelt out in financial terms in the consultation document. It saves £1.4million over a period of time so there are financial benefits and best value benefits, but the overriding principle here are educational benefits and community benefits because it will enhance the facilities available to the pupils and it will provide much better facilities in Wick than are currently available. In relation to the timescale for the project, it hasn't changed and it won't change because Councillor Fernie has said it is his priority is to deliver this school as soon as possible.

Comment – Mr Beveridge: As a member of the original stakeholder group, which included pupils and members of the community, we looked at using the existing building and basically decided to through it out. The staff and more importantly the pupils did not want this option. There is not enough room in the school as it is. Another aspect of the design is that, if I understood the presentation, all relevant practitioners will be involved in the detailed discussions re the design that will follow on from this consultation. Mr Beveridge made reference to school designs elsewhere in the UK that have produced iconic designs in spaces less than either of the options being considered tonight.

Questioner – unidentified: If we don't have a community library do we lose the money. If they build a swimming pool in the new school for the pupils and the library for the pupils, do we lose the money?

Answer – Bill Fernie: The money is on offer to do certain things to build a community school. If we don't do that, that amount of money will be deducted from the total.

Follow up question: Are you saying that we don't get the money if we don't have a community library and swimming pool?

Answer – Bill Fernie: The money would be removed from the total.

Unidentified comment: The funding provided by the Scottish Government is two-thirds of the existing school on a like for like basis. There is no funding for a community library, community pool and performance venue

Answer – Gordon Craig: Two thirds is not strictly correct. It's two thirds up to a certain limit. The Scottish Futures Trust has written to the Highland Council and offered £18.3m based on the number of students and a certain number of square meters which averages at around £2,200 per m² to build. They offered a certain amount of money - £2m to build a swimming pool. If we don't build a pool, they will take the money from the £18.3million.

General discussion ensured re the possibility of operating 2 swimming pools within Wick, the existing community pool and the pool within the new High School.

Answer – Bill Fernie: In theory you could have 2 swimming pools, but common sense would suggest that we're not likely to have the funding to run 2 pools.

Question – Professor Baikie: Do you know how much the school uses the current community pool facility?

Answer from floor: 2 hours a week

Answer - Mr Beveridge: When we did have a pool on site it was used all day, every day. We have to get pupils down to the pool and back within 80 minutes. That means for the vast majority of pupils it is not practical and the only High School pupils that are using the pool are those that are following a certificate course. That is why the usage by High School pupils is so low.

Questioner- unidentified

Answer – Gordon Craig: There will be a small training pool next to the big pool and gym facilities.

Answer – Ron MacKenzie: In relation to the letter from the Scottish Futures Trust, we will publish this as part of our consultation report so that it is very clear what is being offered in relation to the school.

Questioner - unidentified: You have referred on more than occasion to the Consultation Report. Will we have an opportunity to comment on the content of that document?

Answer – Ron MacKenzie: This consultation report will be published 3 weeks before it's due to go to Committee in January so we will publish it in the first week in December and there will be 3 weeks in which comments can be submitted and those comments will be tabled at the Committee meeting in January.