

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 13 November 2014 08:20
To: Ian Jackson
Subject: Fwd: Future of Strontian Primary School

Ian

The email below was sent to our local councillors in advance of Tuesday's meeting. I understand that a decision has been referred, and that you are collating representations to form part of the ongoing consultation. I would be grateful if you could include this email.

From
Board of Directors
Sunart Community Company

To
Councillor Andrew Baxter
Councillor Bren Gormley
Councillor Thomas MacLennan
Councillor Brian Murphy

Cc:
Helen Tait, Chair, Strontian Primary School Parent Council

Sirs

Future of Strontian Primary School

As the Board of Directors of Sunart Community Company, we represent our members in the following areas:

- To manage community land and associated assets for the benefit of the Community and the public in general.

- To provide, or assist in providing, recreational facilities, and/or organising recreational activities, which will be available to members of the Community and public at large with the object of improving the conditions of life of the Community.
- To advance community development, including urban or rural regeneration within the Community.
- To advance the education of the Community about its environment, culture, heritage and/or history.
- To advance environmental protection or improvement including preservation, sustainable development and conservation of the natural environment, the maintenance, improvement or provision of environmental amenities for the Community and/or the preservation of buildings or sites of architectural, historic or other importance to the Community.

As you may be aware, the community of Sunart has been actively discussing and planning its own future, in the form of a series of community consultations and the creation of a Community Development Plan. It is quite clear that there is significant strength of feeling around the provision of quality accommodation for the Primary School; indeed it counted as the third most important on a long list of issues and challenges we all face.

We have been following the discussions about the future of the Primary School with interest, and more recently with increasing concern. It has been widely reported that council officers are recommending that you approve the move of Strontian Primary School activities to demountable units adjacent to Ardnamurchan High School. We would like to draw your attention to three specific areas:

1. In spite of this being the least popular option among parents, officers appear to be claiming that this recommendation is based on consultation. We urge you as our representatives to ensure that the voices of the local community, in particular parents of children at both Primary and High Schools, are given prominence in the decision-making process. As indicated, this issue has a high profile across the community;
2. The 'solution' being offered leaves no legacy for the public authorities, and appears to be based on a short-term view of the needs of the community, or perhaps more accurately the desires of the council above that of the community. Any option must be considered in light of the fact that premises, of whatever nature, could be reused, and future flexibility must be designed in from the outset. Careful thought must be given to how any decision affects (and indeed actively promotes) community regeneration and development, increasing the long-term value of Highland Council's investment. Possibilities that ought to be explored include partnership with WestHighlandCollege, later conversion into housing units, or sale to a community body. The recommendation that you will be considering states "*9.12 Although a permanent structure built at this stage could be designed in anticipation of its future incorporation into the High School building, the creation of a permanent structure now would inevitably mean some reduction in the number of options available to Highland Council in 2027*". It is obvious to us that this is contrary to the facts: joined-up thinking at this stage will actually increase the number of options available to HC in 13 years' time.
3. The approach supporting the recommendation appears to be based upon demographic assumptions relating to aging and falling rural populations. Our approach is more holistic, focussing on maintaining and sustaining our rural community, with affordable housing, improved transport and improved economic opportunities. We would urge you when considering the officers' recommendations to adopt a similarly broad-spectrum and positive approach.

We appreciate that we live in straitened times, but urge you to take a long-term view of what is best for our community.

Subject: Highland Council meeting with Strontian Primary Parents, Thursday 4th December

Hi Ian

Please can you pass on my apologies to the meeting on Thursday night, I am unable to attend, as I am away.

Please can my personal view below be considered as part of the meeting.

My view is that if HC want the primary school to move up to AHS then what is being offered needs to be an improvement on what is currently available at our current site, and the current plans mainly in terms of size do not do this.

As discussed in our meeting on the 4th November and previous meetings, the lack of a physical connection to AHS to use the dining facilities, community and music rooms is a major issue for your proposed new SPS. In its current location, SPS uses the village hall all the time, and because the school and village hall is self contained the children can take themselves through and back on their own. Without the same physical link in the new location children will constantly need escorting to and fro, and I can't imagine that SPS or AHS will have the staffing to do this. Weather is also an issue, as it takes quite a while to get small children in and out of waterproof clothing.

To compensate for this, SPS is going to need more flexible space in the new location, an issue raised again at our previous meetings. For me it would be ideal if there was a large '3rd classroom' where the children could eat their lunches, have active learning sessions, and music lessons, and learning support time - and area where the door could be shut, i.e. not just a central space in the middle of the building where any noise would disturb everyone. Currently SPS use the village hall to run around in during wet playtimes. Again for me, to compensate for a loss of this, a covered play space outside, around the new building?, is essential.

The current HC plan for a new SPS is for 242m². I agree with whoever said it at the last meeting that an additional 100m² is needed in the plans to make SPS in the new location adjacent to AHS more viable.

If we are unable to achieve these extras in the new location, then my preference would be for option 1 from the consultation.

I stress that this is my personal view, but it may echo the views of other parents.

I hope that you have a productive meeting.
Kind Regards

Cc: Ian Jackson
Subject: Response to consultation re: upgrading / relocation of Strontian Primary School.

Dear Sirs,

Response to consultation re: upgrading / relocation of Strontian Primary School.

Having, between us, attended all meetings in the last three years regarding this process we would like to convey our dismay at the report being presented to the Highland Council by the Education Department.

There have been on-going negotiations regarding the possible solutions to the problem of the current poor standard of the Strontian Primary School buildings and the three final, costed plans were only presented to the parents and community barely three weeks ago.

Five issues strike us from the report, written by the Education Department, that accompanied these options:

1. It is implied that the parents do not want Option 1 (upgrade existing school) based on this comment:

“After reviewing the consultation responses, Highland Council does not propose to continue with either Option 1 (refurbishment of Strontian Primary on its current site),”

However, although there are around 50 pages of communication there is no evidence to support this and a recent ballot makes it clear that this is the parents' preferred option.

2. For the vast majority of the consultation, Option 1 has been a very minor upgrade of the Primary school with no improvement in playground space, among other things.
3. The most recent comment listed in the 'received communication' in the report is 8th July, which is long before the final options were presented to the parents to make a decision.
4. The investment for demountable units now will necessitate considerable additional expenditure in twelve years time if the proposed move into the AHS takes place.
5. It appears that, in order to help make the case for the Education Department's preferred option, the cost of land purchase has been excluded from the costings. This 'oversight' has

meant that the true cost of the two options next to the High School is not known. We think it reasonable to assume that taking up around 4 building plots next to AHS would result in an extra cost of around £200,000. This difference would make the cost of the new build options very similar to the upgrade option.

It is clear that the Education Department's long-term goal is to force the Primary School into AHS, whether the Strontian community want this or not (or the wider community within the AHS catchment area who also appear to be against this).

The report agrees (Section 9.11 and 10.1) that a key to recommending the demountable option is to maximise flexibility. However, we believe that this is the least flexible option as it virtually guarantees that, by having a school with a limited lifespan, the Primary School will be forced to move into AHS regardless of the wishes of the parents or community in 12 years time. A permanent build would provide considerably more flexibility when the possibility of moving into AHS is possible but it doesn't make it inevitable. Perhaps the 'upgrade' option and the 'permanent build' option have been overlooked as this is precisely what the Education Department would prefer.

You will have seen the result of the recent secret ballot organised by the Primary School Parent Council. This has been the first time there has been a vote in three years – since the decision to **explore** the possibility of moving into the High School – and the result speaks for itself. The desire of a significant majority of parents is for the existing school to be upgraded and there is a complete rejection of the demountable option with not a single parent voting for it as their preference.

In a consultation meeting with Cllr. S. Barron, two weeks ago, when this issue was raised by a number of concerned parents, he assured us that it was they – the elected councillors – who took the decisions, not the civil servants, and that our concerns / preferences would be taken into account. We hope this declaration will stand the test of time when it comes to making this important decision and that the wishes of the parents and community will not be overlooked.

Yours faithfully,

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From:

Sent:

To:

Cc:

Subject: Strontian Primary School - refurbishment

Dear all,

Just a quick message to inform you all that [redacted] and I are among those parents (the vast majority, according to the local poll) who are keen on refurbishment of the existing primary school accommodation and will strongly oppose any moves to shoehorn Strontian pupils into a demountable unit at Ardnamurchan High School.

We are both shocked and dismayed by the shortcomings of the so-called "consultation process" carried out by Highland Council and, more pertinently, the recommendation made to councillors following this process, which has taken absolutely no account of the wishes of parents.

We would prefer it if a decision on this matter was not made this week, unless we can be assured that one of the two preferred options - refurbishment/upgrade of existing facilities or a new-build at AHS - will be provided.

Thank you all for any support you can give us regarding this issue.

[redacted]

From:
Sent:
To:

Cc:
Subject:

Dear Ian,

Please can my following representation be added to the report for consideration by the Education Committee on the 12th November with respect to Strontian Primary School Consultation Report 2014.

1. I believe the Education Departments preferred option (4B) as currently presented in the report, will have serious operational failings that will only increase the stress and pressure on the primary school staff.

These are:

a. With the building being outside of the current AHS PPP redline boundary and no provision made for a direct link to AHS, then every child leaving the proposed building to attend AHS facilities (as is proposed) will have to be escorted across public rights of way. This will be very disruptive to staff teaching time, when say for example individual pupils are coming and going to music lessons at half hour intervals.

b. The current proposal at 243sqm is very small and makes no allowance for handling wet pupils and their clothing.

c. With the small size there is no space to exercise/entertain pupils at wet break times. Will the AHS gym hall be made available for this and supervisors employed, so the primary staff can have their legally entitled breaks?

2. The reports preferred option 4B is a temporary building that I fear will have 2 consequences for primary education in Strontian in the future:

a. The primary school maybe absorbed into AHS completely and lose its identity in 2027 when the AHS PPP agreement ends. It currently has a very good record and is an asset to our community for helping to encourage young families here. 3 to 18 facilities may be the current vogue but we are all aware about how teaching policy and practice seems to be constantly on the shift - which leads me to my second point.

b. If in 2027 when the AHS PPP ends and the then Education Department is no longer in favour of 3 to 18 facilities, Strontian Primary School would be left in a temporary building halfway through its lifespan. This would mean in 20-25 years from now we could be looking at a school housed in failing buildings, having to go through this process again and looking at having to spent another £1 to 2m of our money to put right. Please see sense and put an end to short term decisions making. Invest for all our children's future.

In conclusion - Currently of the 3 proposals on the table in this report, option 1 (to refurbish the existing school) is the only option that improves on things beyond where they are at present. If you can't see you way to vote for option 1 then please can you propose to delay the process until a fully satisfactory solution is found.

From:

Sent:

To:

Cc:

Subject:

Dear Mr. Jackson,

I write to express my belief that your consultation process regarding this matter has not been satisfactory, and that a decision should therefore be delayed so that a more comprehensive consultation can take place.

The principal matter under discussion is how to provide adequate accommodation for Strontian Primary school, and as such all relevant parties in Strontian have been consulted. However, it is clear from the Consultation Report and comments made by Norma Young and others at recent meetings, that it is intended that the Primary School will ultimately be housed within the AHS/Sunart Centre building, and that the recommended course of action is specifically intended as a first step along that route. Accordingly this decision has significant implications for the future of High School education in the wider area and the consultation should therefore involve all communities in the AHS catchment area, including Kilchoan, Lochaline, Acharacle and Ardgour.

Point 2.2 of "Strontian Primary School - Proposals to Improve Accommodation, Report by Director of Care and Learning", lists the groups and individuals consulted with in this matter. Whilst this list might meet "statutory requirements" in the limited sense of those affected by Strontian Primary school, it does not acknowledge the implications for AHS and High School education in the area, and has not undertaken adequate (or any) consultation with that wider community.

Norma Young further indicated recently (meeting held at Strontian Village Hall on Tuesday 4th November 2014) that the absorption of Strontian Primary into the AHS/Sunart Centre building in approximately 12 years' time would be part of a wider plan to create "age 3 to 18 campuses" for future education of children in rural locations. This further highlights the significant impact upon future education of all ages in this area, that this initial, seemingly small and localised decision will have.

Furthermore, this recommendation is being put forward in spite of unanimous objection from current Strontian Primary parents.

Neither of the options preferred by current parents, namely upgrading the existing school, or creating a new build school adjacent to AHS, would have the same implications for locking the community into a future course of action – this recommendation, in spite of assertions to the contrary, is therefore the LEAST flexible option for the community. Either of these options would address both the current (urgent) need for improved accommodation for Strontian Primary School, and enable wider consultation and consideration of the medium to long-term proposals being raised.

Thank you for your consideration of these points.

Yours sincerely,

.. it

From:
Sent:
To:

Cc:
Subject:
Attachments:

Hi all

Thank you for last night's meeting. Please find attached a summary of the key issues identified at the meeting. I have passed to parents, and have asked them how they wish to proceed. I am hoping that with the drawings we will have a better idea which way things will go (Many thanks Ian, received this afternoon).

The parents have said no to the use of a modular building. I think that the way forward for the parents is a vote between option 1, and a permanent option 4 with additions (size being the chief factor) if I have read the situation correctly?

Any advice or comments on those 2 options would be helpful, and I will pass through.

Kind Regards

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Summary of public meeting with Highland Council regarding Strontian Primary School refurbishment proposals.

Held in Strontian Village Hall on Tuesday 4th November at 6.30pm

Attendees: Cllr Thomas MacLennan, Cllr Brian Murphy, Norma Young, Ian Jackson, plus members of the public, including Mindy Ogilvie and Chris Millar Craig.

Apologies: Bren Gormley and Andrew Baxter

- Additional meeting requested to discuss the Education Department recommendation that the installation of a 2-classroom demountable unit, with additional accommodation is adopted to improve the current accommodation for Strontian Primary School

The main points to come out of the discussions were:

- All are after a solution which improves the accommodation for Strontian Primary School. The accommodation needs to be attractive to a new head teacher following Mindy Ogilvie's retirement in Oct 2015.
- The opinion from the floor was that with the options currently on the table, only Option 1 is offering an improvement to facilities for the children and staff of Strontian Primary school. The flexibility of having the hall, which is also used as a general learning space, adjacent to the classrooms seems to be a major deciding factor. At present the children can get to a dry play area, music lessons, drama workshop and active learning sessions in small groups without being escorted.
- There is strong opposition to the use of temporary modular units, particularly as their cost will involve additional spend in 2027 which we cannot be sure Highland Council will have the budget for.
- Future ideas on what a 3-18 community campus would look like vary. There was opposition from the floor to the idea, in 2027, to install the primary school within the walls of the existing AHS. It was felt that this would be detrimental to both the primary school and the high school. If this is the Education Departments intention, then this was considered an ASG wide decision, not just for Strontian Primary School. An additional permanent building adjacent to AHS and then connected in some way in 2027 was considered a better option.
- Problems with the option 1 proposal include initial building cost, and relocation of pupils during the construction phase. Positives for this proposal include cheaper land purchase costs (?), keeping the school in the centre of the village, no negative impact on AHS, retaining Strontian Primary schools identity and keeping the village hall for the community.
- Problems with the option 4s on the table include initial land purchase cost (higher than option 1?), additional spend required in 2027(with modular units), no covered walkway link into the main school for the next 11 years, concerns about timetabling shared facilities, insufficient building size and flexibility. Positives for this proposal

include new purpose built building (for traditional build solution only), timetabled access to AHS facilities and an area to develop as a new playground/ outside space.

- Debate was opened up to a 'do we stay/ do we go scenario'. Floor was unable to make a decisive decision either way – citing lack of information / drawings. All said current plans for option 4 inadequate, particularly in terms of size, (at least an additional 100m² required?). This doesn't help our Councillors, who can argue on our behalf, if they know what we want.

Way Forward...

- Drawings requested, and Ian Jackson will get copies to the Primary School and the Library for viewing. **(DELIVERED TO PRIMARY SCHOOL ON 5TH NOVEMBER)**
- We could ask for a delay in putting the documents to Committee. The next Committee meeting would be January. This could delay the start of the project works by more than 3 months. Cllr MacLennan to investigate whether a delay is possible and sensible.
- Representation is needed to be made to Committee before 11th November, and written representations encouraged as soon as possible. Contact Ian Jackson on ian.jackson@highland.gov.uk
- Strontian Parents need to decide on a particular option together, or to decide to delay and need to inform Councillors asap.

, 5th November 2014

From:
Sent:
To:
Cc:

Subject:
Attachments:

Dear Ian

Please can the attached correspondance be included as part of the consultation for Wednesdays meeting.
Sent on behalf of the Strontian Primary and Nursery Parent Council.

Many thanks

Strontian Primary School Relocation Proposals

Results of Parental ballot held on Friday 7th and Saturday 8th November.

Following a public meeting on Tuesday 7th November, and the subsequent release of drawings by the Education Department, Strontian primary and nursery parents undertook a ballot to establish feeling on the current proposals from Highland Council relating to the future of Strontian Primary school.

BALLOT PAPER

This is a secret ballot undertaken to establish the current views of the parents regarding the Strontian Primary School relocation proposals. Each family has two ballot papers (i.e. 2 votes) to vote with.

You should prioritise the options listed below with a 1, 2 and 3. Please use '1' as your preferred option and '3' as your least favoured option.

The three options are as described in the '*Strontian Primary School Consultation Report 2014, prepared for the Education, Children's and Adults Services Committee meeting on 12th November, along with preliminary drawings ECSB0365/A/00/104/A, ECSB0365/A/00/101/A*'.

Option 1: Upgrade existing Primary School. Floor area 270 m² (460m² including hall / stage)

Option 4a: Demountable modular units close to AHS. Floor area 243m²

Option 4b: Permanent building close to AHS. Floor area: 243m²

Thank you.
Helen Tait.
Chair, Strontian Primary School Parent Council

2 votes were offered per family. Those with a single parent in the household all chose to put one vote into the ballot.

40 voting slips went out, and 40 were returned, a 100% turn out.

- On a points system, where we allocated 2 points to a 1st choice on the ballot, and 1 point to the 2nd choice, the results were
 - Option 1, 60 points
 - Option 4a, 4 points
 - Option 4b, 47 points.
- On a first past the post system, the results were
 - Option 1, 25 votes
 - Option 4a, no votes
 - Option 4b, 15 votes

Conclusion. Overwhelming rejection of Highland Councils preferred option 4a, installation of temporary accommodation adjacent to Ardnamurchan High School.

....., 0th November 2014.

Mr Ian Jackson
Area Education Officer, West Ross, Skye &
Lochaber
Highland Council – Education, Culture and
Sport
Camaghael Hostel
Fort William
PH33 7BR.

10th November 2014

Dear Mr Jackson

Results of Parental Ballot November 2014

Following our public meeting on the 7th November, and the subsequent issue of drawings, the parents agreed to hold a ballot to establish a snapshot of opinion on the current proposals. Many parents expressed disappointment and anger that after 3 years of discussion they were being asked to identify a preferred option when none has a satisfactory level of detail. A full breakdown of the process and results is attached.

A 100% return expressed an overwhelming rejection of your current proposed option to install demountable units adjacent to the high school, with the intention of additional spend in 12 years time. The preferred option as currently presented is Option 1, remodelling and extension to the existing Primary School (62.5%).

The parents feel that there has been a complete lack of clarity over the last 3 years and that information has only been forthcoming if we have had a councillor present at our meetings. Drawings of the current proposals were only made generally available after intervention by Councillors last week, and the options currently available bear little resemblance to the options discussed 3 years ago.

The one area of unanimity amongst parents is the rejection of demountable buildings which has been very consistently opposed from the start. Many feel this predetermines the future of a separate Primary School, as by definition a temporary building is not permanent. Education Scotland noted these concerns in its report and asked Highland Council to reflect them. Instead of this HC has chosen demountable buildings as its preferred option.

The wish of the parents is a long term solution which improves the facilities in which our children are educated, in a way that benefits both staff and pupils.

Yours sincerely