**CONSULTATION MEETING – NEW NESS CASTLE PRIMARY**

**HOLM PRIMARY SCHOOL – 8 NOVEMBER 2017 - 7pm**

**MINUTES OF MEETING**

Cllr. John Finlayson - Chairperson

Brian Porter, Head of Resources;

Kenny Murray, Area Education Officer;

Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Resources;

Bruce Ross, Architect;

Alison Hanna, Estates Officer;

Loraine Gilchrist, Admin Assistant and note taker for the evening.

Approximately 20 members of the public attended, plus 3 Head Teachers, a Deputy HT, and a journalist.

Cllr. Finlayson welcomed everyone and explained the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to establish a new primary school to serve the Ness Castle and Ness-side housing developments, and to amend the catchment area of the current Holm Primary School, in order to create the catchment area for the new school, as set out in the recommendation to the Proposal Paper.

Copies of the Proposal Paper and appendices were distributed, and Cllr. Finlayson drew attention to the larger copies of the maps that were available for inspection

Brian Porter described the legal process the Council has to go through if it wishes to establish a new school or alter catchment areas. It is essentially the same process as is followed for school closures, although the proposal in front of us, to establish a new school, is a much more exciting one to be involved in. Tonight’s meeting is part of a six-week period of public consultation, after which there will be a further 3 week consultation with Education Scotland. We will take account of any views voiced and the Council must reply to any issues raised in the public consultation before coming to a final decision. In addition, the Final Report has to be published at least 3 weeks before being submitted to Council Committee, and further representations may be made during that 3 week period. Parents and other members of the public can rest assured that any points they make will be given due consideration.

Mr Porter continued by highlighting the various options for the new school’s catchment area, and asking the Community’s views on those options.

The consultation is about the establishment of the new school and its catchment area. It is not about the detailed design of the new school. The drawings that have been made available are for illustrative purposes only. We are not at the design process stage yet. Assuming the current proposals are agreed, there will be a separate process of consultation with stakeholders on detailed design.

Kenny Murray advised that the clear reason for the new build is that Holm School, which is a fantastic school, is at full capacity. There are 8 schools in Inverness that are currently capped, including 3 within the immediate area, Hilton, Holm and Lochardil. The roll projections set out in the Proposal Paper indicate that local rolls will continue to rise further. From the Council’s perspective the educational issues are clear – there is a need to build a new school to take pressure off the other schools in the area. By 1st December we hope to have a clear view of what the community would like.

**Questions and Answers**

**Q1 When will the new school be open**?

A1 – Brian Porter - The Proposal Paper advises 2.5 - 3 years following the end of the statutory consultation, but we aim to accelerate the timeline if possible. Construction is likely to take 18 months to 2 years, and in advance of that we have to work up the design and go through the planning process. The other factor is the availability of funding. The Council plans to decide on its capital plan in February 2018, and at that point we should know how much we have available to progress the new build.

**Q2** - **What will be put in place for children at Holm meantime, “as children are already like sardines” and the staff too? Will the school continue to enrol children?**

A2 – Brian Porter - We will look to accelerate the timescale of the build. The phasing of the housebuilding will be significant in determining how many children will enrol in the next few years. We have a best estimate of when the houses will be built but the pattern of housebuilding might alter the figures from our current projections. We might need to look at additional temporary accommodation at the Holm Primary site. We don’t know the true number of how many children this will involve as the new house builds in the area are still under construction. The Proposal Paper contains our best estimate of when they will be built and occupied and number of children in each property. We are looking at options for short term, additional accommodation, and at the space available to create options.

**Q3 – When the new school opens, it is just the case that half the children at Holm Primary will move to the new school? Will that mean that staff and resources will also be moved from Holm to the new school?**

A3 – Brian Porter - The Proposal is not to replace Holm Primary. Holm PS will remain as it is and will be left in a stable and sustainable position. The different catchment options will have different ramifications for Holm, but the figures are only projections.

Kenny Murray - We will be planning ahead and looking very carefully at what the different options will be, and we will be working with our Workforce Planning colleagues when doing so, to decide what staffing is required for both schools when the time comes. The Council is used to this sort of exercise – we have done it before with Milton of Leys, with Inshes, and with other schools. Projecting rolls is not an exact science, but we will ensure that the pupils at Holm Primary are taken care of and offered a suitable education, that continues the existing high standards

**Q4 - We take it there is not going to be a sudden change in numbers? This will be a phasing/gradual decrease in numbers? Is it the case that pupils who are already at Holm Primary can stay there if they choose?**

A4 – Kenny Murray - It won’t be an overnight change, and there will be an element of parental choice.

**Q5 – So if there is a child in, for example, P5 in Holm when the new school opens, and they are in the new school’s catchment, will they be able to stay on at Holm?**

A5 – Ian Jackson - The general principle is that if a child is already enrolled at a school, they will be able to continue at that school. We wouldn’t be dragging children out of Holm PS and forcing them to attend Ness Castle. If a child was still at the pre-school stage and living within the Ness Castle catchment, the expectation would be that they would attend Ness Castle, but even in those circumstances parents could use the placing request system to ask for another school.

**Q6 – I have an 18 month old child. I am currently in the Holm catchment but in future I will be in the Ness Castle catchment. When and where should I enrol my child?**

A6 – Ian Jackson - For enrolment, the Highland Council operates a sort of default position based on a child’s home address, so that when a child is aged for P1, the parents are sent a letter advising that their child will be enrolled in “X school”. If the parent wishes their child to attend another school, they can submit what is termed a “placing request.” Children are automatically enrolled in their catchment school unless parents make a placing request. In the early years of the operation of Ness Castle Primary, we will have to take account of pupils in the Ness Castle catchment who are already at Holm and wish to stay there – they will have an entitlement to do that. The general rule is that this will also apply to younger siblings, because we don’t expect parents to have to send siblings to different schools.

**Q7 – What about nursery enrolment? Does that work the same way?**

A7 - Ian Jackson - Nurseries do not have catchments, as it is not compulsory for children to attend Nursery. There is a broad pattern under which children who enrol at a school nursery often attend the same school at P1 stage, but there are no nursery catchments as such.

If a child was enrolled in Holm Nursery at the time Ness Castle opened, and they were in the Ness Castle catchment, the parents would receive an enrolment letter saying that the child would be enrolled in Ness Castle.

The Chairperson added that it would be possible to submit a placing request in these circumstances. He also advised that the whole profile of nursery was changing and by 2020 there would be greatly increased hours combined with flexible provision. Parents will be able to choose different providers and different establishments at different times. Flexibility is going to be really important at the nursery stage.

**Q8** - **Which Secondary school would the children go to from Ness Castle School?**

A8 - Kenny Murray - Inverness Royal Academy.

**Q9 – Will the Academy have enough capacity?**

A9 – Brian Porter - When the Academy was built it was with additional capacity knowing that the housing development was planned. For any new school, we design it for the size it needs to be, but we also design it so that we can easily add to the accommodation. With the pace of housebuilding in Inverness, we are continually monitoring pupil numbers across the city, to see when existing numbers might escalate and we may need to consider extending schools.

**Q10 – There are various rumours doing the rounds at present -** **Ness Castle pupils would go to Charleston Academy – the Gaelic school will become a mainstream school – Milton of Leys pupils will go to IRA not Millburn Academy? It doesn’t look as if there is a lot of land at the Royal Academy site for expanding the building.**

A10 - Brian Porter - We are looking at the picture city wide. It’s not just this part of town – we have capacity issues right across the city. We’ve been asked a number of times about redrawing catchments across the city. The reality is that redrawing catchments will not solve the capacity issues. The number of houses being built – which is a very positive thing – means we may have to increase the number of schools in Inverness and/or increase the number of places in the current schools. Redrawing the lines isn’t going to “cut it.” Whilst we can’t give a cast iron guarantee that nothing will ever change, we are not looking at changing the secondary school catchments. We’re here to talk about Ness Castle tonight. We are also considering the possibility of a new primary school in the east of Inverness at Stratton, possibly even a new secondary in the future also. It’s a challenge, but it’s a challenge that arises from living in a brilliant city with plenty of jobs and a growing economy. It’s a good challenge to have.

**Q11** – **You say you’re here to** **talk about Ness Castle, which we understand, but there are also separate problems with Lochardil catchment, which has a boundary with Holm. Would it not be better to take a holistic approach to the whole of this local area – not necessarily the whole of Inverness but the local area? By looking at Ness Castle/Holm and then moving on to look at Lochardil, there is a chance you may draw lines in wrong place. Isn’t this a perfect opportunity to take bigger approach rather than this individual area?**

A11 – Brian Porter - As stated earlier, the Council is looking across the entire city to address school capacity pressures. Ness Castle is the first phase, with potentially other changes and new builds in other parts of Inverness. BSGI is also under capacity pressure, and house-building means there are English medium capacity pressures in the Slackbuie area also. It’s too early to state what changes may be progressed in that catchment at this time. We think that it is legitimate to present this current proposal as a self-contained one, without prejudicing future options that may be considered regarding BSGI and Slackbuie, and whether that in turn has implications for the Lochardil catchment.

**Q12 – Of the 3 catchment options – does the Council have a preferred option?**

A12 - Brian Porter – We have no preferred option at present. There is not much between each of the options. We think it is sensible to use easily identifiable features such as Holm Burn or the Distributor Road to delineate the catchment. People in Holm Dell may have a view on that. Where we draw the catchment will clearly have an impact both on the size of Ness Castle PS and on the size of Holm PS. One thing that is difficult to predict is parental choice. There may be placing requests into Ness Castle as an attractive new school, and if Holm PS ends up with spare capacity then it may attract placing requests from elsewhere. We can’t say with any certainty what will happen, but we are genuinely looking for views from parents and the local community, if not tonight then by the end of the consultation period on 1 December.

**Q13 – Where are the roll projections taken from? The housing in the Holm Mills housing is static with not many people coming and going or buying and selling houses. Families within the area are potentially not going to have primary school age children.**

A13 - Ian Jackson – That’s one of the reasons for some of the relatively low projections in Options A & B. The population within the established housing in Holm is becoming more mature and there is not much buying and selling. The roll projections take quite a sophisticated approach and one of the factors taken into account is whether the population in a given area has a high or low proportion of families of normal child bearing age. A new estate often has a lot of younger families coming in.

**Q14 - As a resident of Ness Castle and a parent, I’m a bit concerned that the plans show only one road going into the new school. With all the extra housing going in, the road is already quite busy. Are there any future plans for an access road to the new school? Could there be another school access further along the road?**

A14 - Brian Porter – We will capture that as a question to be responded to. At the moment we are unaware of the detailed plans for road access, and can’t provide an answer tonight. Clearly though the planning conditions will set down requirements for appropriate infrastructure in terms of getting into the new school.

Bruce Ross – It would be worth looking at the Local Plan, which sets out proposed land use. Within that there will be an initial apportionment of land which sets out the school area. The developers will already have carried out their own studies as to what will work and what infrastructure will be needed to support the new housing.

The Chairperson added that whenever a new school is built there is a “Safer Routes to Schools” assessment that involves consultation with parents.

Bruce Ross – In this area the houses would be close to the school and children will be unlikely to use public transport. There will be an expectation that many children will be walking or cycling to school. Some will be dropped off individually by car. Before anything gets built there will be a huge amount of discussion with the community about how best to get people to the new school site. I guess we will be trying to minimise car use. Better cycling and pedestrian routes have a really positive social impact.

**Q15 – It will be critical to get the parking and Safer Routes plan right for the new school. It would be useful to have a date for when the consultation with the community take place. Holm PS is already under a lot of pressure. I am also interested to hear that you are also looking at the Academy. The dining areas at the Academy are already insufficient for the number of pupils they have.**

A15 – Noted.

**Q16 - Is there going to be a change to Aldourie’s catchment area?**

A16 - Ian Jackson - No, this is staying as it is.

**Q17 – I have 2 children, one is 5 and one is four months. By the time the new school is operational the older child will be in the upper stages, so I will probably want to keep her at Holm, whereas I will probably send the younger child to the new school – is there an issue with children going to 2 different schools?**

A17 – Ian Jackson – The younger child will automatically be enrolled at the new school if they are within catchment. If parents wish to leave older children in Holm School this will not be an issue.

**Q18 – I know there are no nursery catchments, but I just wondered whether a new nursery was going to be built into the new school. It’s not just the population increase that is a factor for nursery, but there is going to be a doubling of nursery hours by 2020, which will put massive pressure on existing nursery facilities.**

A18 – Kenny Murray - Yes indeed. Nursery has been factored into the new build.

**Q19 – There are 800 houses planned for the area over the next 7/8 years. The Council will get a developer contribution of £11,000/house allocated for a new primary or secondary school, less for an upgrade to an existing school – Is the new school going to 8 classroom to start with rising to 16 classrooms later?**

A19 – Brian Porter – Depending on the size of the catchment, we know roughly what size of school we are going to need. How exactly we phase that will be looked at in due course.

**Q20 - Depending on which catchment option is chosen, Holm Primary will be running at 100-130 pupils, which is 4-5 classrooms. I don’t think that’s a feasible number to attend a school the size of Holm Primary. It will be a poor catchment area that Holm will be left with. Cauldeen Primary is under sized, Drakies Primary is under sized, Lochardil is under pressure. In 3 years’ time we will have a brand new school at Ness Castle with whatever catchment, but how many from that catchment will go to the new school from Day One? Many will already have started at other schools and will want to continue. There will be a short term pressure at Holm and other schools until this is resolved. I agree with the concerns expressed by the previous speaker about IRA. As she said, the dining area is only big enough for 700 and there are over 1200 pupils at the school. Also the children are crossing a main road with no Crossing Patrol. In my opinion, the whole boundary system should be looked at.**

**Q21 – That point was made earlier. Under the first catchment option, Holm Primary would drop from a roll of nearly 300 to a roll of about 100, but there would be adjoining catchments where the schools were under capacity pressure. Surely it makes sense to take an overall view? We need to open this issue up. It doesn’t make sense for this school to drop to 100 pupils, when Lochardil is a few hundred yards up the road and is bursting at the seams.**

A20/21 - Brian Porter - We are looking at this city wide. The reality is that new schools are attractive to many parents. The city will have a mix of old and new schools. Redrawing catchments in urban areas inevitably means dividing up streets. People will have differing opinions on the boundaries.

**Q22** – **School buildings are just bricks and mortar. Just because a building is new doesn’t mean that parents will want to send their children there.**

**Q23 –** **Over the years Holm Primary has grown from a 7 classroom school and to a 13-classroom school, without there being any addition to the shared facilities. The tiny gym hall we are in also serves as the dining hall, and the playground has been reduced in size to accommodate a nursery with 50 children. This school is undersized for the pupil roll.**

A22/23- Kenny Murray – We’ve acknowledged that earlier in the discussion. That’s part of why we are proposing to build the new school.

Alison Hanna - You’re absolutely right and that’s why we are trying to accelerate this process by starting work on the design even before the consultation is finished.

**Q24** – **Because Holm Primary is so crowded, people might be tempted to leave the school for Ness Castle. They will look at the space available in the new school and think “Let’s go there.” Surely there should be a decision that the only pupils allowed into Ness Castle are those in the correct catchment?**

A24 - Ian Jackson – We can only cap schools where we anticipate capacity problems. Parents have the right to submit a placing request to any school they want, and we are obliged to grant those requests unless certain set circumstances apply. One of those is where capacity issues arise, so we would have to look at the roll of Ness Castle when it opens.

**Q25** - **People coming from further afield to enrol in Ness Castle will obviously affect those of us who live in the catchment of the new school. Should that not be taken into account?**

A25 – Ian Jackson – The Highland Council has to obey the law and the law currently gives parents the right to request whichever school they want. It doesn’t mean that the parents will be granted a place in the school of their choice, but it means that they will be granted the place unless there are good reasons to refuse it.

**Q26** - **Is the idea to build as big a school as possible to accommodate placing requests? It would seem foolish to build a school and have it hit capacity straight away due to placing requests, which would just put pressure back onto Holm.**

A26 – Alison Hanna – The projections in the paper are not just based on the number of houses in the catchment. They are also based on the trends we have observed from previous builds. It’s difficult to estimate, but we have looked at our experience with the pattern of placing requests with previous builds.

Ian Jackson – When we have opened new schools in the past, they have had a bit of a magnet effect.

**Q27** – **Surely the quality of teaching in a school is more important than the quality of the building?**

A27 – Ian Jackson – I couldn’t agree with you more.

**Q28** – **If the roll at Holm is going to drop to 130, we will lose about 4 of the good teachers we currently have, and the school will have less resources too. So Holm Primary would end up getting squashed and our children, who have had to put up with overcrowding, will suddenly be left with a load of empty buildings and cuts. What is going to happen over the next 3 years? At the moment children can’t get proper outdoor time due to the lack of facilities.**

A28 – Kenny Murray - I think we have tried our hardest to deliver adequate facilities at this school. We are not just planning ahead for 3 years’ time, we are planning on a year by year basis, looking at the roll projections annually. I know that when you look around this school, at the play space and such, that it is difficult, but the best we can do here is to put things in place to make sure that Holm PS sees this period through, and the children receive an appropriate education.

**Q29** – **So when is it that the Council knows extra facilities are needed? Is it in March? Last year the demountables that were added were not put in until well after the start of term. There were 6 weeks, nearly 7, when that could have happened. Can you promise that next year parents will be kept better informed of what is to happen?**

A29 – Brian Porter – We are always trying to plan ahead as far as we can. One of the issues is that there are a limited number of suppliers. One of the things we try to do is to get contractors to commit as early as possible, but sometimes that depends on what else is on their order books.

**Q30** – **Does there a come a day when the Council says “Sorry, we can’t take any more kids in Holm Primary, even for children who are within the catchment area?”**

A30 – Brian Porter - We would just have to consider that situation if and when it arose.

**Q31 – The current access arrangements for this school are a nightmare, and Ness Castle will be a bigger school. I can’t see how the Council isn’t looking at the bigger picture. This is the most thriving area of Inverness, never mind Tornagrain, this area is the one that is growing fastest and it is where the Council should be investing most. Should we not be looking at a new school for Holm as well as for Ness Castle?**

A31 – Brian Porter - You make a number of valid points, but regardless of how we draw the catchment, Ness Castle will be a large primary school. If the new school were also to replace Holm Primary, that would result in a very large primary, perhaps up to 1000 pupils. Do parents want a primary school that size? Do we have a site big enough for such a school? This building is actually pretty decent, relative to the 200 or so schools in Highland. There is an A-D rating system we have to follow, for the condition and suitability of our schools. Holm Primary is rated B for both. There are about 70 schools in Highland with a “C” rating. In terms of decisions on investment, the need for work at this school has to be judged against the 70 or so schools that rated “C” for “Poor”. Although there is no way around a new school in some form, it is quite difficult to argue for significant investment for a school such as Holm Primary, which is relatively modern and is in reasonable condition.

**Q32 – One of the catchment options involved drawing a line across the proposed Ness-Side development, but since those houses aren’t built yet, the people living there do not have an opportunity to comment on the catchment boundary.**

A32 - Ian Jackson – Parents thinking of moving to those houses would be able to check beforehand which catchment they were moving into.

**Q33 – Can we revisit the nursery issue? If there are parents living in the Ness Castle catchment, where do they send their nursery children in the next 3 years? Can they send them anywhere?**

A33 – Brian Porter – There are colleagues who are not available tonight who might have been better able to answer that question. They are actually in Edinburgh meeting the Scottish Government about nursery expansion, and we should hear by December what funding is being made available for that. We expect it to be a phased process in terms of building up our staffing and accommodation, and our plans for buildings and staffing for 2020 will be shared with parent councils.

* A parent commented from the floor that parents are able to go wherever they want for Nursery and there was an option to use commissioned childminders. Many parents were unaware of this.

**Q34 – Will the Council know by enrolment time what the position will be for August 2018?**

A34 – Brian Porter - We would hope so.

**Q35 – I agree with the Council’s plan to phase the increased provision in, but am concerned about the position for Holm in 2018. Will the nursery have to be capped to admit only 4 year olds?**

A35 - Kenny Murray - Nurseries have not been forgotten about. There is a major amount of work going on within the Council to plan for nursery expansion. Our Early Years colleagues are working alongside everyone else to deliver on this. We need a clearer view about the funding before we can provide more detail.

**Q36 – It seems that you can’t give the local parents any reassurances about where we can enrol for nursery, but this is a fairly immediate problem for local people.**

A36 – Brian Porter - We will reply when more information is available.

There being no other comments, the Chairperson reminded those present of the closing date for responses – 1 December 2017 – and of where responses should be sent, either via letter or via email. A record of this meeting would be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the People Committee which considers the Final Report, as well as all the submissions. The members of the Committee would have a chance to see the note and all other representations before the meeting. Following the decision of the Committee, the minutes would be submitted to the full Council for ratification.

The Chairperson commented that there is nothing more important to parents than the education of their children, and he encouraged everyone to submit their views in writing.