

CONSULTATION MEETING – TAIN 3-18 CAMPUS

HELD AT TAIN ROYAL ACADEMY COMMUNITY CAMPUS – 18 JUNE 2018 – 6.30pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Cllr. Margaret Paterson - Chairperson
Brian Porter, Head of Resources;
Derek Martin, Area Care and Learning Manager;
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Resources;
Bruce Ross, Architect;
Susannah Holmes, Estates Officer;

Approximately 45 members of the public attended, plus 3 local elected members - Cllr. Fiona Robertson, Cllr. Derek Loudon and Cllr. Alasdair Rhind.

Cllr. Paterson welcomed everyone and noted the presence of the two local elected members. She continued by explaining that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to replace the following schools; Tain Royal Academy, Craighill Primary School, Knockbreck Primary School and St. Duthus Special School; with a new 3-18 campus on one of two possible sites, either the Tain Royal Academy site or the Craighill Primary site.

Copies of the Proposal Paper and appendices were distributed, and Cllr. Paterson drew attention to the larger drawings that were available for inspection. She then asked Brian Porter to explain the background and context to tonight's meeting, and the consultation process.

Mr Porter acknowledged the work undertaken by the local Stakeholders Group, many of whom were present, in arriving at the current Proposal. Although a great deal of consultation had already taken place, the relevant legislation, the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, lays down a set process for any proposal for significant changes to school provision. As was well-known, the Council carried out a statutory consultation in 2014-15 on a proposal to establish a new 3-18 campus for Tain, on a particular site – the TRA site. The Council made a decision last year to pause that process and look at alternative sites. A decision to move forward with the new campus on any site other than that set out originally requires a new statutory consultation. Since June last year, the Council has engaged with the community, both through the local Stakeholder Group and the drop-in session, to look at what site options should be considered. That started with a list of four, and we consulted informally on whether that list could be narrowed down. The outcome was that the paper on which we are consulting tonight contains two site options.

Mr Porter continued by commenting it was important to note that the principle of merging the schools into the 3-18 campus was consulted on in 2014. The Council took the decision to proceed with the campus and that decision was approved by Scottish Ministers. The most recent dialogue with Stakeholders and local members emphasised there was no desire, within those fora, to look again at that principle. However there may be different views within the community. In accordance with the legislation, the Proposal Paper does set out the case again for the educational benefits of the campus, and if anyone wishes to ask questions about that, my colleague Derek Martin will respond.

In terms of the consultation process, officials anticipate the Council will come to a decision on the proposal by December of this year. The Council does however still need to obtain funding for the proposal to move ahead with the campus. Our assumption is we will obtain clarity on funding within the same timescale as the consultation process. This involves discussions with the Scottish Government.

The consultation process requires the Council to hold a formal consultation over a period of at least 30 school days. Because of the summer holidays, the consultation will extend until 4 September. Mr Porter encouraged everyone present to make a contribution tonight, and to submit written representations as well. These would help inform the Council's decision. Also, if anyone was unclear on any aspect, they could ask questions, either tonight or in writing. The Council must reply to any issues raised in the public consultation before coming to a final decision. After the end of the public consultation, there will be a further 3 week consultation with Education Scotland, who will examine the educational merits of the proposal.

After the Council has taken stock of all the responses, and the Report by Education Scotland, we will publish our Final Report at least 3 weeks before that is being submitted to Council Committee. Further representations may be made during that 3 week period. Tonight is therefore not the only opportunity to comment. Parents and other members of the public can rest assured that any points they make will be given due consideration.

The Chairperson then asked Derek Martin to set out the educational benefits of the proposal.

Mr Martin commented that suitable buildings were necessary to provide suitable education for our young people, and we know that Tain does not currently have those. Craighill Primary has the lowest rating of any school building in Highland, Knockbreck Primary has reached its capacity and Tain Royal Academy itself has many challenges. St. Duthus is accommodated within modular units and though those are good they do not represent suitable long term accommodation. Irrespective of which site the community prefer, his interest was in providing suitable educational accommodation for the young people of Tain. A 3-18 campus is a better

educational option, providing better opportunities for music, arts and sports across the community. Those children who currently attend St. Duthus, who have the highest levels of need, also deserve the best facilities.

Bringing children from across Tain into the one campus will make key transitions smoother, and the single campus would allow for better staff collaboration, including primary and secondary teachers assisting each other. There are good examples in PE and science of secondary school teachers coming into the primary school, but equally examples of primary school teachers going into secondary schools to assist with the Broad General Education and with Additional Support Needs (ASN) education. There would no longer be artificial barriers to calling on staff with the right skills.

The new build would provide better opportunities to develop vocational skills, particularly the Developing the Young Workforce initiative, which is applying further down the curriculum and not just to the 15+ age group.

The single campus will allow ASN provision from 3-18, with the opportunity for pupils with additional needs to attend mainstream classes where appropriate.

Overall, the benefits of a campus are clear, both for the community and for our young people.

The Chairperson then asked Susannah Holmes to set out the two site options.

Mrs Holmes outlined the two site options identified in the Proposal Paper. The TRA site totals 6.35 hectares, and the Craighill site 10.62 hectares, 6.72 hectares of which were currently allocated for future housing (170 houses). She described the access issues for both sites and highlighted that the TRA site is closer to the town centre whilst the Craighill site is close to the health centre. Both sites have a fall, 1:29 at TRA and 1:20 at Craighill. There is no service provision at either site. The TRA site has a HV cable running across it, whilst the Craighill site has an open water ditch that would need to be culverted or bridged. The Council have trial pits for the TRA site, following the 2015 decision, but not for the Craighill site. In terms of bus access, the TRA site could keep its existing bus drop-off arrangements whilst these would have to be created at Craighill.

Questions and Answers

Q1 - With reference to the educational benefits deriving from smoother transition, could you comment on how those will apply to pupils coming from Tarbat, Inver and the other rural feeder schools, who will not see those benefits and who will be coming into a school where their peers from the town will already be well-integrated?

A1 (Derek Martin) – Those pupils would still have those challenges, and that's the reality of living in the Highlands. Staff will work very hard to ensure appropriate transition, but this consultation is about pupils from the town of Tain. Transition for pupils from the rural schools within the Associated School Group (ASG) will still be important, but isn't part of the consultation.

Q2 (Follow-up) – Surely it should be? Secondary education at TRA is composed not just of pupils from Tain itself but also a considerable number from the more rural feeder schools. Surely that factor should have been built in from the very beginning?

A2 (Derek Martin) – This consultation is really about the benefits for the pupils from within the town of Tain. Those outside the town are still very important and the schools will continue to work to provide appropriate transition for them.

Q3 (Follow-up comment) – That is a very unsatisfactory answer.

A3 (Derek Martin) – We will take a note of that and consider the issue you raise further.

(Brian Porter) -The secondary education offered at TRA does as you say reach out well beyond the town of Tain itself. The consultation is not limited to the town of Tain. Anyone who lives in the wider area is welcome to submit comments.

Q4 – I'm very worried about vehicle access to a possible new campus at Craighill. At the moment Craighill Drive is like a racetrack at school leaving time. There are already cars going to the primary school, the care home and the health centre. What thought have you given to vehicle access to a campus that would be much larger than the existing school?

A4 (Bruce Ross) – What we've done at this stage is to work with traffic engineers in looking at the four sites that were considered prior to this stage. Their job was to look at all four sites and see whether there was anything in the traffic infrastructure that would preclude any of the four sites from being considered as the location for the campus. They didn't exclude any of the four. Some of the sites had quite a lot of infrastructural improvements that would need to be made to facilitate access, Craighill was judged to have reasonable access opportunities. It's obviously adjacent to the A9 and one of the things people have talked about is whether it would be possible to get access directly off the A9. That's quite a tricky thing to do. It's a trunk road with a 60mph limit and there are certain geometric considerations. Both the engineers and Transport Scotland reminded us that there is a presumption against creating new access points off a trunk road, particularly against a pattern of existing historic junctions. The site that is currently proposed for Craighill is much bigger than the one discussed in 2014, and extends further to the north. There is already a precedent for access off Craighill Terrace into the primary school. There is

also the possibility of extending the road past the health centre and taking an access off from there.

Q5 (Follow-up) – All that traffic would still be coming down Craighill Terrace?

A5 (Bruce Ross) – We wouldn't be looking to get additional access from the north and east. This also needs to be considered in the context of the active schools methodologies and the encouragement given to pupils, parents and staff to walk, cycle, car-share or use public transport to come onto site. The idea is that we have multiple access points onto the suite so we can manage how people come onto it. The capacity of the site at Craighill should allow you to have capacity to manage the transport that comes to service different needs. One would be the 10 or so school buses dropping pupils to the secondary and the primary, one would be taxis taking pupils directly to St. Duthus, one might be pupils dropping children off to nursery, another people visiting the health centre. The site could manage that, and Craighill Terrace already has a lot of traffic. The transport engineer is reporting that there wouldn't necessarily be any more. The caveat they have is what happens at the junction of Craighill Terrace and the A9. Further study is needed on whether improvements would be required there, but their analysis of the actual traffic leads them to conclude there won't be a failure of the infrastructure to cope with that.

Q6 (Follow-up comment) – I don't agree, but there we are.

Q7 – It seems there will be traffic congestion and access issues at whichever of the two sites is chosen. I would like to know why the other two sites were eliminated? This decision seemed to be taken very quickly by a small group of people and without reference to the wider community. The other two sites may have been better for traffic access.

A7 (Brian Porter) – In terms of the process around how we got from the four to the two, from October last year we got together with our Stakeholder Group and used that as sounding board for ideas about taking this project forward. We have a broad representation on that Stakeholder Group, but we also went beyond that with the recent Drop-in Day, which was a conscious attempt to gather views from the wider community. The results of the Drop-in Day are in the report and they indicate a fairly strong community preference in terms of the site options. I feel we have undertaken a very thorough pre-consultation, and of course that process does not represent the decision, nor will a decision be taken tonight. Decision time within the Council will not be until later in the year. I appreciate many people want to see a new school tomorrow, but we have a process to go through, and that process is time consuming. Procedurally, I don't feel we can be accused of not engaging with the community. We have done that in many ways before tonight and the consultation process continues as part of the current exercise. I would say though that the consultation

before you tonight is quite clear in terms of sites – it is about the two options outlined in the consultation paper.

Q8 (Follow-up comment) – I would agree that the Council has improved its consultation process recently, though there could be further improvement.

Q9 – Has there been any thought given to taking an access to the Craighill site from Craighill Terrace?

Bruce Ross – are you talking about the road to the north of the site?

(Follow-up comment) – No, to the south.

A9 (Bruce Ross) – Not from a vehicular point of view. In a school site you want to keep vehicular and pedestrian access apart as much as possible, and allow pedestrians to access via as many points as possible. At the Craighill site we have a broad road frontage which can allow us to utilise a number of access points. That allows us to separate cars parking, taxis, buses etc from cyclists and walkers, which is a good thing. All the vehicular traffic could be directed into the road next to the health centre. Be aware that no sites have been selected or designed, but as a strategy that was how we saw things. If the Craighill site was selected there would be further scrutiny as to how these things would operate.

Q10 (Follow-up) – So you can't guarantee there won't be vehicular access taken from further down Craighill Terrace?

A10 (Bruce Ross) – It's all hypothetical at the moment.

Q11 (Follow-up) – There's been talk before about Compulsory Purchase Orders?

A11 (Bruce Ross) – Neither we as architects nor the transport engineers we engaged with saw that as a strategy with any kind of merit. I can't offer any meaningful guarantee but it isn't something we are actively looking at. We haven't seen that approach as in any way useful.

Q12 - If you use the Craighill site, will you be using the same plans as were set out in 2014, or will there be new plans? Similarly, if you use the TRA site, will you be using the same plans as were set out in 2014, or will there be new plans?

A12 (Brian Porter) – The key point in answering that is budget. We still need to identify and secure funding for the project. Given the Council's financial position, there are likely to be challenges on what can be achieved with the available budget. We don't have a design for Craighill, but I suspect that whatever site is chosen there will be need to be a fresh look at the scheme.

Q13 – The Proposal Paper refers to St. Duthus as taking pupils from ages 3-18. That's incorrect as it is actually 3-19. The Paper also acknowledges that the school is currently at capacity with 24 pupils in 4 classes. At the moment there are children who can't get into St. Duthus because the school is at its absolute maximum. The plans that were drawn up for St. Duthus envisage 4 classrooms. This means you will be doing nothing for St. Duthus, you won't be increasing its capacity. Fair enough, you will be replacing the modular buildings, but there needs to be an awareness that St. Duthus is at its absolute maximum, and we need to build in the right amount of space, not just classroom space. The kids attending St. Duthus need an awful lot more than you are proposing to give them. I was a teacher at St. Duthus and am passionate about education for these very special children. I don't think these proposals give them enough.

A13 (Derek Martin) - Thank you for those comments. This is why we have public consultation. Clearly before we move forward with a design we need to look at a variety of factors, including roll projections for all of the schools, and in the case of St. Duthus, looking further afield to see if we can project, as best we can, the likely demand on the school in future. It's quite a difficult thing to do with St. Duthus but we need to future proof our design as best we can to ensure the children at St. Duthus get the very best education we can provide. Your point is well made.

Q14 (Follow-up) – It's not just a matter of classrooms, the school needs General Purpose space, access to the Gym, dining facilities. These kids need so much more. Managers in the Council need to do more than just make wee visits to St. Duthus. They need to spend a couple of days in the building to see why the space is needed.

A14 (Derek Martin) – I appreciate the depth of feeling. Let me assure you that we are well aware of the current limitations of the accommodation at St. Duthus. When Highland Council builds new schools, we always allow for additional capacity for ASN purposes. These things are being considered, they are important, and thank you for your comments.

The Chairperson urged that all those making points at the meeting should also submit written responses to the consultation exercise.

Q15 – Is there any sound research evidence supporting the suggestion that a 3-18 campus provides better educational benefits? I myself feel that split primary/secondary campuses would be better. That would create a more equitable situation between the town and rural primary schools. Under the present proposal pupils in the rural schools will not have the opportunity to be part of a 3-18 campus, through no fault of their own. We cannot just blunder into a 3-18 campus without decent evidence to back up the claimed benefits. There have been problems

throughout Scotland with 3-18 campuses. The model just doesn't work. I think it's time to consider just why local authorities and the Scottish Government are so keen on creating 3-18 campuses.

In terms of the two sites, there is a major issue with parked cars on Craighill Terrace, which would need to be addressed if that site were chosen. The TRA site is much more central. Mention was made earlier of encouraging children to walk to school, and yet if Craighill were chosen you would be asking children to walk from one end of town to the other. Children would be much more likely to walk to the TRA site.

A15 (Derek Martin) - There are a number of points there that would be better answered by others but let me see if I can answer some of them. Wherever secondary schools or joint campuses are located, the further away a primary school is located the greater the barriers to transition. I can't comment on the specifics of how in future the schools will deal with those barriers. I have some ideas, but those links will develop between schools at the time. We take note of your comments.

(Bruce Ross) – On the site selection, there is nothing I can meaningfully say in response at the moment, but we will take a note of your comments and undertake further analysis.

Q16 – Is there a concern that we could be making transition for pupils too smooth, and leaving them unprepared for life when they leave school? If pupils have been in the same campus from the ages of 3-18 they will never have had to deal with change. All of sudden they will be thrown out in the real world and will not have had the experience of dealing with challenges. Has any thought been given to that?

A16 (Derek Martin) I'm often challenged on transition between schools but I've not previously had a question about transition on leaving school. It's certainly something worth thinking about. I recognise there is an argument that if our children don't face difficulty in their school life then they are left unprepared for adult life. Then again, there is an argument that if we support our children well, it gives them the ability to cope with change in their adult life. My feeling is we need a balance between support and challenge, and maybe we can get that balance away from the traditional points of transition. I'm not convinced that putting up barriers at the points of transition is the way to prepare children for life beyond school. I think that the high standards of learning and teaching we have in our schools, and the curriculum we now have, does provide appropriate challenge, but I take your point as well, and will reflect on it.

Q17 - In my view, the TRA site should no longer be even on the table. I'm fully in favour of the Craighill site. Given the size of the TRA site, what future proofing does the Council have for expansion at the site?

A17 (Susannah Holmes) – We will look at both sites in the context of our roll projections. There is a formula built in for the number of pupils we can expect per house, in the event of an increase in population.

Q18 (Follow-up) – So you're saying the TRA site could cope with an extra 400-500 pupils?

A18 (Susannah Holmes) – The roll at TRA is expected to rise to around 600 pupils, and our projections are made for 15 years ahead.

Q18 (Follow-up comment) – The TRA site is too small.

(Brian Porter) – The Proposal Paper itself captures the results of the Drop-in Day and the informal consultation, which revealed an overwhelming preference for the Craighill site, but some support for the other sites, including the TRA. Your question was about why the TRA is still being considered. One of the criticisms levelled at the Council about the 2014-15 exercise was that on that occasion we put all our eggs into the one basket of the TRA site and then went out to consultation. The new Proposal provides a comparison of the two sites – you have done one yourself in comparing the sizes. The information is there in the Proposal Paper and allows everyone reading it to make the direct comparison.

In addition, until we get to the end of the current process, the TRA site represents the status quo. I'm not saying that to be controversial. It's simply a fact that in 2015 the Council chose the TRA site as the location of the campus and that remains the Council's decision until such time as the decision is changed. We've tried to be up front in explaining this to the Stakeholder Group and to those who came to the Drop-in session. The Proposal Paper includes the results of informal consultation and some technical information about the sites. It's clear that on both counts Craighill looks a strong candidate, but we're here tonight to hear views. During the Drop-in session some people were speaking up quite vocally in favour of the TRA site. The Council hasn't stated a preference in terms of site location. We're open to views.

Q19 – Looking around here tonight, it looks a bit like a Saga outing. Most of us here are too old to be concerned about our children's education although I accept that if you are a grandparent you will be concerned. I would like to make the point that the venue is totally unacceptable. If I had been in a wheelchair there's no way I would have managed to get to this meeting. It's also extremely difficult to hear.

I want to ask about the consultation exercise. At the last meeting we had, on 10 May, there was a discussion about how the consultation should take place. One suggestion was that, because we are all on the electoral roll, everybody could be consulted. No-one would have to come to a meeting and everyone would get proper information, unlike in 2014-15. Everyone would have a choice whether or not to

respond. This format though relies on people coming to a public meeting, finding the venue and coming along at a time that isn't suitable for young mums.

The TRA site isn't being mentioned at the moment. As an ex-teacher I would have huge problems with the TRA site because it seems to be based on the premise that the new school is built alongside the current TRA whilst the Academy continues to operate, and that the old Academy building is demolished after pupils have moved into the new school. So for about 2-4 years teachers would work next to a building site, which is educationally unsound, a no-no on health and safety grounds, and very disruptive to exams, so I think the TRA option is a crazy idea. I'm also very concerned about the campus proposal. It's clearly been decided by somebody that this is a good idea. As a former teacher of English I know how hard it can be to get hold of a drama studio or a hall for a rehearsal. Can you imagine what it would be like if you have the secondary school, the primary school, the nursery and the special school all competing for the same facilities? The situation for the PE teachers would be even worse. Actually what would they do when they lose their playing fields to the building of a new Academy? I've been concerned for many years about the way this has been going. I think I'm right in saying that that in 2014 the Craighill site wasn't looked at in the way we are doing now, because now we have more land available.

A19 (Brian Porter) – I'll respond on the consultation process to begin with. Although I'm delighted to see a good turnout tonight, this is not the only opportunity people have to comment. Our consultation process runs until 4 September. We will accept comments up to that date. The legislation requires us not just to accept comments but to consider and respond to them in the Final Report. We've worked very closely with the Stakeholder Group to consider how best to conduct the consultation, so beyond what we have to do in law, I know that the Stakeholder Group, off their own initiative, have taken their own action to publicise the consultation within the community. I don't agree that we have failed to engage with the community in this process, which is not just about tonight. It's about everything that's happened before tonight and everything that will happen up to the 4 September. I can speak for everyone around this table when we say we want comments. The worst consultation I can think of is one where no-one comments. Responses to consultation help us as officials to shape recommendations to elected members and they help elected members in taking decisions.

(Susannah Holmes) – We would have a strategy to ensure that whichever site is chosen the school would have all its educational facilities open to it at all times, even though it's a live site.

(Derek Martin) – The reality is that either of the sites will involve an element of disruption. That's just the reality unless you are building on a completely greenfield site. In respect of the use of facilities within a campus, the campus would be built

with facilities that reflect the pupil numbers. If we were simply to replicate the current facilities of the TRA and have another 3 schools join the site, then of course there would be difficulties. The appropriateness of the facilities would be part of the design process, and facilities would be designed to suit the number of pupils.

Q20 – It was mentioned earlier that the Council has roll projections for the numbers of pupils in future, based on a formula of pupils per house. Two years ago you were projecting 18 pupils for St. Duthus and it already has 24. If you can't get it right for St. Duthus then why should we trust you to get it right for TRA, Craighill and Knockbreck? You are only allowing for 24 pupils at St. Duthus which is the figure it has already. If St. Duthus was given another hut now it would be full instantly. That school could have a roll of 36 easily. The second point I would like to make is that "inclusion" is the buzzword just now. That's fine but you need space to deliver it, both inside and outside.

A20 (Susannah Holmes) – Calculating roll projections for special education isn't done in the same way as for mainstream schools. The Council's policy is to encourage integration of pupils with ASN and SEBN into mainstream classes. Additional space for ASN purposes was part of the previous design but not in the same way as is currently offered at St. Duthus.

Q21 (Follow-up) – At the moment there are children who can't get the right placement as St. Duthus is full. If it had additional capacity it could have 36 pupils straight away. I endorse the previous point about the competition for space. At the moment it is extremely difficult for St. Duthus to get slots in the swimming pool so that the children can get healthy exercise. It's ridiculous and you will have "forgotten children" because you're not catering for their needs.

A21 (Derek Martin) – If we were to put another hut into St. Duthus I can tell you it would not be full straight away. Before any pupil attends St. Duthus they go through a process at Area level that looks at the most appropriate placement for them, and we would assess whether St. Duthus was an appropriate placement. So the idea that an extra hut at St. Duthus would be full tomorrow is simply not true. There is also a presumption in law that all children will be educated in a mainstream setting, and it is current educational thinking that wherever possible we should be doing that. In my opinion, a campus setting allows for the best of both worlds for pupils with high level ASN. There are children in special schools who, if they were close to a mainstream school, would be able to access, not all mainstream education, but some. This might be for part of a day, or a single lesson, or just integrating with other young people socially. In terms of accessing facilities, of course there are currently problems with this. We are agreed that the current facilities in the town are not good for any pupil, not just those at St. Duthus. Again, if a new campus were constructed, it would be with appropriate facilities which would be shared equitably.

It was mentioned earlier that when we design new school facilities we build in extra additional support needs facilities and also spaces for pupils with SEBN.

Q22 (Comment) – Three points - If we get a new campus all the buildings should be on the same level. If not, then you need to include lifts, which means that disabled pupils are not being treated in the same way.

Secondly, whilst I don't like looking back, I feel that if the consultation in 2014 had been carried out properly, we wouldn't be in this position. We would be much further along with our new school. Now, we might not get all the resources we need for the new school.

Lastly and on a positive note, I visited my sister whose grandson goes to a brand new nursery on a single school campus in Largs. It's a wonderful place. The school has 1200 children so is much bigger than our campus but the whole place looked good. I just hope Highland Council can get it right.

Q23 - I'm concerned about the potential impact on the seaboard villages. Currently we have a situation where children in all the primary schools transition at the same time, so they are all treated the same. With the campus, children from the seaboard villages will be joining a campus where the primary children from Tain are already settled, and where they will be the outsiders. I have seen a letter from Mr Porter's predecessor which stated that the decision to move to a 3-18 campus was taken in 2012. As we are now in 2018, with different parents and different children, this question should be re-opened and considered within this consultation.

A23 (Brian Porter) – I think what you're referring to in 2012 was an informal consultation undertaken on various options within Tain. That was a body of work undertaken before statutory consultation in 2014. You're correct in saying the campus was discussed as an option at that time. To an extent that demonstrates the extent of consultation that has been undertaken on this project, but the Council can only take a decision to establish a campus through the statutory process, and that decision was taken in 2015.

The Council was clear last year that it needed to respond to the concerns of the community, and those concerns were about the site options rather than about the principle of a campus. As mentioned, we have had extensive engagement with the Stakeholders Group and through the Drop-in session, and there have been some concerns expressed about the campus model. However, I haven't had the sense that those concerns are widespread. The overwhelming message from the community has been that there is a need to move forward with the campus and create better school accommodation for Tain, recognising the problems we have with the current accommodation. No-one within the Stakeholders Group has wanted to look back, they have all looked forward to improving facilities for the young people

locally and for the community, and that has been about site options rather than the principle of the campus. That said, any comments that come in about the campus as a result of this consultation are welcome, and will be reflected upon and responded to, but we will be guided by the majority view of the community and I haven't had any sense there is a widespread view that the concept of a campus should be revisited. The clear message from the Stakeholders is "Let's get this moving, let's get the funding clarified and let's get our new school as soon as we can." If there isn't majority support for the new campus, then I'm not sure how these proposals will move forward.

Q24 – When you talk about the support of the community, is that the community of Tain or the wider community from which TRA draws its pupils?

A24 – (Brian Porter) – The consultation that took place in 2014 invited comments from the wider community. It wasn't just for residents and parents from Tain itself. The current consultation takes the same approach. We are very much inviting views from the wider community and in no way are we trying to restrict that input. The Stakeholder Group also represents a mix, it's not just from the town of Tain.

Q25 (Follow-up) – Can I suggest that's made clearer? All the messages about this consultation have been "Tain, Tain, Tain."

Q26 (Comment) – I have to register disagreement with that. I'm a member of Nigg and Shandwick Community Council and we are represented on the Stakeholder Group, as are other community councils.

Q27 (Comment) - I endorse the last comment. We're from Gledfield and we are represented on the Stakeholder Group.

Q28 – I'm a parent at Knockbreck School. When the last consultation took place, we were told we have the new school around about now, so I'm wondering what the timescale is now, and once set will it be set in stone?

A28 – (Brian Porter) Unfortunately I can't give a definitive answer right now. Because of affordability issues, back in March the Council reduced its capital programme by about half. Tain Campus, along with a number of other projects, was identified as a priority for the Council to bid for funding from the Scottish Government. We are expecting that bidding process to open shortly, and we are assuming it will take place over a similar timescale as this consultation, so that by the end of the year we will know whether we have been successful. So I can't give any commitments on timescale. We are (a) waiting for the Scottish Government's capital bidding process to open, and (b) waiting for the outcome of that process. Part of the reason for moving forward with this consultation is so we can "hit the ground running" if we do get approval for the funding. It will certainly help our case if

we can say to the Scottish Government that we have concluded a consultation and therefore removed that uncertainty. We're well aware of the condition of our schools and that is reflected in the Proposal Paper. You can see in the Paper that we state Craighill is the lowest scoring school in Highland. That's not an emotive statement, it's a fact.

Q29 (Comment) – I think we should make it clear that when you say “Craighill is the lowest scoring school in Highland”, that's a reference to the building and not to the standard of education. The other thing I'd like to say is that we need to select the site before we get too involved with discussing the design.

Q30 – The Proposal Paper includes a table comparing the capital costs of the two site options. Does that table take account of modular or off site construction, or other techniques?

A30 (Brian Porter) – Because we don't yet have a design for the Craighill site, and we're not assuming that the design we had until last year is necessarily the way forward for the TRA site, the Paper assumes at this stage that the construction costs are neutral across the two sites. One thing you can be sure of is that whether it is modular construction, or any new or innovative way of delivering buildings, the one key message elected members are giving us is that we need to figure out a way of making our capital investment go further. Whether it is Tain or anywhere else in Highland, we are looking to deliver the best possible facilities at the lowest possible cost. However, before we work up a design, we need to know what site we are working on and we need to know what budget we have.

Q31 (Follow-up comment) – The Proposal Paper doesn't make that clear.

A31 (Brian Porter) - We'll take that on board and consider that for the final report.

Q32 – Will the staff who actually work in the schools and nurseries, and the pupils, be asked their opinion about what they want, and more importantly, that they need, for their schools?

A32 (Derek Martin) – The short answer is “Very much so”. The Council has traditionally done this, and in the Alness Academy project one or two of the older pupils have been part of the team guiding that project. The staff input is vital, and the communication between the staff and the wider team is of crucial importance. Where that works well you usually get a good outcome. The views of the pupils are also very important and the questions you ask depend on the age of the child. So with a nursery child you might ask them to draw you a picture of a classroom, whereas with upper secondary pupils you can go into a lot more technical detail. To get any of our pupils involved in aspects of design is absolutely fantastic. It's too good an opportunity to miss.

(Bruce Ross) – I'd echo all of that. In previous projects we've recognised the importance of consulting with schools. Clearly you can't consult with every single member of staff but we consult through nominated individuals to make sure we understand how things work, that we are evidencing our plans and having our plans critiqued by staff. In the previous work we did with TRA we had good relations with the Craft and Design Department and the students were on the point of making a 3D model when the project was paused. Although I wouldn't want to play down concerns about construction noise, it's quite an opportunity for young people to see a large fabrication go up. These things, managed correctly, can be quite an informative thing.

Q33 – I'm not sure how you construct quietly!

A33 – It's not so much how you construct quietly as how you manage the construction. These things can either be badly done or appropriately managed.

Q34 – I understand that it was after the 2010 Act that the Scottish Government decided to roll out 3-18 campuses. I've been onto Google and have searched extensively for evidence about the educational benefits of 3-18 campuses. I have found no academic research on the subject relating to the UK. The closest I found was from Scandinavia, where 3-18 campuses have been rolled out, but in terms of educational benefits, the results are inconclusive. I have a relative who works in a 3-18 campus in Fife, where there are 1800 pupils. Last year, after the senior school results, there was an emergency inspection, responding to the fact this school has the worst results in Scotland. They also have the highest rate in Scotland for staff absence due to stress. I know the Council claim that campus education up in Caithness seems to be working, but some of us have been flagging up for years that 3-18 campus education may not be the way ahead. I'm not convinced about the 3-18 campus idea, and would like to support those in the community who support a split campus, that would deal with the traffic issues, deal with the footfall, and keep our schools functioning competitively, in the way they have been up to now.

A34 (Derek Martin) – I'm also unaware of academic research on this. No doubt there will be eventually, but I'm not aware of any to date. What you are describing in Fife could be down to problems within the community, differences in leadership styles – who knows? It would be wrong to speculate too much about that.

I recall many years ago when we started introducing school nurseries. I remember thinking at the time that I was the Head Teacher of a primary school. My business was learning and teaching, not childcare. I look back on that now and have a good laugh at myself, because of the benefits of having joined up thinking in early learning. That has been of benefit to our children.

Q35 (Comment) – I feel it's quite disappointing that we've got to this stage and people are still questioning the 3-18 campus, and I'm not sure it's reasonable to claim that the Fife example can be blamed on the campus model. We're looking at schools that will be cheaper to run, be more up to date, which will have better facilities, and which will provide better education. At the moment many parents have to submit placing requests for the school they want as they are in the "wrong" catchment, and have to wait ages before they get the decision on that request. I feel we should go ahead with the campus. There isn't any substantial opposition to it.

Chairperson – People have different opinions, and not everyone will agree. That's why we're here tonight and that's why everyone should submit written comments too.

Q36 - (Cllr. Derek Loudon) (Comment) – The local Head Teachers have visited a 3-18 campus, and they came back with the feeling that this was something that would work. They want to get on with it, and I would take my lead from our Head Teachers, both as teachers and as managers. I'm sure there will be challenges, and maybe some of the problems elsewhere have arisen from poor design. I think with the right design and the right Head Teacher, we can make a success of this.

Q37 – People are saying there aren't strong objections to the campus, but it has been raised several times tonight. Has the question been publicly asked across the community, as to whether they want this campus or not? All the consultation to date has been purely about the site. People are not being asked.

Q38 (Comment) – You don't need to wait to be asked. You can just go right ahead and comment.

Q39 (Follow-up comment to Q37) – If you really want people's opinions, you should ask for them.

Chairperson – That's what this meeting is about.

Q40 (Comment) – I was a Parent Council member at the time of the 2014 consultation and we were asked. Our Head Teacher visited a 3-18 campus and came back with glowing reports, as did those who visited from other schools. We didn't just jump into this campus idea without being asked. It was all fully discussed at the time. This meeting tonight needs to focus on getting a site.

A40 (Susannah Holmes) – When the decision to implement the 2015 closure was paused, it was because of the issues with the site. The majority were in favour of the campus.

Q41 – You talked earlier about access to the Craighill site being from the road beside the Health Centre. How do you stop access from Kirksheaf via Manse Road

and Manse Crescent? Also at lunchtimes, how do you stop a swarm of children going down Manse Road?

A41 (Susannah Holmes) – I think a lot of this comes down to design, and a design that addresses those particular issues – where the main accesses are, and looking at ways of discouraging parking and use of private vehicles for local journeys. It comes down to management of the site.

Q42 (Follow-up) – If a pupil is going out to the shops at lunchtime, that pupil is going to take the easiest route.

A42 (Susannah Holmes) – There are ways and means of managing it. I'm not saying we want to put a 4 foot high fence around the whole site, but it does come down to detailed design.

(Bruce Ross) – There are two potential strategies. One is that you want to have enough parking, and enough public transport, also a decent design for public transport. You want to have off-site routes that connect things so that you provide an incentive to walk and cycle, not just for kids but for staff who live nearby. Then there are inevitably things you want to do to try and prevent people from acting irresponsibly, for example people stopping in the middle of the road to let their kids out. It's a combination of measures. In terms of lunchtime, the school canteen is optimistic about retaining most of the kids for school meals.

Q43 – That's not realistic. You can't do it now and you won't be able to achieve it in future.

A43 (Bruce Ross) – I think that's part of creating modern dining facilities. The previous brief we had included not just a main cafeteria but snack bars and outside eating spaces. On the other hand, I imagine there will be businesses in the town that would welcome the footfall from pupils at lunchtime. Having multiple ways in and out of the site can be a good way to avoid channelling pupils along a single route.

Q44 – The problem you will have is that for pupils leaving the site at lunchtime to go to town, the quickest route will be through a residential area.

A44 (Bruce Ross) – Possibly, yes.

Q45 – Whilst I take the point made by the previous speaker, I think those issues would be even worse for the TRA site, which is very residential. At both sites, the access routes will not only be used by the parents, staff and pupils but also by works traffic. Will this lead to road closures, and what will the other impacts be?

A45 (Bruce Ross) – At the moment we don't have that level of detail, but when you have a proposed construction, people are mainly interested in the impact of the construction and what the legacy of the development will be. Getting works vehicles on and off site, controlling when they do it (e.g. avoiding school opening and closing times), what they do with their plant outside of working hours – all of that will have to be carefully considered. The reality is though that every construction project has an impact, even if that impact is short-term in comparison to the life of the building. Ultimately, people tolerate the impact if they feel that the long-term gain is bigger than the imposition during the construction period.

Q46 – It sounds to me that if you were to proceed with the Craighill site, you will need access off the A9. It is the single measure that would relieve the traffic congestion.

A46 (Bruce Ross) – That's an issue for the Trunk Roads Authority. The A9 is a major asset of theirs, which they manage, and they have clear strategic view on how it should be managed.

Q47 - I appreciate the difficulties associated, but you could always try.

A47 (Bruce Ross) – I'm not saying we wouldn't try but the ultimate say doesn't lie with the Council.

Q48 (Comment) – Whichever site is chosen, some people are going to be upset, but we should look at the bigger picture. At the moment people are just imagining a huge increase in traffic onto the existing road network. In reality, there will be road improvements that will reduce the impact.

Q49 – All your roll forecasts are based on the information you currently have, but schools can increase in size very quickly. You don't have any guarantee that the school will not expand due to changes in the local situation. You cannot sit here and say "This is how it's going to be". Projections are just projections, they may be the best you have, but they can't anticipate the future.

A49 (Susannah Holmes) – The design would allow for the maximum expected rolls, but on top of that it would allow space for further expansion. The previous design included the foundations for 4 extra secondary school classrooms, 1 or 2 primary classrooms, and additional nursery space as well as extra capacity for auxiliary facilities such as toilets and boiler size.

Q50 – What percentage?

A50 (Susannah Holmes) – Whatever percentage the above represents! I don't have the precise figure to hand.

Q51 – Nobody can accurately project the size of a school. Have there been any new schools that have had to be extended?

A51 (Susannah Holmes) – Yes.

Q52 (Follow-up) – Why is that?

A52 (Susannah Holmes) – It was because our roll forecasts were inaccurate, but that's exactly why we allow space for further expansion. For example, Milton of Leys had to be expanded, but an area of land had been factored in to allow that, so that happened.

Q53 – You're not quite sticking a finger in the air, but you're not far off it.

A53 (Ian Jackson) – Surely all anyone can do is work with the best information available?

Q54 (Follow-up) – I accept that, but you must recognise that things could change markedly in a very short space of time.

A54 (Ian Jackson) – You're right in many ways. An example of what would have been an unforeseen issue 10 years ago is that of nursery expansion, with the Government legislating for a large increase in childcare hours, which has had an impact on the space available within schools. So yes, these things happen all the time. All we can do is work with the best information we have available and as Susannah said, make provision for future extensions, where they are needed.

Q55 (Comment) – I would like to make the point that we can't stay as we are. We have to move on.

There being no other comments, the Chairperson reminded those present of the closing date for responses – 4 September 2018 – and of where responses should be sent. 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.

MEETING CLOSED

