

# Ness Castle Stakeholder Group Meeting Minutes

## Microsoft Teams

23 March 2022 at 6:30 pm

<b>In Attendance</b>	
<b>Councillors</b> Cllr Alasdair Christie Cllr Ron MacWilliam (Chair)	AC RMW
<b>Parent Council Representatives</b> Martin Fitzgerald, Inverness Royal Academy Parent Council Donna Grant, Lochardil Parent Council Stuart McLean, Ness Castle Interim Parent Council Scott McRoberts, Holm Parent Council	MF DG SML SMR
<b>Community Representatives</b> Gail BeveriDMGe, Holm Community Council Maria De La Torre, Lochardil Community Council Murray McCheyne, Holm Community Council Scott McRoberts, Resident	GB MDLT MMC SMR
<b>Holm Primary</b> Janine Webb, Acting Head Teacher	JW
<b>Lochardil Primary</b> Audrey Kellacher, Head Teacher, Lochardil Primary	AK
<b>Ness Castle Primary</b> Craig Conon, Head Teacher Helen Mudie, Principal Teacher	CC HM
<b>Highland Council Representatives</b> Robert Campbell, Estates Strategy Manager Dorothy Gibb, Principal Estates Officer Evelyn Miller, Cleaning & FM Manager Sue Neild, Catering Services Manager Alan Paul, Estates Officer Fiona Sangster, Estates Co-ordinator Liz Scott, ELC Commissioner Fiona Shearer, Area Care & Learning Manager	RC DMG EM SN AP FSa LS FS
<b>Kier Construction</b> Steven McRoberts Finlay Niven	StMR FN
<b>Apologies</b> Ian Graham, Road Safety Officer Andrew Martin, Holm Parent Council Gordon Stewart, Education Adviser	IG AM GS

## 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

- DMG welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked RMW to chair in AC's absence.
- Minutes of previous meeting approved.

## 2. UPDATE

### KIER

- FN gave an update on progress. External roof works are in the final stages. Glazing will be complete by the end of next week. Internal partitions and mechanical and engineering works are progressing at pace. Work will then begin on flooring and ceilings.
- Ground works and external services will begin shortly. Work will be required on Eilean Donan Road and more information will be provided nearer the time.
- Kier had previously asked for approval to work every other weekend but may now require the flexibility for weekend work more frequently. Works would be internal and noise would be minimal.
- GB reported no issues with previous weekend work.
- FN noted that the completion date on the programme was 8 July but that it would now likely be the end of July for construction and with commissioning to follow but he believed they would get finished on time for the new school session.
- RC noted that as mentioned at the previous meeting, it was good practice to have a contingency plan for major projects and with a high risk of the new school not being ready for 16 August, THC had started to look at options.
- FS noted that it was important to focus on what was best for children and families to minimise disruption during the school session. It is also important to establish the identity of the new school from day one even if the building is not ready.
- It is planned to undertake transition steps between Easter and summer and to bring the children together as a school.
- RC shared the three options that were being considered as part of the contingency plan.
  - Option 1 – not establishing the new school until October.
  - Option 2 – establishing the new school at Holm Primary with the use of temporary classroom units.
  - Option 3 – establishing the new school in another location.
- The Ness Castle opening roll is expected to be 110 primary pupils and 45 nursery pupils. 78 of the primary pupils are currently enrolled at other schools, with 47 attending Holm Primary.
- The pros and cons of each option were explained.

- The site at Ness Castle is not an option due to limited play space, it being a construction site and disruption of the ongoing works.
- Option 2 would be the preferred option.
- SMR agreed that option 2 seemed the most sensible but offered the use of the field next to Tesco as an alternative on behalf of the Church if it was required.
- SMR also enquired about how the contingency information is communicated to parents etc. and suggested that they should be informed of the rationale used to determine the decision and asked if the presentation could be shared with them.
- RC agreed that communication would need to be handled carefully and suggested that he, FS and CC would be happy to support communications with parent councils and provide a copy of the presentation.
- FS agreed but wanted to re-iterate that this was just a contingency plan and that we are still hopeful of the new building being ready for August.
- FS noted that changing classes after August (option 1) would cause a lot of disruption for the children in terms of the possibility of having to change teacher or classes for pupils and would be difficult to manage.
- FS was sure that establishing the new school in August was the best option, regardless of where it was located.
- RMW noted that it was another 4 months until the programmed completion date and asked when would we know for sure if the building would not be ready and suggested that there would be speculation that October might not be achievable.
- RC noted that October was the worse-case scenario and that we would aim for sooner if possible.
- FS added that an exceptional closure day could be granted by the Scottish Government to allow for a move to take place during the school term.
- RC noted that the last two years have been very uncertain, particularly for the construction industry so it was important to allow for further unexpected delays, and to be cautious.
- It was considered better to inform people of the possibility of a delay now, with a proposed plan in place rather than to wait until June.
- StMR added that the programme has suffered slippage but at this point in time Kier were highly optimistic that the programmed delivery date was achievable.
- SML noted that option 2 was a positive solution and agreed that it was important to keep parents up to date and informed.
- SML asked if the school hours would require to mirror Holm Primary if the school was temporarily located there.
- FS noted that the hours for Ness Castle would be established regardless of location but that some flexibility may be required for drop off if co-located at Holm Primary.
- CC to speak to the parent council about the school hours.

RC/FS/CC

CC

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AC expressed concern and disappointment at the need for the contingency plan and enquired if a fourth option of using the Ness Castle site and using completed areas within the building would be possible.</li> <li>• RC noted that this was too risky as the site was effectively still a construction site, and it was unlikely that building control would be able to issue a temporary occupation certificate.</li> <li>• RMW asked for regular updates on progress to be shared with the stakeholder group.</li> <li>• A fortnightly update was agreed with interim updates if necessary.</li> <li>• DMG added that towards the end of a build, some items were out of the contractors control e.g. connections for utilities.</li> <li>• StMR agreed that dates had been confirmed for utilities but that they were not always reliable.</li> <li>• Next steps are to inform parents and staff and to prepare a press release for the contingency plan.</li> <li>• RC, FS and CC to work on this tomorrow morning.</li> <li>• AC agreed that communication with parents was important and that they should be informed officially by THC.</li> <li>• JW noted that staff at Holm Primary would need to be informed too.</li> <li>• FS agreed to issue a letter for staff and thanked JW for being so positive and supportive in discussions on the option of locating the new school at Holm on a temporary basis.</li> </ul>	<p>StMR/DMG</p> <p>RC/FS/CC</p> <p>FS</p>
<p><b>3. SAFER ROUTES TO SCHOOL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IG had submitted apologies for the meeting but had provided the following updates.</li> <li>• David Summers had reported that although bus usage was recovering it was still below pre-Covid levels and Stagecoach are not in a position to consider extra peak hour services at this time.</li> <li>• Approximately 100 responses had been received for the travel survey.</li> <li>• IG to speak to CC about a reminder being issued prior to drafting the results.</li> <li>• MDLT and MMC requested a copy of the School Travel Plan and a link to the survey.</li> <li>• DMG reminded the group that the School Travel Plan was initially being created for Planning purposes but would then become a live document that was maintained and updated by the school.</li> <li>• MMC asked for an update on the street lighting and traffic lights required as a planning condition.</li> <li>• DMG noted that this was being dealt with by the THC PDU (Planning Development Unit).</li> <li>• William Fettes of THC had been invited to the meeting to give an update but unfortunately could not attend.</li> <li>• DMG to arrange for an update soon for the offsite works.</li> </ul>	<p>IG/CC FSa</p> <p>DMG</p>

<p><b>4. Transition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FS has been working on the staffing allocation based on the enrolment figures. Although the figures allowed for a 5 class entitlement, it has been agreed to start with 6 classes at Ness Castle to allow for any new enrolments through the year.</li> <li>• Staff will be allocated shortly, along with buDMGets for resources.</li> <li>• HM will be leaving Merkinch at Easter and will begin working with CC in her new role at Ness Castle after the Easter break.</li> <li>• The Depute Head Teacher post has been advertised and interviews will take place after the Easter break.</li> <li>• The interview panel will include members and parents.</li> <li>• A Transition Group meeting has been arranged for next week to begin discussions on CCFM, clerical staff etc..</li> <li>• CC confirmed that the official name for the school is Ness Castle Primary School.</li> <li>• A competition to design the school baDMGe is underway. The parent council will choose a shortlist and pupils will be asked to choose the final design.</li> <li>• School colours will be identified based on the baDMGe design.</li> <li>• Breakfast and After School Clubs will be going ahead. Times will be 8 am – 5.45 pm</li> <li>• Proposed ELC hours have been issued to gauge preference.</li> <li>• School hours have not been confirmed, however discussions are taking place on 9 am – 3 pm with an afternoon interval for younger pupils.</li> <li>• CC has now met most of the pupils who will be attending Ness Castle and hopes to meet the remainder soon.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>5. COMMUNITY BENEFITS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the absence of Keir's community benefits co-ordinator, Lindsey McNaughtons (LMN), FN noted he has been working with LMN who had visited the site this week.</li> <li>• Visits to local schools to do presentations on construction are being arranged.</li> <li>• There have been some discussions with Holm Primary about some playground works.</li> <li>• A request has gone to Kier supply chain for information on community notice board options.</li> <li>• FN will summarise the key points and circulate to the group.</li> <li>• MDLT asked if suggestions were still open and suggested something that would benefit the children e.g. a playpark</li> <li>• DMG confirmed that suggestions should still be put forward.</li> </ul>	<p>FN</p>

**6. AOCB**

- RC outlined developments on the toilet layout at the new school.
- CC noted that the toilets now allow more flexibility for allocating toilets to girls and boys and also to have some unallocated.
- CC and FS to report back to the parents.
- RC noted that many of the enquiries that THC receive on this topic appear to assume that all pupil toilets in new school buildings are designated as “gender-neutral”, which is not the case.
- The toilets are designed to allow flexibility in how the school makes use of the facilities, either now or in the future. The cubicles and doors are full height and fully enclosed for improved security and privacy for pupils. The handwashing areas are open plan and can be easily supervised from the corridor. It is widely considered that this model of toilet facility can contribute to positive pupil behaviour and reduce the potential for vandalism.
- RC wanted to reassure the group that we are achieving a much better solution and one that is in line with other local authorities.
- SMR noted that it was good to hear that there was now allocation for girls, boys and all pupils.
- FS noted that there was always the intention to have boys, girls and unallocated toilets and that it was in line with current legislation.
- There is more privacy in this style of toilets than in those in older school buildings. What was needed at Ness Castle was more flexibility in the design and we now have that.
- CC noted that this was shared at the recent parent council meeting and the minutes of the meeting were available on the school website.
- MMC enquired if the remaining trees to be felled were now down.
- DMG confirmed that all trees that required to be felled are now down.
- MMC asked if there was to be a fence around the attenuation pond.
- DMG noted that it was actually a SuDS area (sustainable drainage system) and that it would not require a fence as it was unlikely that it would have standing water. It is hoped to develop a wetland area in and around the Suds area as an educational feature for the school.
- MDLT agreed that this was a good opportunity to create a wetland.

CC/FS

**7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- Wednesday 20 April 2022 at 6.30 pm via Microsoft Teams

