

CONSULTATION MEETING – RELOCATION OF ST. CLEMENT’S SCHOOL

ONLINE – 6.30PM, 10 MARCH 2022

MINUTES OF MEETING

Panel

Cllr. Margaret Paterson – Chairperson
Derek Martin, Area Education Manager
Brian Porter, Head of Resources
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Resources
Robert Campbell, Estates Strategy Manager
Cllr. Graham MacKenzie
Cllr. Angela Maclean

Also Attending

Sarah Gitsham – Estates Officer
Ruth Malone – HT
Gordon Stewart, Education Adviser
Fiona Sangster – Estates Co-ordinator
Margaret Berry – Teacher, St. Clement’s
Matthew Brown – Teacher, St. Clement’s
Janet Cross – PSA, St. Clement’s
Karen Howie – PSA, St. Clement’s
Jane Drummond – PSA, St. Clement’s
Karen Campbell – PSA, St. Clement’s
Liz Angus - HMIE

Avril Robertson – Parent
Nadia Gillespie - Parent
Kirsten Kirkwood – Parent
Colin Pettinger – Parent
Donald MacLean – Parent
Caleb MacLean – Pupil
Karen Ross – Parent
Karolina Gość – Parent
Tracey McBain - Parent
Emma Pearce - Parent
IB - ?

Chair Cllr Margaret Paterson opened the meeting.

For those who haven't participated in a Teams meeting, could I ask that you keep your microphone muted if you aren't actually speaking, as that reduces feedback. You should see a microphone symbol on the bar on the top of your screen, which you can toggle on and off. Secondly, Teams has a system under which anyone who wants to ask a question or make a point should "raise their hand" to attract the Chair's attention. You do this by clicking on the hand symbol on the bar at the top of your screen. To keep the meeting manageable, could I ask that anyone who wants to ask a question alerts me by clicking on the "raise your hand" symbol, and by clicking it off once you have finished speaking.

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the proposal to relocate St. Clement's School, as set out in the recommendation to the proposal Paper.

We have a number of Council officials present tonight, and I'll just mention those that we expect to do most of the talking. We have Brian Porter, Head of Resources, Derek Martin, Area Education Manager, Robert Campbell, Estates Strategy Manager, and Ian Jackson, Education Officer.

Ian Jackson will now describe the consultation process and the detailed reasons for issuing the Proposal.

Ian Jackson - As the Chair has indicated, the Council is proposing to relocate St. Clement's School, and the relocation of a school is subject to a statutory consultation process, of which this meeting is part. We are currently in the initial phase of that consultation, which is due to end on Friday 29 April, and I would urge anyone who wants to submit views in writing to do so by that date. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to gather views, and we will try to answer any questions that are raised.

To clarify, we are asking for people's views as to whether St. Clement's should be relocated to the proposed site off Dochcarty Brae, and we welcome expressions of opinion on that, whether for or against.

My colleague Derek Martin will shortly set out the educational basis for the Council's proposal to relocate St. Clement's, but before that I will briefly describe the rest of the consultation process.

The formal process has a number of stages. Once the public consultation ends on 29 April, Education Scotland becomes involved. They will look at the Proposal Paper, the note of the meeting tonight, and any written representations, and will form their own view on the educational benefits of the proposal. Education Scotland will contact St. Clement's, and they will be keen to hear from any parents who wish to make their views known. The Council has to take account of Education Scotland's view on the educational benefits and respond to any points raised by their report, as well as any representations received as a result of the consultation process. Following Education Scotland's input, the Council will prepare a Report reviewing the

consultation exercise and present it to the Council's Education Committee. The Review Report will be published at least 3 weeks before it is submitted to Committee, and anyone who responded in writing to the initial consultation will be invited to make "further representations" during those 3 weeks. Any further representations that are made are submitted to the members of the Committee, either in advance or tabled on the day, so that members are fully informed of any issues that may have arisen. Members will also see copies of the original responses and the note of this meeting.

In summary, I would say that the consultation process provides multiple opportunities for views to be expressed to the Council before any final decision is made.

The Chair then invited Derek Martin to describe the educational benefits of the proposal.

Derek Martin – In the Inspection Report into St. Clement's in 2014, Her Majesty's Inspectors were clear that the buildings do not provide the quality or range of facilities appropriate to the pupils. Corridors and doors are narrow and provide obstacles to children with limited mobility, and one classroom can only be accessed through the staffroom. There is a lack of space and lack of specialist facilities. Despite the best efforts of the staff, pupils and community, it's clear that the building is not fit for purpose in the modern era. In looking to build a new school at Dochcarty Brae, we can look forward to a much better educational experience for our children. The design of a new school, most of all a special school, will take account of the wide variety of needs that the children have. By providing a suitable building as well as great staff, we have an opportunity to provide improved outcomes for the young people. The needs of every child at St. Clement's must be placed at the centre of everything the Council does. The proposal offers the opportunity to provide more flexible teaching spaces, better facilities for visiting specialists and a healthier, less stressful environment. Pupils will have the chance to access a much wider range of the core and wider curriculum.

The new school building would be environmentally efficient, allowing the children to enjoy a more comfortable, naturally lit and well-ventilated environment. Aspects of the design will include purpose-built classrooms, a suitable place for the children to have PE, dedicated lunch facilities, and the ability to use sensory and soft play. We should not forget the opportunity to have improved staff facilities, and the landscaping around the school will also be a better environment.

The location, whilst outside the town centre, is only a few minutes away, and that is good as it continues the strong links St. Clement's has with its local community and its local businesses. I believe that relocating the school to Dochcarty Brae will provide the opportunity to improve learning and teaching at St. Clement's.

The Chair then invited Robert Campbell to provide an update on the project itself.

Robert Campbell – There are a couple of areas I will cover. Firstly, the site selection process, and also where the project sits within the Council's capital funding allocation.

A new school for St. Clement's has been talked about for many years and we've been working closely with local members and the Parent Council since about 2019. We came up with an initial long list of sites. Most of these were ruled out early on, some because they were too small to accommodate a modern school, and others because much of Dingwall sits on flood risk plain. We did look closely at a site at Ferry Road, but it was impossible to make that work due to the flood risk and road access issues. We've since looked at the site at Dochcarty Brae. It's not owned by the Council, it's owned by Dingwall Mart, but we've been in discussion with the Mart and they have been very co-operative, and we've built up a good relationship with them. We've come up with a scheme we think will work, and are still in discussion with the Mart. There are a couple of options as to how the school will sit within the site. The statutory consultation has to run its course and we can't complete the legal process of buying the site until the consultation has been completed, but we are well advanced with that and we wouldn't have taken the statutory consultation process forward if we thought there was any risk of things falling through. I think we've got a good site and the best we can identify in Dingwall.

With regards to the capital programme, just last year there was a report to the Council in June, where Members agreed that the project would be a priority, and a further report in September where it was formally agreed as part of the capital programme.

The Chair advised that Mr Porter, Mr Martin, Mr Campbell and Mr Jackson were available to answer questions.

Q1 – Nadia Gillespie – I'm new to Dingwall. Could you explain to me exactly where Dochcarty Brae is please?

A1 – Robert Campbell – [Robert shared his screen with a Google maps view]. Coming in from Dingwall from the Inverness direction, we meet the traffic lights by the Council Offices, then we turn left onto the A834 Strathpeffer road. Dochcarty Road comes off the Strathpeffer road and leads onto Dochcarty Brae. The road crosses the River Peffery and there is a flood risk adjacent to the river, so we are building above that.

Q2 – Avril Robertson – How much funding has been formally approved for the whole project?

A2 Robert Campbell – There's a total of £13 million that has been set aside.

Q3 – Kirsten Kirkwood – Is there any space available for a small swimming pool similar to the Puffin Pool? I know the children are really keen on that. It would be great for their confidence and mental health.

A3 Robert Campbell – No, there's no funding included in the capital programme for a pool.

Q4 (Follow-up) – Would that be an option for the future, if funding could be found?

A4 Robert Campbell - We do have an expansion zone, which is something we incorporate into every new design, in case of a future increase in roll. I think though that the footprint for a swimming pool would be quite a bit larger than the expansion zone we have allowed for.

Q5 (Follow-up) - The children love the Puffin Pool, but it breaks down quite a lot and it's really hard for me as a parent to get a slot for my child, outwith the school taking her.

The Chair commented that this was a useful marker for the future, although the Council couldn't promise anything at present.

Cllr. Graham MacKenzie - The Puffin Pool is ideal for this, and I'm sure the Pool Committee will overcome the current problems. It is unlikely that there would be a second such facility created in Dingwall, but at previous stakeholder meetings we have discussed the need for transportation. Officers are on board with the idea that transportation would have to be made available so that all of the facilities of Dingwall would be available to the children.

A5 – Derek Martin – Cllr. MacKenzie has summed that up very well. It's vital that in building the new school, we consider the needs of the children, and we alluded to that earlier. Apart from the Puffin Pool, there are the HLH facilities. The need to ensure transportation to provide access to a wide curriculum is very much in our thoughts.

Q6 – Avril Robertson – I want to endorse the comments made earlier about the Puffin Pool. The benefits of hydrotherapy are huge, and at the moment there are only limited time slots for the children due to demand. However, my question is, how protected is the expansion zone Robert referred to?

A6 Robert Campbell – It would be part of the overall site we would be purchasing, so it will be up to us to decide how we use it. We would lay out the new building in such a way within the site that we could expand in the future, if necessary.

Q7 (Follow-up) - Does that mean it is protected for use by St. Clement's?

A7 Robert Campbell – It would be an Education Service site and I can't imagine any other part of the Council would want to use that space. It would be used as outdoor space for the school in the meantime.

Q8 – Nadia Gillespie – Do we have a rough date for completion?

A8 Robert Campbell - Assuming all goes well with the statutory consultation and that is completed later this year, we normally reckon on 3 years from then. We have

the Planning process to go through, and the construction period itself of course. We will be working up the design in conjunction with the current consultation.

Q9 - Cllr. Angela MacLean – Could you expand on what the design might look like? I know that both the children and parents have put forward ideas.

A9 Robert Campbell – We already know the majority of the facilities that will be going into the school - new classrooms, a proper games hall, dining space, and as well as the larger classrooms, breakout spaces. There's still a bit of discussion to be had with parents and pupils as to how this all fits together. We do have space standards that we have to work within, based on the capacity of the school, so it's not a completely blank sheet of paper, but we will be working with Ruth and her staff and the parents and pupils as well, to make sure everyone is involved with the final design. Gordon Stewart, who is at the meeting, has been seconded as an Education Adviser and will be heavily involved with that process. I think he has already had initial meetings with Ruth and Avril.

Gordon Stewart – The key for us is involving the staff, parents and pupils. They must have a say in the design. I've already visited the school and Ruth has invited me to the next meeting of the Pupil Council. If there are any issues arising from this meeting, I'm happy to get in contact with parents about them.

Ruth Malone – It's very important to get the pupils' voice. Gordon and Avril are coming to the next meeting of the Pupil Council. We will be working together and getting the pupils' views at every stage.

Q10 – Donald MacLean – This is a question from myself and Caleb. Given that the school takes nursery, primary and secondary age pupils, will the outside space be big enough to accommodate the needs of the various children?

A10 Robert Campbell – The simple answer is yes. This will be one of the key issues we will be working on with Ruth, the parents and the pupils – how that space is divided up, how it's managed. There will be hard and soft play areas and maybe some playing field provision. We'll be looking to cover everybody's requirements and have been through the same process with St. Duthus.

Q11 – Caleb MacLean - What about music and science?

A11 – Derek Martin – It's good to see you here Caleb, and a really good question. I don't know whether you can see Gordon Stewart on your screen? Gordon will be coming into the school and that will be a good opportunity for you to speak to him about what you are looking for in terms of music and science.

Q12- Kirsten Kirkwood – Just following on from Caleb's question, I think a separate music area would be amazing. A lot of the children would really value that. It is so good for them, and so therapeutic, even if they can't keep a rhythm. It would be very beneficial for the children to have a separate music department with a proper music teacher.

The Chair added that she was sure those comments would be taken on board.

Q13 – Colin Pettinger – My little boy attends St. Clement’s, and the highlight of his day is the mile walk. We have been so impressed at the work that the staff have put into this, as it has given him something I thought he would never have, which is a sense of citizenship. Has there been any consideration given to the impact on the sense of citizenship and community that could arise from moving the school from the centre of Dingwall to the periphery? The town centre will no longer be walkable for pupils.

A13 Derek Martin – When we started to look at different locations, it was clear from the outset that once we moved from the centre of town, we might get a visually appealing location with lots of space, but there would be an issue with ensuring that the school continued to engage effectively with the town community, and you’ve raised another aspect of that. Clearly, the daily mile will not be able to take place in the way it has up to now. The school will look at what facilities they have and what space they have, but we are also looking at a transport solution, as was mentioned earlier. That’s not strictly part of the statutory consultation, which is about the relocation, but we recognise it would form part of the effective delivery of education in the new location. We don’t know the detail of that yet, but we want to keep the kids out and about and engaging with their community.

Q14 – Emma Pearce – I totally agree with Colin’s comment. My son also goes on the mile walk and it’s not just the exercise, they get to meet people as well, so they are making connections. Where the school is at present, they have everything around them, and I think it helps everyone. I am a bit concerned about the limitations on the amount of land to be purchased. There was mention about a possible future expansion – would that mean the school would lose outdoor space if it did need more classroom accommodation? My other question is about the capacity of the new school. I know the schools struggles with capacity at the moment. Will the new building have increased capacity?

A14 Derek Martin – I’ll try to answer the first question and maybe Robert will address the second part. You’ve echoed what Colin said earlier. The school itself will sort out the detail of their activities once they are up and running, but we have a variety of facilities in Dingwall, such as High Life Highland in the quadrangle near St. Clement’s, and the Newton Room. If the school moves to Dochcarty Brae and the children are travelling into the town centre for activities, then there might be a natural muster point at somewhere like the library, where they could pause to have a snack or something, so that it’s not just “in and out”. The Council could support the school with the detail of that.

Ruth Malone – We have 48 pupils at the moment and 52 after the summer.

Robert Campbell – At St. Clement’s we work out the number of classrooms based on multiples of six. Compared to the school at the moment there will be a big increase in space, but that’s where the future proofing comes in as well. For the external areas, we will make sure we have enough. If anything there might be too much to begin with, and if the school does expand in the future we would ensure the external space remained adequate.

The Chair commented that the new school site was close to Maggie's Wood. Whilst not every child would be able to access the wood, it could be an exciting space for those who could. It is a beautiful spot with birds and plants.

Emma Pearce - I agree. I'm an ex-Dingwall Academy pupil myself so I know it well. I had asked about capacity because I have a friend who couldn't get her child into St. Clement's, so I was hoping there would be a big jump in capacity.

Q15 Avril Robertson – It's really positive that so many people have attended tonight and asked questions. I think Derek's suggestion of a muster point is a great idea that we can discuss with Gordon. Perhaps there could be a shelter or something in the town centre?

A15 Derek Martin – I'm sure Gordon will take forward some ideas. We'll need to take account of course of what's already there. Just on Maggie's Wood, we could maybe have a look and see if anything could be done in terms of wheelchair access. Again, not part of the statutory consultation but a really good point to make.

Brian Porter – I just want to emphasise how much we value comments in response to the consultation. We will have captured the meeting tonight and that will form part of the paperwork that eventually goes to Committee, but any written comments are also welcome. If you want to tell us that our proposal is a great idea, we want to hear that, but equally, if you don't agree, please put your comments in. Genuinely, that is what this process is about, and as Ian said earlier, we have to consider and respond to points raised. I imagine our elected members will also feel that the more comments we get, the easier it is for them to make a decision.

Cllr. Graham MacKenzie – I think it would be useful if, following the election, Gordon could attend an early Ward Business meeting, and assuming we are still members, we could talk through the issues that arise from this consultation period.

Ruth Malone – I'd like to record my thanks to all the parents, pupils and staff who have given up their time to attend the meeting tonight.

Liz Angus – Just to say that I am delighted to have been able to attend tonight's meeting and I have already been in touch with Ruth about visiting the school. I'm looking forward to meeting the staff, pupils and parents after the public consultation period has finished.

There were no further questions.

Chair - Cllr Margaret Paterson

Cllr Paterson thanked everyone for coming and reminded everyone that representations should be sent to Ian Jackson, email Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk (address circulated in the letter), or via the online form, to arrive **no later than Friday 29 April 2022**.

She advised that the record of the meeting will be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the Education Committee where it is intended that the report of the meeting, plus any submissions/representations and the view of Education Scotland on the proposal, will be considered.