

SHEVINGTON



PARISH COUNCIL

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Mr J Winterbottom
Director of Children's Services
Civic Centre
Millgate
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7 July 2016

Dear Mr Winterbottom,

Re: Proposals to Reduce the Number of School Places in Shevington

I have been asked to write to you on behalf of Shevington Parish Council in connection with the pre-consultation over the above proposals.

It is the Parish Council's understanding that Children's Services are seeking to reduce the number of primary school places available in the Shevington area because the occupancy, particularly at Shevington Community Primary School, has been low and is now, because of the low birth rate patterns in the area, expected to be consistently in single figures for several future years.

This was discussed at a recent meeting of the Parish Council, which was attended by a number of parents and grandparents of children who attend all three Shevington Federation Schools. As you will appreciate, there is considerable opposition locally to the proposal to re-structure the Federation provision in any way that would result in the closure of even one of the schools.

The Parish Council wholeheartedly supports this opposition and would like to make the following points on behalf of its residents:

- The pattern of low birth rates has been used to inform future trends in population growth. This does not allow for families with children in the relevant age group moving into the area. Granted, this is not something that can be predicted and, with only small housing developments in the pipeline for Shevington and a growing population of grandparents, the capacity in the catchment area for the Federation schools for this type of growth is not large. However, many working parents bring their children to their grandparents every morning and it is they who take their grandchildren to local schools. Such children do not necessarily live within this catchment area. With the growth in the number of families with two parents who work this is a trend that is likely to grow.
- There may not be much in the way of new housing developments proposed for the Shevington area once the developments at Oakwood Meadows and Herons Wharf are completed, but planning permission (both outline and otherwise) has been given for approximately 1,000 properties just over the border in Standish. Most of the properties planned are family homes. The developments in question are on the Parish boundary and well within driving distance of Shevington primary schools – in some cases possibly closer than the nearest primary school in Standish. Yet, people attending meetings arranged for parents of Shevington Federation schools have apparently been told that it will be cheaper to increase the capacity of existing schools in Standish or even build a completely new school there than it will be to maintain the three Federation schools in Shevington.
- Channelling children from the large new estates in Standish to primary schools in Shevington would increase the volume of traffic along the main roads through the Parish. However, this would only be at peak times. Channelling the same children towards the primary schools in Standish will exacerbate existing congestion along Almond Brook Road and through the centre of Standish at peak times. As

the main link between J27 of the motorway and the centre of Wigan, this route is already heavily congested at all times - something that the centre of Standish has not been designed to cope with.

- Since the Parish Council meeting last week we have heard that there has been an Open Evening at Shevington High School. Residents attending the event have reported that they were told that there are plans for increasing the future intake at the High School and that additional building will precede this. Understandably, this has created more anger and ill-feeling amongst the residents of Shevington, not to mention more confusion. One question that people are asking is 'why increase the size of the High School when one of the primary schools in Shevington will be closing because there are not enough pupils to fill it?'. Assuming that the answer is that this is being done to accommodate pupils from the new Standish estates, this has led residents to question why it seems to be acceptable for pupils of secondary school age to be channelled towards a facility in Shevington, and why it is not acceptable to do the same with respect to pupils of primary school age.
- Since the beginning of your pre-consultation Shevington Miles Lane Community Primary School has had an Ofsted inspection and has been designated an 'Outstanding' school. This means it is now ranked amongst the top 10% of schools in the country. It also means that local parents who would not have sent their children to the school when it was perceived as 'Requiring Improvement', may now choose to send them there, assuming it is not under threat of closure. As all the Federation schools share their human resources, the success of Miles Lane must be deemed to be down to all of the staff and management across the Federation. While we cannot be complacent, this must bode well for the outcomes of any future Ofsted inspections of the other two Federation schools (both currently designated 'Good') and could result in all of them being over-subscribed.
- Many parents of the children at present attending the Federation schools were once pupils there themselves and have fond memories of their time there. They want the same for their children. There is something about 'following in your parents' footsteps'. Because it celebrated its 200th Anniversary in 2015 there is a lot of attachment for Miles Lane Community Primary School amongst several generations of local residents, as this was once the ONLY primary school in the village and the one everyone attended, although it was not always located on the current site.
- The parents of children at every Federation school are convinced for a variety of reasons that it is their children's school that is going to close. They are cynical in believing that any decision taken by Wigan Council to close one of the schools will be driven by the value of the land on which the buildings are standing in terms of a sale for future housing development. This then leads them to wonder where the children who will be living on this future estate will go to school if the local capacity has been reduced.
- Finally, I must stress that parents are very upset and very angry, but, even though their schools are in 'competition' with each other with respect to any prospective closure, they are working together and supporting each other. They are united in their aim to convince you and Wigan Council that all schools in Shevington should remain open for 'business as usual' indefinitely and that none should be closed.

Once again: Shevington Parish Council are opposed to any school in Shevington being closed. In the light of this they Council would like to invite you to meet with them to discuss the matter further and answer some of the questions they have.

The Council will be meeting in Shevington Library on Wednesday, 13 July to discuss a couple of other matters. They wonder whether it would be possible (if you are willing to do this) for you and/or one or two of your representatives to come along to the Library to meet with the Council at 7pm.

I appreciate that you are extremely busy and this may be short notice, but the Council, who are unpaid elected members, are willing to meet with you at a time when the Council is technically 'in recess'. They are willing to do this because they view the matter as being a very important one for the community they serve.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Krystyna Pilkington
Clerk

cc Donna Hall, Dist Cllrs P Collins, M Crosby, D Edwardson, Dist Cllr J Platt and Lisa Nandy MP