

**Public Consultation Meeting
Rezone of Hillside School
5 March 2020
7- 9pm – Hillside School**

Officers present: Craig Clement, Head of Service, Resources & Performance
Maxine Booth (Quality Improvement Manager), Rachael Goldring (Learning Estates Team Leader)

Elected Members present: Councillor Gillian Owen, Chair of Education & Children's Services Committee

1. Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Owen opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to Hillside School. She introduced the officers present and advised that a minute would be taken by Maxine Booth and Rachael Goldring

She confirmed that the format of the meeting would be an overview of the proposal and then an opportunity for questions from the floor.

2. Consultation Overview

Craig Clement gave an overview of the consultation proposal.

This consultation has come about as a result of the planning application for 175 houses at Leathan Fields. In 2014, a planning application was submitted for 176 homes (APP/2013/2841) at Leathan Fields, Portlethen, it was refused on grounds of Education capacity. The developer appealed to the Reporter and the Court of Session, however, Aberdeenshire Council's decision was upheld. Subsequently, a second planning application for 175 homes was submitted in 2016 (APP/2016/0934). On 10 December 2019, this planning application was considered by Kincardine & Mearns Area Committee who agreed that authority to grant planning permission be delegated to the Head of Planning and Environment Service subject to a number of conditions. One of these conditions being a rezoning exercise and successful implementation of rezoning the houses in this application to Portlethen Primary School or Fishermoss School.

Education & Children's Services would only be able to remove their objection to the planning application if the rezone takes place.

The proposal currently under statutory consultation is the Rezone of Hillside School. This consultation proposes to rezone the Leathan Fields Site within the Hillside School catchment area.

Consideration is required to the most appropriate way to re-zone the Leathan Fields site of 175 houses which is currently zoned to Hillside School to a different school within Portlethen. For this consultation the options are:

- Option 1 – Rezone the Leathan Fields site to Portlethen Primary School
- Option 2 – Rezone the Leathan Fields site to Fishermoss School
- Option 3 – Keep the current catchment area for Hillside School with no changes (The Status Quo) – As already mentioned, Option 3 would result in Education & Children's Services being unable to remove their objection to the planning application.

An alternative to the proposal that has been discounted was to educate P7 pupils at Portlethen Academy. This wasn't considered as a viable option.

There are maps around the room showing what the catchments would look like for each option.

We want to be very clear that all existing primary aged pupils should continue their education at the schools they are currently attending. This proposal would only affect pupils moving into the new houses at the Leathan Fields site once they are built.

This consultation is taking place under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and will run until 27 March 2020.

The proposed changes, if approved will be implemented after a final report is received by Education & Children's Services Committee.

3. Questions from the floor

The Chair opened the floor to questions and asked everyone to introduce themselves for the minute.

Ian Bruce – Portlethen Primary Parent, lives in Hillside catchment – This application for housing was previously refused on the grounds of education capacity. What has changed materially, that means that it is now appropriate to rezone, when it wasn't felt to be viable previously.

Craig Clement responded that as the application is handled by Planning, that he is unable to answer what has changed in terms of the application, and the planners decision. He reiterated the three options in the proposal document.

Ian Bruce –there has been no increase in capacity, and no increase in teacher numbers?

Craig – this school has been built, that has provided additional capacity, and it is being extended due to rise in numbers of current pupils.

Kay Michie – 2 children at Hillside

Three points to make, with reference to 1.1 and 2.1 of the proposal document (quoted) this whole proposal is in direct contravention of these two statements. At best this results in over capacity, even with the extension.

Gillian Owen responded that these comments will be taken to the Education & Children's Services Committee.

How has the number of children been calculated? – Rachael Goldring answered that this is based upon the number of houses forecast to be built in a year by the developer. As part of the preparations for the meeting, an increased multiplier of 0.5 pupils per household was used, and in the unlikely event that all houses were built in a single year, this would be expected to generate a further 88 primary aged pupils. Craig Clement added that Portlethen, as a whole, has the capacity for these additional children.

Why was the alternative of refusing all future planning applications discounted? – Rachael Goldring replied, that it has been discounted, as this is not something that Education & Children's Services have control over. Whilst a response to the planning application will be submitted by Education, based upon capacity, the decision making powers for planning applications sit with Planning and with the Elected Members.

Ian Downie – Grandparent - How will the decision be made?

Craig replied that we will have to report back to Kincardine and Mearns, and then Education & Children's Services Committee at the end of the consultation. If the view is that the rezoning can't go through, then the planning application will have to be reconsidered, as the objection would still stand.

Mike Wright, Hillside Parent – What was assessment done on traffic impact. The statement is incorrect, that there will be no impact upon this catchment area. This will result in increased traffic, with people living beside the school going against the flow, at school pick up and drop off times. This will put our children in danger.

Craig replied that the traffic impact assessment forms part of the planning application. The statement about no impact upon the catchment area, related to the impact upon education provision, in that this would continue for all families already living in catchment. Safe egress to school has to be part of the assessment of the planning application, that is one of the many things considered by councillors at the end of the process.

Anne Wilkins – Former member of staff and Fishermoss School Parent Council Who devised the distances in the document? The distances to Fishermoss are all wrong. The document states 1.8 miles, I measured it in my car and it is 1.9miles. By taking the safest walking route, it was 2.3 miles.

Rachael replied that the distances were calculated using the Council mapping software from Fishermoss School to a point in the centre of the Leathan Fields

site. Pupils living over two miles from the zoned school would be entitled to transport.

Anne Hingston – Portlethen Primary Parent Partnership Chair

Anne had previously issued the Learning Estates Team with a set of questions, and she read through these, with answers provided to each.

There were a number of inaccuracies and omissions within the document and I am pleased that these have now been corrected.

In the Kincardine and Mearns Area Committee Report of 10th December 2020 re. the planning application for 176 houses, it states under section 6.8 “the most appropriate solution is to accommodate children from this development within an alternative primary school within the settlement that has adequate underlying capacity. The most likely option would be Fishermoss Primary School.” When did Portlethen Primary School become the preferred option? Who made that decision, and why?

Max replied that Education has always stated that the rezone could be either to Portlethen Primary or to Fishermoss. Ideally, Education would not want to undertake the rezone. Our preferred option would be Status Quo, with no new houses built.

Andrea Macera – Hillside Parent – It will be unfair on Hillside children, if you keep status quo. They will still be in a school that is over capacity.

The school roll at Porthlethen Primary has been forecast to fall over the last few years, yet it has in actual fact remained stable or slightly increased. How can this forecast be taken as accurate, when it has been shown to be wrong before?

- Further to point 5 regarding the school roll forecasts:
In 2016, the roll in 2019 was predicted to be 199.
In 2017, the roll in 2019 was predicted to be 238.
In 2018, the roll in 2019 was predicted to be 251
The actual roll in December 2019 was 263.
The school roll forecasts for PPS have been consistently underestimated.

Rachael responded that whilst our forecasts are largely accurate it is very difficult to predict who will actually buy houses, who will move and what age their children will be. The forecasts are a best guess.

The original plans for Hillside school which were available to the public showed the extension, which has only been built now the school is over capacity. This suggests that the roll forecasts were known to be inaccurate from the start. Why are the same mistakes being made again?

Craig replied that new build schools are designed to be extended if required in the future. However, this is always subject to budget phasing.

Why is rezoning of the area of Hillside which is closest to Portlethen Primary School not being considered as an option, in the interests of social cohesion rather than division?

Max replied that those children are already attending Hillside School, and we do not require children to move school with a rezoning. It can take up to 7 years for the full impact to take effect. It is the new houses that will have the greatest impact.

Learning Estates considers that there are 12 classroom areas available at PPS and that the capacity is 342. The first floor contains open plan classrooms of 153.4 sqm. teaching space, which is detailed as four classrooms. According to the Aberdeenshire Primary School capacities review 2017, section 2.4 defines a standard sized classroom as "between 50sqm and 70sqm". This clearly demonstrates that 4 classrooms will not fit into the space. A capacity of 342 is based on a school with 12 standard sized classrooms (Aberdeenshire Primary School capacities review 2017, appendix 2). Why was this not picked up when the capacity was recalculated last year? When is Learning Estates going to recalculate the capacity and classroom spaces of PPS, based on this knowledge?

Further to point 10 regarding capacity and classroom spaces, the Scottish government recommendation of 1.7 sqm per pupil calculates a maximum of 90 children in the first floor open plan classroom. This further proves that four classes cannot be accommodated in the space.

Max responded that this information related to Room 32 which is 230.6 sqm and could accommodate 135 pupils. She advised that capacities are not based upon the Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA) and that this is only a factor used in determining the overall size of new build schools. Existing schools are subject to Premises Regs. She also explained the different types of general purpose spaces that a new build school would get, and how they might vary in older schools, which might have 'AV rooms' that can be used for small group work.

What is the operational capacity of PPS, as opposed to the published capacity of 342?

Figures from appendix a of "New build Primary Schools Aberdeenshire" (2012) detail the recommended space standard for the gross internal floor area of primary schools. For a school with 12 classes, capacity 325, it's 2869 sqm. For a school with 13 classes, capacity 355, it's 3040. At PPS (based on 2019 floor plan and 2013 figures, taking into account the space lost to the nursery and the removal of the huts) we have 2210.2 sqm for potentially 12 classes and capacity 342.

Max replied that there are a number of different terms used for capacity. Published capacity and planning capacity are the same thing. Operational capacity only comes into effect when the school is approaching capacity, and working capacity needs to be identified. The GIFA is not used to calculate the capacity of the school. We use the core facility – size of dining room and number of toilets according to Premises Regs, and 1.7sqm per pupil for classroom spaces.

PPS is the Enhanced Provision school for the cluster and has a higher proportion of children with need for this support than the other primary schools. Rising rolls will put pressure on facilities, staff and children. How will our children be safeguarded?

Craig responded that staffing and facilities are separate for Enhanced Provision.

Hillside Parent – We were told that the GP spaces would only be used for one year, but this is not the case. We've lost the community room and the music and drama room. When will we get this back?

Lindsey – Hillside mum, the educational benefits statement is incorrect. The overcrowding at Hillside further restricts delivery of the curriculum.

Max replied that Hillside School are doing a remarkable job to ensure the delivery of education. We acknowledge that using most of the GP spaces is not ideal. There are still the separate dining and hall spaces which can be used flexibly.

Andrea Macera – Why are you giving recommendation that PPS preferred when you have stated that Status Quo is preferred. It is confusing.

Craig replied, that we are required to carry out this rezoning consultation as part of the planning conditions. As such the council needs to give a preferred option if the rezone goes ahead, and that would be for the houses to be zoned to a different school.

What if the planning application still gets approved, even if the objection stands?

Max replied that in that case we would cap the school. This would be setting a maximum number of pupils who could attend the school, and then after that limit is reached, any new in zone children would have to attend a different local school.

Abbie Whitelaw – Hillside Parent – I am aware of Portlethen Primary School limitations, as my daughter was at Portlethen when it was over capacity before Hillside was built. I have been attending meetings like this for seven years. I am aware of the traffic implications at Portlethen Primary School. The suggestion of Fishermoss is a non-starter, it's too far for children to walk. Hillside is over capacity, so status quo is not an option either. These houses should not be built.

Parent -What about siblings, would they be able to attend if the houses still get built?

Max replied that if the houses get built and the rezone takes place, then siblings would be able to join the same school. However, this would only apply if the family moved into one of the new houses. Existing families who aren't moving house, won't be affected.

Fishermoss parent – there is already a teacher shortage, will there be enough teachers for the extra children if these houses are built.

Craig replied that this is a challenge across Scotland.

The hall at Fishermoss is very small – what would be done to ensure that the school could accommodate the extra children.

Max replied that there is a planned programme for improvement works, and that would be addressed as appropriate.

Tracy Keith – nursery parent - Would capping affect my nursery child attending Hillside?

Max replied that this was difficult to answer, as it would depend upon timescales, however where possible we try to ensure that in zone pupils can attend the same school as their siblings when a school is capped.

The pupil yield was questioned further, as it is not possible to have half a child. Further explanation of pupil yield as can't have half a child. Rachael responded that this is what makes roll forecasting difficult, because people aren't statistics, and the pupil yield is distributed across all year groups, which does result in fractions of children being spread across the year groups, when in reality of course that doesn't happen.

Tracy also added that the Baby and toddler group got moved out of community room to the academy, and this has been very detrimental to their numbers.

Paul Melling Ex Councillor, Community Council – It's a pity that nobody from planning is attending the meeting, what the community needs is greenfield space. The community not getting listened to.

Louise – Hillside parent - Concerned that the houses will go ahead. It will impact Portlethen Primary and Fishermoss.

Ian Hingston - Portlethen Primary School parent

This is a very leading document. Who made the decision to put Portlethen Primary School as the preferred option? This is a direct question that has been asked repeatedly and not answered. You are Rachael Goldring, is that correct? Your name is on this report. Did you make the decision?

Rachael replied that she wrote the covering committee report, and that the consultation report was written by the team. Craig added that if anyone needed to take responsibility for the decision, then as Head of Service, he would.

Max reiterated that our preferred option is status quo, for no houses to be built, however if the rezoning has to take place then Portlethen Primary would be the preferred option.

Alison Miller – Fishermoss parent - In your experience what would planning want to hear from parents.

Craig replied that as we are not directly involved in planning we can't really answer.

Anne Wilkins – Fishermoss

Education doesn't just happen in the schools but also in the playgrounds and in the community. By putting the children elsewhere, you are dividing the community which struggles already. It's a question of safety, there is no safe route for children. It took me 45 minutes to walk the route on clear day with healthy 11 and 12 year olds. In bad weather that's not safe, not practical, not healthy. It will also affect capacity of academy. In summary, I don't want to see the houses built.

Rachael replied that if all the houses were built, a maximum of 52 pupils would be expected at academy level.

Parent with 3 children at Portlethen

Our head teacher is currently also head at Banchory Devenick. Has the impact of the rezoning been considered on the dual headship arrangements. She would have an even larger number of pupils, and staff.

Craig replied that the levels of staff would be adjusted accordingly as school rolls increase, not just as a result of rezoning, and that arrangements are continually under review.

The parent added that their child is in a P1/2 class with 3 teachers per week. This is not acceptable for a child of that age.

Parent with 2 nursery children at Fishermoss

Should you not be getting information from NHS about the number of children. Also people have completed the survey online but have not heard the information tonight.

Rachael replied that we already get NHS data, which provides details of all children living in Grampian by their postcode and their month and year of birth so we know when they will start school. The roll forecasts already use that data. There have been many responses to the survey already, and the vast majority are echoing the feelings of this meeting, that the houses should not be built.

Hillside Staff Member – The management here at Hillside have done their best. All of the policies have a strong emphasis on working with families and on outdoor learning, but space is needed to do that and we shouldn't be cramming children into schools. The community should have a say in what happens to this land.

Ian Downie – Further comments made about the lack of risk assessments and consideration for health and safety.

Dan Roberts – Fishermoss parent – If the planning application is refused, can anyone overturn the planning decision. A member of the community replied that the decision could be referred to the Reporter, as with all planning decisions. Craig confirmed that this was correct.

Mike Wright – We request that the councillors take this information back to the planners, and request a full meeting like this with the planners hearing the views of the community. We appreciate that you are here from an education point of view and are unable to answer questions relating to planning.

What about impact on Academy –

Rachael replied that whilst Portlethen Academy is forecast to exceed capacity, this is largely due to housing at Chapelton. The developers have an aspirational build out rate, which is included in the forecasts, however this has not been realised in terms of house sales to date.

Anne Hingston - Will the minutes be circulated before end of consultation period. Rachael replied, that this was not normal practice in a statutory consultation, that they are normally published as part of the final report, and put on the Council website. However given the strength of feeling they would be issued to schools to circulate before the end of the consultation.

Councillor Pike then introduced himself and asked the other ward councillors to identify themselves. He advised that as this is still a live planning application, the councillors could not directly comment upon it. He reiterated that all of the comments from the meeting would be considered by the Kincardine & Mearns Committee at the end of the consultation process before a decision is made by Education & Children's Services.

Repeatedly throughout the meeting, Steve McKerron interrupted officers and jeered at the responses given. Councillor Owen asked him to allow the other members of the community present to hear the answers that they had come for, and that if he continued he would be asked to leave.

4. Next Steps

Councillor Owen outlined the next steps in the process. The consultation period will run until 27 March.

Any comments you wish to make on the proposal document need to be submitted by 5pm on Friday 27 March 2020.

Comments can be submitted in writing, either by email to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or by post to Gordon House, Inverurie – full details of the address are in the consultation proposal.

Alternatively, we would encourage you to take part in the consultation and give your opinions via the online survey.

At the end of the consultation period, all written submissions, minutes of this meeting and pupil discussions information will be provided to Education Scotland for their consideration. Education Scotland will produce a report on the consultation. This report, along with our own report on the consultation, will be presented at Kincardine and Mearns Area Committee, Education & Children's Services Committee, then Full Council to consider and be asked to approve the officer recommendation in the report. We will publish our report shortly before it goes to the area committee.



5. Close

The Chair closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.