



CONSULTATION REPORT REGARDING THE REZONE OF HILLSIDE SCHOOL

2020

This Consultation Report has been issued by Education & Children's Services of Aberdeenshire Council in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

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1. THE PROPOSAL

- 1.1 At its meeting on 30 January 2020 Education and Children's Services Committee authorised the launch of a statutory consultation regarding the Rezone of Hillside School, Portlethen.

The Proposal Document included as Appendix A to this report, was issued to those individuals and bodies listed under Distribution within the proposal document. The Proposal Document was also published on the Council website: <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/education-consultations/>

The proposal on which the consultation took place was that:

The Hillside School Catchment area be amended to remove Leathan Fields, Portlethen with this new housing being zoned to either Portlethen Primary School or Fishermoss School from the completion of the consultation process.

The proposals will only affect new pupils in the network, moving into the new houses in the Leathan Fields development.

The Proposal Document made clear to consultees that the consultation period would run from 10 February 2020 until 27 March 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 disruption and schools closing the consultation was extended to 28 August 2020. This covered the required minimum of 30 days term time consultation.

A four class extension was due to be completed at Hillside School for the beginning of the 2020/21 session, however, due to the COVID-19 disruption this was delayed and will now be completed by the end of January 2021. Temporary accommodation has been provided for Hillside School, which will be removed once the extension is complete. Parents have been kept informed of the progress of the extension.

Once the extension is complete it will increase the school capacity to 509 pupils, however, it will only accommodate pupils from housing already built or approved in the Local Development Plan. General purpose rooms within the school will still need to be utilised until the peak in school roll reduces post 2025.

Hillside School will continue to operate above capacity until the roll naturally declines in 2025. Any increase in pupils from additional housing will place additional pressure on Hillside School.

Rezoning any additional housing to an alternative school within Portlethen will enable pupils to have access to education without an over-crowded setting.

There may be a disadvantage for pupils living within the new housing development attending a different school from their peers living in neighbouring established developments.

There is equity within early years provision across the town of Portlethen

2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public Meeting

- 2.1 All parents/carers and stakeholders were invited to a public meeting which was held during the consultation period on 5 March 2020 at Hillside School. The meeting was chaired by Councillor Owen and was attended by parents, staff, elected members and members of the community. A total of 65 people attended the meeting. The minutes of the meeting is attached as Appendix C.
- 2.2 Councillor Owen explained that the reason for the proposal was that the result of the planning application for 175 houses at Leathan Fields.
- 2.3 Education & Children's Services would only be able to remove their objection to the planning application if the rezone takes place. Councillor Owen also explained the three options that were outlined within the proposal.

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.

During the meeting there were a number of questions and comments, the main themes were;

- School Roll Forecasts
 - School Capacities (including Portlethen Academy)
 - School Catchment areas
 - Enhanced Provision at Portlethen School
 - Traffic Implications
 - Distances to Portlethen and Fishermoss Schools
- 2.4 Portlethen Primary Parent Partnership had previously provided the Learning Estates Team with a set of questions, these were addressed at the meeting, and are attached as Appendix B.

Online Survey

- 2.5 During the consultation period parent/carers, stakeholders and community members were invited to take part in an online survey to express their opinion on the proposal.
- 2.6 The survey provided a summary of the proposal to rezone the Leathan Fields site from the catchment area of Hillside School to either Fishermoss School or Portlethen Primary. Participants were also given the opportunity to leave comments regarding the proposal.

- 2.7 A total of 464 people took part in the survey. A full summary of the online survey is attached as Appendix D.
- 2.8 The majority 346 (74.89%) of people who participated in the survey do not support the rezoning of the Leathan Fields site.
- 2.9 Respondents commented that if Hillside School does not have the capacity to accommodate additional pupils, then the houses within the Leathan Fields site should not be built.
- 2.10 Some commented that Portlethen School was too small to accommodate additional pupils, and the school itself requires some repair and modernisation. Concerns were also expressed that this would have a negative impact on the pupils currently attending Portlethen School with additional support needs.
- 2.11 It was suggested that both Portlethen and Fishermoss Schools have adequate pupils from their own catchment areas and that the proposed rezoning would increase the rolls to near capacity.
- 2.12 Concerns were raised regarding road safety, if the rezoning was approved, respondents suggested that pupils would be more likely to be driven to school due to the distance, and pupils should be encouraged to walk to school. This would have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of the pupils as well as a negative impact on the environment.
- 2.13 Rezoning an area from within the catchment area was an impractical solution and either a change should be made to current boundaries or a full rezoning of the three schools within Portlethen should be carried out.
- 2.14 Other comments were that it was unfair for pupils who lived adjacent to Hillside School to be rezoned to a different school within Portlethen with the perceived lack of amenities within the area. There were also concerns raised in relation to families moving into the area and the lack of spaces available at Hillside School.

Discussion with Pupils

- 2.15 As part of the consultation process, Head Teachers at Hillside, Portlethen and Fishermoss Schools discussed the proposal regarding the rezoning of Hillside School with their pupils. These are attached as Appendix E.

Hillside School

- 2.16 The pupils at Hillside School felt that the positives would be;
- There would be new children so they could make new friends.
 - The children in that development site would feel more part of the community if they went to Hillside.
 - The children could walk to school easily instead of sometimes having to drive, driving isn't very eco-friendly

The negative points would be;

- There wouldn't be enough room for everyone. We are already having to get an extension for the children we have, where would any others go?
- It would cost the school lots of money they would have to buy more tables, chairs, pencils, textbooks and clever touch boards.
- Class sizes would be really big.
- There wouldn't be room in the lunch hall.
- We would need to have really staggered breaks and lunches to make room for everyone.
- Not all classes would get two PE slots a week.

Portlethen Primary

2.17 Four Primary 7 pupils discussed the proposal and decided the following;

Option 1 – All four children felt this was the best option.

Option 2 – All four children thought this was not an option at all as they felt Fishermoss was too far to travel.

Option 3 – All four children thought this would be a good option if there was space.

They also made the following comments;

- Could children who live nearest to Portlethen School come here instead of them that live next to Hillside School?
- Hillside are already getting an extension so is there not enough room to take them? I would like to make some new friends so it would be good to have other people at Portlethen.

Fishermoss School

2.18 From Fishermoss School, 126 pupils from Primary 4-7 were asked to vote on the proposal, their votes are shown in the table below.

No of Pupils	Hillside	Fishermoss	Portlethen
Total	32	51	43

2.19 They also thought that Fishermoss is a great school to pupils to attend and they will have more friends. They also thought that Portlethen was closer than Fishermoss and easier to walk to.

Staff Engagement

2.20 Staff feedback was received from Portlethen School, they had mixed views on whether the Leathan Fields site should be rezoned to Portlethen School or whether it should remain within the catchment of Hillside School.

2.21 They also had concerns that if the Leathan Fields site was rezoned to another catchment that the children wouldn't feel part of the Hillside community. Some

were concerned about the capacity at Portlethen School, and the standard of the building at Portlethen School.

3. WRITTEN RESPONSES

3.1 As previously mentioned in Section 2.4 Portlethen Primary Parent Partnership provided the Learning Estates Team with a set of questions, these were read out at the meeting with the answers provided. These questions and answers are attached as Appendix B.

3.2 In addition, 72 comments were received from stakeholders, with only one agreeing to the proposal, the remainder of the comments received were opposed to the rezoning of the Hillside School catchment area and any new house building at the Leathan Fields site. Of the responses received 31 were identical responses using a template that had been circulated by parents.

The main concerns that were raised were;

- School Roll Forecasts
- School Capacities
- Enhanced Provision
- Traffic Congestion

4. EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT

4.1 The Education Scotland report is reproduced in full, attached as Appendix F.

4.2 Education Scotland reports that the Council has failed to outline significant, detailed educational benefits for the three options detailed within the proposal document.

4.3 Education Scotland indicated that rezoning to Portlethen as outlined in option one, failed to take account of the impact of the increased role and accessibility to Enhanced Provision. It was further noted that the school roll forecast was projected to be 256 in 2020 and as of September 2020, this figure sits at 267.

4.4 Education Scotland reports that under option two and a rezoning to Fishermoss, challenges around accessibility to hall space for Physical Education and for serving lunch would be exacerbated.

4.5 Education Scotland indicated that under option three and a decision to retain the existing zoning, there was insufficient detail provided to substantiate claims of curriculum delivery challenges. Concerns were raised around accessibility to Outdoor Learning space, shared learning and circulation space, as well as the loss of space used by local community groups. It was further noted that an amendment to option three which considered moving Primary 7 pupils to

another school was not supported by parents or staff who recognise the value of pupils accessing education in their local area.

4.6 Education Scotland further acknowledged concerns from parents around the following issues:

- Figures used for role predictions in all three schools
- The impact of increased travel
- The veracity of identified safer routes to school
- The veracity of distances and routes between housing areas and schools.

5. EDUCATION AUTHORITY RESPONSE TO WRITTEN AND ORAL REPRESENTATIONS

School Capacities

5.1 Officers acknowledge that Hillside School will continue to operate above capacity for the next four to five years despite a four class extension being delivered by January 2021. The school will continue to utilise general purpose spaces as classrooms until the roll naturally declines in 2025. The extension will only accommodate pupils from housing already built or approved in the Local Development Plan.

5.2 The school roll forecast predicts that Portlethen Academy will exceed the published capacity in 2023. Further housing development within the area will place additional pressure on the school roll.

School Rolls of Forecasts

5.3 Officers analyse a range of factors in order to achieve a high level of accuracy for school forecasts. However, by their very nature, these are predictions, and changes to one or more factors can impact significantly upon the pupil numbers actually attending each school.

5.4 Parental choice can have a significant impact upon primary school rolls, particularly in smaller schools. Forecasts are based upon known data in terms of current locations of families, however the decisions that these families make about whether their children attend their zoned school or submit placing requests cannot always be predicted.

5.5 Officers constantly monitor school rolls against forecast; checking incoming planning applications, particularly for schools where there are already capacity pressures; annual updates have previously been acquired from NHS to plot the location of all children across Aberdeenshire and liaise with planning and developers about the pace of housing completions to ensure education infrastructure is available to meet the need.

Travel Implications

- 5.6 The Leathan Fields site is adjacent to Hillside School and any pupils living within this area would have a short walk or cycle to and from school. The Council encourages pupils to walk to school to promote health and wellbeing and acknowledges that pupils are more likely to be driven to school if the Leathan Fields site was rezoned to a either Portlethen or Fishermoss Schools.

Catchment Areas

- 5.7 Officers recognise that it is not best practice to rezone an area from within a school catchment when the zoned school is adjacent to the site.
- 5.8 If the area is not rezoned, any families moving into the area are entitled to a place within their zoned school. Education and Children's Services would carry out an assessment for placing a cap on the roll of the school. This would have an impact on the whole catchment area.

P7s to Academy

- 5.9 This was an option that was identified as part of a desk top appraisal as one of the possible solutions to address the capacity issues. This was discounted prior to the consultation as Officers were aware that this would cause substantial disruption. Had this been considered as a viable option then full discussions would have been held with effected families prior to implementation.

Enhanced Provision

- 5.10 Comments were made about the impact of rezoning Leathan Fields to Portlethen Primary School and in particular on the enhanced provision centre located there. The enhanced provision at Portlethen School is a facility for the whole of the Portlethen Cluster and this will remain the case regardless whether there is a change to primary schools catchments within the cluster. Some of these concerns related to staffing, however, if there was a rise in pupil numbers at Portlethen Primary School their entitlement to staff would be adjusted accordingly.

Opposition to the Proposal

- 5.11 Officers also recognise that the community within Portlethen are strongly against the rezone of Hillside School and that the Leathan Fields site should remain within the catchment of Hillside School.
- 5.12 Officers recognise there is not a convincing argument to overwhelmingly support any of the three options and that the proposal lacks sufficient detail in terms of the educational benefits which might result from any of the proposed options.

6. ERRORS, OMISSIONS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 6.1 During the consultation period there were areas identified by respondents as being inaccurate or omitted from the proposal paper. Officers carefully considered the alleged inaccuracies and omissions set out by those who responded to the consultation.
- 6.2 In response to these alleged inaccuracies and omissions, the following amendments were made to the proposal document.
- 6.3 The following amendments were made to the consultation document.
- 6.4 Within paragraph 3.4 the capacity of Portlethen School was amended.
- 6.5 Paragraph 4.3 was amended to “The Leathan Fields site is 1 mile from Portlethen Primary and 1.8 miles from Fishermoss School”.
- 6.6 The tables within 5.10 and 5.11 were amended to show the correct capacity at Portlethen School from 2020 and to remove duplicate year headings. The roll projections remained the same.
- 6.7 Paragraph 7.1 was amended to read “The following alternative possibilities have been considered and discounted as noted below”.
- 6.8 The proposal document was re-distributed to all parent/carers and stakeholders, accompanied by a letter detailing the above amendments which were made to the original report.

7. COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 9(1) OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION)(SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

- 7.1 Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 states that:

After the Education Authority has received HMle’s report, the Authority is to review the relevant proposal having regard (in particular) to

- (i) written representations received by the Authority (from any person) during the consultation period,*
- (ii) oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting,*
- (iii) HMle’s report.*

- 7.2 Officers of the Education Authority have listened carefully to the points made at the public meeting and have considered equally carefully the written representations. The Education Authority’s position is set out in this document.
- 7.3 Section (10) (3) of the 2010 Act also places a requirement on the Council to provide details of any inaccuracy or omission within the Proposal Paper which has either been identified by the Council or raised by consultees.

- 7.4 This section of the 2010 Act also requires the Council to provide a statement on the action taken in respect of the inaccuracy or omission, or, if no action was taken, to state that fact and why.
- 7.5 Officers are required to publish its response to representations made during the consultation period within its final Consultation Report. The Council's detailed responses to the alleged inaccuracies is set out within this Consultation Report in Section 6.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 The Council now has four options, namely:
- Rezone the Leathan Fields site to Portlethen School
 - Rezone the Leathan Fields site to Fishermoss School
 - Amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt; or
 - Abandon the proposal and maintain the status quo
- 8.2 Parent/carers and stakeholders are overwhelmingly against the rezone of the Leathan Fields site to either Portlethen or Fishermoss School. They strongly believe that the site should remain within the catchment for Hillside School.
- 8.3 Education Scotland agree with the community in terms of their reservations for rezoning children to a school considerably further away from one which is within easy walking distance.
- 8.4 Education Scotland also state that the council has failed to provide convincing arguments to overwhelmingly support any of the three options and that the proposal lacks sufficient detail in terms of the educational benefits which might result from any of the proposed options.
- 8.5 Officers recognise that they have not provided sufficient evidence to outline significant Educational Benefits for pupils by rezoning the Leathan Fields site.
- 8.6 The recommendation of Officers is that Aberdeenshire Council should not rezone the Leathan Fields site to either Portlethen or Fishermoss School and that it should remain within the catchment for Hillside School.**