



EDUCATION, LEARNING & LEISURE

**PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE ELLON ACADEMY
CONSULTATION REPORT
JANUARY 2012**

This Consultation Report has been issued by the Education, Learning and Leisure Service of Aberdeenshire Council in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

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1. THE PROPOSAL

- 1.1 A Proposal Document was considered and approved by Aberdeenshire Council's Education, Learning & Leisure Committee at its meeting on 25 August 2011. The Proposal Document was issued the following week to those individuals and bodies listed under Distribution within the document. The Proposal Document was also published on the Council website: www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk. The Proposal Document made clear to consultees that the consultation period would run from Monday 5 September 2011 - Friday 28 October 2011 – a period of 30 school days in total.

The proposal on which consultation took place was that:

Education provision at the existing Ellon Academy should be discontinued with effect from 3 July 2015;

Pupils of the existing Ellon Academy and future pupils from the Ellon Academy catchment area should continue their education at a new Ellon Academy Community Campus located on Aberdeen Road from 18 August 2015.

1.2 Educational Benefits Statement

The Proposal Document contained within it an educational benefits statement. That statement drew upon concerns about the split site at the current academy which makes delivery of the curriculum very difficult and poses significant safety issues. These concerns remain at the heart of the Education Authority's position.

The current school buildings have had little more than cosmetic improvements made over the last 30 years and a substantial number of temporary classrooms have been introduced to accommodate an increasing roll. The proposed new academy would ease the issues of capacity removing the need for temporary classrooms.

2. THE PUBLIC MEETING

- 2.1 A public meeting was held in Ellon Academy on Tuesday 13 September 2011. That meeting was reasonably well attended, with approximately thirty members of the public present. A full note of the meeting is attached (Appendix 1). As can be readily seen, the comments are wide-ranging but the principal issues raised can be summarised under the following headings.

- Location of the new building
- Facilities that would be provided within the new building
- School Transport and Road Safety
- Community access to the new school

2.2 Discussions with Pupils

As part of the consultation process, the head teachers at Ellon Academy and at the network primaries posed four questions to pupils about the proposal to relocate the academy. A summary note of responses from the schools is appended (Appendix 2).

3. WRITTEN RESPONSES

In all, 11 written responses were received.

A very brief summary of each response is provided below.

- (1) Email from resident / parent (5 September) – question relating to public meeting
- (2) Email from resident / parent (5 September) – concerns raised regarding location of site
- (3) Email from resident / parent (5 September) – question related to Balmedie zoning
- (4) Letter from Ellon Scrabble Group (6 September) – concerns raised regarding transportation to new school, and an available room to let.
- (5) Email conversation from Aberdeenshire Public Transport Unit and local elected member (9-12 September) regarding transport planning
- (6) Email from local resident / parent (12 September) – concerns raised regarding location of site
- (7) Email from resident / parent (12 September) – supportive with questions about future of existing site and impact on economy at lunchtimes
- (8) Email from resident / parent (12 September) – supportive of proposal
- (9) Email from resident / parent (16 September) – supportive of proposal
- (10) Email from Academy employee (4 October) – supportive of proposal
- (11) Email from Ellon Community Council (27 October) – supportive of proposal but concerns raised about site location and transport

In summary, the written responses highlight:

- Support for the proposal to build a new school
- Concerns about the location of and transport to the proposed site
- Concerns about the community facilities that will be provided at the new campus

4. EDUCATION AUTHORITY RESPONSE TO WRITTEN AND ORAL REPRESENTATIONS

4.1 Educational Benefits

For Aberdeenshire Council, Education, Learning and Leisure Service, educational benefit to pupils of the proposal is the key issue. None of the responses received to the consultation or at the public meeting suggested that a new academy would not deliver educational benefits. There is general agreement that a new school will provide better facilities and the key concerns are around the location rather than the educational experiences that will be provided. The response from pupils is also encouraging with the majority excited and enthusiastic about a new school with improved social areas, bigger classrooms and better facilities. Some primary pupils raised concerns about whether they would get lost or be able to find their locker, however these worries can be shared by many primary pupil faced with moving to a much larger school.

A new Ellon Academy Community Campus will provide a high quality learning environment offering greater flexibility for all school activities. The suitability of the new school building is at the heart of the design process. It will be an attractive place to learn that inspires pupils to engage with the curriculum on a single site. The new building will adapt to future learning requirements, and the design process will ensure that all spaces support modern learning and teaching methodologies.

The condition of the building will be a significant improvement on the current establishment, making the environment more attractive to learners and ensuring days are not lost as a result of building failures which will become a growing concern with the existing building. The new school will provide more space per pupil; will be fully accessible and equipped with modern ICT solutions to ensure that the best learning opportunity is afforded to every pupil. All teaching will be provided in purpose built accommodation on the one site rather than the temporary accommodation currently provided at the existing campus.

4.2 Proposed Site and Transport

The key concerns raised by respondents to the proposed academy are in relation to the site chosen by Aberdeenshire Council. The site chosen for the school is in the Cromleybank area of Ellon, backing onto the A90. This area has been identified in the Local Development Plan as the next area in Ellon to be developed and planning application has been granted for a significant number of houses.

The decision to locate the proposed academy within this area of Ellon was not taken lightly. It was the subject of a robust process that incorporated the views of stakeholders whilst also looking at important factors such as the cost and availability of land. A number of other sites were considered, however it was determined that the Cromleybank site was the most appropriate for the new community campus.

One of the concerns raised is the potential lack of public transport to the Cromleybank site as none of the planned housing developments have been built as yet. Aberdeenshire Council is committed to working with transport providers over the coming years to facilitate the delivery of demand led public transport. Until the housing development begins it is not possible to predict what public transport infrastructure will be in place but it is reasonable to expect that bus services will be introduced as required and that there will be some in place by August 2015.

Concerns were also raised with regards to Road Safety and pedestrian access to the proposed site. Substantial work is currently underway within Aberdeenshire Council developing a Safe Routes to School Strategy and this will continue beyond August 2015. The footbridge across the Ythan from Castle Road will be adopted by the Council. A traffic impact assessment will also form part of road safety plans, and reduced speed limits will be introduced where appropriate.

4.3 Impact on the Community

This is clearly an important factor, and some of the responses to the consultation have focused upon concerns within the community that there will be less access to community facilities in the town of Ellon than at present. These concerns are based around the current central location of the community centre attached to the school and the perceived distance to the new campus at Cromleybank.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the new community facilities will not be located as centrally within the town as they are at present, it is anticipated that public transport will be introduced which will ensure that the campus is fully accessible to members of the public and pupils alike.

5 EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT

- 5.1 The Education Scotland report is reproduced in full (Appendix 3).
- 5.2 Education Scotland acknowledges that the proposal offers significant educational benefits to young people attending the proposed new academy, through improved facilities. (Appendix 3 paras 3.1 to 3.3).
- 5.3 Education Scotland agree that Aberdeenshire Council has consulted extensively on the proposals and has made efforts to involve both current and future pupils and parents in the plans. Education Scotland also acknowledges that staff and the wider community have been engaged with throughout the development of the proposal. (Appendix 3 section 2).
- 5.4 Education Scotland make a number of points related to the proposal specifically:
- concern from parents about road safety issues in accessing Cromleybank (Appendix 3 para 2.4)
 - in taking forward the proposal, the Council needs to ensure that the concerns raised about travel and community use are addressed (Appendix 3 para 4.3)

In responding to these points it is important to note that whilst the statutory consultation surrounding the relocation of Ellon Academy may be drawing to a close, the Council is committed to an ongoing consultation with all members of the Ellon community as the plans for the new campus develop. The above points have also been addressed elsewhere in this report.

- Road safety remains an important concern for all involved and the Council is committed to addressing and minimising these issues prior to the introduction of the new campus (para 4.2).
- The exact number of pupils entitled to free school transport to the proposed academy will not be confirmed until 2015, as families will inevitably move in and out of the area during the next three years. However, based upon current pupils attending the existing academy the change in pupil entitlement will be minimal (para 6.4).
- The new academy will continue to have a range of facilities available for community use, and will also provide enhanced parking to improve access for those with their own transport. Work will continue both with community groups and with transport providers as the community campus development progresses (para 4.3).

6. RURAL SCHOOLS – COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 12 OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

6.1 Section 12(3) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires the education authority to have special regard to the following factors when proposing changes to rural schools:

- any viable alternative to the relocation proposal
- the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal
- the likely effect caused by different travelling arrangements that may be required.

Ellon Academy is not a rural school, however Aberdeenshire Council has given regard to the above factors in keeping with the spirit of the legislation.

6.2 Viable Alternatives to Relocation

One possibility to relocation was identified in the Proposal Document. This is to retain the status quo. This would not address the concerns about the capacity and suitability of the existing school building.

Prior to issuing the consultation document significant work was undertaken with stakeholders to identify any potential alternative sites for the new community campus and these included building a new school on the existing site. Through a robust process, it was determined that the identified site contained in the proposal document is the most suitable for building a new academy.

6.3 Effect on the Local Community

This issue featured in a number of the responses to the consultation exercise and has been addressed, in para 4.3 and 5.4 above.

Whilst the community is largely supportive of a new academy and community campus and agree with the benefits that will be delivered for pupils, they have concerns about the distance to the new facility from the centre of town.

Discussions with community groups are ongoing and as previously stated it is anticipated that transport services will be provided by August 2015, however this is dependent to an extent on the delivery of new housing in the Cromleybank area. The concerns raised by community groups are not insurmountable and therefore should not be sufficient to delay the development of the new school. The wider community will benefit from enhanced facilities with the new campus.

6.4 Travelling Arrangements

There will be a change in school transport provision for some families living between 2 and 4 miles away from the current academy. As the location of the proposed replacement academy is approximately 1 mile to the south of the existing establishment, some families living to the south of Ellon may find that they no longer live more than 3 miles from the school and as such would no longer be entitled to free transport. Conversely there will be some families, mainly to the north of Ellon who will find that they live further than 3 miles from the new school and become eligible for free school transport.

As the school is still a number of years away from delivery, it is not yet possible to provide accurate figures to identify how many families will be affected and what the financial implications of this will be. Further work will be undertaken in the next two years to clarify this. Based upon the current entitlement for school transport to Ellon Academy, and if the new school was to open immediately with the same group of pupils, seven pupils would no longer be entitled to free transport and seven more pupils would be eligible for privilege transport.

7. INACCURACIES

In the course of the consultation exercise, one inaccuracy has come to light. Paragraph 1.5 of the proposal document listed Balmedie as being part of the catchment area for Ellon Academy. The Ellon network contains a zoning anomaly. Balmedie Primary school forms part of the Ellon Children's Services network, and there are strong linkages between all schools in the network including the academy, however pupils from Balmedie are zoned to attend Bridge of Don Academy which is a school within Aberdeen City Council. It was decided from the outset that Balmedie families would be included in the consultation process as the school forms part of the wider network.

A statement was made during the public meeting confirming that Balmedie would have been included in the consultation regardless, and clarifying that pupils from Balmedie would continue to be zoned to the Bridge of Don academy. The Rector also commented that during his time at the academy all placing requests from Balmedie pupils to attend Ellon Academy had been accepted.

A decision was taken that no further remedial action would be taken with regards to this typing error during the consultation period, and that it would be reported as part of our submission to Education Scotland and this report. This decision was taken for the following reasons:

1. Only one written response was received questioning the zoning of Balmedie
2. The comments made at the public meeting around Balmedie zoning suggested that the error was not causing particular concern or confusion to consultees
3. The Head Teacher at Balmedie Primary was the first to identify the error and queries directed to the primary school were addressed accordingly.
4. Paragraph 3.2 of the proposal document clearly states that 'The catchment area for the academy will not change with the new location. All primary pupils currently zoned to Ellon Academy would continue to be zoned to the school and would attend the new academy.
5. Balmedie families would have been included in the consultation, as it was intended to include all schools within the Ellon network in this process.

8. COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 9(1) OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010 AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 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.*

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.

8.2 Conclusions and Recommendation

The Council now has 3 broad options, namely:

- (a) abandon the proposal and maintain the status quo; or
- (b) amend the proposal in some way and undertake a further consultation exercise on a new proposal; or
- (c) adopt the proposal.

8.2.1 In abandoning the proposal, the Council would be recognising the limited opposition which has been raised. This option would result in the funding allocated by Scottish Futures Trust for a replacement academy being lost. This option would also result in the capacity issues at the current academy not being addressed. It is unlikely that replacement funding could be secured from the Aberdeenshire Council Capital plan to solely fund a replacement academy within the next 10 years.

8.2.2 There are no obvious ways of amending the proposal other than possibly postponing its implementation or by selecting a different site. Previous work undertaken both by Council officers and with stakeholders has ruled out any other viable site. The option to postpone implementation would require a new consultation exercise to be taken and any delay would seriously jeopardise the Scottish Future Trust funding allocated for the replacement school.

8.2.3 If the Council adopts the proposal, it would be on the basis that the educational benefits set out in the Proposal Document would materialise. There would also be a requirement that the Council continues to work closely with stakeholders including community groups and parents to ensure that the concerns that they have raised are addressed.

8.2.4 The recommendation of officers is that the Council should adopt the proposal.

9. OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE REPRESENTATIONS TO SCOTTISH MINISTERS IN TERMS OF SECTION 15(4) OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

Recipients of this Consultation Report, and other readers, should note that the legislation allows for any person to make representations to Scottish Ministers within three weeks of the Council taking their final decision to implement a closure or relocation proposal. Aberdeenshire Council's Policy and Resources Committee will take the decision on whether or not to implement this relocation proposal at its meeting on 19 April 2012. If the decision is taken to implement the relocation proposal, any representations to Scottish Ministers, therefore, in this context need to be with the Ministers within three weeks of this date.

In this context letters can be addressed to:

The Scottish Government
Area 2A (South)
Victoria Quay
EDINBURGH
EH6 6QQ