

## **Appendix P**

### **Report on Responses to consultation on proposals for Holt Farm and Olive Hill Primary Schools.**



**Directorate of Children's Services**

## **Investing in the Future**

# **Consultation on proposals for Holt Farm and Olive Hill Primary Schools**

**March 2006**

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## **Executive Summary**

The Council consulted previously on proposals to close Holt Farm Primary. In response to concerns about the impact on children, parents and staff Hurst Green Primary were invited to support Holt Farm during the closure process. It was not possible to complete these arrangements and the involvement of Olive Hill Primary required the withdrawal of the Statutory Notice and further consultation.

This report details the responses received during the consultation. Only 46 questionnaire returns were received representing a response rate of only 4.6%. The returns need to be interpreted with care but there is a majority in favour of the proposals and for Option 3 with regard to how pupils could be managed across two sites. There are strong messages of regret regarding Holt Farm but also recognition that the current position is not sustainable. There are also strong messages regarding provision of adequate support for the change process and for the proposals to be implemented without further delay.

Recommendations will be made to publish Statutory Notices to implement the proposals as set out in the consultation document.

## **Introduction**

The live birth rate in the borough fell from 4,116 in 1990/91 to 3,344 in 2003 – a drop of more than 18%. This has resulted in an annual fall in the number of children entering Reception classes in primary schools. There is no evidence that families with children are moving into the borough in significant numbers or that parents in other boroughs are sending their children to Dudley schools in greater numbers than in previous years.

The total number of pupils in Dudley primary schools compared with 2005/6 will reduce by about 2,358 by 2010. The calculation is based on children that have already been born and will enter Reception classes in each of the next few years. The loss of pupils will result in a loss of grant of £7.8 million at present values and the loss of income means less to distribute to schools. All schools will have significantly less income to pay for staffing and other essential requirements. This reduction will occur whatever the configuration of primary schools.

Dudley schools are not generously funded by the DfES when compared to schools in other Councils in the West Midlands. We cannot afford to waste any funding on maintaining the growing number of surplus places. Neither can we afford to maintain more schools than is necessary.

The cost per pupil in small primary schools is significantly greater than the average and these costs can only be met from the Dedicated Schools Grant, that is, by reducing the budgets of larger schools both primary and secondary. Calculations in the 2006/7 budget show the average unit cost per pupil in Dudley is £3,038 and the cost per pupil at Holt Farm is £3,883.

The Council has been considering the configuration of primary schools in Dudley since 1999, when KPMG produced an independent report for the Education Department. The issue was picked up in the LEA Ofsted inspections of 2000 and 2002, and featured in both inspection action plans. Consultations on proposals were carried out in 2002, and some limited action taken.

The Primary Schools Review concluded that unless action was taken there would be over 5,000 surplus places in Dudley primary schools by 2010. This is the equivalent of around twenty 210 place schools or ten 420 place schools. The proposals agreed by the Cabinet on 17 November included the closure of 5 schools and a reduction in capacity in many others. Holt Farm Primary was proposed for closure and a Statutory Notice was published.

The Council had considered the concerns raised during the consultation period and responded positively. Although the proposal to close Holt Farm Primary remained unchanged, Hurst Green Primary was invited to work with Holt Farm to provide a greater degree of stability during the closure and transitional period. It was not possible to progress this proposal.

At the beginning of January, Olive Hill Primary accepted the invitation to work with Holt Farm. The Governing Body committed to

- joint working with Holt Farm
- development of a new staffing structure
- ring fencing of additional posts for Holt Farm staff in the first instance
- representation at Governing Body meetings.

The involvement of Olive Hill Primary required further consultation. The Statutory Notice for the closure of Holt Farm was withdrawn to facilitate a new consultation period. This report describes the consultation and the responses.

### **Consultation Process**

The Council developed a consultation process with the full participation of the headteachers of Holt Farm and Olive Hill Primary Schools. It is important to acknowledge the highly professional approach that has been maintained throughout

this process. The contributions of the headteachers were critical in developing the level of detail required by parents.

The consultation document was copied to all parents of Holt Farm and Olive Hill and a range of other consultees. The list is included at the end of this report. The consultation document was also available on [www.dudley.gov.uk](http://www.dudley.gov.uk).

Consultation meetings for parents and governors were held at Holt Farm and Olive Hill Primary Schools. Consultation responses were recorded at these meetings. Responses were also received in the form of consultation questionnaires, emails and letters.

### **Analysis of Responses**

There were 1,000 consultation documents issued and 46 returned representing a return rate of 4.6%. Of the 46 returned six provided no details of the respondent and have been excluded from the analysis. Electronic access to copies of the document was also provided for those on the Children's Services distribution. One late response was also excluded.

The total responses by question are set out in the table below.

<b>Question number</b>	<b>Total Yes</b>	<b>% Yes</b>	<b>Total No</b>	<b>% No</b>	<b>Total No Response</b>	<b>% No Response</b>
1	21	52.5	18	45.0	1	2.5
2	19	47.5	19	47.5	2	5.0
3	22	55.0	15	37.5	3	7.5

The number of responses received is lower than expected. This could be an indication that the greater number of people have accepted the case for closing Holt Farm Primary or that they believe that the decision is inevitable. Whatever the reasons may be for the low return there is a majority in favour of the proposals.

The comments overall reflect a degree of regret that Holt Farm will close and bring to an end the contribution made over a very long period. There is also a degree of anger and frustration towards the Council. There is also a strong view that the proposals should be properly supported and implemented without further delay. These reactions are understandable when the Council is faced with difficult decisions. Dudley has taken similar decisions about school provision many times

over the last few decades to manage essential change programmes with minimal disruption.

Question 4 response.

<b>Total Option 1</b>	<b>% Option 1</b>	<b>Total Option 2</b>	<b>% Option 2</b>	<b>Total Option 3</b>	<b>% Option 3</b>	<b>Total None</b>	<b>% None</b>
1	2.5	4	10.0	28	70.0	7	17.5

There is overwhelming support for Option 3 which would transfer Reception, Year 1, Year 2 and Year 5 along with any Key Stage 2 siblings from Holt Farm to Olive Hill. This would allow the three classes (Year 6, Year 4 and Year 3) with nursery to be grouped together in the Holt Farm building. As stated in the consultation document, all of the options are based on several assumptions including pupil numbers for both schools remaining as planned. If there is a significant change in pupil numbers alternative arrangements will need to be considered.

### **Responses To Consultation On Proposals For Holt Farm And Olive Hill Primary Schools**

**Total number of consultation documents issued = 1,000**

**Total number of responses to consultation = 46**

**Non - attributable responses (no details of respondent provided) = 6**

**Total attributable responses = 40**

### **Description Of Respondents**

<b>Parent / Carer</b>	<b>Headteacher</b>	<b>Governor</b>	<b>Other School Body Representative</b>	<b>Other</b>
29	5	4	1	1

### **Detailed Analysis Of Questionnaire Responses**

**Postcode analysis**

<b>Halesowen</b>	<b>Cradley Heath</b>	<b>Rowley Regis</b>	<b>Smethwick</b>	<b>Oldbury</b>	<b>Brierley Hill</b>	<b>Kingswinford</b>
<b>B62/B63</b>	<b>B64</b>	<b>B65</b>	<b>B66</b>	<b>B68</b>	<b>DY5</b>	<b>DY6</b>
30	1	3	1	1	2	2

### **Late Responses**

One response from a resident of area DY6 7RD responded too late to the consultation and therefore has not been included in this analysis.

### **Questionnaire Responses**

*Officer comments where appropriate are in italics.*

#### **Question 1. Do you agree with the case for changing the current pattern of primary schools as described in the consultation document?**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No Response</b>
Total	21	18	1
B62/B63	15	14	1
B64	1		
B65	1	2	
B66	1		
B68		1	
DY5	2		
DY6	1	1	

#### **Comments from respondents who said yes**

- I agree as the change will mean our children will have better standards of education. (B64)
- I am however very sorry that Holt Farm is affected. I would be happier for my child to continue at Holt Farm. (B62/B63)



- Agreed with, if not liked. (DY5)
- It is essential that we respond strategically to the drop in pupil numbers in order to best utilise the resources that we have available (difficult as this is for closing schools). (B62/B63)
- Holt Farm School has a low number of children. Hopefully with the schools merging it will make Olive Hill a much better school and recognised for outstanding learning. (B62/B63)
- Although it is difficult, the hard decision of funding and fall in pupil numbers has to be made. (B62/B63)
- We recognise the issue of falling pupil numbers within Dudley Borough, nationally and especially within the Halesowen Township. We also recognise the requirement to implement a solution, however painful to the selected schools. Olive Hill governors wish to support Dudley LEA in their commitment to provide the best education for Dudley children. (B62/B63)
- Whilst looking theoretically good on paper there are a number of issues against in practicality. (B62/B63)
- All the numbers and costs; makes sense to change things. (B62/B63)

#### **Comments from respondents who said no**

- Not at all. There has been a massive increase in the number of new build homes to the area. These are family homes and the owners will be planning families. With this and the increase in birth rates and immigration the school will be bursting in a few years time. (B62/B63)

*The approach taken by Dudley is that on average 100 new dwellings would produce 42 children of which 25 would be primary age. This means that for every 100 dwellings there would be 3 or 4 children for each primary age group. There is no evidence to support the claim of massive increases in housing developments or that there would be significant impact on the demand for primary places. Similarly, there is no evidence that birth rates or immigration will increase overall demand for places.*

- I agree that the subject of surplus places needs to be tackled / addressed but feel there are other ways forward that should be actively explored, tried and tested before school closures should be proposed. Through the short consultation (less than 6 weeks) Holt Farm Primary put various options to you which could tackle the problems. (B65)

*Proposals to close schools are not considered as the first option. A wide range of options has been considered over the last few years in meeting the challenge of overcapacity and wasted resources in 82 primary schools. Dudley receives government grant for education based on the number of children attending its schools. As the numbers of children have fallen the level of grant has fallen and schools have less to spend on staffing and other essential areas. All of the alternative suggestions submitted during the initial consultation were considered but none provided the level of funding required to improve the viability of Holt Farm. Any additional use of the building would have to meet the full costs without compromising the operation of Holt Farm as a school. None of the options submitted were considered to meet these requirements.*

- Schools should never be closed. Extra services and facilities should be encouraged to use the school to boost funding and staffing should be altered accordingly. But a community school should always be there to serve its community. There were other options to this problem but none have been explored or tried out, even on a 2-year trial basis. (B62/B63)

*All local authorities including Dudley have to respond to fluctuations in population or other pressures to change the pattern of school provision. All schools will offer extended provision by 2010 in line with national policy but the provision must be sustainable. None of the options suggested provided evidence that the additional services would be self subsidizing or fully funded. There is no funding available to subsidize the development of such services on a trial basis. To do this would divert funding away from children in schools.*

- I feel it is beneficial for communities to have small local schools than a less local, large school. (B62/B63)

#### **Comments from respondents who chose not to give a yes or no answer**

- I have no control of what happens. Whether I say yes or no what difference does it make? The answer? None! (B62/B63)

*Changes were made after the initial consultation. The consultation has been transparent, views have been actively sought and carefully considered.*

**Question 2. Do you agree with the proposals for Holt Farm?**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No Response</b>
Total	19	19	2
B62/B63	14	15	1
B64	1		
B65		2	1
B66	1		
B68		1	
DY5	2		
DY6	1	1	

**Comments from respondents who said yes**

- It is a shame any school needs to close though. (B62/B63)
- Important that staff are treated fairly. (DY5)

*Work has been ongoing with governors and staff for many months to ensure that opportunities for staff are maximised. Individual support is also being provided for staff.*

- I agree with the proposal but would like to stress how strongly I can empathise with staff, families and governors at Holt Farm who would be losing a beloved school. (B62/B63)
- I would prefer for the whole school to be merged as soon as possible to minimise disruption. (B62/B63)
- Yes, but personally I believe the children would still adapt, without the annex idea. (B62/B63)

- We agree with the proposals for Holt Farm but wish to express our empathy and support for pupils, parents and staff at Holt Farm. (B62/B63)

### **Comments from respondents who said no**

- We cannot continue to close schools. The primary school at the top of Ross in Blackheath has just closed and all the pupils moved to Britannia. A massive housing estate has just been built on that ground - can Britannia house all those children if each home was to have a child? (B62/B63)

*Without action Dudley will have over 5,000 surplus places by 2010. This is the equivalent of 28 schools similar to Holt Farm without any pupils and every other school paying to keep them open. Alternatively Dudley could reduce the size of all schools and keep 82 open. This would mean that a higher proportion of the government grant would be spent on keeping 82 buildings. The average number of pupils in each school would fall from 319 (January 2006) to 298 (January 2010) and every school would have less income to pay for staffing, accommodation and other essential resources. Neither id these extremes are appropriate and a more appropriate range of proposals with a small number of closures and reduced capacity in many more represent a more proportionate response. Dudley must address the surplus places issue. The supply of places in Blackheath is a matter for Sandwell MBC to address.*

- I do not think closing a successful school can benefit the children. (B62/B63)
- Again using the spare capacity that Holt Farm has in other ways. It was suggested to you that you could have a specialist classroom which would benefit the children's education. For example, Specialist Arts and Crafts room / Specialist Music room / Special Needs Centre / Sure Start/ Preparation and Planning room. You could have tried the Federation option with the heads. You could have tried to get more money per head of pupil from the government as Ray Watson clearly states Dudley receives less than average. (B65)

*Representations continue to be made to government by low funded local authorities. The government is spending more on education than at any other time and they expect Dudley to put its own house in order with regard to the resources wasted through surplus places. The additional facilities would add costs as no evidence of additional income was provided. Federation was considered but rejected on the grounds that it would not reduce costs or lead to better facilities for more children.*

- Holt Farm should have been left as it is until the other school was ready to receive the children. Kids are moving left, right and centre in a panic of getting a place. Staff are feeling vulnerable and children are unsettled. (B62/B63)

*Holt Farm could not have remained as it is. The financial impact of falling pupil numbers on school budgets would have required Holt Farm to make significant reductions from April 2006. The Council listened to concerns about buildings being ready and these proposals will ensure that the construction work is completed before all the children transfer to the Olive Hill site. The Council has tried to maintain stability by persuading parents not to move children early. Legislation and the opportunity provided by so many surplus places limits the actions that the Council may take. In this context the Council, with a strong plea from headteachers, is moving forward with proposals as quickly as possible.*

- Strongly disagree. (B65)
- The future, we feel, has already been decided. (B62/B63)
- Holt Farm is a successful school. On page 8, paragraph 18 of this document it states that MBC of Dudley has already succeeded in securing millions of pounds from the Government for new schools. Demolish Holt Farm, build a brand new Holt Farm and lower the capacity. (B62/B63)

*Dudley has a successful track record in securing external grants. In each case, bids are written against specific criteria. The DfES would only approve grants for new schools if there was a strong case such as the need to remove surplus places. There is no case for replacing Holt Farm even with a lower capacity.*

- Would prefer Holt Farm to stay open! (B62/B63)
- I do not believe a good school (Band 1 assessed by the authority) should be closed when Band 2, 3 and 4 schools which are less effective remain open. (B62/B63)
- Definitely not. There is not enough space at Olive Hill that is adequately adaptable for Holt Farm children. (B62/B63)

*The area available is large enough to accommodate the proposals.*

### Comments from respondents who chose not to give a yes or no answer

None

### Question 3. Do you agree with the proposals for Olive Hill?

	Yes	No	No Response
Total	22	15	3
B62 / B63	16	11	3
B64	1		
B65	1	2	
B66	1		
B68		1	
DY5	2		
DY6	1	1	

### Comments from respondents who said yes

- At this stage of proceedings we can only hope the five new classrooms are built to high standards and are completed on time. The proposed two extra classrooms as I can see will not be needed. Falling birth rates remember! (B62/B63)
- Uniform - has consideration been given to the process of rebadging both institutions and cost implications? (DY5)

*Questions such as uniform are matters for the school to determine. Olive Hill have already demonstrated their willingness to engage with children, parents, staff and the local community. There is no reason why uniform and similar questions would not be considered fully.*

- At Olive Hill we are also experiencing falling rolls and this proposal will enable us to plan a more secure and stable future. (B62/B63)
- This will make the school stand out from any other in the borough. (B62/B63)

- I believe Olive Hill is a better choice than Hurst Green due to the ethos and nature of both schools. (B62/B63)
- We agree with the proposals for Olive Hill, subject to the Olive Hill site being improved and the proposed provisions meeting the needs of our children. As discussed with Mr Watson we understand these to be:
  1. Additional Classrooms
  2. Support for a Children's Centre and wrap around care.
  3. Amendments are needed to the initial Children's Centre plan. If a Children's Centre is located within the school, adequate access must be available for all children 0 - 5 years old to be designed in such a way as to promote interaction and movement between them.
  4. Provision of a separate dining room with consideration to access to the kitchen, for pupils and suppliers.
  5. Improved entrance - an entrance to be created which addresses the current situation where pupils collect their dinner from the hatch which is adjacent to the main school door and then cross the main school corridor to get to the school hall where they eat.
  6. Re-siting of staff room and office accommodation so as to facilitate communication and effective working. Staff room to be of sufficient size to accommodate increased number of staff. Appropriate space for PPA time for teachers.
  7. Improved access and car parking to the site. This has been a long standing issue and relates directly to the safety of pupils as they enter our site. This issue being further highlighted by our commitment to becoming ever more an extended school.
  8. Provide additional playground to meet the needs of a 420 pupil school. The additional classrooms may well reduce our current playground space (which is limited currently) and with additional pupils we will need to create more playground space.
  9. In order for any changes to the site to work efficiently and effectively, the governors and staff at Olive Hill must be involved with planning and implementation of developments. (B62/B63)

### **Comments from respondents who said no**

- The school is already cramped. There is already a problem with parking. The fields at the back of the school cannot be used as it is old mining ground. Barrett's housing tried to secure this land a few years ago and permission was refused. (B62/B63)

*The current site is large enough to accommodate a 420 place school. Feasibility work is in progress on the various options and further information will be shared when this work is more advanced.*

- Again you should have explored every other avenue prior to this option. Although clearly Olive Hill is a good school and offers a fine level of education, every other avenue should have first been explored, implemented and then proved not to be viable. Then if that was the case a full consultation should have been offered to every resident of Dudley MBC. (B65)

*See earlier comments. Residents did attend the parents meetings and there has been full access to the consultation documents. Consultation with every resident of Dudley MBC would have added considerably to the cost of the Primary School Review Process and there is no guarantee that the response rate would have justified the added expense.*

- In principal, no - but there is no other choice. (B62/B63)

#### **Comments from respondents who chose not to give a yes or no answer**

- I agree with the proposals for a Children's Centre as part of the plans but shouldn't every school have the chance of extended days to cater for their families. Olive Hill is a lovely school but they too are under pressure to hurry through plans they are not ready to carry out. (B62/B63)

*All schools will be required to offer extended provision by 2010. Some schools will offer a wide range of provision, others a more limited range.*

- Cannot answer this until firm plans are in place regarding playground(s), traffic and safety. (B62/B63)

#### **Question 4. There are 3 options described in paragraph 21. Do you support...**

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	None of these
Total	1	4	28	7
B62/B63	1	2	22	5
B64		1		
B65			2	1



B66			1	
B68			1	
DY5		1	1	
DY6			1	1

### **Comments from respondents who chose Option 1**

- I agree schools do need to be improved but not at the expense of closing good schools. (B62/B63)

### **Comments from respondents who chose Option 2**

- There will be fewer children moving to Olive Hill during the first move. This will help ease integration and allow unknown problems to be overcome. (B62/B63)
- It seems more realistic to keep KS2 at Holt Farm. (B64)

### **Comments from respondents who chose Option 3**

- As you are clearly intent on railroading this cause through I feel bullied into opting for option 3. Other parents felt bullied and worried from comments you have made and have even moved their children early to secure a place at nearby schools. Including taking places at Sandwell schools. So under your tactics I opt for option 3 to secure that my children stay with friends. (B65)
- Both my children will go to Olive Hill together. (B62/B63)
- Don't waste taxpayer's money keeping Holt Farm open. Close it and let all the parents (especially without transport) adjust to the situation. Try to employ Holt Farm teachers at Olive Hill so we can put this nasty business behind us. (B62/B63)
- This appears to be a part move to one site. It would also protect Year 5 from moving twice in 2 years. (DY5)
- Less disruption for families and especially Year 5 pupils. Begins to join the 2 schools together earlier. Shorter timescale - will save money eventually. (B62/B63)

- Option 3 provides the best solution on the pupil numbers at the time it was written. It enables Year 6 at Holt Farm to see their year out there and avoids the same situation happening to subsequent year 6's and begins to bring the two schools together. (B62/B63)
- If it must change this is my preferred choice as it keeps my child at Holt Farm for the longest period. (B62/B63)
- The decision to close Holt Farm has already been made so I feel I have to make some decision for the sake of the children. (B62/B63)
- This is the most practical solution for both schools. (B62/B63)
- Moving as many children as possible will help with settling the children in faster. (B62/B63)
- Option 3 is the best for pupils of both schools. (B62/B63)
- We support option 3 which we feel meets the needs of the children with least disruption and is financially the most efficient. (B62/B63)

#### **Comments from respondents who did not agree with any options**

- Olive Hill DOES NOT have any spare capacity for additional classrooms, or a dining room. The only way of making the proposed changes is to reduce the playground area. You will have more children playing in a reduced space. (B62/B63)

*The scheme for Olive Hill Primary will add the necessary capacity as well as improving the existing accommodation and external areas. There are many ways of achieving these improvements without reducing the playground area.*

- Leave the schools as they are; two individual schools. Keep our children happy and safe. (B65)
- Possibly Option 1. (B62/B63)
- At the moment the options seem to leave years 3 and 4 at Holt Farm. These children are just beginning KS2 and have less time to settle when moved. I

don't like the idea of such a few children rattling around in a ghost school with no headteacher on site. (B62/B63)

- Olive Hill historically has been a poor achieving school. (B62/B63)

*The Primary Schools Review has focused on the need to address falling numbers and ensure that the pattern of school provision overall is improved. No reference has been made to the performance of individual schools. The assertion that Olive Hill is “historically a poor achieving school” is inaccurate. It is disappointing that such unfounded claims are made.*

- I would rather the school did not close but if it must then I support option 3 which would move the maximum number of children to Olive Hill in the shortest period to avoid children's and parents apprehension. (B62/B63)

**Question 5. Do you wish to make any other comments?**

- I have picked option 3 as I am looking to move property within 12 months so it would save my child moving school 3 times than 2 in 1 year. (B62/B63)
- At the age of 40 my family plans have not been completed - we hope to have more children. I currently have 3 children in Olive Hill and hope that in the future that I can put any future children into Olive Hill. BUT I have a nagging feeling that I will struggle in doing this as the school will be fit to burst and I'll be saying 'I told you so!' (B62/B63)

*The criteria for admissions to Dudley primary schools take full account of siblings. There is no evidence to suggest that there will be a significant increase in demand for places at Olive Hill beyond the planned capacity.*

- The extension at Olive Hill is long overdue, as the existing mobiles have been used for so long and with no toilet facilities. (B62/B63)
- Make sure the Holt Farm site is put to good use and not just demolished and sold to build new houses and get more children into the area thus over filling the two remaining schools. (B62/B63)
- I wish Mrs Jordan of Olive Hill (Headteacher) good guidance from God that she may run a successful school. That Mr Freeman, Cllr Vickers and Mr R Watson stick to their words as gentlemen and provide every child from Holt

Farm with the appropriate new uniform (for whatever parents choose for their child / children) for their new schools. (B62/B63)

- I hope that all of the process will be managed with sensitivity to the feelings of "redundant" personnel, many of whom will have given many years to Holt Farm. (DY5)
- We do not agree with the integration until the following issues have firm plans in place. 1) Playground facilities 2) Traffic congestion / road safety 3) Car parking / access. (B62/B63)
- Timescales will be very short after the next consultation period. Will a school for 420 pupils be needed? The projected numbers for the combined new school do not look as if a 2-form entry school will be full to capacity. (B62/B63)

*The proposals overall include a margin of surplus places to enable some movement in and out of areas as normal. The Council expects Olive Hill and all other schools to be near capacity.*

- Somebody from Dudley LEA should be held responsible for this shambles of a consultation. John Freeman clearly stated at the Halesowen Area Committee that if the Governing bodies at partner schools did not commit then Holt Farm would just close. The children would then be dispersed locally. What I need to know is how this could be done with Cannon Lindley's rejection of admission numbers being increased. At no point since September have you listened to the parents at the Dudley schools. Head now spends all his time trying to secure a good educational future for our children, he seems to have resigned himself that this will be rubberstamped and forced through. How is that right? (B65)

*The School Adjudicator agreed with the case for rationalising primary school provision in the borough to remove surplus places. He stated that "the implications of not taking action would be very serious for efficiency, economy and above all educational effectiveness". The process for changing admission numbers for September 2007 is being conducted as normal. The Director's statement at the Halesowen Area Committee emphasized the position that Holt Farm does not attract sufficient pupils to meet the costs of running the school and that the continuing fall in numbers would require Holt Farm to make cuts in provision irrespective of proposals. The involvement of Hurst Green initially and now Olive Hill is intended to support the closure process in response to concerns expressed by parents and others. The*

*Cabinet Report (17 November) includes references to where changes were made in response to consultation with parents and others.*

- This hasn't been thought through properly. Olive Hill isn't ready to take all the children, any left at Holt Farm are going to be feeling left out with no clear leadership on site in a half empty school. This is not a good basis for their well-being. There have been no extra measures for admissions. We have to stick to the rules; move now, which I don't want to, or risk having no place in September except in a half empty school. (B62/B63)

*Olive Hill and Holt Farm are working closely together with support from the Council to ensure that the transition is as smooth and effective as possible. Consultation meetings and individual support have been provided for parents both in considering alternative schools and financial support for uniform changes. No parents are being encouraged to move before September.*

- I do not want to see Holt Farm close but feel there is no choice than to agree with the merger with Olive Hill. Otherwise, like parents were told, Holt Farm would just close and the future would be even more uncertain for our children. (B65)
- Leave us alone. Save Holt Farm from closure. (B65)
- I am not happy with the decision to close Holt Farm. My child has just got comfortable in this school and made friends. I think the move will upset him. (B62/B63)
- A very difficult decision. In my opinion very badly handled by the Council. If this is democracy I am ashamed of it, my vote obviously counts for very little. Let's see what happens at the local elections - let us not forget the way our children and their futures have been treated and ignored. (B62/B63)
- There are major concerns regarding the substantial landfill site with the attendant dangers of landfill gas / contaminated land – not ideal in close proximity to any school. (DY6)

*There is no evidence of danger from gas emissions. The proximity of the landfill site is taken fully into account by the current scheme and the feasibility work for these proposals.*

- I am committed to making this process as positive as possible for all of the staff, pupils and families involved at both schools. In order to become a bigger school Olive Hill will need access, parking, playground, classrooms and hall facilities improving, otherwise we are in danger of exacerbating suitability issues currently existing on our site. With a strong commitment to developing our school for all of the community this may be a chance to meet the local needs in a way not done before. (B62/B63)
- This entire process is a farce. I no longer have any confidence in our local Council and I have serious concerns about there being enough school places for the children of Halesowen North. (B62/B63)
- I would like to register my disappointment at the length of time it has taken to make a decision on Holt Farm. Since the original statement in 2002 staff, parents, children and governors have been anxious. Since September 2005 this has intensified and now in March we are still a long way from a decision. I hope people in power understand the suffering this has caused for everyone in this community! (B62/B63)

*The process is largely determined legislation and guidance. The Council with the full support of headteachers is moving the process forwards as quickly as possible.*

- I feel very disappointed by the whole consultation process. I feel we have largely been left in the dark during the entire process, apart from a few occasions where we had our hopes raised only to be let down again. I hope that we will soon have a positive outcome for our children. (B62/B63)
- It has all been a farce from start to finish. No proper thought and planning has gone into this whole escapade. Plans have been changed, proposals changed. You've even changed your mind about closing two schools. When are you going to change your mind about closing Holt Farm? (B62/B63)

*The proposals have remained consistent. The proposals to close five schools announced in September remains the same although the way in which closure would be supported has developed in response to consultation. This is the purpose of consultation.*

- Car parking - This is a major issue and is already causing concern. The PCSOs have been called out already. Reviews need to be looked at as I have heard that there may be a petition put in place. People have also been blocked in or out of their own drives. (B62/B63)

*The scheme for Olive Hill will include car parking issues.*

- I feel the vast majority of press reporting to be of a political nature and misleading to the general public. We are discussing young children and some people have used and indeed abused their position during the lead up to this time. (B62/B63)

*The vast majority of press reporting may well be of a “political nature and misleading to the general public”. The Council however, has maintained a very clear position, preferring to communicate directly with parents, schools and other stakeholders rather than through the media.*

- The governors of Olive Hill Primary School have acted decisively and considered the affect of the proposals upon all children. The Governing Body have acted in good faith and are reliant upon Dudley LEA delivering upon the issues mentioned in question 3 as discussed before governors agreed to become a partner of Holt Farm School in the proposal for consultation.

The above are by no means the definitive requirements to supply good quality education to the children both now and in the future of Olive Hill School, but the governors pledge their support wholly to the proposals within the consultation document.

We would refer to the letter from Mr Watson in which he outlined both the preconditions of the local authority and those of the Governing Body prior to the Governing Body agreeing to be a part of this proposal for Holt Farm. (B62/B63)

- If this proposal is so achievable and best for the children why wasn't it considered first? Realistically Olive Hill is not suitable - what of this toxic gas? (B62/B63)

*Hurst Green is geographically closer to Holt Farm than Olive Hill. There is no evidence of danger from gas emissions from the landfill site near Olive Hill Primary.*

### **Other Correspondence**

#### **Letters**

1. I write in reply to your consultation document. I do not consider it appropriate to offer views on the case for change on the various options under consideration. They are best dealt with by the children, parents and others directly impacted by the need for change.

Where I do offer a view and assistance as appropriate is on the implementation of the change process. Whatever changes are agreed they will have an impact on the safe and healthy environment for children, parents, staff and local residents.

In providing the local policing service I would be pleased for my staff to work closely with partners to ensure a smooth and positive transition to the new arrangements.

Architectural liaison in the planning of new buildings should ensure 'Safer by Design' and I believe we could assist here, not only with buildings but with car parking design and approach routes to the site.

At the beginning of the 2006/07 academic year it would be beneficial for all concerned if local officers work closely with the school to reinforce considerate and safe parking, during the dropping off and collection of children, particularly in light of the increased numbers. To these ends I have forwarded your consultation document to the local sector Inspector and ask that he make himself available for further contact prior to September 2006. I look forward to building, over the coming months, on our already good relationships with schools in the borough. (B63)

2. I have been asked to write to you in relation to your concerns regarding the out of school childcare provision at Holt Farm Primary School and the impact of the proposed closure. Happy Families, a private provider, ran the out of school childcare at the school as I'm sure you are aware. When we heard about the proposals to close the school and the threatened closure of the out of school club we discussed the issues with the owner. The setting was already struggling to break even and the owner had considered closure. We did manage to persuade her to remain open and gave the setting sustainability funding to enable this to happen. Unfortunately the situation worsened with numbers continuing to drop and the owner had no option but to close.

We are concerned, like you, to ensure that parents and carers in the area are able to access out of school childcare for their children, especially if they have been relying on this service to enable them to work. We did provide an outreach clinic with officers from the Children's Information Service in order to support



parents to find alternative provision, but this was very poorly attended. We are also working with Olive Hill Primary to develop before, after and playscheme provision. Hurst Green Primary already has before, after and playscheme provision at the school run by a private provider.

We understand that this is a very stressful and worrying time for everybody, I do hope that this gives you some reassurance. (B65)

3. As you may be aware, both Phil Everington and Tess Jordan have considered the latest set of options put forward by Dudley LEA and decided that they favour option 3. That is to say that they favour the Reception, Year 1, Year 2 and Year 5 classes from Holt Farm moving to Olive Hill in September 2006 along with all Key Stage 2 siblings - in order to keep families together - and the three classes and Nursery remaining on the Holt Farm site being located together in the building.

Having discussed the matter with the two head teachers, I would also like to register my support for option 3 as it would appear to be the least disruptive for the children and staff.

I am, of course, mindful of the adjudicators report on the consultation thus far. I am sure you will appreciate that the prolonged uncertainty that has resulted from the consultation process, as described by the adjudicator, has had a negative impact on staff, children and families. In view of this I believe a prompt and intelligent decision would be much appreciated.

If the school site at Olive Hill is to be developed and support made available for the intake of new pupils, certain assurances will be needed. An undertaking from the Council to follow through on their commitment to develop the site and provide adequate access would be necessary. I understand that plans should include an additional school hall, expanded playground space and extra car parking. As the constituency MP, I know the importance of parking and it would be helpful to have a decision with definitive plans.

In addition to this, it would be helpful to know how long Holt Farm will serve as an annex for Olive Hill.

If there are any objections following publication of the Statutory Notices, I would ask you to seriously consider arranging for the Schools Organisation Committee to meet as early as possible in order to maintain staff morale and the support of parents. (SW1A)

## Emails

1. I've not very much to offer on the above proposals. I really think that the issues are essentially local ones that are not readily amenable to wider consultation. The Holt Farm and Olive Hill development meets the requirement to 'change the provision of primary school places' (paragraph 5). Option 3 appears to be the best of the three options. The caveat would seem to be that the whole school coming together after one year depends on the two extra classrooms being completed by August 2007. The implications of the classrooms not being completed are not spelt out.

I thought the paper was very clearly presented and argued the case cogently. It would have been helpful to have had a map of the locality as well as the well as the proposed floor plan. (WV1)

2. Firstly I completely disagree with the closure of Holt Farm. I did believe there was going to be hope but after receiving a news bulletin from the Head Mistress at Olive Hill there it was as blunt as it could be - 'it doesn't matter what decision is made about Olive Hill and the merger but Holt Farm will be closing in the Autumn'.

I am completely shocked that Dudley MBC can continue to knock down schools without seeing past the next 5 years. A key example of this is the knocking down of Greenhill Middle School - there we had a fine school with all the facilities that you are aiming for now within Olive Hill. A gymnasium, 2 x assembly halls / theatres / dining rooms, playing fields, a sectioned off central playground and off road parking.

Greenhill Middle was replaced by Leasowes which even today suffers from the lack of space it requires, no playing fields and now a new building which has to be 'bolted' on the front end of the school as there's no where else to put it. I was a pupil at Leasowes when it first opened and following a recent visit to the school I can only surmise that the facilities are in a sorry state throughout, extremely dirty with chewing gum throughout, severe lack of natural light and a very depressing place for young children to be schooled.

Greenhill Middle school was knocked down and children moved into Leasowes which has continued to expand since its initial build- within its first few years mobile classrooms had to be put on the site as there weren't enough classrooms.

Hindsight is great isn't it? - can't Dudley MBC learn from its previous mistake mentioned above. Twenty years on - here we are again:-

- The closure of Holt Farm
- The squeezing in of its pupils into Olive Hill and Hurst Green - I know there is capacity now but what happens in 5 years time. The number of births nationally is on the increase, the number of new build homes to the area is on the increase and an increase in immigration. All of these factors mean that the population is growing and therefore the number of children in the area is on the increase.
- Even more additional buildings at Olive Hill. The plans on show at Olive Hill show a reduction in the current playground area even though at a recent meeting it was said that the children's play areas were not going to be reduced. I thought that the fitness and health of children would be high priority but obviously this is not on Dudley MBC's agenda even though the government are pushing for it. Reduced play areas, more buildings, more facilities, more children which leads to the next point.
- Parking - we are unable to park near the school at the best of times. In fact on most days the traffic wardens are out in force. We do walk our children to school but occasionally have to use the car and struggle to park. At a recent meeting it was suggested that the fields at the rear of the school could be used. But I do remember when Barratt's tried to secure this old landfill and they were refused so there is the possibility that you will never be able to use this space so where do the additional users of the school park?

It would be nice this time if Dudley MBC saw past the end of their 5 year period and gazed into the future - you may save yourselves a fortune and indeed the taxpayer.

Finally just to clarify that I am completely against this proposal. (B62)

### 3. A few points that I mentioned to Ray were

1: In the Ofsted report for Olive Hill 2004. It states under paragraph 80 The uneven surface of the field as recognised in the last report restricts the range of activities, which can be undertaken safely.

*The Ofsted report referred to the old field which has been replaced with a new flat field.*

Can you tell me if this affects the building plans?

How does it restrict activities?

What happens?

Where on the school site is this?

2: You have sent consultation documents out again, yet only to the parents of Olive Hill and Hurst Green.

Do you not think it appropriate to include the local residents of Olive Hill and possibly Holt Farm? These people are entitled to know what is happening in the local area. They should be allowed to voice their opinions too.

In particular when you state you intend to build a second car park at the rear, close to the old Halesowen Tip / British Steel site.

3: A number of parents at both schools are of different races. One in our street cannot read / speak English, have you provided these people with a consultation document in a format they can understand?

Are you sure they can understand this consultation?

4:- Why are you allowing children to be transferred mid term / year?

I look forward to your response. (B65)

4. As a parent of Olive Hill, I wish to enquire of the actual size of our school.

I believe it is measured in a m2 capacity.

Could you please furnish me with this information at your earliest convenience, as I am aware the consultation finishes next week. (Postcode unknown)

5. I understand under DfES guidelines a school needs to meet a size criteria based on the numbers attending.

My question is:-

Does Olive Hill Primary have enough room / size to take all children from Holt Farm in addition to the children already housed there?

Is there enough area both internally and externally?

How will this be affected with the proposed Children's Centre?

I feel this is an important question that needs answering before the end of the consultation period. (B65)