



Directorate of Children's Services

**Investing in the Future
Transforming Secondary Provision**

**Report on responses to consultation on
proposals for Cradley High School**

September 2006

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Executive Summary

The number of pupils attending Cradley High School has fallen every year for 5 years. Cradley High only had 34 first preferences for Year 7 admissions in September 2006. There are not enough children of secondary school age living in the area and not enough want to attend Cradley High.

GCSE results have improved over the last few years in 2006 73% achieved 5+ A*-C GCSE grades. Although this is commendable 29.9% achieved 5+ A*-C GCSE grades including English and mathematics. The impact of falling pupil numbers results in severe financial difficulties and the school will not be able to sustain current expenditure on staffing or maintain standards.

Consultation on proposals to close Cradley High School began on 6 July and ended on 28 September. Consultation meetings were held with the School Council, parents, staff, governors and the Area Committee. Responses focused on the points listed in this report. None of the responses challenged the data or information provided or addressed the critical question of how Cradley High could continue to offer a viable curriculum with falling pupil numbers and budgets. All of the responses have been retained and can be made available on request.

Introduction

Dudley has managed numerous changes to the pattern of schooling at several critical points over the last 60 years. Political, educational and demographic changes have led to the building of new schools, amalgamations, changes in size and closures. Dudley is now facing again the need to change and, with the benefit of much better information, can respond with a degree of certainty to meet the needs of children for the next 20 – 30 years.

The annual birth rates (using academic year September – August) in Dudley have reduced from 4,116 in 1990 to 3,344 in 2003. There was a slight increase to 3,514 in 2004 but long-term projections indicate annual births of around 3,300. This is a major problem for all Dudley schools because the amount of money Dudley receives through the Council's revenue grant from government is based on the number of pupils attending schools. As the pupil numbers fall the level of government grant falls and school budgets have less capacity to meet the costs of providing education. Based on the numbers of children already born, the number of primary pupils in Dudley is projected to fall by a further 2,358 by 2010.

Secondary schools have been full for a long time due to the higher birth rates in the 1980s and 1990s. The fall in birth rates is beginning to affect secondary schools across the Borough. The impact on Cradley High has been evident for 3 years (see page 6). The fall in numbers overall and at Cradley High in particular means that the school will receive a smaller budget because

there is less to distribute to all schools and because its own numbers are falling. The school can no longer afford to offer the quality of education that has been available so far.

It has become imperative to take action now to ensure that all schools have sufficient resources to continue improving the quality of education and the standards achieved by children and young people. This means the pattern of secondary school provision must be cost effective, with only sufficient surplus places to allow a degree of parental preference and in order to cope with any small variations in demand. It is important to say that these proposals for Cradley High, combined with the other changes, will affect every secondary school in the Borough, by ensuring that money is not wasted on maintaining surplus places but directed to the education of all children and young people.

Consultation Process

The consultation on proposals for Cradley High School ran from 6 July 2006 to 28 September 2006. The consultation document was copied to all parents, staff and governors of Cradley High School and a range of other consultees. The consultation document was also available on www.dudley.gov.uk. Electronic access to copies of the document was also provided for those on the Children's Services distribution list.

Consultation meetings for parents, staff and governors were held at Cradley High School. Questions were recorded at these meetings and answers published on www.dudley.gov.uk. Consultation responses were received in the form of questions at consultation meetings, emails, telephone calls, letters and a petition.

Analysis of Responses

During the consultation period a total of 86 responses were received including 61 letters, 16 emails, 5 telephone calls, 2 complaints, 1 petition and 1 pledge list. A number of further responses were received after the closing date and they have been added to the record of evidence. Around 30% of the responses were from a small number of individuals. Overall the number of responses was very low.

The range of responses was mixed with the large majority expressing support for keeping the school open. A few responses supported the proposal to close the school. Many of the responses raised similar points. The main points raised are listed below with a brief comment (in italics).

1. Pupil numbers have fallen at Cradley High because
 - Dudley has not promoted Cradley High School effectively

It is not the responsibility of the Local Authority to promote one school before others. All schools are promoted equally in the Parents Guide to Secondary School Admissions. Cradley High is included in 2007 Guide.

- The Headteacher has not promoted Cradley High School

The Headteacher has successfully managed the school and achieved year on year improvements in GCSE results.

- School Admissions Service have prevented admissions to Cradley

School admissions staff have provided consistent and appropriate advice to enquiries about Cradley High. Pupils continue to be admitted to Cradley High.

- Cradley High has a bad reputation

Surveys are not conducted with parents about the reasons for making their choice of secondary schools.

- Cradley High is not supported by local newspapers

Newspaper coverage of Cradley High is not monitored.

2. There are not enough places in alternative secondary schools.

There are sufficient places in Dudley secondary schools to accommodate the 233 pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. There are also some Year 7 places at Heathfields School (Sandwell). Discussions are taking place with Dudley secondary schools about options for additional places to increase parental choice.

3. There will be no secondary school in walking distance

Eligibility for transport support is 3 miles or more from home to nearest school. No pupils currently attending Cradley live more than 3 miles from an alternative Dudley school. Many live less than 1 mile from an alternative.

4. Pupils will have to travel further to school which will

- Add to traffic congestion

If pupils transfer to their nearest secondary school there should be no significant increase in traffic congestion.

- Create pollution from increased traffic fumes

If pupils transfer to their nearest secondary school there should be no significant increase in traffic pollution.

- Take time away from learning

Pupils are not expected to travel long distances to school so there should be no significant increase in travelling time.

- Be unsafe

The council will assess the risks and take appropriate actions once the transfer arrangements are confirmed.

5. Examination results have improved year on year

GCSE results have improved over the last four years. This has made no significant difference as the number of applications and admissions has dropped every year for five years.

6. GCSE results in 2006 were 73% 5+ A*-C and above most Dudley schools

The curriculum followed by Cradley High enabled a high percentage of pupils to achieve 5+ A-C GCSE grades. The percentage of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C GCSE grades including English and mathematics is only 29.9%.*

7. Local housing developments will generate more pupils for Cradley

All of the potential housing developments including the former Cradley Heath Speedway site, Huntington Gardens, Banner Lane (Henley Foundries) and Clancys (Belle Vale) will not provide sufficient pupils to make a significant difference to Cradley High admissions. There is also no guarantee with open enrolment that any of the pupils would wish to attend Cradley High.

8. Traveller children have traditionally attended Cradley High

Only about 11 traveller children currently attend Cradley High. All of their needs would continue to be supported by the West Midlands Traveller Service before, during and after transfer to other schools.

9. Children should be made to go to their local school

This is not possible within legislation and guidance covering admissions to schools.

10. Documents were not made available in community languages

The consultation document is the main document setting out the proposals. It is not possible to guarantee that any transcription into community language would be accurate. Interpretation has been offered on numerous occasions. No requests have been received. Summary documents have been translated into Arabic for parents meetings and Area Committee meetings.

11. The consultation should not have taken place at the same time as consultation on Transforming Secondary Education

The Transforming Secondary Education consultation is a preliminary stage in preparation for inclusion in the national Building Schools for the Future programme. It is unlikely that Dudley will be included for several years and several years after that before the impact of new school buildings takes place. Cradley High is facing severe financial difficulties now.

12. Cradley High was excluded from the consultation on Transforming Secondary Education

Cradley High school has been fully included in the consultation.

13. Cradley is a multicultural school that has embraced diversity

This statement applies to many other secondary schools.

14. Cradley High has 50% of pupils with SEN

The high percentage is a consequence of the low numbers of pupils attending Cradley. Many secondary schools have higher numbers of pupils with statements of SEN or School Action Plus than Cradley High.

15. Cradley High should be included in a collaborative arrangement with other secondary schools

A collaborative arrangement would still only receive funding based on the total number of pupils. There would not be sufficient funding to maintain the Cradley High site.

16. The location of the school in a park with inadequate facilities has disadvantaged Cradley High

The consultation document refers to the inadequate accommodation at Cradley High. If the school was full closure would not be proposed.

17. Local businesses will lose trade if Cradley High closes

Letters were received from 4 shops concerned about loss of trade. These included grocer, fast food and off licence.

18. We will demonstrate that there is sufficient interest in pupils attending Cradley High

By the closing date for secondary admissions to Cradley High for September 2007 only 9 first preferences had been made. Of the 45 preferences in total it is expected that most will gain first preferences for other schools or as a result of appeals. This is because there are fewer pupils transferring to secondary schools in 2007 compared with 2006. There are no first preferences from Sandwell.

None of the responses addressed the critical issue of how Cradley High could continue to offer a viable curriculum in the context of falling pupil numbers and budgets. **The case for closure remains compelling.**

Responses to Consultation on Proposals for Cradley High School

Total number of responses to consultation = 86

Description of Respondents

Parent / Carer	Headteacher	Governor	Teacher / School Body Representative
29	1	4	7

Pupil / Student	Councillor	Local Business Owner	MP	Relative
4	2	4	1	3

Professional organisation	Dudley Residents / Taxpayers	Past pupils	Other Various / Not Stated
7	4	5	13

Responses Received

Letters

There were 61 letters received in total.

Letter 1

The first time I entered Cradley High School was in 1963 as an eleven year old ready to start my education at senior level. I am still walking through the doors of Cradley High to play a different role, a minor part in the education of the children that come here. My mother came to this school on the first day it opened in 1941 and my three daughters have all been educated here, and are doing very well, all entering the education field. Obviously I have very emotional and personal feelings towards this school, and feel I personally need some questions answered.

Why Cradley High School? Yes, the entries for inclusion have dropped, but this has been happening over a period of several years. The main feeder schools do not aspire to send their children here, why has Dudley Education Services not picked up on this and done something about it before? You have allowed this school to degenerate, that can only be to serve a purpose known only to yourselves.

The school buildings are only twenty years old, you say that they are in a poor state of repair, you should be looking to Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council planning department for the answer to this one, they must have fallen short on their responsibilities twenty five years ago when the "FLAGSHIP" school of the area was being designed.

We have never had a fenced off school playing field in the 67 years that this has been an educational site, it hasn't been a big enough problem for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council to address before.

Now Mr Freeman is the time for honesty.

Where are the children in this school going to be educated? Parents and children all think they are going to nearby Windsor and Earls High Schools, we know that this is not possible, and that they will be farmed out to different schools in the Dudley area. They deserve to be informed that this is a strong and probable outcome. We have an excellent reputation for our work with children with special needs, can you ensure us that they will receive the same sort of help and attention that as individuals they need within schools that are bursting at the seams!!

The head and her staff have worked hard and tirelessly to improve the education in this school for all its children and this has been reflected in Ofsted and examination results.

Finally, what about Cradley and the effect on its community? We are an area that Dudley

council has always neglected, but recently there has been a marked improvement in the regeneration of the area. With many large sites being used for new housing, surely this proposal will affect the sale of these new houses, people will want to buy in an area with good secondary education. Cradley businesses will suffer and we shall become a ghost town, for the people that live here that is not an appealing thought.

Mr Freeman I look forward to hearing from you very soon, but I for one will be doing my utmost to try to keep this school open. I cannot just let it lie down and die without every one knowing how I feel and letting my concerns known to absolutely everyone.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Letter 2

Thank you for consulting with the Service on the above subject. [Cradley High]

Showmen's children have traditionally attended Cradley High and several have expressed dismay at its closure.

Provision for the children on transfer will be the same as for other children. However because of the travelling season families often miss out on some paperwork re transfer and will invariably miss the preparatory visits from primary to secondary school. In addition their return from the travelling season is usually in excess of six weeks after the start of the new academic year.

Cradley High has been supported by this service to ensure that pupils have distance learning during travelling to prepare them for their new school curriculum. WMCESTC will need to begin this work with a range of schools to raise their awareness of the lifestyle and travel patterns of the Traveller community and to develop the necessary expertise in managing Distance Learning increasing through e-learning.

If families find that their children are not able to gain places at a local school and are allocated a school some distance from their homes there may be a move by families to choose Elective Home Education.

Currently 11 pupils attend Cradley High this is made up as follows:

YR 7 - 1

YR 8 - 2

YR 9 - 4

YR 10 - 3

YR 11 - 1

If you would like to discuss any of the above please contact me.

Letter 3

I am writing in response to the consultation document announcing the closure of Cradley High School.

Firstly, I was totally shocked and gutted that the local education authority cannot see Cradley High as an essential tool to serve the local community in the immediate surrounding area of Cradley. Many of the children attending are from families who do not own cars and I am incredulous that the LEA is suggesting they travel further to schools such as Pedmore College of Technology, Thorns, etc.

It is a very worrying time for those children in year 6 at Colley Lane Primary and Caslon Primary for whom Cradley High is their only real option.

On a positive note I'd like to say that the way the consultation paper is written is decidedly better than that for Beauty Bank. I think it is a lot fairer to simply state the decline in pupil numbers and let parents and the general public choose to access the Ofsted reports from the surrounding schools for themselves.

Finally, I think it is a shame that small schools are not being supported by the local education authority and that the LEA feels compelled to simply shut them down due to finance and disburse a lot of small communities.

Letter 4

I hope you will take the time to read my letter. It is not a letter of complaint, rather a letter to outline my feelings about the proposed closure of Cradley High School. It was with great distress that I recently read an article in the Halesowen News, regarding the proposed closure of Cradley High School. Cradley High School has played a major role in both my professional and personal development and it is for that reason that I decided to write to you today.

I lived in the Colley Gate area of Cradley for over twenty years, only recently moving to Halesowen within the last year. In that time, my friends, parents and even grandparents of friends, all attended Cradley High School or Homer Hill, as it was then known. The impact the school has had on the community is immeasurable and unique. All of these people received an education to enable them to be successful in life. You see that's the great thing about Cradley High, whilst on the outside it may not appear to be the best school around, heck, Windsor and The Earls have always had a far better reputation. If you scratch the surface, however, and look a little deeper, you'll see the effect Cradley High has had on the community as a whole.

Cradley High is a school which offers more than most. It teaches you many life skills, which I

believe others don't offer. I went there having had a 'comfortable' education at Cradley C of E Primary School. From the age of eleven, until I left at the age of sixteen, I experienced many things at Cradley High. The good memories, like my favourite teacher Mr Stallwood and the bad memories, such as the death of Headteacher Mr. Grass. I learnt many skills that have served me well today; confidence, resilience and most importantly that if you work hard, you will achieve success.

I left Cradley High with good GCSE results and like a lot of my peers, I was offered a place at King Edwards College in Stourbridge. I declined the offer as I wanted to pursue a 'less stuffy' 'Cradley High Style' education at Rowley College. To cut a long story short, I qualified as a teacher three years ago. I love teaching but as Cradley High taught me, you should always work hard and try to be the best you can be. I have been Acting Deputy Headteacher in a local primary school throughout this academic year and will take up this position permanently as of September. I'm sure you'll agree that having gained Qualified Teacher Status only three years ago, this is excellent progress.

I wanted to share with you my story, not to ask for congratulations or credit, but to outline the risk you take by shutting a great school like Cradley High. Many of the peers I shared my education with, are successful people. I firmly believe that this is because schools like Cradley High teach you that it's not just about academics, but about gaining skills that will serve you throughout life. You see, like me, it's ok to have 10 GCSE's, but if people keep saying, 'You don't have the experience' or 'You'll never make it', then the results mean little.

Cradley High gives you the ability to fight back against those people and show them that you are good enough and you will succeed, because you have been given a gift early in life, to fight against all who doubt you. Many of us gained this at Cradley High School. It might be worth checking out where Cradley High's outgoing cohorts are now. In my small circle of friends who attended Cradley High, there are; 4 teachers, an accountant, a computer programmer... the list continues.

Having viewed your consultation document, albeit briefly, it appears that your figures and graphs are aimed at proving standards and pupil numbers are in decline at Cradley High. However, I think it is also extremely necessary to show on your part, what you have done to address this. Is the current leadership and management at Cradley High good enough? According to your figures, it appears not and thus this should be the first priority to be addressed.

My main concern is that the underlying factor to this closure is money. I can imagine that the likes of Barratts and George Wimpey are rubbing their hands together already. To see houses on such a beautiful school site would be a travesty. You see everyone in the area knows the 'Double Banks', 'The Marly Hole' and the 'Bowling Green'. It holds so many memories for everyone and is a focal point of the community. My late Uncle used to keep the rose gardens, my sister had her wedding photos taken there and I scored my first goal, try and runs on the

sports pitches of Cradley High. I am just one person, but I think if you scratch the surface and look a little deeper, many people would share similar memories and stories like me.

People often say, "You don't realise what you had till it's gone". I urge you not to fall into this trap. Cradley High and its surrounding land has so much potential. The Leisure Centre, with the right leadership and vision, could be hugely successful and the area as a whole is ready made to be a centre of education for all ages. It is not the right place to build houses for families, who will then have to send their children out of the area to be educated.

In summary, I hope you consider my views carefully. Cradley High and the area of Cradley has helped to make me what I am today. Losing the school will devastate the whole community. Please don't regret your next move, it has the potential to affect the future community of Cradley more than you could ever imagine.

Letter 5

We are writing to you in reference to the proposed closure of Cradley High School. We understand that responses are to be made to you, however if this is not the case please pass this letter onto the appropriate authority.

Firstly we would like to say that the meeting held at Cradley High on 12th July, to us was completely pointless. None of the points made by any of the concerned parents were answered adequately.

This "proposed" closure appears to be a "done deal". We were told over and over again that there was not enough money to keep the school open and running efficiently and a parent pointed out that his daughter will be having to choose a high school in November and Cradley High would not be an option available to her. If this is the case surely this means that the fate of Cradley High has already been decided. We understand that birth rates are falling in the area but surely an area that currently warrants three primary schools should also warrant its own High School.

We were told at the meeting that the falling numbers of pupils at the school was NOT because it was a bad school. WRONG! We know from speaking to other parents that Cradley High has a reputation as being a bad school! We were also told that as parents, we had not been good ambassadors of the school. CORRECT! When speaking to other parents of pupils of Cradley High they all say that they would not recommend the school to other parents. Have the parents been asked why this is the case? Well we can tell you, in two words "HEAD TEACHER"!

No one has a good word to say about her, as parents we can NEVER get to speak with her! It has taken us FOUR years to get a meeting with her and this request was only granted because it was VERY strongly demanded! This is the same for other parents, she has never made it

possible for parents to speak or meet with her, yet despite many complaints she has remained as Head Teacher, why?

If parents had been consulted as soon as student numbers began to fall so dramatically we could have suggested why this was the case. A few years ago Hillcrest School in Netherton had severe problems like Cradley High, and, as a parent pointed out at the meeting, the Head Teacher, along with most of the teaching staff were removed from the school and new staff were recruited. This school is now thriving, why can't the children of Cradley be given the same opportunity?

Cradley High could and SHOULD be the first choice of every parent and pupil in the area. It is the only High School which is not situated on a busy main road and it is also one of the newest and most modern. The reason it is NOT first choice is because it is a well-known fact that it does not have the best teaching staff. The children of Cradley deserve the same chance as the children of Netherton.

Cradley children will HAVE to catch a bus to ALL of the other High Schools as none are in walking distance. This will cause several problems. How many parents can afford the bus fare every day? Also we are constantly being told to stop using our cars so much because it is bad for the environment, surely the closure of Cradley High will force more parents to use their cars because the children of Cradley do not have their own school within walking distance. It will not only cause more pollution but will also cause more congestion in the areas where the other High Schools are situated.

Before the future of the school is decided, the education authority should speak with as many parents and pupils as possible and ask them what they think should happen to the school. I am sure that most if not all would like Cradley High to be given the same opportunity as Hillcrest was given. We want our daughter to spend her final year of High School at Cradley High. Moving to another school would have an extremely negative effect on her education and well being and we do not think she along with the other pupils should be forced into this situation. Why should the children have to suffer because the school has earned itself a bad reputation because of its staff? The children deserve much better so give them better! Give them back Cradley High, an improved Cradley High, with a good Head Teacher and good teaching staff and then we can and will be good ambassadors for the school because Cradley will have something to be proud of!

Again, we wish to strongly point out that it IS a fact that the falling numbers of pupils is mainly due to the fact that Cradley High has got a bad reputation but this could be altered if you gave us the same chance as Hillcrest. PLEASE listen to the parents and pupils and let us keep our school. The children of Cradley SHOULD have their own High School!

Letter 6

I was told to write to you by a friend as I wanted to do something to help to try and save Cradley High, I know just one letter won't really do a lot. I moved house a few years ago to be nearer to Cradley C of E and Cradley High, they are only 10 – 15 minutes away from my house, not needing to get up in a morning really early to have to dash out and wait for buses that don't turn up.

My one daughter went to Cradley High and has just left school, she loved it there. My son is going to be in Year 11 when he goes back, he has had problems but that wasn't the school's fault that was his. I've had to go up that school and have meetings with teachers in the past. I haven't got a car so I've had to walk there which hasn't took me long, if he'd gone to a school further away I wouldn't have done it.

I have a daughter still at Cradley C of E School, she has got to go back in year 4 so I know she hasn't got to think about high school yet but she wanted to go there just like her brother and sister.

The thing that gets me angry and what has probably caused this problem is there are children that live on the estate next to Cradley High and all round in Colley Gate area choosing to go to high school in Halesowen, Quarry Bank and Stourbridge. Well I think it should be changed, I don't think you should give them a choice, they should all be made to go to their nearest school, that would solve the problem because I don't want my youngest daughter to have to travel far. It is stupid when there is a high school on our doorstep. I know another girl that moved to be by the high school, her 2 older brothers have left school now but she has a son about to go into Year 5 and she is worrying she doesn't want him to have to travel when they only live 5 minutes from the high school.

Cradley High is a lot nicer than the other schools, it's in better condition. Windsor is dirty and I've heard bad things about that so I don't know why the children all want to go there.

Cradley High was a middle school when my brother and myself went and I used to say I wish it was a high school as I didn't want to go further on to Halesowen. I went to the Earls and hated every minute of it. Then, when my younger brother was there, it changed to a high school.

I know there was a meeting a couple of weeks ago and there is going to be another one quite soon, I'll be there. I know there are lots of people involved to try and save it, I just hope it makes a difference and saves it.

A friend of mine has got a son that is going back into Year 9, that means he'll be settled in Cradley High then he will have to move to another and get used to everything all over again, that's not going to do a lot of good is it? It's just all so stupid and got out of hand. Well I just hope and pray that Cradley High will be saved because, if they don't save it, all they'll do is

knock it down and build more silly little houses. That would be a sin. I look forward to hear what you have to say.

Letter 7

In response to the Consultation Meeting for parents of Cradley High School pupils held on 12th July 2006, I would like to make the following comments in relation to matters raised and discussed.

- I am in total agreement with the majority of parents views that this proposal has been known about for a long time and that it is already probably a “done deal”. In fact I was informed by a reliable source before Christmas that a secondary school in the Dudley Borough was facing closure and that it would more than likely be Cradley High, so it did not come as a total shock to me on the morning when a member of the press informed me of the proposal.
- I feel that the cause of the falling numbers of pupils wishing to attend Cradley High is mainly down to poor marketing and that not enough has been done to promote the positive aspects of attending this school. It was pointed out at the meeting that Governors were aware of the falling numbers and its possible effects some years back but I feel the Local Authority, along with the Governors, should have addressed these issues at least 2 years ago and taken steps to improve the situation.
- When Hillcrest School was faced with difficulties only a few years back, immediate steps were taken to ensure its future, i.e. appointing a new Headteacher and a total restructure of the school and its staff. Since then Hillcrest seems to have had money ploughed into it as and when required on the basis that it is supposedly a “Popular and Successful School” even though its GCSE results last year were below that of Cradley High.

I cannot see why these same “tactics” cannot be applied to Cradley High to ensure its future. It was not many years ago that Hillcrest was the local school where no parent wanted to send its child but with the help from the Government and Local Authority they have turned the situation around and it is now an over-subscribed school. Why can’t the same be done for Cradley High?

My main concern with situation, however, is not the future of Cradley High and what will happen with the building if it does close, but **how it will affect my sons**. I have one son in year 7 (year 8 from Sept. 06) and as long as he gets into his first choice school I do not envisage it having too much of a damaging effect. However with regard to my son in current year 9 (year 10 from Sept. 06) I feel very concerned that both the Option 1 and Option 2 proposals set out in the document presented to us could have a very unfavourable outcome on his GCSE results.

Option 1: Would leave his year group the only pupils in the school as from September 2008. I cannot see how it could be financially feasible to keep the school open for 1 year with only approx. 100 pupils attending or how you could provide the required amount of quality teaching staff for one year group to enable them to achieve good GCSE grades. Liz Walker stated that the existing teaching staff were committed to “seeing it through to the end” but I have no doubt that the majority of staff will be actively seeking other employment as soon as the school closure is confirmed (I know I would in their situation!). This would result in my son being taught by an endless stream of supply teachers in what will be the most important year of his schooling.

Option 2: Would see my son moving school in September 2007 just as he is entering year 11. I think again this option would be very disruptive to his GCSE’s and feel it would be very unfair to place the burden on him of settling in and adjusting to a new school in his final year, as well as having to concentrate on his studies.

I understand that it is a very difficult situation, but if the school does have to close, I feel the pupils, particularly those in year 10 as at September 2006, should be moved into their new schools as quickly as possible, preferably no later than after the May half term week. This at least would then give them one term in year 10 of their new schools in which to settle in before embarking on their very important year 11.

With regard to new school preferences it is very hard to see from the facts and figures presented to us how our children are going to be accommodated. I live in the Dudley Wood area where the only other schools I consider to be in a **reasonable distance** are Hillcrest and Thorns and these are both already over-subscribed. (It is also probably an equal distance to Heathfield but as I am a Dudley resident I would prefer my children to be educated in a Dudley Borough School).

If Cradley High School does have to close the only other school I would really consider is Hillcrest and I would like some indication as soon as possible of how likely it is that we will get our first choice preference. I feel that considering the disruption our children are going to face it is not much to ask for some guarantee that they will be accommodated in whichever school they choose.

I hope you will note my comments and take my suggestions into account. I very much hope a prompt decision, whichever way, will be made, in order that our children can get on with their education in the way in which they deserve without having this unsettling situation hanging over them.

Letter 8

Thank you for returning my call on Friday last. My son is currently in year 8 and going into year 9 in September. My main concern is that he is settled in this school and it is your intention as to

the consultation proposal to let year 9 finish in August 2007 and be transferred to another school.

As in our lengthy conversation, I must stress that it is my opinion that it will be extremely difficult to settle into a new school and start GCSEs in year 10 – indeed this may be very detrimental.

I do take into consideration the falling birth rate and although it may be selfish to think only of my son's well-being, but as a caring parent could there be an alternative and keep his year in Cradley High until his GCSEs are completed?

As discussed, I am very worried what school he will end up in. My main worry is that we do not live on the number 9 bus route. Indeed to walk to it would take a good 20/25 minutes. There is a bus stop outside of our house; 243 to Dudley and 002 to Halesowen. Although I believe that children should walk to school for exercise, walking long distances early in the morning (especially dark winter mornings) is unsafe.

The only sensible and safe option would for him to be sent to Windsor High School or Hillcrest School as these are direct bus routes from our house.

I have four children and no car. My children's well-being and safety are paramount. My husband's earning approx. £17,000 per year, we just about manage to survive with four children to look after. I did not budget for a new uniform and bus fares – that is why we opted to send him to a local school in walking distance. I am sure there are many parents in the same situation.

During our conversation, I did mention to you the above points. You stated to me that every effort would be made to ensure the first choice of school was given. It is my opinion that everyone's first choice will be Windsor. As children from Lyde Green area never get into Windsor, this is rather worrying.

You also stated that primary school parents had an allowance of £50 for uniforms and bus passes provided free of charge during their remaining years in school and that this would be the case for high school pupils (irrespective of earnings). Would you please be kind enough to confirm this in writing to me, thank you. As stated there is more expense involved with a high school uniform i.e. blazers, sports kits etc. and you did say this would be taken into account and a larger allowance may be given.

I look forward to your reply and clarification on the above mentioned specific points.

Letter 9

I am writing to lodge a formal complaint against your careless and wasteful proposal to close

Cradley High School.

You cite as one of the reasons for the suggested closure, one of falling numbers in birth rates. However, there are numerous housing developments under construction within walking distance of the school, and it stands to reason that in these 2 to 3 bedroom properties that, aimed at the family market, children of various ages will reside there. Surely they will need a high school?

Unfortunately, due to today's society I do not feel comfortable allowing my 11 year old son to catch several buses to get to his school, which is one of many problems our family will incur if the closure goes ahead. In turn, my daughter will then also be faced with the same dilemma, which distresses me further. Apart from the obvious dangers they will face, there is of course the financial implications involved, as opposed to walking up the road. All the additional costs we will incur will create hardship and induce great difficulties for me to continue working in Birmingham. (In a society with ever increasing obesity and air pollution, surely these are two reasons alone for the school to remain open, refrain from the use of transport and instil some daily exercise).

My son has suffered at the hands of bullies since he started year 3. He is a very bright but sensitive young man, and because of this is easy prey for the bullies. I was glad he was awarded a place at Cradley High, as I felt confident in the school's ability to deal with any bullying issues that may arise. Also, the school's pupil count is similar to the primary school my son has just left, which makes his transition far less daunting.

My son did extremely well in his recent SATs, attaining 5's in all his subjects. Given that over the last few years Cradley's examination results have consistently improved, I find it incredulous that such a proposal should even be considered.

I would be most interested to know why, if the closure is only a proposal, how come Cradley High is not being offered to present year 6 pupils by the Admission's Department? Obviously there will be a fall in pupil numbers if parents aren't allowed to send their children to Cradley!

To say that you are paid, by hard-working tax payers, to provide the children of Dudley with the best services is an abomination.

Letter 10

I have received your letter dated the 22nd August. Your item 4, I read with interest – this regards support for transport. I am asking for further clarification on this point please.

1. Would travel expenses be considered if “as the crow flies” the distance is just under 3 miles or does one have to travel over 3 miles before any expenses are provided?

2. Why would distance to school be calculated “as the crow flies” as my child does not have wings to get to another school.
3. I believe also that as your position is under “Children’s Services” my child’s welfare, well-being and education should be considered as a whole.
4. If my child cannot travel to school safely (i.e. when the sun is up and shining) then that would be to me, and I presume to yourself, to not put my child’s well-being first.
5. If a child has to leave at 7:00am from home to walk to a main bus route, wait around for a bus (which in winter months might not turn up) and then get off at a bus stop (because the bus does not take him to school directly) and walk half an hour to the school would you consider this to be not putting a child’s welfare first?
6. If a child has to endure this task of going to school and getting home each and every day, do you not think as I do that it would put a strain on his / her ability to learn to their full potential.
7. In my view, the above points, which I require answers to please, would point to a safer option of having a local school in the area which enables the child to walk to and from each day.
8. Both my son *****, aged 13, and I, as well as many others, were asking you to consider including Cradley High School under the Secondary Schools Review and not just slapping a statutory consultation document on it.

I await your response.

Letter 11

I enclose a copy of my letter dated 22nd June to which I received no reply and my son now starts Cradley High School tomorrow not knowing where his future lies, I feel disgusted at the way this situation has been dealt with.

I attended a meeting at Cradley High on 1st September to which parents, staff and local members of the community attended remaining hopeful that Cradley High will remain open and I fully support them, however my son takes first priority and I want answers to ascertain that if the school does close, where exactly will my son go to school?

You fail to put Cradley High in the 2007/2008 admissions book so you must have the answers, this school apparently is only a proposed closure yet you do not include them in any future plans or financial budgets so this shows me you fully back the closure of this school.

I feel my son's education will suffer at Cradley High as teachers will obviously try to find other teaching posts at stable schools and that will mean a constant flow of temporary teachers, tutoring my son with no dedication to their pupils.

If Cradley High does close, what will be put in its place, more new housing? Huntington Gardens is also a large housing development and so will be Clanceys, where do you propose to school the children from these new developments???

I really would appreciate an honest reply.

Letter 12

So, Dudley MBC again is intent on closing another school, this time it is Cradley High School. Again I find myself involved as my nephew ***** attends this school. His siblings would also attend in a few years time so feel I must respond accordingly.

This school although smaller than some other schools has improved itself year on year, this year in fact it was second to Oldswinford Hospital School with a staggering 73 %.

The pupil with Special Education Needs accounts for some 50% of the total on roll, can you honestly provide them with the same education and support at the other local schools? These other local schools i.e. Windsor and Earls, my nephew was turned down and is now getting wonderful support and education at Cradley High.

These children have often been together through Primary School into High school and now will be separated and face long journeys to and from school. They may be members of school clubs and sports teams, they have built relationships and friendships.

Why choose Cradley High, there are other Dudley Schools with similar numbers Pensnett, Holly Hall and Bishop Milner?

I notice that you had misrepresented the Oldswinford figures in the consultation document and have now included this on your website, I believe you also failed to offer this document to the Yemeni community in a language they can understand. The Yemeni community is prominent in the Cradley area, this again may divide a community.

The community utilize Cradley High for many different activities, have you therefore consulted the community?

Again you state, discussions are taking place to ensure that sufficient places are created in other schools, why after the debacle of a primary school review have you not done this first. How do they feel about this? Do they have sufficient capacity? Have they been consulted?

One the same page it shows that only one school in the group associated with Cradley has significant spare places. So will Halesowen lose out again?

You also state on page 6 that the "number on roll will fall to around 370 by September 2009". This is "based on continued intakes of around 69 pupils". This is the lowest figure in the series, the next page shows a cyclical trend between 1997 and 2006. The total number in the school rose from 619 in 1997, peaked at 769 in 2002, and has fallen to 607 in 2006. If the pattern is cyclical, might you not expect the number to start rising again at some point in the future?

You mention in the consultation document about the number of staff at Cradley High, may I ask if the staff ratio is high due to the SEN factor?

Were any other initiatives tried and tested prior to closure, amalgamation, federating Schools, reductions in capacity?

Did you take on board comments made from the Schools adjudicator after his decision to keep Beauty Bank open, and indeed the comments from the SOC after the meetings for Sycamore Green, Highfields and Holt Farm?

As you are aware, the problems are still there at Olive Hill, the building not yet ready, the fact that you have a few classes remaining at Holt Farm and have had to spend money altering toilets etc.

It's so disappointing that you will now close off half of Holt Farm and put all the children in the nursery end. When will they ever get to see the other children, head teacher etc?

The mess at Beauty Bank is displayed daily in the newspapers, parents being provided with bus passes to trek the kids every day on two bus rides. Parents still not receiving 'a grant' for the new uniforms.

It still leaves me thinking, that you indeed hope parents will move their children in the middle of this consultation, as they indeed did with the Primary School Review, because people do panic and worry about their children's schooling.

AFTER ALL PUTTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FIRST IS WHAT PARENTS DO.

I would not be surprised to hear it will be local libraries next. Something else that betters people lives, that we the taxpayer actually pay for.

Letter 13

I am writing to you, our Director of Children's Services, with regard to the proposed closure of Cradley High School.

In the meeting at the school in July, I voiced then that it felt very much like you had already made up your minds and to find out that Cradley High School has been deliberately left out of the review of Secondary Education throughout the borough, only goes one step further in confirming this.

I would like to draw your attention to the article in the Halesowen News, 31st Aug 06, alongside the one where Cllr Walker offered her congratulations to GCSE pupils. "Record Results", 73 per cent of students gaining five A* - C grades, the fourth successive increase in results, making Cradley High School the second highest rate in the borough.

This, along with the past few years, have shown dramatic improvements. It makes it so difficult to understand why you are not investing in this school, instead of proposing to close it.

I have a daughter aged 12yrs, who will be going into year 8 this Sept. She has enjoyed her 1st year and happily progressed in all subjects. She has also attended various after school clubs.

If Cradley High School has to close, the likelihood is that she will have to catch at least two buses to get to any other school. We are told that all other schools in the borough are FULL! So this could mean even further to travel. It just makes no sense at all, to pack these other schools to overflowing, in temporary buildings.

I have listened to all the questions and queries raised at these meetings and to some of the responses, from yourself and Cllr Walker. I am still of the opinion that it would be a severe loss to this local community if Cradley High School is forced to close. It is a large local area and it would leave a big gap in the high school education.

It was said at the meeting you wanted to listen and that this was a consultation time. I ask you to please, listen to the pupils and parents of Cradley High School. Reconsider the decision in allowing Cradley High to be part of the overall Secondary School Review. Cradley High should NOT CLOSE, I truly believe if it was given a fair chance alongside the other schools, this would show through.

Letter 14

I am writing you this letter, as you are the person that signed the decision sheet that began the consultation period about the closure of Cradley High School. As a former pupil I am appalled by this decision. I thoroughly enjoyed my five years there and have no criticism of the school what so ever. The school has a loving and caring environment where pupils are encouraged throughout the whole five years to do the best they can. I left Cradley with many happy memories; a great set of friends and most importantly a good set of GCSE's.

Cradley High School is a school on the up. The results have shown a dramatic improvement over the past few years and this year, my year at the school, achieved the second highest set of results in the area. This is a huge achievement for any school in the area. Also I would like to say that at least 90% of those pupils are going on to higher education. I myself achieved the grades necessary to get into King Edward VI, as did 5 other pupils.

So, if you had of tool the time to consider this information before signing the decision sheet I am sure you would have found no grounds what so ever to close the school. You are claiming the closure is due to dwindling numbers, but as you should know, there is a large housing estate been built on Huntington gardens that, in a short amount of time, will provide more pupils as will the large number of other estates been built in the Cradley area.

I urge you to reconsider your decision as, in my opinion, there is no logic behind the decision what so ever!

Letter 15

I attend Cradley High School and am wondering why you are closing the school. It's a great school and has great results. All the people I know don't want this school to close. My friends and I who have just started year 8 think that it is unfair that you are closing the school as we don't want to change schools. The school has great teaching methods and great sports facilities. The teachers have got special bonds with the children and I personally think it's cruel to break them. Since I went to Cradley High I have began to improve with all my subjects and don't you think that it's got something to do with the school?

I will be very upset if you do decide to go ahead with the closure of my school please think about this before your decision thank you.

Letters 16, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38

I am writing to you as you are the Cabinet Member for Children's Services in Dudley Council. You have signed the decision sheet that began the consultation period about the closure of Cradley High School. Like many other local people I am appalled that you made this decision, here are just a few reasons.

1. You made this decision and in the same timeframe you also launched a review of secondary education throughout the Borough deliberately excluding Cradley High. This is illogical and reinforces the view that I have that you have no intention listening to counter proposals.
2. The results of Cradley over the past few years have shown a dramatic improvement and this year it has produced the best results of any comparable school in the

Borough. In fact the pass rate at GCSE is well above the Dudley average and way above the national average.

3. Cradley is a truly multicultural school that has embraced diversity, this is in marked contrast to some other schools in the Borough.
4. Almost half the pupils are on the schools of special educational needs, the School provides a safe structured and caring environment that has shown tremendous results for this group of children. Over a third of these pupils gained five or more higher GCSE grades in 2005.

At the meeting you held in the School I was shocked when the Director of Education washed his hands of any responsibility and blamed the staff, governors, councillors and parents for the falling numbers attending the school. What are we paying him for it isn't to provide support and ensure that schools in Dudley are given the help they need rather than just waiting for situation to progress to the point where decisions like this are taken.

Finally you have stated that you want to listen and that this is a consultation, you did so at the meeting at the school. Yet in reality it is not, it is a statutory process that leads to the schools closure. This has been demonstrated by the quote from your leader Cllr. David Caunt who stated that "school closures will be pushed through". So much for listening.

I hope you will take note of this letter and reverse your decision, allow Cradley High to be a part of the overall Secondary School review and give our children and their children a chance to continue to go to this school.

Letter 17

In reply to your letter of September 13, as I previously indicated, the selection of Cradley High School for closure cannot simply be a matter of falling birth-rates. Your figures for birth rates between 1990 and 2004 (p.5) show a mean annual fall of 1.04% (i.e. divide by 14). Table 3 shows that between Yr 11 and Yr 7, pupil numbers at Cradley fell by an annual 8.1%. Clearly, there must be other forces at work.

Yet, in relation to 'market forces' the consultation document shows these to be misleading, e.g. Cradley High has substantially improved its pass-rate but is under threat whilst Hillcrest has level-pegged but is secure. (I hate to use the example but it shows how foolish the policy of league tables, etc, is). It is the most bizarre outcome that the most successful school in the borough, barring the quasi-private Old Swinford School, is the one under threat.

I have studied the figures in the document at some length and feel strongly that they do not provide a reliable case for closure. You seem to be taking a simplistic, global and short-term view of the situation. This suggests that you are in danger of committing a serious, strategic error in relation to secondary provision in this part of the borough.

Letter 18

As you are the Cabinet Member for Children's Services in Dudley Council and have signed the decision sheet that began the Consultation Period about the closure of Cradley High School, we just wonder how this closure can be considered and would like to make the following points:

Our oldest son has just finished year 11 at Cradley High. He has had a wonderful time there and made many friends and also had good relationships with all of his Teachers. He achieved 12 GCSE's and is now attending King Edwards VI College, all of which he achieved with the help and support he received at Cradley High School.

Our younger son started at Cradley High last year and is doing really well, he loves school and is never reluctant to attend, making many new friends in his time there and getting on well with his Teachers. He does not want to change school.

How can you close a school which has achieved 73% in its GCSE results, bettered only by Oldswinford Private School. Cradley High's marks have consistently improved over the past five years. Surely now that these high marks have been achieved parents will be trying to get a place at Cradley High and therefore admissions will increase.

There are at least three new Housing Developments in the local area, where will the new residents' children go to school?

Finally, we hope you will consider our points and think again before closing Cradley High School.

Cradley High is NOT run down, has NOT got a bad reputation, it just needs some good publicity to show what a good school it is and improve admissions.

Letter 19

I / We would like to express an interest in part of Cradley High School if it was to close. Currently, there is a huge lack of youth and community provision within the Cradley area and we felt that the reception, sports hall and possibly the room above reception area could be utilised very effectively as a youth and community centre for the future. We have a lot of support from local Councillors and voluntary organisations within the Cradley area who are looking to establish a more permanent facility.

If there is anything else I need to do, would you please contact me as soon as possible.

Letter 20

Having received and considered the implications in the above document I would like to offer the following observations from a Sandwell Local Authority perspective.

Over the last 2 years there have been 19 resident Sandwell children (13 in 2005 and 6 in 2006) who have transferred to Cradley High School. Of these, 12 were attending Sandwell primary schools. Based on this information we would expect approximately 6 extra children each year to remain in Sandwell if the proposal to close Cradley High proceeds.

The closest Sandwell secondary school to Cradley High School is Heathfield Foundation Technology College, Wrights Lane, Cradley Heath. The pupil projections for this school indicate that, although numbers are expected to fall over the next 10 years, there will be insufficient capacity to admit substantial additional students especially as there is a potential for further house build in the Cradley area. The projections for Heathfield are attached for your information and take into account the likely effects of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) initiative. They also reflect a reducing cohort moving through from primary schools as well as a number of secondary aged pupils which we forecast will be generated by known residential development in Reddal Hill Road and Haden Cross (over a hundred homes).

Other than the potential residential sites allocated in the Council's Unitary Development Plan, it is difficult to be certain of other residential developments. There are two remaining undeveloped UDP sites within the Cradley area which have a potential combined capacity of 77 dwellings. It is likely that eventually there will be more residential development in the area, most of which could be within 1 or 2 kilometres of Cradley High School. The size of such developments is, as yet, unknown.

In conclusion, I would say that with the exception of present Year 7 where there are currently 15 places available, it is unlikely that Heathfield would be able to accommodate any pupils transferring out of Cradley High if the closure proposal proceeds. Given the potential for house build in the area and the impact of BSF, we expect the school to remain fully subscribed for the foreseeable future.

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter 21

I wrote to you at the start of the school holiday it took me a while to write a six page letter and I'm still waiting for a reply. I am also very angry about all this talk of closing Cradley High, it's a wonderful school I've never heard anything so stupid. My daughter has just left and did very well in all her exams. They were in the Halesowen News last weekend for doing well. Doesn't that tell you something? My 8 year old daughter is worrying already about what will happen when she has to go to high school. I have a son still at Cradley High but he will leave next Summer, but as I said in my last letter the school is only 10 minutes away from our house it is almost on

our doorstep. I also said this in my last letter about children that live on the estate almost next to the school they are going to Halesowen, Stourbridge and even Quarry Bank, don't you think that's stupid? Children that live in the Colley Gate area should be made to go to the nearest school – Cradley High. Windsor is a dirty horrible place, I don't like the Earls, also Stourbridge and Quarry Bank. I want my daughter to be able to go to Cradley High. I know you can save it if you want to. I will do everything I possibly can. I will join parents to do what we need to do. Please stop all of this and just save the school, all of my family went to that school. I hope to hear from you soon.

Letter 22

Before we respond to particular points within the above document we wish to make the following general points:

- a. We have been contacted by many parents and pupils and some staff regarding the lack of availability of sufficient documents in languages other than English. As you are aware there are a significant number of pupils who attend the school whose first language is not English. In addition there are many parents who were not able to understand the document, given the amount of Education 'jargon' and technical English within the documents. We believe this has put a significant number of pupils and parents at a distinct disadvantage in this process. It was very difficult and confusing particularly to Arabic speakers because of course in the first few weeks of the consultation no translation was available.
- b. It is unprecedented for the LEA to begin a separate consultation on one high school followed the week later by a release of a second consultation for the whole of Dudley's secondary sector. It is particularly puzzling in light of comments from ***** who in a recent letter to all Dudley MP's after his investigation into our objections on the conduct of the LEA on the Primary Consultation said:

“Officials are writing to the local authority and SOC to confirm my decision. However, given the level of concerns expressed in this case, the letter will make it clear that I remain concerned about the impact on public confidence. The letter will confirm that I would expect the authority to consider very carefully how it handles future reorganisations of this kind, in particular where sensitive school issues are involved. For instance, the authority must ensure that their consultation exercise is comprehensive and robust. The authority should consider providing more detailed information in consultation leaflets (eg. more specifically tailored to the individual school concerned) and also to allow more time for parents and the public during consultation to that those with concerns are reassured that their views have been adequately considered and taken into account”

The Minister goes onto say:

“For school closure proposals the authority must provide a statement as to whether the school has been inspected in the last three years and, if so, details of the outcome of the inspection, together with an assessment of the quality of any schools to which displaced pupils may transfer” 20 June 2006

Although the document does refer to website details for other schools, it is quite obvious from our meetings with local parents that many do not have the facility of internet access. In the cases where parents have been able to follow suggested internet links the information has been patchy and inconsistent meaning that parents have not been able to compare ‘like with like’. It is our opinion that the conduct of the authority in this case falls far short of what the minister was recommending.

- c. It is quite obvious that the declining number of pupils who make Cradley High their first choice is not a new phenomenon this year. We were surprised therefore to find that nowhere in the document was a reference to any work or support that had been done by officers or given to the school’s staff and governors to reverse this trend when it was first noted. We would welcome further information on this point event at this late stage.
- d. We are very concerned at the timing of the consultation process. To begin a process three weeks before the Summer Break and to complete three weeks after has meant that it has been very difficult for parents to consult with the officers they have needed to due to holidays. In addition the end and the beginning of new terms are the most frantic times of year in any school and have meant that the process has been disjointed and unhelpful for the majority of consultees.

Further we are surprised that the only meeting scheduled for this side of consultation deadline is two days before the closure of the consultation (and incidentally in the middle of the Labour Party Conference which will mean that the two MPs involved are unable to attend).

The disjointed consultation process and the inadequate timing of this final meeting is most unfortunate and we are concerned that the councillors prevented residents from taking advantage of the Area Committee meeting last week to further discuss the matters with their elected representatives.

- e. There is no indication as to whether parents, pupils, staff and governors from other schools who may receive the majority of ‘displaced pupils’ have been consulted about the possible effects on their schools, nor of any further intention to do so. 145 pupils from Halesowen and Rowley Regis currently attend Cradley High yet only 30 new places are proposed in Halesowen. We welcome clarification on these points also.

- f. There is no indication on the list of consultees that the Yemeni community or a representative body has been consulted. Once again we welcome explanation of this oversight.
- g. The decision not allow current year seven pupils to express a preference for the school or to allow transfers into other years from new pupils undermines the consultation process leading many to assume that the school will close regardless of the outcome of the process.
- h. Cradley High School has a significantly higher proportion of pupils with special needs. Around 50% of pupils at Cradley High are registered with SEN. Over a third gained 5 or more, higher GCSE grades in 05. Indeed, the schools most recent OFSTED report said:

“A considerable strength of the school’s care system is the range of additional support which is put in place to support and safeguard vulnerable groups of children and those with learning difficulties and disabilities”

There is no mention of how the needs of these pupils will be met and whether there is suitable alternative provision in other local schools. Neither is their mention of any sort of special transitional arrangements. Change itself will be difficult. Staff at other schools where they do not have as much experience or expertise may well have some difficulty in supporting the children at a time when they feel most vulnerable. Once again a great deal of clarification is required on this point.

- i. What consultation has taken place with Sandwell LEA? We understand that around 65 Sandwell pupils currently attend Cradley High. We are particularly interested to hear what timetable has been discussed or agreed with Sandwell and request this information at this point.

Turning to the full document:

1. Context

Once again we have to point out that your argument that the population of school aged children is falling is flawed. According to the census information provided on the DMBC website, the population increased by 504 to 305 155 in the course of the 10 years between 1991 and 2001. This number is negligible for population growth. However, the percentage of 9-14 year olds grew as part of the overall population, thus indicating that the lower birth rates are faulty or cyclical. ONS projected population numbers for Dudley between the present and 2020 suggest that the population decline reaches a low point then rebounds afterwards; furthering the argument that the falling birth rates are simply part of a cyclical pattern.

2. Cradley High

Your contention on page 6 that 'the number on roll will fall to around 370 by September 09' is based on consistent 'intakes of approximately 69 pupils'. Interestingly, this is based on the lowest figure available in the series; further statistics underline the cyclical trend between 97 and 06: Thus:

Yr	No on roll
97	619
02	769
06	607

Reference to the proposal to increase the PAN at Earls and Windsor still only mean that 30 extra places will be made available. Yet at present, all three secondary schools in Halesowen are oversubscribed.

We remain most concerned at the possible effect on both 'displaced pupils' to the schools as well as those already studying there. We want to know what provision has been made for the additional pupils and the knock on effect to the current pupils.

In addition you make no specific reference to the fact that Windsor School is a foundation school. Can you give assurance that the governing body is aware and in agreement with your plans?

It would appear that the only school with sufficient capacity at the moment to accept displaced pupils is Pedmore College of Technology. This is a good school and has received significant investment recently, however, it would not be appropriate for currently Cradley High pupils to increase their journey times to and from school to amount that is necessary for them to reach the college. All of the pupils would need to get at least one bus or would require transportation via parents or means to get to the College, whereas at present the majority of pupils walk to Cradley High.

4. Standards in Alternative Local Schools.

Please see point B above.

5. Support for the Local Community

Closure of the school destroys value within the local community which cannot be measured in terms of monetary savings. The school is a vital part of the community, it fosters relationships amongst the pupils and local community and provides the pupils with a sense of belonging, home locality and pride. The closure of the school will have a negative impact on local jobs, teachers, administrative staff, caretakers, cleaners and will ripple through the wider community. Closure of the school is likely to increase congestion on the roads. We welcome results of any impact studies the LEA has carried out.

6. Community Use

The facilities at the school are significant to the wider population of Cradley. We are not satisfied that this use has been adequately assessed and future plans outlined and welcome further information on this area of use.

7. Alternative Options

It is not in our view sufficient to dismiss this section with a statement such as 'a range of alternative options has been considered'.

There is considerable data and planning information available from the Black Country Study and regional development plans to show that both Halesowen and Stourbridge are likely to increase in population, indeed, it is a positive aim of the study to attract business, jobs and migrants to the Borough. To say that there is no solid evidence is to deny the needs of the Borough and to negate all the work that the MBC is doing in this area. People will not relocate if facilities are not available.

To close a school which had the best GCSE pass rate in the Borough after Oldswinford Hospital appears, quite frankly, perverse.

To further dismiss the ideas of federation, reduction in capacity and inclusion of Cradley High within an overall Secondary Plan is not sufficient. As with the Primary Document and in the spirit of true consultation we require sight of your studies of these alternatives before you dismissed them as not suitable for Cradley High. It is important that we are all able to examine and understand the reasons why these alternatives were rejected.

Letter 23

1. We have concerns about the whole process of the consultation. Dudley is embarking on a review of secondary provision across the borough and a preliminary consultation on that is under way, with responses due by 8th October. Trade unions were assured that specific proposals would emerge over time and the review was not to be rushed. We were then presented with a proposal, immediately made public, to close Cradley High School. An attempt is being made to suggest that the proposal to close Cradley High is a separate issue to the Secondary Review as such, whereas we believe the future of Cradley High should be considered along with all other secondary schools as part of the Review.
2. There are a number of flaws in the consultation document which are confusing to parents and teachers and which may suggest that rather than the proposal being based on evidence collected, evidence has been gathered to support a decision already taken. There was considerable confusion caused by the figures given in the original document for Old Swinford Hospital, although this has now been corrected. Pages 8 and 9 seem to be proposing closure in July 2007 when the last year 11 (given as 145 on page 8 and 146 on

page 9) leave, while page 10 says that a Year 11 of 136 or 138 will leave in July 2008. Page 12 has Cradley High in January 2006 with a staff of 48 fte and a pupil / teacher ratio of 13.9 compared to a Dudley average of 15.9 in one paragraph while in the next paragraph the figures have changed to 46, 13.2 and 15.6 respectively.

3. Announcing proposals to close a school can be a self-fulfilling prophecy as parents are panicked into moving their children and parents of Year 6 pupils are reluctant to apply to that school. Staff also will seek alternative employment, reinforcing the impression that closure is inevitable. This is another reason why the future of Cradley High should be considered as part of the wider Secondary Review and a number of alternative solutions suggested in response to the falling rolls across the borough.
4. If Cradley High were the only school affected by falling rolls it might make sense to treat it as a special and separate case, but there are other schools already affected, and will probably be more in the future. Table 3 shows that – in addition to Cradley High – Hillcrest, Pedmore, Pensnett, Crestwood, Wordsley, Holly Hall, Bishop Milner and Old Swinford all have numbers below the 900 which is suggested in the Secondary Review consultation document as the minimum desirable number, while several others are not far above it and could easily slip below in the future. A number of these schools also already have significant numbers of surplus places. Meanwhile Hillcrest, Windsor and Earls – in neighbouring parts of the borough – are being allowed to increase their admissions numbers. Windsor and Earls are already large schools, as is nearby Thorns. The logic of this approach is that some schools are allowed to expand at will, while others close. In the long run this may be wasteful of resources, as well as disruptive for children and local communities.
5. Table 6 gives unit costs for Cradley High but not those for other schools which have small or declining numbers. If the table is to provide any meaningful evidence, these should be given for comparison.
6. While we appreciate that the world does not stand still and applaud the provision of new school buildings, the construction work taking place at some schools, sometimes combined with rising numbers, also tends to pre-empt the Secondary Review and make genuine consultation on the future direction of secondary education in Dudley difficult.
7. The other Halesowen secondaries – Earls, Leasowes and Windsor – have formed a partnership with Halesowen College as "Pathfinder Trust" schools. This may help in managing the admissions problems caused by falling pupil numbers. It seems mainly designed to manage the changes coming to the 14 – 19 curriculum. These changes will lead to schools and colleges sharing teachers and buildings and, by extension, students. It will no longer be so important in curriculum terms which school a pupil is actually registered at, as some of the teaching will take place elsewhere. These developments will go a long

way towards overcoming the disadvantages of small schools in terms of curriculum provision, while increasing their importance as a familiar local base for local children. Teachers employed at a small school could teach across the consortium, removing the staffing cost disadvantages of small schools. Cradley High could easily be included in such a partnership.

8. Cradley High has an excellent record of improving examination results. KS4 results have shown an impressive improvement in recent years and in 2006 were almost the best in the borough. To close a school showing such success would send a very strange message. It is clear that the staff are working as a highly effective team. Should the school close, this expertise and team-spirit will be lost to local children and the borough as a whole.
9. Cradley High has a high proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs. This makes the school's improving examination results an even greater achievement. If the school were to close, the SEN team, obviously highly committed and successful, would be broken up and SEN pupils divided between other schools which might have difficulty in meeting their needs, particularly considering the disruption caused by an enforced change of school.
10. Cradley High serves a local community which has some elements of deprivation. Local children may be disadvantaged by having to travel to more distant schools. Cradley High's small numbers do have the advantage of enabling smaller class sizes. Children may find themselves having to travel to an unfamiliar school where they will be in larger classes. This will compound especially the problems for the large numbers of SEN children mentioned in the paragraph above.
11. Point 6 on page 16 states that "there is no solid evidence of sufficient housing developments that could generate the extra pupils required for Cradley High to become viable". We understand that there are at least four major housing developments going on in the area, at the former Cradley Heath Speedway, Huntington Gardens, Henley Foundries (Banner Lane) and Clancys (Belle Vale). These will feed into Primary schools which feed Cradley High. If we take this point together with the points raised above about the expansion of some other schools and the need for schools to co-operate to deliver the secondary curriculum, we believe there is a place for Cradley High as part of a coherent plan of secondary provision.
12. The consultation document is vague about the process of transfer of pupils if Cradley High should close. It talks about "discussions....taking place to ensure that sufficient places are created in other schools to meet preferences of pupils currently attending Cradley High" but does not name schools. If parents are to be given a free choice – as suggested on page 10 – it is difficult to see how a guarantee can be given of a place at the chosen school. The future status of Earls and Windsor may also be relevant here as the Local Authority may

have less influence on admissions. A longer timescale is needed to secure alternative provision, and this comes back to the point that the future of Cradley High (or more to the point here, Cradley High *pupils*) should be considered as part of a wider review.

13. The future of staff is also uncertain. We welcome the statement that "Each member of staff will receive support in securing new posts in alternative schools or elsewhere. It is not anticipated that there will be any requirement for redundancy." We would however seek an assurance on this point less equivocal than "*it is not anticipated*" and, in the next sentence, "*It should be possible* during a two year process to ensure that all staff secure new posts" (my italics). The redeployment process in primary schools last year caused a great deal of stress and uncertainty. Secondary teachers tend to be even less easy to place because of their subject specialisms. Many have responsibility points and are pursuing a career path based on their specialisms, and in these circumstances it may be impossible to find a suitable post in another Dudley school.
14. By the time a decision on this consultation is reached and the redeployment process begins, we will be well into the two year period envisaged. Many teachers may simply move outside the borough, with a regrettable and avoidable loss to Dudley of enthusiasm and expertise. If the proposals were to go ahead, Cradley High will remain open in 2007-8 with its Year 11 pupils presumably taking an appropriate range of GCSEs and other 16+ qualifications. How will the specialist and experienced teachers needed to staff these courses be persuaded to remain?

We therefore believe that the proposals in this consultation document should be rejected and the future of Cradley High School considered along with all other secondary schools as part of the Secondary Review.

Letter 24

With the closure of Cradley High imminent, will the Conservative Councillors who represent parts of Cradley be throwing their weight against any proposal to do so?

The futures of our children and grandchildren could be at risk with overcrowding at other schools.

The futures of Councillors could also be at risk if constituents see that they do nothing about it.

Letter 25

The continuing decline in pupils choosing Cradley High School as their school of choice leads to the conclusion that if the school remains open the situation will only worsen. On the information available there appear to be no future developments which would result in a substantial increase

in the number of pupils seeking admission.

The school's financial situation is rapidly approaching a point where it will become completely untenable. The reserves have been severely depleted and salary costs are requiring an increasing percentage of the budget. This will impact on the ability of the school to provide adequate, up to date, resources.

It is a fact that all schools in the Borough are facing depleting budgets due to falling pupil numbers across all educational phases. The result of this is a smaller allocation of funds by the Government. At Cradley High School this will be combined with a substantial year on year decrease in pupil numbers and therefore the effect will be exacerbated. The school will reach a point where in order to function it will require extra financial support from the Authority. As this can only be achieved by reducing funds to other schools it is clearly not an option.

The only other option for the school is to reduce costs by reducing the number of teaching staff. This would probably only be achieved by using non-specialist teachers to cover some area of the curriculum. This would inevitably lead to a lowering of standards and the possibility of some pupils failing to receive their entitlement to a high standard of teaching across the whole curriculum. The lowering of standards would inevitably lead to a further decrease in pupil numbers, and also to the ability of the school to retain the staff it did require.

The consultation document itself does not clearly identify where places will be available in the event of Cradley High School closing. References are made to increased PANs at some schools, but the indications are that in at least two cases the PANs have been increased to fulfil a need which existed before the proposed closure of Cradley High School. As an Association we have some concerns about pupils having to travel unacceptable distances in order to secure an appropriate place.

There are also concerns about the provision for children with Special Needs, including those for whom English is a second language. We would hope to see extra support channelled into schools which accept groups of these children, and not a scenario where the existing support in these schools becomes overburdened and thus less effective.

As an Association we would hope that the decision about the future of Cradley High School, whatever that may be, will be made at the earliest possible opportunity in order to end the uncertainty for staff, pupils and parents.

Letter 26

As Head Teacher of Cradley High School I believe it is appropriate that I respond to the proposals for the school published by the local authority on 6th July 2006. I would stress that the views expressed below are mine, written from the perspective of head teacher of the

school, though I have shared them with the Governing Body and Staff, who will be making their own response.

Firstly I must comment on the achievement of the young people and staff at Cradley High School. The attainment of young people at the school has improved steadily over the last four years at the school. Last year we were the fourteenth most improved school nationally at GCSE / or equivalent over a three year period. In August 2006 Year 11 achieved the best results ever at the school, with 72.2% gaining five or more GCSE Grade A* - C (unvalidated data). This means that the young people have achieved the second highest level of attainment among Dudley schools.

I, therefore, think that it is particularly sad in the light of the consultation proposals that there has been no public recognition of the efforts and achievement of the young people and staff of Cradley High School. Had there been more recognition and confidence by elected members (I appreciate officers are not in a position to do this) over the last few years it may have influenced parental perception. My primary concern, however, is that at a time when the staff and young people at the school feel quite vulnerable they should receive the recognition (and assurances such recognition will give) I believe they deserve.

I will now address the proposals set out in the consultation document. The document deals mainly with pupil numbers: historic and projected and the budget implications of falling rolls. I would not take particular issue with or dispute any of the figures. However, I do consider a major omission from the document is a lack of detail on capital investment in schools in the area: historic and proposed. Especially as the headline for the document is *Investing in the future – Transforming Secondary Provision*, reference *Building Schools for the Future*.

I will address this point in more detail later in my response.

I believe it is only fair that at this point I set out my educational perspective as this provides a context for my response.

I believe in small schools. I think they provide a particular ethos and environment for children and young people, and the staff. This varies from the staff, including the head teacher and deputy head teacher, knowing all children and young people by sight if not name to the sense of community among the children and young people. Having held senior management posts in larger schools, the small school also enables the head teacher and deputy head teacher/s to have a significant teaching commitment. There is also evidence that the size of a school is a significant factor in the behaviour of students¹. This is not meant as a criticism of larger schools rather a comment on the policy of successive governments over the last twenty years which has supported schools to increase in size, perhaps forgetting why the school was successful in the first place and making it increasingly difficult for the small school to compete and survive.

I believe it is important to develop a sense of success and "can do" with the children and young people (not a radical thought I know). For many of the children entering Cradley High School, and given their levels of prior attainment, an academic diet dependent on high levels of literacy and numeracy is always going to be a challenge. While we did improve results it was always difficult to sustain and drive above a ceiling. I raise this as there may be comment that our success over the last few years has been based on GVNQ. GVNQ courses have enabled us to provide a curriculum which is both challenging and relevant to our young people and has enabled them to achieve QCA accredited success. However, analysis of our results shows that the confidence they now have is reflected in improved performance across all subjects and significant improvements in performance in English and mathematics in particular.

Lastly I believe in the role of the school in its local community. The leisure centre is well used by the local community and other facilities in the school are used by various groups. We have also run a range of holiday activities for the children and young people. We have tried to bring investment into the school to increase community facilities. In the mid-1990s we entered into extensive discussions with the Lawn Tennis Association to build a tennis centre on the site as part of their policy to bring low cost tennis and coaching to urban areas. However, a commitment was required from the local authority which was not forthcoming. As a consequence the facility went to Tipton in a neighbouring authority. A few years ago we were consulted on the proposal for a replacement building for Colley Lane Primary School and the possible development of Homer Hill as a joint campus with improved community facilities. The Governing Body of Cradley High School, supported by the staff, submitted a proposal for the replacement build to be on the Cradley site so as to create a 0 – 16 campus with co-located services for the local community. At that time such developments were taking place in a number of authorities and are now at the heart of Academy programmes, extended schools, and the response to the Children Act. However, the proposal was not formally discussed by the local authority with the Governing Body.

I raise the above points to illustrate the loss I believe the closure of the school will be to the children, young people, families and communities in the area. I also raise them to illustrate the key factors we have had to contend with at the school and why information on capital investment would help to inform the discussion.

The location of the school in a park and the design of the school building have always presented specific issues. The park at the front of the school provides community pitches which we support. However, we have always argued that to place them under the management of the school, as happened with the leisure centre, would be more effective both in terms of security of the site and maintenance: at times they have been unusable by the school and others. While the school is a comparatively new build its design is not ideal and there has been little capital investment, other than the school's own funds, to address these issues or to develop the facilities.

This lack of investment in the school over a number of years allied with the school's location always meant that even with high levels of achievement Cradley High School would find it difficult to "compete" with other schools for student intake and survive when secondary rolls started to fall. Even the consultation on closure becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as a number of parents look to move their children from the school. Also parents who, based on our current performance, might have considered sending their child to the school in September 2007 are unlikely to do so.

In conclusion while I hope that the Cabinet of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council recognises the value Cradley High School brings to the local community and reconsiders the proposal I also have to be pragmatic in protecting the interests of the children and young people at the school. Were a decision made to keep the school open there would be a need for significant capital investment in the school and financial support over the next two / three years to enable us to keep staff, capitalise on our resources and success and recover from the "planning blight" of consultation.

¹ "Violence in US Public Schools: 2000 Schools Survey on Crime and Safety" National Centre for School Statistics 2000

Letter 27

Here are the effects that closing Cradley High School will have on the life of my daughter;

I now face the uncertainty of how my daughter will cope with this upheaval in her life. Not only having to move schools, make new friends, finding her bearings around new unfamiliar surroundings, building rapport with new teachers, adapting to different teaching styles and the possibility of changing her subject options due to the school not teaching this subject, all while in her final year of her school academic life, sitting her GCSE's and this supposedly the best years of your life. Wonder weather the examination board will be taking this into consideration while marking her paper, I THINK NOT. What a way to start your college life!!

I appreciate the fact that over 90 other pupils will be exactly in the same position as my daughter and at the meeting on 12th July it was suggested that the appropriate supports networks will be in place. Will this be on a first come first serve basis or a waiting list and will there be enough qualified school councillors to slot my daughter into their already chaotic case load?

As you are aware there are uniform guidelines at each school within this borough and where ever my daughter ends up finishing her education, as a parent not wanting her to stand out like a sore thumb as a Cradley High REJECT, I will no doubt be investing in a new school uniform. I am quite aware that blouses, trousers, skirts, underwear and shoes will not have to be brought, I am well attentive to the fact that I will be purchasing the following with the correct school logo on the items of clothing: 2 Jumpers, 2 Rugby Shirts, 2 P.E Shirt and 2 ties all amounting to a rough

estimate of £98.00. This approximation from the Cradley High School Uniform Price List – June 2004. So I am presuming that the rate of inflation will have gone up by the time 2007 approaches me. You may ask why two sets of everything, surely as parents among you, you will be aware you do need one to wash and one to wear. So to the conclusion of this, who will be footing the bill? Will it be us as parents or will it be you because it is not my choice that my daughter is moving schools, it is yours the Education Department for closing the school.

Another issue that is unsettling me is the fact that whatever school my daughter has the pleasure of attending, not by choice, she will have to grapple with this countries Public Transport system. Oh dear? So not only will Term Passes have to be purchased, will that be by me or are the education department paying. She will be adding extra time travelling to and from school, so any extra curriculum activities that her new school may provided will have to be missed.

Well I hope I haven't bored you to much with my concerns over my daughter's future but I feel very strongly about the consultation over Cradley High School and I hope that this is apparent in this letter.

Letter 28

I feel I must make my feelings known as to the proposed closure of Cradley High School. Firstly I have a personal interest having attended the old school, Homer Hill Secondary, during the sixties, and enjoyed the close proximity of a school within the community. I know that changes are inevitable, but I think that it is appalling to close the school and leave the local children with no option but to have to travel out of the area, probably using public transport. Which brings to mind the subject of encouraging children to be healthier and walk to school! How can the children of Cradley achieve that?

Also, as fifty percent of the children are SEN, I feel they alone would benefit most by staying in their local school to avoid further disruption in their education by having to settle into a new school and possibly delaying their progress even further. These are the very children who would benefit from smaller classes and to me it seems so sensible to keep the school open but maybe on a smaller scale, at least.

I have had two daughters attend Cradley High, my eldest very much enjoyed her time there and completed a good education. We had no complaints whatsoever. My second daughter was also doing well there for her first two years until we realised that the school's music department did not fulfil her needs. We moved her to another school, but that was our only complaint, had it not been for her musical aptitude she would have continued her education there too.

Finally, I really do think that Cradley desperately needs to keep the school open to accommodate the many children who do not want to have to travel out of the area. I do not think that a child of twelve years should be expected to commute to school by bus. Some find it a

worrying time to have to change schools without the added trauma of finding themselves having to worry about bus fares and bus passes and bus timetables. It can only add to the stressful time of changing schools.

I realise that the intake this term has been an all time low, but who would want to send a child to a school with an 'axe hanging over its head'. I know that many parents have had second thoughts, due to this decision, who would otherwise have sent their children to Cradley High without reservation.

I urge you to think again about this unacceptable decision that has caused much unrest among the community. Children only get one chance at their education and it should be as smooth running experience as is possible.

Letter 29

Thank you for your letter dated the 6th September which is in response to mine of the 4th. My letter to you today is an objection to closing Cradley High School.

I would point out that your letter to me does not answer points 4, 5 and 6 of my letter to you. I did state the following in my letter:

4. If my child cannot travel to school safely (i.e. when the sun is up and shining) then that would be to me, and I presume to yourself, to not put my child's well-being first.
5. If a child has to leave at 7.00am from home to walk to a main bus route, wait around for a bus (which in winter months might not turn up) and then get off at a bus stop (because the bus does not take him to school directly) and walk half an hour to the school, would you consider this to be not putting my child's welfare first?
6. If a child has to endure this task of going to school and getting home each and every day, do you not think as I do that it would put a strain on his / her ability to learn to their full potential?

The following schools; Earls and Windsor and Pedmore School are all in a three mile radius. There is a bus stop on Lyde Green where we live, the bus along Lyde Green takes you directly outside Windsor School. If I am correct this school is heavily oversubscribed (and you have stated that first choice of a new school cannot be guaranteed). It appears to me and many other concerned parents that the school with the most places for children is Pedmore School which we believe you will give us no alternative but to send our children there which we don't want.

Will you therefore expect my child to follow the procedures as listed overleaf in points 4, 5 and 6? I would like an answer please. If you send my child to Pedmore he will have to leave home at 7.00am to walk 20 minutes to the main no.9 bus route, wait for the bus, get off at Lye High Street, walk 20 minutes to that school.

That to me is not putting my child's welfare first. I am also stating to you Mr Watson that holding a "special meeting" of Halesowen Area Committee on the 26th September to discuss matters relating to the closures is in my opinion not very good timing – two days before the end of the consultation period.

It would also appear that League Tables no longer have any meaning.

Splitting my child from his friends, unsettling him whilst he is taking his yr 9 SATs, choosing options, trying to settle into a new school, hassle of travelling on a bus – does not put his welfare first.

I am asking you to include Cradley High School in the Secondary Schools Review and give it a fair chance as it well deserves and also await your reply with interest regarding the concerns raised.

Letter 39

I go to Cradley High School and I like going to school it's my favourite thing. I like the teachers because they are very polite, helpful, caring and are very supportive. The teachers are always coming up with ways to make our education easy to remember and fun at the same time.

I want Cradley High to always be open because it is such a fun and exciting environment to learn in. The school is not too big nor is it too small it is just right. Cradley High is a great place the library has got loads and loads of great books and also has great computers.

It has a lot of things to do after school like football, netball, hockey and other great sports.

This letter has explained why I want Cradley to stay open.

Letter 40

It is with great regret that I write this letter regarding the consultation for the closure of Cradley High School. As a member of the teaching staff for 6 years now, I have seen the school develop in many ways, always putting the need of the child first. As you have said many times yourself, Cradley High is a unique educational establishment, and current moves to close it seem to negate all the work that has been put in by staff across the board.

I understand that the only reason for this consultation is a financial one which has arisen due to the demographics of the area and that no other factors have really been taken into consideration. At the meetings I have been present at, this is the only factor that the committee seems to be concentrating on. You have acknowledged the growing success rate that the

school has with its results, but I am afraid that at times like this a simple 'thank you, you have done well', is little consolation to the pupils and the staff of the school who have come to consider the place as an enjoyable and committed place to work and study.

The issues that are really at stake here revolve around the pupils. Your philosophy is that every child should be put first in the borough with their education and general well-being. This will not be the case with the closure of the school. Not only will you create great unrest and unsettling for the pupils who have to move, but you will also damage their educational prospects as well. What parent would want their child to move to a school which does not achieve as high as Cradley? It has been stated time and time again that one of the reasons for the school closing is that not many parents have it as their first choice. I put it to you that the pupils that are here are a large proportion of first choice children, and by moving them mid schooling you are indeed taking away any choice that you applied to them when they started school. You have taken away the right to choice that you so happily maintain is present within the borough.

Being present at the Pupil consultation meeting, I was extremely proud to hear the children put forward their case eloquently, politely and with challenge. It was a proud moment as a teacher, and one which is not repeated on frequent occasion. I can honestly say that the pupils in this school have passion, honesty and growing integrity. It is when you are integral to that system on a day by day basis that you realise that you are dealing with lives and not figures and numbers shuffled around in offices. I sometimes think that this is forgotten about and that bureaucracy becomes less and less ethical and humane.

It is hardly worth me stating all the points that have been mentioned in previous meetings – they always seem to be batted away with great political ease and evasiveness. I only hope that the support that the school has gained in the local community and the efforts of all the pupils within the school go some way to show you that the closure of Cradley High School would be a devastation to the community, the pupils, and all the staff.

Education should not be seen as a competition – let us not forget what we are here for – providing supportive and comfortable learning environments that best suit the pupils to enable them to achieve to the very highest of their abilities. This is something that Cradley High School excels in.

To quote a Year 7 pupil in the consultation meeting with the children 'Small is good'.

Letter 41

I attended the meeting last night in regard to the proposal to close Cradley High. As you know things didn't turn out as we had hoped so I am taking this opportunity to write to you.

I am not going to ask you any questions but would be happy if you would take time out to listen to my point of view.

I did see last night a softer and caring side to you and hopefully I caught you in the right frame of mind that I can appeal to you.

I have three children who have attended Cradley High. Two have left and one remains. Well, two remain really as my eldest left and went to college and has returned to assist in the special needs department where she and the other teaching staff do a fantastic job. I am very proud of her and the staff. My son has just left with good GCSE results and now also attends college.

Recently, I have joined a committee for Cradley High. None of us were aware the school was up for closure. It was a bolt out of the blue that was sprung upon us with no or little alternatives and by the looks of what I have heard no back up plans and very little provision for our children.

Last night did get a little rowdy but you have to understand us because of the lack of compassion we received from our councillors and the LEA Group, who I thought were supposed to be there for us. You are responsible for our children's education and yet with all our protests and concerns we have been treated with such contempt it's disgusting. We haven't had any proper answers and when it concerns our children and their safety and futures, the response we have had not surprisingly is going to get people's backs up. I hope that you understand that point. We all feel very let down by all of you and I think that's an understatement.

I do have a proposal, why don't you give us one year to try to turn all this around. If we can't manage it then go ahead but at least just give us a chance to keep our school for our community.

Letter 42

I am writing to you hoping that you will consider over turning the decision to keep Cradley High open.

When my grandson was trying to get into school it took admissions 14 days with myself and my son speaking to admissions morning and afternoon only to be told that there was no places at Thorns School also Windsor High also we were told that there were no places at Cradley High as they were not even taking the children who were starting in September as there were no places it proves that it was true as it was printed in the paper on August 10th and when I brought it up at the meeting they said it was untrue so who is lying to cover up?

People want to know why pupils are not going to Cradley High well the blame lies with the admissions as they told us so how many more parents have been told.

Why, why are you doing this what is more important than our children the school and Teachers are marvellous and caring as Cradley High has a pass rate of 73 per cent of our school has one of the best special education need so why deprive our children of that need of an education or don't you have a heart as you have not thought about our children and the upset it will cause them including the travelling and the distance on buses just because you have other things in mind for Cradley High. But you have gone over their heads as though they are nothing but numbers.

There is quite a lot of building going on around Colley Gate and surrounding areas so where will the children go from those Estates?

The only reason I can see for you closing Cradley High is the land is very valuable for another housing estate but where will the children from that housing estate go to school?

Remember: EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION
NOT: CLOSURE, CLOSURE, CLOSURE

Letter 43

I am writing concerning the above matter. I find it very upsetting that Cradley High has been the only school considered for closure. I have attended the meetings to try to discuss the consultation, but as I see it your one and only reason for closing Cradley High is that no local children have opted for this school as a place to attend for their secondary school.

I have lived in Cradley all my life, 53 years, because I love Cradley and its peoples, nothing to do with financial status. But Cradley has always had to fight. We have always been overlooked in the borough of Dudley, but recently there has been considerable growth. Long overdue, with still a lot to be done, we are starting to feel part of the "cared for Dudley" then we hear we are about to lose our high school.

I do not intend to insult you in any way, you have a difficult job to do. It's not pleasant to have to close a high school, with children at such a vital time in their education.

I intend to give you the facts that I know to be true a factual in the hope that you will reconsider your proposal.

Cradley parents do not want to send their children to Cradley High – Why?

Cradley High is out of fashion at the moment. Unlike other local high schools, we are situated right by two of our feeder schools, thus parents there see the children leaving Cradley High, on their way home – loud, verbal, smoking (not all of course but they don't see children leaving the

other high schools, and believe Cradley High pupils are unique. This behaviour is of course the way the youth culture is in society today.

Answer – change leaving time to avoid clash.

The feeder school staff verbally put parents off opting for Cradley High as an option for secondary education, saying that their offspring are too clever for Cradley High, pretty rich from a school that is under 12 – 18 months notice to improve! “What goes around comes around”

Generally rumours are rife that Cradley High is a crap school (not my words) with a crap head (again not my words). When you actually talk to prospective parents this is always something they have heard, not something they have experienced.

On July 27th 2006, I phoned admissions to secure a placement in year 7 and year 9 for my two grandchildren moving into the area. I was told there were no places available in any Halesowen School, only Cradley High, and that was closing. I could appeal to other schools, but would not be placed until the end of September. I can only presume that the admissions department thought it better for these children to go without education for a month than to be placed at Cradley High. I complained to one Vicky Cook, who assured me Mr Freeman would get back to me that day. I am still waiting (on Sept 27th). This is not the only case recorded.

By your own admittance, Cradley High is a good school, everyone knows the GCSE pass rate of 73% 5 A*-C, thank you for the commendation you have given to the school. I now know that you are questioning that Cradley still does not do well enough in Maths and English, but you do have to take into account that we have more special educational needs children, more disadvantaged children, children that other schools have not coped with, being realistic, some of these children are not going to be academic, but at Cradley they have achieved excellent grades that will assure them places at local colleges, to further their education. Surely this is an important factor. Surely EVERY CHILD MATTERS, not just the mathematicians and the English scholars. Every child is different, and special.

Over the years, Cradley High has been let down by Dudley Council, built just 20 years ago, “A Flagship School”, it was called at the time, but since then it has had a minute amount of money spent on it when compared to the millions of pound spent on other high schools in the vicinity.

Mr Freeman agrees this with the excuse that it was expensive when built, but, if you buy a new house, by comparison you would expect to spend money on it to keep it in good repair, up to date, and attractive.

This is another reason Cradley High is not popular, it is not “state of the art” and does not have the same facilities as other schools. What we have is an attractive school, beautiful surroundings, but very, very dated.

There has to be an answer, Earls and Windsor are oversubscribed, turning pupils away, these schools cannot be extended any more surely, if we are not careful they will become unmanageable, could we not link the three schools under one proven leadership, each school having its own management team. Invest cash into Cradley High, bring it to the 21st century, instead of ploughing millions into schools like Pedmore Tech that are doing nowhere as well as Cradley High as parents do not want their children to go to Pedmore because of the bullying problems reported in the national press. If you do this the parents will soon be back, because all the parents want is an excellent high School, excellent facilities and if they have it on their doorstep that's surely better for all, transport, environment, children walk to Cradley High from the local area thus promoting health benefits.

Please I implore you to consider my letter, all we want is to be treated fairly. There are other schools, Pensnett for instance, smaller than Cradley High, dreadful Ofsted report, the worst GCSE results 23% (compared to 73%) falling numbers!!!

Why oh why it is only Cradley High! How do you justify not considering this school for closure (Pensnett Tech).

Letter 44

I have just had to write as I am so very angry like many other parents about the talk of closing Cradley High. Why? Just because so many are choosing to go to other high schools, how pathetic? That's no reason.

Most of my family have attended that school over the years. My 16 year old daughter has just left and has passed all of her exams and is now at college. My 15 year old son is in year 11 and in the past he has had problems with other boys bullying him and other problems but the staff dealt with them and he is now ready to do his last year there. I have got an 8 year old daughter at Cradley C of E School, she is now worrying about where she will be sent. Cradley High is on our doorstep and only 10 minutes away from our house. When my son was being bullied I tried to get him in Windsor as most of his best friends had gone there but they didn't want to know, they told me there was nothing wrong with the school he is at and it's within walking distance. So I don't like that school or Earls, I went there because at the time Cradley High was a middle school.

Halesowen has got 3 high schools, Stourbridge has at least 2, Cradley only has one, so why pick on that? There are lots of things that can be done to save this school, don't pick on our only high school, I don't want my daughter travelling when there is no need.

I bet you have never been to a school in Cradley, so what gives you the right to come along and decide you want to close Cradley High? It could be made smaller if need be or changed in some other way, but please I beg you don't close ours.

Another thing is if there are any problems and we need to go to the school, you don't have to catch buses, as we don't all have cars. There has been so much in the local papers recently praising Cradley High, they don't deserve this, we need a high school round here, if you wait at the bottom of the school hill and see all of the children that come out, there are loads. Ok there maybe so many less than there should be but so what? It's a great school and its better than any of the other high schools, they have just done really well with the exam results, surely you can see its worth saving.

I've put 6 cuttings out of the local papers, read them and please reconsider. It's making me and others feel sick worrying what's going to happen. I will not send my child to another school. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Letter 45

During the first parents meeting which you chaired you stated that "no decision has been made" with regard to the proposed closure. I find this confusing as Cllr. David Caunt states to the press "school closures will be pushed through." There appears to be a conflict of statements here between you and your colleague.

Also it would appear that the consultation is a 'statutory consultation' which means it is intended to close this school. As your statement and I quote "no decision has been made", could you please enlighten me as to which one is correct? I await your response.

Letter 46

This is a letter of objection to the closure / proposed closure of Cradley High School. I am also asking you to include this school in the Secondary Review as you have done with all the other schools in the borough.

There are other schools with apparent drop in birth rates. There are also schools that have not done as well as Cradley High School's 73% pass rate for GCSE's this year. In fact there are schools that have both!

Cradley High is a multicultural school that has embraced diversity and this is in marked contrast to some other schools in the borough.

Almost half the pupils are on the schools register of special educational needs and the school provides a safe, structured and caring environment that has shown tremendous results for this group of children. Over a third of these pupils gained five or more higher GCSE grades in 2005.

Look now at even more excellent results – 73% - second to Old Swinford School!

The results for Cradley over the past few years have shown a dramatic improvement and this year, as I state above, has produced the best results of any comparable school in the borough – in fact this pass rate at GCSE is well above the Dudley average and way above the national average. What an excellent school. Come praise this school with us! Do not close it!

You are the cabinet member for Children's Services in Dudley Council – you have the power to include it in the secondary schools Review and again I am asking you to do this for the sake of our children's future. Please allow Cradley High to be part of the overall Secondary School Review – give our children and even our grandchildren a chance to go to this excellent school.

Letter 47

I wrote to you a few days ago I'm still waiting to hear from you. It was a 5 page letter with 6 cuttings out of the local newspapers.

I object to Cradley High closing there is no real reason for it to, only as it's for the Colley Gate and Cradley people we are considered not good enough. Why? That's wrong. The schools in Halesowen and Stourbridge are favoured by all of you snooty people, we are treated like dirt. Did those schools come second? No they didn't but Cradley High did, it's a wonderful school with wonderful staff, they don't deserve to have this hanging over their heads. Most of them have got children and it's a worry not knowing if they're going to lose their job or not. I will be at this next meeting with as many people I can get to come along. You really need to change your mind.

Letter 48

I am writing with my concerns about Cradley High School closing in 2008.

As I have a newsagent and convenience store on Colley Lane, I will lose a lot of trade if the closure goes ahead. The school children, parents and teachers come into the shop to purchase items.

The business is my livelihood. I look forward to hearing your decision.

Letter 49

I am opposed to the closure of Cradley High School. This would have an adverse effect on my business.

Every lunchtime I have many Cradley High School pupils purchasing lunch and drinks from my fish bar. At times when pupils attend 'after school activities' they call in for their tea also.

Please reconsider and keep Cradley High School open as no doubt this will have a great adverse effect on the local community.

Letter 50

I feel that I must write to you concerning the proposal to close the above mentioned school. Have you indeed took time to consider the adverse effect this will have on businesses in the area who are very much dependant on the pupils, parents and staff of Cradley High School.

My business is fairly recent. I have been encouraged by my customers linked with the school, they use my shop for snacks and non-alcoholic beverages during lunchtime and after school and this is vital to the future of my business.

I object most profusely to the planned proposal and urge you to rethink.

Letter 51

Speaking as a concerned member of the local community the closure of the school will not only affect my business but also increase problems within the local community; as local talent will leave the area further decreasing the value and prospects of promoting the area as a clean and child friendly community to live in. Cradley High School over the years has been providing the local community with a source of pride as local children went on to prove themselves and make the area proud, to close such an establishment not only disheartens the local community but also saddens previous students who had the privilege of attending such an upstanding institute.

I ***** am very much against the closure of Cradley High School as it has been a long standing source of income for the business over a period of time. The school children purchase snacks and drinks from the premises on a regular basis at lunchtime and after school ends, it will have an extremely adverse reaction on the business as a whole.

Letter 52

It was with great sadness to read that Cradley High School is due for closure. Both my son and daughter attended the school when it was a middle school. Both my husband and myself were on the PTA and my husband was a parent governor at the time it was due for closure in the early 1980s. The parents teachers and children at the time all pulled together to save the school. To

which we saved the closure and in place had a high school built to which we were all very proud of and it was worth all the hard work put in by all. My son (now 36) had a lot of help from the teachers and is now a Royal Marine which he joined at the age of 18. My daughter (now 35) had a lot of help as at the time she had learning difficulties the middle school asked if we would like to send her two days a week to a special needs school in Halesowen to which she went and it was found out that she was dyslexic which was not recognised at the time. The two days at this school was a great help to her. We were very grateful for the help from Cradley Middle School. We attended the meeting on September 1st and we were pleased to hear parents say the help at the high school for special educational needs were very good. (Will they get this from any other school? I wish this had been available for my daughter when she was there).

We thought the pass rate was really good and a credit to the teachers and children. What will happen to the teachers they must be devastated after all the hard work they have put in and may not have jobs in the future, not to mention cleaners, dinner ladies, administration workers and caretakers.

Also what will happen to the school building will that be left to fall apart?

So please see sense at the end of the day and help to make Cradley High School even better and let the teachers, children and parents get on with making Cradley a better place for all. We don't want to be doing this in another 25 years.

Letter 53

I am writing with reference to the above [proposed closure of Cradley High School] and to outline my concerns with reference to my son ***** starting school at Cradley High in September 2006.

*****'s first preference of school was Windsor High which we unfortunately did not gain admission for. We appealed against this decision and again were rejected on the grounds that there was a suitable school which could meet his needs this being Cradley High School.

This obviously has now changed as Cradley High is not going to be suitable, as it is going to close. The proposed closure has yet again caused upset to my son and I would like to know if Windsor will facilitate some of the children who will move from Cradley High as I would prefer my son to have the chance to start at Windsor in September rather than him going through upheaval in 2008.

I believe it will cause a lot of stress not just to my son but to all of the September starters, they will not know where their loyalties lie, not know if their new friendships will have to change again and just cause a lot of disarray. This is a very important change in a child's life, they are starting

High School but how can they feel settled when they are not sure of what High School they will be at in the future.

My husband and I are very concerned and would like to know where we stand in relation to the above.

I look forward to your response.

Letter 54

[Same as letter 11 – mistakenly entered twice]

Letter 55

I enclose copies of letters sent to Dudley Education for your perusal.

I am a very concerned mother of a child starting Cradley High School tomorrow and really feel utterly disgusted at the way my child has been treated in relation to the most important matter in his life at this time, his education. He initially chose Windsor as his first preference, was declined, we appealed, we were refused, the refusal was because there was a school closer that fulfilled his needs, yet now to find the proposed closure of Cradley High, which at the moment seems almost a certainty.

I feel that I keep asking questions that are vital but unfortunately remain unanswered; the welfare of my child is of the utmost to my husband and I and would appreciate being kept informed.

I hope you understand how important this matter is to me and my son.

Letter 56

I am writing this letter as we are concerned as parents. For the closure of Cradley High School as we have two boys which attend the school. One with special needs who has come on a great deal in the last three years. Due to the teachers. And I don't see why the school has to close. My children enjoy their school because they don't have to catch the buses everyday. And their teachers are brilliant. They say they are shutting the school because the intake is small. But Cradley is growing due to new houses being built so we say keep the school open as children don't have to be disrupted.

Letter 57

I am appalled at your decision to close Cradley High School, my husband and my children

attended this school and I thought my grandchildren would also, but now that could be doubtful because of the schools possible closure. I would have thought that the excellent results the children gained in there GCSE's would make you think again, some of these children needed extra help with there education so the fact that they have done so well is a good reason to keep the school open.

The fact that you have insufficient places in local schools for the children would mean that they would have to travel some distance to get to school and the children with special education needs would be even more limited finding a school. Parents find that the discipline in the school could be better, and the fact that you have let the school in need of some repair as put parents off from their sending children to Cradley High.

Letter 58

I will not bore you with all the arguments in favour of keeping Cradley High open I am sure you know them all. Suffice it to say that they are very convincing; yet you appear determined to ignore them.

Well my grandchild attends Cradley High and your actions threaten to cause a great deal of disruption to her life, both on a social and academic level.

This upsets me, on a very personal level; I do not like it and will do everything within my power to thwart you and your plans to close this school.

Letter 59

I am writing to you in your position of cabinet minister of children's services in Dudley council, I have tried very hard to liase with Mr John Freeman, Director of education, via letters and telephone, but have received no communication from him at all, most unprofessional.

You have signed a decision sheet to close Cradley High School, and it is your intention to do so, I and many other people question, and are very upset by this decision.

I have lived in Cradley for 50 of my 53 years, I was educated at Cradley [then Homer Hill] and my three daughters were also. All have done very well and are working in the education sector. I work at Cradley High in a minor role, and have done so for 20 years, so I think that I have the right to ask questions AND receive answers.

The only reason that you have for closing Cradley is the question of falling numbers! Yes, the numbers have decreased in the last three to four years, but there are questions to be answered here, Dudley council must have seen this happening and should have addressed this problem as and when, The Heads and staff of the local feeder schools have been actively discouraging

pupils through their parents from opting for Cradley High for their secondary education, this is a fact, I have grandchildren at one of the schools locally and have heard parents talking about this. Surely this is not in the staff's job description!!! The admissions department will not give Cradley High as an option for anyone phoning for a place in secondary education, my niece phoned in July for a place for her two daughters, one year 7 and one year 9 place at any of the Halesowen schools, she was told that there were none, only Cradley High, but that was up for closure, similar scenarios have been reported.

Places are being created at other schools in the borough, 28 new places at Hillcrest, parents of pupils on the role at Cradley High were phoned and encouraged to move their children to this school, who authorised this? Admissions could not have done this without direction from someone in authority; this is most unfair and unjust. You said at the parents evening that Cradley High would be open for business until it's fate had been decided, and the consultation period was finished, but it seems that Dudley council have been actively chipping away at the numbers at the school.

You are aware of the results of the GCSE examinations, all of the children in the borough did very well, congratulations to them all, Cradley High did extremely well, but you failed to give them a mention in the local papers, as the borough's top achievers, do their hard work?

Ms. Walker, I know that a lot as been said in the press, that perhaps with hindsight you wish had not, the petition affair, and then your very negative comments about the article being Monday's chip paper, these comments were unnecessary, you are an intelligent woman, and you know that chip paper's need hands, and, you should never bite the hands that feed you. Also the quote from your leader Cllr. David Caunt who stated that school will be pushed through. This does make you wonder if the fate of Cradley High as already been decided, and the shutters are up before the last pupil as left the building.

But as a mother and grandmother [like yourself] I believe that the people of Cradley deserve a good high school that serves the community, so that children of eleven do not have to travel on maybe two buses to get to school, on dark rainy mornings, stuck at home on snowy day's because they can't get to school. And I truly believe that we have this in Cradley. The head teacher has done her job, we need to promote this school, build on their fantastic results, and shoe everyone what a good school it is, surely that's what everyone wants isn't it? A safe, caring, close school in the borough's highest achieving school [after Oldswinford].

Oooop' s I nearly forgot, Can you assure me that the 300 approx special educational need's children will be admitted to schools that can cope with these children, taking into account that they all want to go to Windsor or Earls. Because as you know this is where Cradley High excels. Oooop' I hope Dudley council hadn't forgot!!!!

Thank you for listening to me, and I hope that you will take note of this letter, Please use it to

reverse your decision on Cradley High's fate, and at least allow the school to be part of the overall secondary review, It has surely earned the right to do so.

Letter 60

Please stop our school from shutting down because this school is a fantastic school and lots of people don't want it to shut, plus where will I go more important where will other people from the school go including the teachers and the head mistress, what I mean is most of the schools are full and this school is great I get educated at Cradley high school and there are great teachers the one of the teachers which is my form tutor has a wife and she worked at my primary Holt farm and that got shut down so what will they do, I mean most of the teachers won't find a job so its up to you to save our school, so please do.

When I first came to Cradley high I was really scared because I didn't know most of the people there and how to get around or any of the teachers, but when I got to the second day I made lots of friends and that shows Cradley high children can welcome you into the school.

Letter 61

Having taught at Cradley C of E Junior School for 26 years and done supply teaching at Caslon, Colley Lane and Quarry Bank schools I wish to say that I cannot understand why Cradley High School should close. Although retired I take a great interest in local schools and it would be wrong to have no senior education in the area.

Cradley High School has been successful. My son attended there before he went to Hadlow College. It was then a middle school and did well for the pupils. I just wish to state that I do not agree with the closure.

Emails

16 email responses to the consultation were received.

Email 1

I am a concerned parent of a current year 9 pupil at Cradley High School. This morning I have received by post the consultation document on proposals for closure of the school. I have to say that as a parent I am extremely concerned at its content. It appears that from its content it is intended that the school will close in August of next year. Whilst I understand the reasoning behind the closure, for example the decline in local population due to the demolishing of local housing in the area over the past few years, I feel the decision of when to close has not been thoroughly thought out. My daughter is currently in year 9 at school and has chosen her options for GCSE for the next two years. Surely closure of the school at this time (which would be in the

middle of those two years) would be disruptive to the pupils at one of the most important times in their academic life. I feel very strongly that this should be reconsidered to give current year nine pupils the opportunity to stay at Cradley High until they finish their GCSE's and leave school in year 11. I would very much like to hear your comments on this matter and await your reply.

Email 2

Further to your consultation document regarding the proposed closure of Cradley High School, I wish to make the following comments for the record:-

- Whilst I accept that the pupil rolls for Cradley High are beginning to look bleak, this cannot be viewed in isolation from the difficult question of where we could possibly displace those pupils who currently attend the school. The other three Halesowen secondary schools are all oversubscribed at present, and I believe the situation at Stourbridge secondary schools is not dissimilar. In particular, the opportunities for expansion at Windsor School must surely be limited given how intensively the site has already been developed with new classrooms. Therefore - and given the volume of cross-boundary admissions to both Earls High and Windsor involving Sandwell children in particular - what guarantee could possibly be offered in the light of the 'Greenwich Judgement' that pupils from the Cradley area would secure places there?
- Should Cradley High School close it would effectively open up a large gap in provision between Halesowen and Stourbridge that would particularly impact upon children living in the Fatherless Barn area of my ward. Although there are good public transport connections between Fatherless Barn and both Halesowen and Stourbridge, should the aforementioned over subscription problem preclude admission of Fatherless Barn pupils, the other nearest schools (Thorns at Quarry Bank, and Heathfield at Old Hill) are poorly served by public transport from this estate, if at all. Indeed, although it is true that Fatherless Barn is linked by a direct half-hourly bus service to Heathfield School, this involves a convoluted twenty-five minute bus ride that will ironically take these unfortunate pupils past both Windsor and Earls High en-route! Therefore, for the use of Thorns and Heathfield as alternative secondary schools to even begin to gain acceptance, Dudley LEA would need to commit itself from the outset to the provision of dedicated school buses from this estate.
- The nature of the catchment area that serves Cradley High dictates that its below-average academic record (which may additionally appear to make it a candidate for closure) is as much a reflection of the deprivation that exists in the Cradley / Fatherless Barn area than any shortcomings on the part of the school management. The imposition of additional travelling time to the school day occasioned by its closure is unlikely to make the task of motivating such pupils any easier.

I trust you will convey these views to the consultation team.

Email 3

First of all I would like to say my son has settled well into Cradley High, is in year 7 and doing very well and doesn't wish to change schools. Questions I would like to ask:

- Have the council already sold the ground off to a housing developer, if so along with families who are going to be moving on other housing estates already being built, i.e. Windmill Hill, Colley Gate, Clancey's factory and also the speedway ground in Dudley Wood, where will these children go to school if the other local schools are already full? You would think with a falling birth rate we are going to end up with surplus houses as well as school places.
- Also will parents be compensated for a new school uniform?
- Hillcrest has had extra funding plus a load of good publicity, don't you think Cradley High would have benefited from the same? If confidence is lost in a school for whatever reason parents will also opt to send their children somewhere else. All of my sons friends want to change to the same school, Heathfields, how will this school cope trying to find all the extra places.

Finally I didn't think it was fair to say that children from Halesowen schools would not travel to Cradley High when it is ok for children from Cradley High to have the extra travelling.

Email 4

We are sorry that the decline in pupil numbers has created the need to close Cradley High School.

The table below shows the number of pupils leaving Colley Lane over the last 3 years, split between destination schools.

July	Cradley High	Earls	Windsor	Pedmore College	Thorns	Other
2004	27	6	30	3	6	
2005	28	6	28	3	7	3
2006	21	11	30	5	5	1

The children of Colley Lane Primary School had historically gravitated towards Cradley High in view of its proximity. However Colley Lane children wishing to attend either Earls or Windsor have rarely all been able to obtain places and having a 'neighbourhood' High School has always been a positive alternative. If children are to be accommodated at 'local' schools then they should be 'local'.

Earls and Windsor are clearly the best options, followed by Pedmore College of Science and Technology and Thorns. Hillcrest then Redhill, Leasowes and Ridgewood are probably too far for sensible access, unless a 'bus service' is laid on in the short term.

It is hoped that additional capacity can be put in place (ideally at Earls and Windsor) to ensure that all Colley Lane pupils have a sensible local option for transition to secondary education.

Email 5

I am writing to you to express my disgust at the proposed closure of Cradley High School. Although my children are well above school age they attended Cradley High and both received a good education and gone on well in their chosen careers.

In my view if a school has falling numbers and underachieving then something should be done to turn that school around - it has been done and proved to be a benefit both to the school and community. Why is this not happening in Cradley? Why are we going to lose a valuable asset in education and Leisure facilities; school, leisure centre and park playing fields? Why should children be made to travel everyday, summer and winter, to another school when we could have a perfectly good school within walking distance, not all parents are able to take their children to school for a variety of reasons.

We know there will always be a certain amount to children wanting to go to what are considered 'better schools' but why can't Cradley High be a 'better school' as well?

Could I also ask where is Toni Fowler in all this? In non of the press articles has she even been mentioned. Is she hiding in her office unaware of what is happening or just quite happy to let a marvellous asset to the community disappear?

Email 6

I would like to say I am disgusted that you would support the closure of Cradley High School.

My daughter attended there 5 years ago and has just finished her degree and about to start teacher training. One of the main reasons she decided to go into teaching was because of the teaching staff at Cradley High who inspired her.

I have just read the campaign committee report newsletter and I am infuriated with you. How dare you close this wonderful school and where are the children supposed to go when you do. The surrounding school are full!!

If this is the type of policy you support maybe its time you resigned from your position and let someone else take your place. There is no valid reason to shut this school and it is a disgrace.

Email 7

I would like our school to stay open. My brother ***** and I both attend Cradley High School, we are very up set because someone is thinking of closing our school.

I only started the school this term I am in year 7, there was the only one boy {me} and two girls that came from my primary school {Dudley Wood} to Cradley High, most of my friends went to other schools because they were afraid of coming to Cradley High, they had listened to rumours spread by people who had not even been to this school. My friends all thought that I was mad to come to Cradley, I said they were wrong. My brother is getting on well at Cradley and so will I if I have the chance.

My brother is in year nine and if you close the school it will be very hard for him to settle into a new school me too, he has joined the football team they have just won their first match today and he is very proud, he would probably not get into a larger schools team. He also does very well in class.

My mom, aunt, uncle, two granddads, grandmother and cousins all went to school on Homer Hill Cradley I hope my other cousins will able to when it is their turn to go to high school.

I have wrote this email hoping you will take notice of what we want for the future MY FAMILY DON'T WANT OUR SCHOOL TO CLOSE.

I am sending this email with backing from all of my family.

Email 8

I am writing to express my disappointment and anger at the proposed closure of Cradley High school. I was a pupil at the school between 1997 and 2002 and I have never regretted my decision to attend the school, despite the fact that my feeder school was Thorns. I gained so much from my time there and with the invaluable support of the staff there, I was able to obtain 5 A*s and 7As in my GCSEs and I am now studying medicine and training to be a doctor at Leicester University. This would not have been possible without numerous members of staff, some of whom even gave up their own time to teach me to enable me to take the papers that I needed to.

I have always maintained that the school is a great one and that the support is there for you should you choose to accept it and put the work in. The reputation that the school has is completely unjustified, and no matter what the school does it always has difficulty in promoting itself, mainly because people aren't willing to help them. This year they achieved outstanding exam results - 73% which is by far the best in the borough (excluding Old Swinford). What

makes this even more remarkable is that nearly 50% of the children at the school had some form of special education needs. Yet Dudley Council's Education department failed to mention Cradley High in their press release despite it being the top school in the borough (I worked for the council over the summer and read the release on the intranet) and the newspapers also completely ignored it. How is the school supposed to promote a positive image when no-one is willing to help?

You claim that falling class numbers are the reason why you are closing the school down. Surely the fact that you failed to deny rumours that the school would be closed down is a compelling reason as to why parents didn't choose the school this year? It stands to reason parents don't want their children to be disrupted by having to change schools!

One of the reasons I chose Cradley High over Thorns is because it was a small school and that suited me best. I didn't want to go to a school where even the teachers didn't know each other (we found this out at a Thorns open evening). I liked the fact that I knew every single person at the school, by sight if nothing else. Surely you need to provide a range of different schools to suit different children? I know so many children who fail to thrive at large schools because they get lost amongst everyone else. Every educational study has shown that small class sizes are the optimum environment for pupils. You claim that educational quality will be compromised by small numbers - but surely you can see from the last few years that as numbers have declined, exam results have improved? How can you justify that statement? You even say in the consultation document that large schools are difficult to manage, so why make them bigger?

As there are not enough places being created at nearby schools, many children will be forced to travel for a long time to get to school. Surely this in itself is likely to discourage children from going to school? I am aware that Hillcrest have had to teach children in a church hall because they do not have the capacity to cope with their huge numbers. And on the subject of Hillcrest who everyone seems to think is wonderful, they have had millions of pounds invested in them yet their exam results are half of what ours were which were achieved with very little investment.

Cradley High is specially adapted to cater for the local community which has a high Yemeni population. The school is perfect for children with disabilities and has a fantastic ability to support children with educational needs. Surely you are depriving these children and their families of this lifeline which is crucial to them? And what of the current Year 10, who will be taking their GCSEs the year the school closes down - surely you will be putting their education in jeopardy because you cannot guarantee there will be sufficient teachers and resources for them.

If the school was failing and had poor exam results then I can understand why you would want to close it down. But Cradley High isn't. They have proved themselves to be one of the best schools in the borough and you have even admitted you won't save any money by closing the school down. So why do it?

Email 9

Introduction

This response is intended to capture the feelings, concerns and considerations of the Governing Body at Cradley High School. We recognise that Governors, Staff, Parents and Pupils will make personal responses corroborating elements contained within as well as identify other issues to be addressed by the Consultation Committee.

Falling Rolls

We acknowledge the issue of falling rolls due to a decline in the birth rate and its current impact on Cradley High School. The issue of surplus places throughout Dudley has been an ongoing issue of the past 3 years and is being used as a reason for closure by the Local Authority. The Local Authority has recognised this issue and their knowledge of it. Clearly they should have produced a Borough wide strategy identifying proposals for rectifying this issue.

We feel that the Local Authority should provide a demographic breakdown on the pupil numbers by wards, indicating availability of places within an appropriate travelling distance between home and school. This is a statutory requirement of the Local Authority to consider. This is also a significant consideration within the consultation document Investing in the Future – Transforming Secondary Provision, developing the education vision for Dudley.

With the Authority commencing a strategic review of its secondary school provision, it is inconceivable for the authority to develop and expand provision within its schools by increasing intake numbers before this process has been completed. It is equally inconceivable that the Authority should choose to close one of its secondary schools before the completion of that strategic review. We call on the Local Authority to delay its decision to close Cradley High School until the full consequences of the strategic review are clear.

No research has been conducted into the needs of the Cradley communities and the reasons why parents are not choosing to send their children to Cradley High School. A significant reason that has been communicated to the Governing Body is the lack of resources and facilities available at the school. The management team of the school have developed, over a number of years, numerous proposals for developing these facilities. Consistent failure by the Local Authority to support these proposals has let down the school and more importantly the Cradley community.

Other options

No information has been provided of any other options that were considered by the Directorate as alternatives to the closure of Cradley High School. It is considered by the Governing Body that an amalgamation between the school and neighbouring schools could provide more beneficial outcomes for both the Authority and its communities.

Cradley High School has an outstanding record and deserved reputation for supporting and educating children and young people with additional needs and particularly those with behavioural difficulties excluded from other more popular schools that were unable to meet their needs.

Neighbouring, high performing authorities are adopting policies to co-locate Special School provision alongside mainstream provision within the mainstream school setting, thus providing a more inclusive environment. Given the continuing difficulties being experienced by the LEA with its Special Schools strategy this option could provide a solution to the falling roll within Cradley High and the move towards a more inclusive strategy for pupils with additional educational needs. It could allow the Authority to develop a beacon provision for its diverse community of vulnerable young people with a holistic range of additional needs. This is also identified as a priority consideration within the Transforming Secondary Provision consultation. We feel that a bit of joined up and creative thinking would not be out of place here, particularly when we read that some local Special School curriculum provision is found to be wanting.

Housing

With 4 significant housing developments within the catchment area for Cradley High School being at various stages of completion, no research into the effect these projects will have on the roll of the school has been evidenced for consideration within this consultation and is therefore a major omission for the data projections

Need to decide now.

The school is clearly financially viable for the current academic year and whilst the data appears to show that on current trends the projected numbers would not make the school sustainable in the future, the impact of the Borough Review on secondary school provision should be resolved and its implications clearly understood before any rash decisions to close schools are made.

We feel that Cradley High school has been singled out for closure in order to precipitate the smooth passing of the overall review.

Head and Staff

The Head teacher has developed a clear philosophy of 'Can Do' through the structure of the school and we have supported her wholeheartedly in this respect. Many children entering Cradley High School do so with below National Average Key Stage 2 test results. In order to meet the needs of these young people the school has designed a curriculum that is accessible to all children irrespective of their entry results, thus allowing each child to reach their potential. The success of this philosophy is evidenced by the continual improvements in key Stage 4 examination results and if Cradley High were to close the educational outlook for a significant number of children will be damaged – and this will be as a direct consequence of the Local Authorities actions.

The schools reputation for supporting vulnerable children and those with additional needs, as commented upon earlier, is acknowledged across the Borough. The unique nature of this group of children, often excluded from other schools, requires highly skilled and committed staff to support and educate them. The knowledge and skills of the staff at Cradley High will potentially be lost upon the closure of this school. The synergy of this group of staff will be lost forever.

Size of the school

It is the philosophy and belief of the Governors that small schools provide the best outcomes for children and young people. We think that small schools provide a particular ethos and environment for children and young people, and for the staff. Small schools have a particular advantage over other types of larger schools in that the staff, including the head teacher and deputy head teacher, know all children and young people by sight if not name and they engender a particular sense of community among the children and the staff. We believe that the small school also enables the head teacher and deputy head teacher to have a significant teaching commitment and that this has been a real contributing factor to the year on year improvement in results. We would corroborate the Headteachers view that the size of a school is a significant factor in the behaviour of its students.

School as a community resource

Consistent advice and guidance from Local Authority personnel that improving the academic outcomes for the children of Cradley High would make the school a viable entity have been heeded and followed by the school leadership. Successive years of exam improvements bear testament to the fact that this is where our focus has been. We feel that the Local Authority is now being inconsistent with its advice, maintaining that the Head and Governing Body should have taken different action to their advice to improve the schools long-term future. The suggestion that the Governors are somehow responsible for the current situation does not sit comfortably with us.

We fully support the Head teachers view that the school has a significant role to play within the local community. As the Authority is fully aware the local community puts the facilities of the school to good use. Despite the best efforts of the Head teacher and Governing Body (over a number of years) to attract additional funding to enhance the schools facilities, support from the Local Authority to enable this has not been forthcoming. We feel particularly let down and unsupported by successive Local Authority senior managers and elected members.

Conclusion

In conclusion feel that we have raised several issues worthy of further consideration as alternatives to the closure proposal of Cradley High School. We feel strongly that the consultation on the Investing in the Future – Transforming Secondary Provision should be allowed to run its course before any decisions to close or expand schools are made. We request that the Authority give due consideration to these issues and provide us with the additional consultative evidence we have requested.

Whilst the tentative statistical projections suggest that the pupil numbers would not sustain the long term future of the school, we feel that the Authority should look at joining up it's strategies including the Special School Strategy and the Secondary School Strategy, in order to identify the Best Value outcomes for children and young people in the Borough and encompass this within the Children and Young Peoples Plan.

Email 10

My name is ***** and I have been a school Governor at Cradley High for several years. I am also an ex parent as both my children attended Cradley High, by choice I might add as they both preferred the smaller school environment. My daughter is studying medicine at university and wants to become a Doctor and my son is undertaking his 'A' levels at King Edwards College in Stourbridge and wants to enter the Navy as an officer. I believe their achievements are down to in large part attending Cradley High along with support from home. Cradley High provides an excellent learning environment for all young people and helps every individual reach their potential.

The Governing Body are submitting a joint response, but I would like to send my own response as well based on my personal views.

I firmly believe there should be a choice of school environment, both large and small schools. I personally believe small schools are good and can work with the right staff and investment. When I was looking round at schools we went to a large school and two members of staff came up to us from different directions to offer help, but they did not actually know one another and yet they taught in the same school. What sort of impression did that give, if the staff didn't know each other how were they supposed to know the children?

The timing of the Cradley High consultation process seems inappropriate, as the Transforming Secondary Provision has not yet been completed.

I would like to say that I am very disappointed in the way the LEA and the lead member for education Councillor Walker have handled the process so far.

Consultation Document – the main points that I have concerns, views and questions on:

- Why wasn't the consultation document discussed with the Head and the Governing Body prior to the announcement?
- Lack of notice for the first meeting held in July 2006 for staff, parents and Governors.
- The way the Governing body were treated at the July meeting – we were given no agenda beforehand, had very little time to prepare any questions and by the time we were asked for comments or questions there was very little time left. We felt very rushed.

- Timing of the announcement – a few weeks before the end of term, was this really the best time, could it not have waited until September?
- Consultation document – the way it is worded makes it seem like a done deal i.e. page 18 no 7 & no 9 says how the closure WILL take place, not how it COULD take place. This gives the impression that the decision has already been made and that the document is a source of information only and not part of a true consultation process.
- Some of the information seems to give an inaccurate picture of the current financial position of the school – page 5, 3rd paragraph, last sentence states the school CAN no longer afford to offer the quality of education. This implies this is a current problem, not a potential future problem dependant on pupil numbers. On whose say so is this based, as far as I am aware the Head and Governing Body were not asked how they would cope and what strategies could be put in place if the budget was to be cut?
- There was no discussion with the Head and the Governing body prior to the announcement with regards to the proposed closure and any other options that might be available for consideration.
- Budget – page 11, the unit cost per pupil at Cradley High has been stated but not all the other schools individual figures only an average. This is unfair, as you cannot make a fair comparison.
- Why has the value added information not been included in the document?

Meetings

I attended a second Governors meeting with Councillor Walker and Ray Watson, where several issues were raised;

- We asked what the LEA had done as they as well as the school and the Governing Body have a shared responsibility to help promote all schools – *Ray admitted no real research had been done to find out why parents were not choosing Cradley High.*
- We asked what other options the LEA had considered and how formal those discussions were – *we were informed there were no minutes taken, as they were not discussed in a formal setting. I find this unacceptable, for something as important as this I feel that should be a correct procedure that should have been followed.*
- We asked if the closure went ahead and the plans to move years 7, 8 & 9 but leave the current year 10 also went ahead what guarantees there would be for the continuity of their education – *Ray said that places would be found at other schools for years 7, 8 & 9 and that staff that year 10 know would be there to teach them in year 11.* When asked what if the staff obtained other posts and left the school what would happen then, *he replied that they could always ship in staff from other schools.* I find this unacceptable as they are playing with young peoples futures and if they can't guarantee how they are going to deliver the curriculum to those year 11 students I think they need to seriously think about their decision to propose the closure of the school.

I also attended the Area Committee meeting and there was a lot of support for Cradley High. I would like to make the point that Councillor Turner made a statement that the surplus places at Cradley High was costing rate payers money, he failed to mention that there are surplus places at other schools in the borough. There was also a document issued to everyone, I would like to comment on the statement 'Cradley is the only school with admissions below 120 and is no longer sustainable' but according to table 4 on page 9 of the consultation document where it clearly states the numbers for September 2007 for Pensnett school is 90 which means that information is incorrect and misleading to the public.

Conclusion

I feel very strongly that over the years the LEA have not supported the school, that the school and the Governing Body are taking the brunt of the responsibility for the lack of trying to promote the school. Don't forget the Governors undertake the role on a voluntary basis and if you didn't have us you would find it very difficult running your schools.

I hope you will reconsider the proposal to close Cradley High and see the advantages of investing in the school for the future generations of children in the community.

Email 11

I have recently heard that the council has made the decision to close Cradley High school. I am writing this letter in support of the school to be kept open.

I am a former pupil of the school (2000/2005) and currently in my last year at King Edwards VI College, Stourbridge. My experience of school life at Cradley High was some of the best of my life. I have had a lot of experiences in my life due to being a Sea Cadet, even going to Russia on a foreign exchange with them, which could not have been achieved, with out my experiences at Cradley High.

The times I have had at Cradley High rank at the top of my list, this includes doing drama productions on a monthly basis within the Drama Department. The annual Christmas production was always well supported of those involved from the staff/pupils and parents. This has helped me build up confidence and the ability to perform in front of large crowds whether acting or performing a speech.

One of the best things that I liked about Cradley high was the fact that it was a small school and that it was always friendly. The teachers knew all the children and the children knew the teachers. This made the learning environment a much better place to learn as everyone knew everyone else. The classes were small, meaning a better teacher/pupil ratio and more time for the teacher to spend on individual pupils.

Going from a school of 700 to a college of over 2000 was a big difference but the fact that I have had the experience of both types of school. I prefer the former type. Overall you knew all the pupils at the school, you knew what year they were in, what friends they had and what form they were in. This helped the teachers and the prefects in their daily business.

On a further note I am appalled by the way the council is going round this closure, they have neglected the chance to talk to the parents, they have used under hand techniques to get out of tricky situations. They have refused to answer the most pressing of questions posed by those concerned. Also the facts they have provided as part of their evidence, about the school numbers decreasing, do not even match the official numbers of the most recent Ofsted government inspection report. In the facts the council have provided they miss off over 100 children to make their facts look like what they want it to be, a gradual decline of children attending Cradley High. If this was in a court of law that would fall under the category of tampering with evidence, which is an illegal action, but I am sure you know of that.

The council has not spent money on the school in recent years. Cradley High only gained a new food technology department by saving up its own money, not because of council funds. Then the council have the cheek to say that we cannot compete with the other schools in providing the extra resources that they do. May I ask why that is? Children go to school to gain GCSE's, Cradley High gives the best chance of coming away with the best GCSE's than any other school in the area. Employers do not look at how far you can run, but at your educational talent. Universities do not ask if you went to a sports technology school, and say yes, that reason has gained you a place. No, they have a look at your GCSE's and your A levels, which are gained by studying hard for your GCSE's. The council told Ms Fowler to improve the GCSE pass rate of Cradley high some years ago. She has done that and yet you still complain.

Do not forget that the council members are elected by the people to serve the people. By closing Cradley High you will not be doing as you are supposed to do. You will be failing the people who put you into office. Consider this the next time you try to run for office again in the coming election.

I will end this letter now on this note. If I had the option to go to any school in the country, Cradley High would be my choice. Because of the people that make up Cradley high and the environment that I have been taught in. Everything that makes up Cradley High is why I would chose the school. Taking this away for the children of the future will be a grave mistake.

Email 12

Cradley High School serves a distinct community and has pupils who will in many cases not find it easy to transfer to other schools. The NUT favours schools with real links to their communities and this surely fits the Government's plans for extended schools.

Whilst there is clearly a falling role at Cradley, the increased collaboration required between schools by the 14-19 agenda must lead to a re-assessment as to what minimum size secondary schools need to be in order to be viable.

The results at Cradley have clearly shown an impressive upward trend. The school produced an enviable 'valued added' score and has a proven track record with students who arrive with lower than average results for their age.

There are only surplus places in Dudley schools if we consider current class sizes reasonable. In the private sector they are, of course, consistently smaller. Government spokesmen, Gordon Brown included; talk of their aspiration to match this in the maintained sector. In the meantime is it not sensible to manage a balanced reduction of numbers across all schools in the Borough?

We need a good local school for every child.

Email 13

I am writing as one of the three local Ward Councillors and write on their behalf about this consultation. I have covered a number of points that I believe need to be fully considered by the Cabinet member before she makes her final decision.

I have been dismayed during the past weeks over the manner in which this consultation has taken place. I believe the following timeline illustrates part of my concerns.

14th June 2006 – Cabinet meeting – item 21 – Investing in the future – Transforming Secondary Provision – The Cabinet member gave an undertaking that this consultation document would be far reaching and enable as wide a range of consultation as possible. The consultation paper was then published on 19th June 2006.

19th June 2006 – I and others were contacted by the press following the release by Dudley Council of the press statement announcing the consultation to close Cradley High School. This was the first I had heard of the matter and I contacted the contact on the press release to ask for a copy – I did this in the early afternoon yet did not receive the press release until 16.56 from Linda Edwards followed at 16.58 by the same press release from the Marketing department.

When this matter was brought to the attention of the Cabinet Member and Lead Officer John Freeman, in my opinion, both fudged their answers. The official response to the question raised at the public meeting on 12th July is as follows:

Q12. When you announced these proposals why did you first let the press and elected members know? Surely the children should have been told first.

A. The staff at Cradley High School were told first, followed by parents later in the day. I believe it was the staff who spoke to the press, not the Council. The children were informed by the school directly.

This recorded answer is in direct contradiction to the fact that the Council announced the consultation to the press sometime around midday on 19th June 2006 with a quote from the Cabinet Member included.

I am at a loss to understand why the press were told of this matter before Councillors, Trade Union officials and their members or more importantly the parents and pupils of the school. This ridiculous situation only served to make the announcement in the school far more difficult than it should have been.

Of far more consequence however is that the Cabinet Member made no mention of the consultation at the cabinet meeting and has excluded Cradley High from the far broader consultation on the future of secondary provision. Since the two consultations must have been printed by her department at the same time and in view of her statements that consultation should be inclusive I cannot see any reasonable person understanding such an illogical move.

20th June 2006 – Official notification is sent to interested parties announcing the consultation. On this same day the Head advised the school of the consultation.

6th July 2006– 12 Noon. The consultation document is released.

The consultation period is stated as starting on 6th July and ending on 28th September 2006. This would appear to be a generous amount of time but in reality the timing of the consultation has only made the consultation more complex and as a result less effective than it should be. The start being some 3 weeks before the schools summer holidays and then leaving some 3 weeks post the summer holidays. Anyone in education knows that the end of the year is difficult and the start of the year is the busiest of times for all concerned. Combining this with the summer holiday period means we have had six weeks of consultation where all parties are available. It will be argued that this is the statutory period for consultation however I have not been able to find precedent for a two-part consultation period in any other consultation undertaken by the Council.

The consultation papers have not been issued in Arabic or any other language other than English – this has been brought up in every meeting I have attended yet it still has not been done. The only Arabic translation that has been made available was at the Halesowen Area Committee on 26th September. This was only available to the audience at the Area Committee and was an abridged version of the whole document. When challenged about this and asked why the full consultation document had not been made available in Arabic Ray Watson advised that the legal position is that it could not be. At no stage had this been advised in fact the

opposite is clear from the written answer given by his department to questions raised at the meeting on 12th July which states

6. The languages in the consultation papers did not include Arabic even though you were aware of the Yemeni community at the school. Why were the correct translations not provided?

We give our sincere apologies for this. An Arabic translation was requested and we didn't spot that it hadn't been provided. Further translations will be available on request and a specific meeting can be arranged if required.

This is in fact the answer given by John Freeman at the meeting on 12th July; this was repeated at the Halesowen Area Committee meeting on 12th September. I would also point out that Dudley's consultation toolkit states

- *Consultation should include adequate information about the issue(s) in a form that is meaningful to groups; accessibility of information is of great importance, with plain English, community languages and accessible formats required as appropriate;*

Finally the consultation document on Cradley High itself states on page 3

"If you would like to be consulted in a different language please contact Vicky Cook on 01384 813726"

12th July 2006 – with little advance notice, including no notification to local Councillors, a meeting was arranged at the School where the Cabinet Member and Education officers attended and gave an overview of the consultation document. Many parents did not know that this meeting would take place at all and all who attended had only at most two working days notice.

The reason given for such short notice is that Cradley High has a policy not to send papers out to parents via the pupils. I find this a tenuous argument and this admission highlights the lack of organisation surrounding the launch of the consultation and its consequent lack of inclusion – again the notices were not in Arabic. The Lead officers should have known of the schools policy and allowed at least a weeks notice of the meeting.

Even with such short notice over 100 people attended, contrast this however with the public meeting arranged by local people some weeks later where well over 200 attended.

During August no Council arranged meetings took place.

12th September 2006 – Approximately 40 parents, pupils and local people attended the Halesowen Area Committee to raise their concerns with the Council Members, seek their views and ask for their support. The Chair of the meeting refused to hear any questions relating to the

consultation document on the grounds that a special Area Committee meeting had been arranged for this. I believe this is in direct contravention of the Constitution surrounding the public forum,

3. To consider issues of local relevance raised by the public, local organisations or members of the Area Committee.

Each of the Members of the Cradley and Foxcote Ward objected strenuously to the Chairs actions. This was later compounded by the Chair when he refused to allow me, in matters from Ward Councillors, to congratulate Cradley High School on their recent GCSE results.

This action by the Chair I find particularly disgraceful, the notice for the Area Committee did not advise that questions could not be raised about the School, more worryingly the section set aside for public debate is sacrosanct and we should never be allowed to restrict the questions raised as long as they do not affront public decency. It has meant that none of the Councillors were able to voice their opinions about the consultation nor offer support or otherwise to those members of the public who attended.

The consultation paper sets out the need to involve pupils at the School and a meeting of some of the pupils took place. The feedback I have received from some of the parents and pupils is that the answers were condescending and many questions were not answered. I am disappointed that this took place so late in the consultation period.

26th September – Halesowen Area Committee – arranged to provide an opportunity for the public and Council Members to voice their concerns, raise questions and input into the consultation documents about Halesowen CE and Cradley High Schools. The first issue raised was that the papers provided for the meeting had been incorrectly drawn up and new papers were before Members and the audience. I am concerned that such a mistake was made at such an important meeting and more concerned that it took up precious minutes at the start of the meeting.

The timetable left little time for the consultation on both schools – limited as it was to 2hrs 45mins. At last we had an Arabic translation of an abbreviated overview of the full consultation document – although this was only made available at the meeting. The meeting hall was full with a number having to stand. Halesowen CE went first and with this meeting being arranged well before the end of their consultation period the time allowed seemed appropriate although it overran. All Councillors were able to make their concerns known or ask questions although some did not receive answers.

The meeting reconvened at around 7.45 and a large number of questions were raised. I am extremely disappointed on a number of issues:

- 1 There remained a large number of unanswered questions, one young man had handed in his question at 8pm yet it remained unanswered.
- 2 The Chair allowed answers from three separate parties – the Cabinet Member and both lead officers. Often restating what each had said. This massively reduced the time available for questions which I attempted to time and out of the 85 minutes available approximately 50 minutes were taken up by the answers. I find this unacceptable.
- 3 The Chair did not allow an extension of the time available which he could easily have done by suspending standing orders. I did attempt to make this point but the Chair refused to hear me and in fact closed the meeting. He had allowed another Councillor to speak prior to me and allowed that Councillor 3 minutes 30 seconds whereas he stopped me after 100 seconds.
- 4 At least two other Councillors had indicated their intention to speak they were unable to do so as the meeting had been closed.
- 5 This meeting took place two days before the end of the consultation period which significantly reduces the time available for people to then make their opinions known.

As this was the last chance for any of us to take part in the Consultation I am deeply disappointed that the public and Councillors were not allowed the time needed to put their points, this was in contrast to the earlier part of the meeting where all questions raised about the CE school had been raised and all Councillors allowed input. I question the fairness of such an approach.

At each of the stages of this process and in similar consultations relating to the Boroughs Primary Schools the subject of falling rolls has been aired considerably. There is no doubt that birth rates have fallen and that families are getting smaller as a consequence the current provision in Dudley, as with many other areas, is above that currently needed. This is far less of a problem in Secondary Schools than in the Primary sector. The figures given in the Consultation document of current over provision do show that Cradley High has a current problem.

I raised this at the initial meeting on 12th July. I said that we had heard from the people at that meeting that local Primary Schools were actively pointing parents and pupils towards other Secondary Schools in the area. I also stated that Cradley High had a mixed reputation locally. I then went on to point out that the people at the meeting and in the locality had never seen anything promoting how well this school is actually doing and what it has to offer to the children. I also stated that we had some 100 ‘ambassadors’ in the hall and that by going out to our community and promoting the school we may see a raised interest in joining the school. I asked why the education officers, who had already stated they knew of the problem, had not made an effort to see why this situation existed and then helped the School and other local agencies to show how good the School is and encourage and support it to alleviate the problem of local youngsters not choosing their local school. I also stated that if we could attract more pupils would this affect the closure.

The answer I received from John Freeman was puzzling and to be blunt disheartening. He stated that it was not his role or his department's role to help a school in this position; he went on to state that Teachers, Pupils, Parents, Governors and Councillors should be ambassadors and should have done more to help the school. He did however imply that if further pupils could be attracted then the decision would need to be revisited. A number of other people had already raised similar questions that evening and similar answers were given.

In the past two weeks local parents have been out to the local Primary Schools in the 'catchment area', they have spoken with pupils and parents. They have not spent much more than a couple of hours in each school yet in that time they have attracted some 268 pupils whose parents have signed to say that they now wish their children to attend Cradley High School. These 268 (with an additional parent adding to the list at the HAC meeting) extra pupils would enable Cradley High to have full rolls for the next two academic years. The signed documents have been handed over to John Freeman.

I find it tremendously disappointing that we, the administration, have failed where a small number of local people with little or no academic background have succeeded where we have failed.

I am also deeply concerned that when people contacted admissions they were told that the School was closing and that there was no point in putting their child's name down for it. Despite this being raised with the Cabinet member and the lead officers explaining that in no way should this happen this continued to be the case until the end of the consultation period.

At the start of this whole process all of the three Ward Councillors made it known that we would represent the views of the residents of our Ward. We were approached initially by a small number of people who felt frustration and anger about the concept of closing Cradley High School. They echoed the views of the many people who we have spoken to over the following weeks. They have a belief that Cradley High has in some way fallen into disfavour with the education leaders of the Borough. They have voiced concerns about the way the numbers have been allowed to fall and disbelief that no-one wants to take responsibility for this.

What they have learnt during the process is that there needs to be a greater influence over the school by local people. For example there is no parent teacher association; there is little if any knowledge about the Governing body; there is a concern about the image of the school. Each of these subjects has been discussed freely by the ever-increasing number of local people who now form the Cradley High Action Committee.

The local Church, St. Peters is now taking an active part in the Committee, it provides its premises for regular meetings. The Church is deeply concerned about the basic unjust approach and the decision to exclude Cradley High from the broader consultation on Secondary

provision for the future in Dudley. Barnardos have expressed private concerns that the community cohesion work undertaken by them and other agencies including the Police and Connexions is being undermined. Similar private reservations have been expressed to me and others by the Police and other agencies.

Many of these concerns have been increased by the fact that although Cradley High pupils and teachers managed fantastic results in the 2006 GCSE round this was not given any weight by the Cabinet Member, in fact they feel almost every other school had praise but not Cradley High. It is true as the Cabinet Member has said that if English and Maths are included then the results are not as good, however with the mix of pupils in the school and the 50% of pupils who have some form of special educational need such results are truly superb.

The school also provides a safe environment for the wide and diverse mix of pupils who attend. When the phrase 'English as a second language' is used this normally means a grasp of basic English, for many pupils in this School it means no English whatsoever. Yet despite this diverse mix the School has had an excellent report from OFSTED and is seen by pupils and parents from the ethnic minority communities as a beacon.

Much has been made by the Lead Officers of the fact that local people do not send their children to this school, and that this will mean the effect of closing the school will be minimised since many local children already travel to schools by some form of transport. I find this attitude unprofessional, we have a stated policy to increase the numbers of children who walk to school, again another reason why the officers should have put resource into finding out why local children chose other schools.

There are other issues that have been raised and questions that still do not have answers, I am aware that others have already written into the consultation and I hope that the many and varied issues raised by residents, pupils and staff will be given the attention they truly deserve.

I congratulate the local people on their work and hope now that the necessary information and reasoning has been put forward to enable the Cabinet member to decide that, after consultation, Cradley High School should remain open, albeit there is still work to do. I pledge that I and my fellow Councillors will work to ensure that Cradley High will be fully supported by ourselves.

Email 14

I would just like to say what a pity it would be to close Cradley High after getting such good GCE results. I have never been interested in local elections before, but I will definitely make a point of voting in the future I am sure I am not the only parent to think this way. This may be the last chance the council has to do the right thing, as Maggie Thatcher the milk snatcher keeps coming to mind.

Email 15

You may both be interested to know that I've had a complaint from a parent today who wishes to transfer her child from Redhill to Cradley. She has repeatedly phoned the school and not one of her calls has been returned, this has been going on since July. She has now decided to change her preference.

Parents have followed the proper procedure and we have forwarded the transfer application direct to the Head, again there has been no response.

I just wanted to raise it because I feel it works both ways, we are being accused of saying the school is closing, what sort of message does this give to parents.

Email 16

1. Presentation of Council's case: title of document (spin); statistics on birth-rates, school nos. (selective, i.e. downswing of cycle); contradiction over time-scale (future changes occur too late but need to meet needs over next 20-30 years).
2. Changing situation in Cradley & Halesowen: new housing going up all over which makes your statistics out of date. Local schools, e.g. Earls, Windsor have no or very few spare places. Closure of Cradley High will make further land available, possibly for more housing.
3. Government policy on school competition: This has worked against Cradley, it's numbers have fallen faster than birth-rates. Yet Cradley's pass-rate has improved dramatically, above say, Hillcrest which is increasing its admission number. This is contradictory to the intention of the policy.

In total, the case made out in the consultation document is a mess and, therefore, cannot be a sound basis for closing the school. You are on the verge of making a serious, strategic error which will hurt other areas as well as Cradley. You are about to cause overcrowding in local schools to the detriment of children and young people in the area.

Telephone calls

5 telephone calls were received during the consultation period.

Telephone call 1

A parent with a child due to start at Cradley High School in September enquired whether to continue to send the child there or find an alternative school. An appeal for Windsor had already been turned down.

Telephone call 2

A parent with a child due to move into year 10 in September expressed concern about the child staying at the school if teachers will be leaving. The parent asked whether she should move the child now or, if not, wanted reassurances that the child would not be taught by supply teachers.

Telephone call 3

A parent with a child in due to go up to Year 9 in September asked for an Arabic speaker to contact her to help her better understand the document and the implications for her daughter.

Telephone call 4

A parent rang to ask for an Urdu speaker to contact her to go over some key points in the consultation document.

Telephone call 5

The caller works at Cradley High School and attended the consultation meetings where John Freeman assured everyone that he would speak to staff regarding referring pupils to Cradley High and that Council staff would not discourage parents from sending their children there. Since this meeting the caller rang the Admissions Department regarding placements for some year 7 and year 9 pupils but was told nowhere in the area was available at the moment. They wouldn't offer Cradley High because it was up for closure.

The caller is appalled by this and will be writing a formal letter of complaint.

Complaints

2 complaint forms were received during the consultation.

Complaint 1

Following a meeting for parents on the discussion for proposals to close Cradley High School, I was upset to hear that anyone phoning the Admissions Dept. were not being offered places at CHS. Mr Freeman said this should not be happening and he would personally see the Admissions Dept. and tell them not to do this again. When I phoned the Admissions Dept for a place for a year 7 and year 9 pupil, I was told CHS was up for closure and not an option.

When I phoned Mr Freeman he was not able to speak to me but after giving details to his PA I was told Mr Freeman or one of his officers would phone me back that day (27/7/06). It is now 23/8/06 and I am still waiting. This is absolutely outrageous. I would like answers!

Complaint 2

My letter addressed to Mr John Freeman concerning the proposed closure of Cradley High School was totally ignored by Mr Freeman and was passed on to his colleague Mr Ray Watson. It was blatantly obvious that he had not even read my comments or had any intention of answering my questions, the best he could come up with was that I would find the answers to my questions within the consultation document and where could I find this document, on the website.

I had made it clear I was employed in a minor role at CHS so was in receipt of the dictatorial (oh) consultation document. No answers to my personal questions where within. Rude and unprofessional springs to mind. My taxes pay this gentleman's wages and a personal question deserves a personal answer. I would like for Mr Freeman to read my letter and get back to me himself with the answers I deserve.

Petition

One petition was received with the following title; 'This petition is in protest against the proposed closure of Cradley High School. Hereby the following people wish to save the school and ensure a secondary education for children at Cradley.'

Analysis of Cradley High School Petition

Description	Number of Signatures
Parent of Cradley Student	23
Cradley Student	213
Cradley Staff	38
Primary Parent	12
Sibling / relative of Cradley Student	10
Year 6 Student	1
Other Secondary Parent	4
Other Secondary Student	2
Other Primary Staff	17
Primary Sibling / Relative	1
Unknown	72
Total Signatures	393

Other Representation

A pledge list was handed to the Director of Children’s Services at the Special Halesowen Area Committee Meeting. It was said that the list was made up of signatures from parents with year 5 and year 6 children who wanted to attend Cradley High in the near future. The title of the pledge list is as follows;

“Due to the excellent exam results of 72% that Cradley High School achieved this year and the recent press coverage, I would like further information about the school as I would consider sending my child to Cradley High in the near future.”

The analysis of the list is as follows.

Total signatures	278
Duplications	8
Unreadable / untraceable information given	51
Total Attributable Signatures	219

From the 219 signatures, 347 primary school age children could be found. The year groups of these children are as follows;

Nursery	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
37	29	55	55	45	46	35	45
10.66%	8.36%	15.85%	15.85%	12.97%	13.26%	10.09%	12.96%

The majority of children on the list are currently in Years 1 and 2 and would not begin to move to secondary schools for 5 years and therefore would not have a significant impact on Cradley High School’s current low numbers.

Of the 45 Year 6 pupils included in the list, 14 applications for secondary school have been received. None of the 14 applications list Cradley High as a first preference. The breakdown of these 14 applications is as follows;

Cradley High listed as second preference	1
Cradley High listed as third preference	4
Cradley High listed as fourth preference	1
Cradley High not listed at all	8

This list includes 4 pupils who have siblings already attending Cradley High School.

Late Responses

105 late responses were received to the consultation and therefore have not been considered in the consultation process.

1 late response was received where the description of the respondent was not stated.

20 late responses were received from Year 7 pupils at Cradley High School.

34 late responses were received from Year 8 pupils at Cradley High School.

24 late responses were received from Year 9 pupils at Cradley High School.

8 late responses were received from Year 10 pupils at Cradley High School.

11 late responses were received from Year 11 pupils at Cradley High School.

7 late responses were received from pupils at Cradley High School who did not include their name or year group.

A petition was also handed in too late to be included in the consultation process.

Consultation Meetings

Staff consultation meeting - 12 July 2006 at 3.30pm

Questions regarding the effect possible closure will have on pupils

1. Can other schools provide the standard and quality of SEN support that Cradley supplies, having over 300 pupils on the SEN register?

Yes. We would also expect schools to increase their capacity for supporting children with SEN as they take on staff from Cradley High School.

2. Is it an assumption that smaller schools don't work or are failing? All educational studies ever carried out show that smaller class sizes are more beneficial to pupils in terms of attention and learning and results, so why close those that have a good balance?

Whilst there may be a good balance at the moment, the falling pupil numbers mean that the school will start to lose money for staffing, supplies, equipment and will become unviable in the near future. This will mean that the school will no longer be able to afford to sustain the quality of education being offered.

3. The document states that the pupil: staff ratio is in the manner of 15:1, how many staff does this take account of? That ratio suggests that some of the administration staff are included in the equation. Can you clarify this?

Page 12 of the document refers to the pupil: teacher ratio which is commonly used and is different from the question's reference to pupil: staff ratio. In January 2006 there were 607 pupils in Years 7 – 11 attending Cradley High School and there were 46 full time equivalent teachers. This gives a pupil: teacher ratio of 13.2 pupils to each FTE teacher. The average for the borough was 15.6. This is a standard calculation used by the DfES.

4. Should staff leave due to gaining other jobs, and the school is chosen for closure, how do you envisage the curriculum to maintain to provide the highest quality education, serving pupils and community?

We would make arrangements to ensure standards are maintained and will support any remaining staff to ensure children continue to get the highest quality education. We will not know precisely how this will be achieved until we know more about pupil numbers and curriculum needs.

5. The document suggests that our nearest schools are 'full' (proposals for Hillcrest and Windsor only allowing for 58 places). If this is the case where will our pupils go as it would take some a three bus journey to get to some schools? (ref table 4 page 9)

Discussions are taking place with Dudley schools to confirm places. We will not know the precise demand until parents have expressed preferences for alternative schools.

6. Will you guarantee parents that they will be able to get their children into their preferred school if Cradley closes?

We cannot guarantee this but will do our best to try and get children into their first preference school.

7. You state that pupils from other schools may not wish to move to Cradley. What guarantees do you have that Cradley pupils will wish to transfer to other schools?

We have already received transfer forms and expect this to continue. We will support all parents and pupils in this process. We recognise that this will be a period of some uncertainty for pupils and parents.

8. We have built up successful and effective personal relationships with the pupils, parents and carers of the school and our local community. Has it been considered how this would

affect these people and how the community would be ripped apart if this school was to close?

We recognise the work the school has done in these areas. We are consulting with pupils, parents / carers and the community about this issue as part of the overall consultation but with only 34 'first preference' children for September 2006 the school is not viable.

9. We have a number of pupils who are travellers and have fostered relationships with the families that allow learning opportunities when they are travelling and when they are in school. Is there a provision to provide places in the same school for these pupils to ensure that their education does not suffer?

The traveller's education service is aware of the situation and will ensure that pupils continue to receive appropriate support.

10. 'Duty of Care' goes beyond the teacher in the classroom. A vast number of our pupils will not be able to attend schools within walking distance or one bus ride. The safety of young people forced to wait at several bus stops is a serious safety issue. In the worst case scenario, is Dudley MBC prepared to deal with the real possibility of law suits?

There is always the possibility of concerns and / or claims arising from legislation. We will do our best to ensure that the transitional arrangements are effective. However, very few pupils will be beyond the statutory walking distance from their new school.

11. How do you see larger classes in other schools improving the education of pupils – especially those with learning difficulties?

Transferring pupils to other schools does not mean larger classes. We plan to ensure that class sizes remain broadly similar as now by using additional teaching spaces and staff. A reasonable measure to use is the Borough pupil: teacher ratio (see question 3). Pupils with learning difficulties will continue to receive appropriate support.

12. Consider the pupils that are already on their second school after having been excluded / asked to leave / not being able to cope at their previous school. The authority has been happy to send them here for many years and we have done a good job with many of them. How are they going to cope in a third school?

Transferring schools midway through a year or key stage is often difficult. We will continue to support pupils, Cradley High School and the receiving schools during this process.

13. Cover Point successfully helps disaffected pupils and those with different emotional needs re-integrate into school life. What provision would be made for these types of pupils in other schools or by Dudley MBC?

Discussions will take place with other schools about this. Disaffected children and young people need support to engage with learning and this is a high priority for Children's Services. Other schools have similar arrangements to Cover Point.

Questions regarding the effect on jobs

14. Can you give a guarantee, in writing, that there will be no compulsory redundancies if the school were to close?

If a decision to close is made, all staff are at risk of losing their jobs. However, there were no redundancies from the Primary School Review and we expect the same situation in this review. We cannot offer a guarantee but we do not wish to make any redundancies as this costs money which should go to the children. We will work with staff and unions to ensure appropriate future placements.

15. What provisions are you putting in place to ensure staff are supported in their CPD? Is extra funding available for staff in light of these proposals?

Training and development will be a key issue for those seeking redeployment. Discussions will be held with staff about these issues from September onwards.

16. If the result of the consultation is to close Cradley, what incentives will you offer to keep staff on site until the closure thus preventing the use of supply teachers which will be detrimental to the pupils and remaining staff?

The impact of the movement of staff will need to be continually assessed throughout this process to ensure no detriment to the pupils. We will work with the governors to ensure the quality of provision is maintained at Cradley.

17. Due to our knowledge and understanding of how the affected primary schools in the borough are coping with their closures this academic year, what will Dudley MBC guarantee every member of staff in terms of support through this process whatever the result of the consultation may be?

We are committed to supporting staff in finding new placements. Redeployment support by way of the Schools Policy will be implemented. Further meetings with staff groups will be necessary to share the details of support both within the school and the Council. Each

individual is in a different position and all staff will be offered individual advice to suit their needs.

18. What is Dudley MBC's policy on redeployment?

A copy of the School's Policy and the Council's Policy will be sent to staff. Redeployment is a very complex area. The Primary Review section of the website has a list of frequently asked questions about staff jobs. Please feel free to look at this and we will keep adding to it as we go along. If you have any questions forward them to us and we will endeavour to answer them as quickly as possible. We can come back and hold further meetings with staff in the autumn term if required. Smaller groups may be better as this will allow more questions to be answered.

19. If we face redeployment, will there be support for us to find another job until a permanent one is found? (i.e. if a temporary position is taken and another job needed)

Yes. Support will be available to all staff until permanent alternatives have been secured.

20. For staff who are trainees or working as unqualified teachers (part way through degree etc) are there schools that will commit to providing them with work based training?

Yes. We will work with individuals to ensure minimum disruption to their training. It is important to us that these skills are retained.

21. If redeployment takes place and staff are moved to general teaching posts as there were no other available jobs, would TLR allowances be protected?

Yes. Staff in receipt of "safeguarding" payments as a result of the removal of management allowances will be unaffected by redeployment. Safeguarding payments will continue up to their expiry date. Those in receipt of TLR payments would have that element protected if new posts do not carry a TLR payment.

22. If redeployed, would admin, cleaners and teaching assistants have their scale of salary protected?

Yes. The redeployment policy provides protection for both teaching and non-teaching posts.

Questions regarding the document and miscellaneous items

23. Parents and pupils are confused by the consultation document, stating that they do not understand the graphs and tables. What will Dudley MBC do to ensure that the statistics

used are clarified to enable parents and pupils to have a full understanding of the consultation process?

The consultation meetings are a forum for people to ask questions to help them to understand the document. We are willing to come back and hold more meetings in the autumn term if required. People can also contact us directly by telephone, letter, email or anyway they wish and officers will try to answer any queries to the best of their ability.

We will hold a meeting with the pupils early in the autumn term to help them with any queries they may have. It may also help if teachers can talk through the document with pupils and explain that this is only consultation and that things may change.

24. Included in the Primary consultation document there were response forms. Why hasn't this been the case with Cradley's consultation document?

The Council was criticised for shaping the questions on the response form to achieve the outcome they wanted. To prevent this and to ensure people were getting their views across as they were intended we decided on this to make it a more open response.

25. 'The proposal to close Cradley High School provides opportunities to ensure that all children of secondary school age have access to good quality education and improve the range of facilities for the community' – This statement implies that Cradley does not provide a quality education and yet we have been told that this consultation document is about admission numbers. Why has this been stated in the document? (ref Page 16 point 5)

As the impact of falling numbers and smaller budgets affects Cradley the quality of education will be adversely affected. The proposal to close Cradley will provide opportunities for pupils to continue their education in other schools.

26. The consultation period started on July 5th – The staff at the school received the documents July 6th – some parents still do not have the document.

The consultation started on 6 July at 12:00 midday. Copies of the document were sent to the school on this day and were received by the school before 1:00pm. The Council's usual method for distributing documents to the parents / carers is to send copies to the school and get them sent home with the children. However, due to Cradley High's policy of not sending letters home with the children, the consultation documents for parents were sent out in the post on 6 July.

27. What would happen to the school building and the site if the school were to close?

We have yet to make a decision on the future of Cradley High School. No discussions have been held about the site other than for the continued use of the leisure facilities.

28. Yesterday a pupil who had applied for a place at Cradley was told that they were unable to come here by admissions as the school was closing down. Please explain.

Parents are being told that we are going through consultation and that proposals have been made but not that the school is closing. Offers have still been made for children to attend Cradley High School.

29. 'Putting children and Young People First in Dudley' is your tag line for the document, whereas the document focuses on Dudley MBC's financial position. You are putting you and your money first, not the young people. Please explain.

Money and standards are linked. No money will actually be saved from closing the school. The reason we are now proposing to close Cradley High School is because we are getting less money to share out due to the falling pupil numbers. This is not about Local Authority money; this is the schools' money. We are putting children first in that with less money the school will no longer be viable and therefore would not be able to sustain the quality of education. This is not in any way due to poor staffing; it is simply because the school will not be able to afford enough staff to sustain quality education. We would not be proposing this closure if we did not think it was the correct thing to do for the children.

30. As stated on the Dudley Website, you have stated that pupils will be consulted. When is this to happen?

We intend to consult with pupils early in the autumn term.

Questions regarding other schools and their provision

31. If other schools are to increase their intake have they all been consulted on this and are they part of the process?

Yes.

32. Have other schools changed their admissions policies?

No.

33. Can other schools meet the rise in pupil numbers satisfactorily?

Discussions are taking place with other schools about the number of places that could be created.

34. Can other schools and Dudley MBC run proper transport services for pupils from Cradley?

Discussions will take place with the transport department to find an appropriate solution to transport issues. Most children live well within the statutory walking distance of alternative schools.

35. Has Dudley MBC advised other schools on strategies to accommodate Cradley pupils should the school be closed?

See 33.

36. Did Dudley MBC at any point consider the closure of other schools in the borough – if so which ones?

Decisions to consult on the closure of any school are not taken lightly. At Cradley High School the number of applications has dropped year-on-year with only 34 first choice applications for September 2006. Cradley High School is no longer viable. No other secondary school is in the same position as Cradley High School.

37. If Cradley has been nominated for closure due to pupil admission numbers, has Old Swinford, with a PAN of 113 but with only 19 places taken in Year 7 next academic year, been considered for closure? (ref table 4 page 9)

The information provided by Old Swinford Hospital School was accurate. However, Old Swinford Hospital is a state boarding school and is not directly comparable to other Dudley secondary schools. A clearer picture of this schools position is shown in the table below.

Old Swinford Hospital School			
PAN	Year	Current pupil numbers	Number of surplus places
60	7	48	12*
60	8	57	3*
75	9	81	-6
75	10	72	3*
75	11	79	-4
135	12	138	-3
113	13	124	-11
Total for school		599	0

*Boarding places only

38. If Dudley MBC cannot afford to keep Cradley open with smaller numbers, why are you pouring money into Old Swinford School which has smaller numbers and could go completely private?

Dudley is not “pouring money” into Old Swinford Hospital School. They have applied to the DfES for funding to expand and have received a capital grant.

39. Are other schools in the authority prepared to take pupils who have been excluded from / asked to leave their present school etc, when there is no longer the cushion of sending them to Cradley?

Yes.

40. Why are some schools within the borough interviewing pupils without the appropriate transfer form being completed with the intention of offering the pupils a place from September 2006?

If a parent expresses a preference to move schools then the law says they have to be admitted. Interviews are unlawful but where a parent expresses a preference the pupil has to be admitted if there is an available space. We will investigate any specific allegations.

41. An article on the front of ‘The Express and Star’ claims that a number of children in Dudley still do not know which secondary school they are going to attend next year. It quotes that a child who has been refused a place at Hillcrest and has been offered a place at Pensnett which is two bus rides away. Why has this child, and probably many others, not been offered a place at Cradley which is one short bus ride away?

At this stage of the year there are always appeals going on in all local authorities. Dudley has a good record of ensuring first choice preferences wherever possible. All pupils who are unsuccessful in getting their first choice are offered a place at the next nearest school with places available. It is not appropriate to comment on individual cases.

42. A family of three was recently refused places at a local secondary school which is now offering pupils places for September despite no transfer forms being completed. Why is this the case?

See 40 and 41. Please notify the Admissions Department and they will investigate.

Questions regarding missing or erroneous data

43. Why have we and the parents not been provided with the data for the borough, which would give a much fairer comparison or at least with other schools of a comparative size?

It is not clear what data is required. If it is not available on www.dudley.gov.uk or the links in the consultation document, please clarify what is needed.

44. Admission numbers may have dipped, but the school takes on a substantial number of pupils throughout the year – why has this fact been omitted?

The number of mid-year admissions is not sufficient to alter the overall position. There are simply too few pupils attending Cradley.

45. It states in the document that large schools are difficult to manage – so why is Dudley MBC proposing to make large schools even bigger?

Research shows a very limited link between school size and standards. Where there is a correlation it occurs within a range of school sizes. Below and above these sizes the correlation largely disappears. Please see the consultation document Transforming Secondary Provision on www.dudley.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools-and-colleges/learning-for-the-future/transforming-secondary-provision for further references.

46. There are at least 4 major housing developments going on in the area: Former Cradley Heath Speedway, feeding Dudley Wood, one of our major feeder schools; Former Huntingdon Gardens previously feeding Colley Lane, our major feeder school; Henley Foundaries, Banners Lane; Clancys, Belle Vale. (ref page 16 point 6)

These housing developments are not large enough to have a sufficient impact on admission to Cradley.

47. John Freeman knew in advance of this consultation – why has this document been released at such an awkward time of year, and why did he not inform staff himself?

There is never a good time to announce proposals to close a school. The timing of this announcement was designed to avoid any disruption with the Year 11 examination timetable.

Questions regarding contradiction in data in the consultation document

48. The report is confusing regarding the movement of pupils. What will happen with our current Year 9 pupils who will be doing their GCSE's in the summer term of 2008 – in one part of the document (ref page 8 final paragraph) it suggests that they will be moved during

the 2006/7 academic year, and in another part (ref table 11 page 18) it suggests they will stay. What is the actual proposal?

There are several ways of managing the transition process. The proposal in the document indicates that Year 9 would receive support for choosing options at other schools (to start as Year 10 in September 2007). It will take some months before a decision on closure is reached and parents will be asked for initial preferences to support discussions with other schools and plan capacity where it is needed. It is likely that the consultation process may suggest other ways of managing the transition and these will be considered carefully.

49. The document claims that pupils will be moved to other local schools and yet it shows that many of the schools suggested have no more places available for pupils in those year groups. (ref table 3 page 8)

See previous responses.

50. The document states that Cradley's pupil teacher ratio in January 2006 was 13:9 with 48 full time teachers. The same page says that in January 2006 it was 13:2 with 42 full time teachers. This is confusing for the staff – how do you expect parents and community members to understand this? (ref page 12 paragraph 1 / bullet point 1)

See question 3.

51. The document stated that 'All of the nearby secondary schools are maintaining their admission numbers' (ref page 17 paragraph 2). However according to earlier tables this is not the case (ref table 4, page 9 / table 5, page 10). Inclusive of the fact that Cradley has shown a significant rise in GCSE A*- C grades compared to schools such as Pedmore.

Pedmore Technology College and Community School remains viable as the admission numbers continue to be around 130. Numbers will continue to be in excess of 750 pupils for the foreseeable future. Cradley High School's admission numbers have fallen year-on-year and the total number of pupils now leaves the school in a non-viable position.

Questions regarding choosing Cradley as nomination for closure

52. Given that our results at KS3 and KS4 have been improving year on year for at least 3 years, can you explain why this school has been considered for closure? (ref table 8 page 14)

We are very proud of the school's achievements and we congratulate you for this. This proposal for closure is simply about falling pupil numbers and the impact on future standards, not about standards that have been achieved so far.

53. Is this process a consultation as to whether the school closes or HOW it closes, Cradley has been singled out at this early stage and the document suggests it is a forgone conclusion?

It is a consultation and decisions have not been made. However, the facts are that pupil numbers are falling and this proposal is based on this. It is our intention to close Cradley High School but this is not a 'done deal'. If the School Organisation Committee and / or the Schools Adjudicator reject the Council's proposals to close Cradley High School then the school will stay open and continue but the obvious problems of numbers and budgets are real and will remain.

54. The statistics show that the intake is dropping in many other schools and at some locally this is lower than Cradley. Why has the school been singled out so early in the process?

The proposal has been made as Cradley High School is the smallest school in the Borough and has experienced the sharpest fall in rolls.

55. Pensnett is a local school that has a lower intake than Cradley, and a poor performance in a recent Ofsted report – why has this school and others with falling numbers, not had a consideration for closure?

We annually review supply and demand at all of our schools, including Pensnett School of Technology, and will continue to do so in the future. Unfortunately the fall in birth rate is more extreme in this part of the borough with a greater impact here than elsewhere.

56. Are you hoping that by proposing a consultation on closure the result will be a self fulfilling prophecy in that pupil numbers will decline, staff will leave out of fear and we will not be able to recruit permanent staff thus resulting in a NEED to close?

The Council had to name the school in the consultation. This is bound to cause uncertainty but we have to go through the consultation period by law.

57. How many pupils was Cradley ideally meant to serve? Approximately 650 (but can hold a maximum of 750) to allow for the smaller class sizes teachers and parents have fought for. Why can't a smaller school work?

Schools are funded according to the number of pupils. Dudley receives less money because overall numbers are dropping. Cradley receives a smaller share of this smaller grant because its own numbers are dropping. Cradley would not be able to afford staffing, premises, supplies and services needed.

58. Some of our pupils live closer to Sandwell schools than those where places are being 'made'. Surely it is not in Dudley's interests to lose numbers as this will affect their budget and this is the reason given for closing Cradley.

Should Sandwell resident pupils choose schools outside Dudley there would be an impact on the overall budget. There are not enough Dudley or Sandwell pupils attending Cradley to ensure viability.

59. There have been several information leaks and newspaper reports stating that Cradley will be closed. These all appeared before the consultation was made public. Is it of any surprise that there has been a fall in roll?

No information was released into the public domain in advance of the consultation. However, we cannot stop the press reporting public information. Unfortunately this has created uncertainty. The numbers at Cradley have been falling year-on-year since 2002, long before any announcement was made.

Other Questions arising in the meeting

60. How do you measure quality?

Using DfES and GCSE outcomes. All of the five ECM outcomes are important.

61. Other scores are lower than ours.

This proposal is not related to the standards achieved by Cradley High School or in comparison to standards achieved in other schools. The proposal is based on the fact that pupil numbers have fallen rapidly and the impact this will have on future standards at Cradley High School.

62. You had difficulties with the Primary Review, is this why Cradley has been singled out now?

See previous responses.

63. We have not seen this document you have given us at the meeting before. Does this mean it is a new consultation document? The options on this are different and we've never seen it until tonight. Is it an additional document?

No, this is a summary fact sheet. The tables at the end show how the data depends on how they are calculated and how there may be other ways of doing things depending on what years children move. Closure is a complicated issue and things could change along the way.

64. Why have the other schools in the area been expanded to allow more pupils to attend if numbers are dropping at Cradley? Allowing schools to 'compete' in this way will always have an adverse effect on other schools. Why was this allowed?

The Government policy of parental preference determines where the children go and what schools are classed as 'popular'. In DfES terms, 'popular' means 'regularly oversubscribed' – that is more applications than places. Only popular schools are allowed to expand to meet the parents' demands. Secondary children are more willing to travel so they are not restricted to their local schools. In November, before these proposals were in place, parents of only 34 children had chosen Cradley High School as their first preference.

65. Just for clarification, would funding science projects fall under special funding?

Yes.

Governors consultation meeting - 12 July 2006 at 5.30pm

1. There was some confusion over the letters to the governors regarding the date of this meeting. Governors were not aware of the meeting and it would have been helpful if Governors had had more time to prepare.

Letters addressed to the governors with the meeting details were sent to the school with a copy of the consultation document and were received by the school before 1.00pm on 06 July 2006. A further meeting for the Governing Body can be arranged in September (Early Autumn Term) if any governors were unable to make it. This meeting is just one part of an ongoing process.

2. How will the timescale and the consultation work?

We are required to follow a set of stages. The first stage is consultation which will run until 28 September. Using the responses to this consultation there will then be a report to Cabinet Members. Statutory Notices will then be posted at the school with a 6 week representation period for people to object. If objections are received then the matter will be presented to the School Organisation Committee who will then make a decision based on all the evidence. If they fail to come to a decision the matter will be forwarded to the Schools Adjudicator who will have the final say.

3. We recognise that this is a difficult process but the document reads as if it is already a 'done deal'. In future it may be better if you approach the language you use differently. Is this a 'done deal'?

No, the only decision made so far is to go through a consultation. We will make sure we look at the document and try to avoid this in future. We will engage with communities to make sure they understand this which we can do in September if required. If people have questions we're very happy to meet their needs and answer in an appropriate format. We are willing to discuss our consultation with all groups.

4. All we are saying is that the language you use makes people scared. You need to think carefully about the wording.

We do our best to make the wording clear and concise but we also need to make intentions to close clear. It is hard to put across the point that we do intend to close Cradley High School but that it is still a genuine consultation.

5. You are causing a great deal of frustration and uncertainty with these proposals, especially where questions are not being directly answered.

Unfortunately, with any consultation process there will be a level of uncertainty but we will do what we can to work with everyone and try to provide answers where possible. Sometimes we are unable to give definite answers to some questions as the outcomes may be unpredictable.

These proposals are not a criticism of Cradley High School and are not a reflection on anybody. We have to take action as the school will no longer be viable. Individual discussions can take place with people if required.

6. As a parent and a leader of a Yemeni group, I would like time in the parents meeting to ask questions and translate. I would like to speak on their behalf. Will you allow this?

Time will be given at the meeting for questions to be asked but we may not be able to answer all questions due to time constraints. However, we are very willing to come back and talk to small groups if required.

7. We realise it is a statutory obligation to consult. Is this just an information sharing session instead of a proper consultation?

We have looked at a wide range of possibilities and think that this is the most viable approach. If, during consultation, other options become apparent we will have to consider these but a lot of thought has gone into these proposals already. We do not make decisions to close schools lightly. We are acting in accordance with the School Standards and Framework Act (1998) which is on the DfES website and legislation is set out. You will find consultation is included. You may have read in press that

Ministers want to investigate us but the DfES responded that there was no need to do this as our processes are correct.

8. Why was there not an Arabic translation in the consultation document?

We would like to apologise for this. It was requested with the others and we hadn't spotted that it had not been provided. Arabic speakers will be available on request to help and a translator will be here tonight. A specific meeting can be arranged if required.

9. Will support be available if someone comes up with an alternative option?

Yes, discussions will take place to explore and investigate any alternative options to consider whether it is possible / viable / better than closure etc. This may lead to further consultation. There will also be support for the Governing Body and Officers will be nominated as a focal point.

10. Why have you waited until now to issue document? It is very bad timing with this being the end of term.

It was important not to disrupt the GCSE timetable. If we had waited any longer to issue the document we would have been running into the busiest time of year. We wanted to give people time for reflection on the proposals and Council offices are open during the holidays so questions can still be asked. We also have the opportunity to run more meetings when the new term starts. We also wanted to try to help stop the rumours going around and provide answers early.

11. We were led to believe you already knew about this decision and the falling birth rate quite early on?

Concerns about falling pupil numbers were raised before any decision to consult on Cradley High School was made. At the time these concerns did not prompt any decision to consult on closure of any school. However the problem will now start to affect the money schools receive so action must be taken if we are to ensure children continue to receive a good quality education. If more children chose to attend Cradley High School then we wouldn't be here today but as children are not choosing the school we now have to consider the future of this school in particular. After elections discussions were held and not until then was any decision made to consult. There are simply too few numbers to sustain the school and this is where the decision to consult came from. Numbers and birth rate drops are affecting Cradley High School in particular out of all the Dudley secondary schools and that is why we came to a view to advise for consultation. Only after looking at the facts very carefully was any decision made. We also wanted to stop rumours by making a decision.

12. On page 5, 3rd line of the consultation document it states that problems have been evident for 3 years. If this is true, why hasn't local authority been working with Cradley High School to correct this issue before?

Conversations have taken place with the Head each year about school results which are creditable but have not increased intake. It is a matter for the Governing Body and the school to increase its popularity. Numbers have been known by the schools for a while and it has been an issue for all schools about attracting pupils. We did inform the school that numbers needed to increase as funding is driven by the numbers of children. We cannot promote one school over another or try to influence parents as this is unfair to other schools.

13. So we have to look at why parents aren't choosing Cradley High School? We may have attracted more parents if we had better sports facilities – why couldn't LEA have invested money in this?

We have been involved in conversations about building a sports field but there is no appropriate space available in practical terms. In terms of investment in the school, this is very expensive and the asset management plan prioritises schools with more pupils. For a long time Dudley secondary schools have been broadly full. Last year there were only 3 or 4 with surplus places in year 7, this year there are 15. If there are not enough children it wouldn't matter what you do, you cannot get them if they are not there.

14. Cradley High School has always seemed like the poor sibling of other schools. Does the LEA feel responsible for the lack of investment?

Cradley High School started out as a middle school and it was always argued that this school as a secondary was surplus to requirements. The school was due to close but opposition was raised and it remained open. Poor investment meant this school was created so it was always going to be the poorest school with limited provision. Considering this it has run well for some time but the numbers of children coming through are dropping off. Parental preferences drive issues of numbers in secondary schools. By 2008 there will be substantial surplus in schools – numbers will continue to drop until 2010 where they may become stable for one or two decades but in this time we cannot maintain Cradley High School. Small secondary schools are extremely difficult to maintain with costs such as staffing etc. Dropping pupil numbers cause many problems.

15. In the Budget and resourcing section of the document the figures show Cradley High School only. Where are the other schools for comparison purposes? Why are some figures estimated and some to be confirmed?

Figures for other secondary schools are in the public domain and can be found if required. The reason for the estimation is that we know what the unit costs will be with numbers as they are now but if the numbers change then the figures could change. To be confirmed has been entered as we don't have all the information needed but we wanted to give as complete a view as possible so put in everything we did have. The birth rate figures are correct and the number of children transferring from primary to secondary are correct. The numbers for September 2006 are as correct as they can be and the figures for last year and this year are correct.

16. We realise that parental preference guides where children go to school but given that the Head and staff have made a concerted effort to raise standards, why aren't parents coming to Cradley High School after all this hard work. There has been a lack of investment. Why? What criteria were applied to other schools to be chosen for investment over Cradley Heath?

Cradley High School has had investment but there hasn't been much investment in secondary schools as a whole. The Government invests in expanding 'popular' schools (in DfES terms, popular means schools that are regularly oversubscribed). This could be down to history, parents consider many schools on how they have performed historically which may not reflect how they are performing today but unfortunately you cannot stop this way of thinking. Only a third of children from the local area attend Cradley High School and if you look at table 1 on page 7 of the consultation document you will see that since 1997 the only times the school was full was in 2002 and 2003.

17. With investment this could be a very popular school. Why can't school be invested in?

This school is only 20 years old and shouldn't really require any major investment. Other schools need major investment to maintain them as they are older than Cradley High School. The Government allocate money for investment. They would look at Cradley High School's capacity and question if they will get value for money on any spend.

18. It states in the consultation document that you considered a range of options before deciding to propose closure of Cradley High school. Are they available to view?

There are no written notes but one thing we considered was restricting intake at other schools so that more children would come to Cradley High School but this could not be done because it would cause a row with schools and the Secretary of State would not allow it.

19. So why are you increasing the intake at other schools?

Unfortunately for Cradley High School it is Government policy that successful or 'popular' schools are allowed to expand and increase their intake. Requests to the Government for expansion were raised by the Governing Body of those schools, not by the Council.

20. But won't increasing intake at other schools just create more surplus places?

Government policies do make planning difficult in this way but we need to sustain patterns and plan for the future as best we can in spite of this. We need to close schools to try and maintain our standards of education. Migration to other areas also decreases our school population.

Cradley High School is a good school and we are hugely impressed by the commitment of staff, governors etc. This has been a difficult decision to make but we feel it is the correct one. If the school continues as at present, the budgets would fall and quality would not be sustainable.

Parent / Carer consultation meeting - 12 July 2006 at 7.00pm

1. We do not think your birth rate figures are correct. Cradley has people attending who come from other boroughs – why not take these into account?

The figures we have used are Health Authority figures and have been verified so are correct. We have only concentrated on live births in Dudley, not from other boroughs. We have not included birth figures in Sandwell but if you look at section 4 of handout you will see that the numbers of children are not there.

2. Our initial reaction to this consultation is sadness and we are upset as the school has been excellent. It has coped with various problems over the years and we are sad that the LEA may have let us down due to lack of investment.

Cradley High School is the newest in the borough and shouldn't require major investment for maintenance. There hasn't been sufficient resource to spend on the school.

3. Children will find it difficult to move mid school life.

If you look at the options on the last two pages of the handout we have given some ideas on how the children could move to allow for as little disruption as possible.

4. The document felt like done deal. How much of this is actually consultation?

This is not a done deal, it is a proper consultation. Firstly we consult on proposals, followed by a period of Statutory Notices. If representations are made in this period it will then go to

the School Organisation Committee for a decision. If they cannot make a decision it could then go to the Schools Adjudicator. No decision has been made and we do not make these proposals lightly. However, if these proposals do not go through then school funding and standards will suffer. If you look at paragraph 9 of your handout you will see that as pupil numbers continue to drop, funding and staffing will decrease and the school will not be able to survive. We appreciate the difficulty of consultation and the period of uncertainty but unfortunately it is a legal process that we have to go through. We will do all in our power to minimise uncertainty but not enough local children come to this school and that is the only reason we are here.

5. We cannot understand why Children's Services have given us such short notice for this meeting. Large number of parents not received notification and Yemeni people were not aware of this meeting.

Letters detailing the time and date for the meeting, along with a copy of the consultation document, were posted out to all parents of pupils attending Cradley High School and all year 6 parents whose children will be starting in September on 6 July 2006 when the consultation document was published. Normally we would provide copies of the letter and consultation document to the school to issue to pupils so that parents would receive them the same day but due to Cradley High School's policy on not sending documents home with children we had to use the post.

This consultation period runs until 28 September so it does continue after the holidays. We are very happy to come back then and have further discussions with anyone who requires this.

6. The languages in the consultation papers did not include Arabic even though you were aware of the Yemeni community at the school. Why were the correct translations not provided?

We give our sincere apologies for this. An Arabic translation was requested and we didn't spot that it hadn't been provided. Further translations will be available on request and a specific meeting can be arranged if required.

7. We want a reason why children are not coming to Cradley High School and why the school was not pushed. Many parents do not even know it is here.

The responsibility for marketing schools lies partly with the LEA and we fulfil this responsibility by publishing our Admissions booklet and making it available to parents. The rest of the responsibility lies with the Governing Body and Headteacher. We cannot give you any reason why children are not attending but the fact is that only 34 parents gave Cradley High School as their first preference.

8. Why were other secondary schools given financial backing and not Cradley High School? Why are Old Swinford and Hillcrest expanding if pupil numbers are not there?

The Government determined parental preference and expanding successful schools should be top. Since 1996, parents have been able to name a school of their choice. At this stage schools were asked to market themselves and started issuing prospectuses, holding open days and having Ofsted reports and league tables made public. Some schools could apply for Grant Maintained Status at this point. The whole process however unfortunately took money from the Council for other schools.

9. Proposals have been put forward but not considered. Why is this?

If any alternative proposals are presented during the consultation period they will be fully considered.

10. What about children in Years 10 and 11? If teachers decide to leave before these children move on this could have a detrimental effect on this very important time in their education.

We would make arrangements to ensure standards are maintained and will support any remaining staff to ensure children continue to get the highest quality education. We will not know precisely how this will be achieved until we know more about pupil numbers and curriculum needs.

11. Your consultation document is very misleading and it reads as though it is all about money and not about education.

These proposals are not just about money but it is true that money reflects on standards as the two are linked. No money will actually be saved from closing this school. The reason we are now proposing to close Cradley High School is because we are getting less money to share out due to the falling pupil numbers. This is not about Local Authority money; this is the schools' money. We are putting children first in that with less money the school will no longer be viable and therefore would not be able to sustain the quality of education. This is not in any way due to poor staffing; it is simply because the school will not be able to afford enough staff to sustain quality education. We would not be proposing this closure if we did not think it was the correct thing to do for the children.

12. When you announced these proposals why did you first let the press and elected members know? Surely the children should have been told first.

The staff at Cradley High School were told first, followed by parents later in the day. I believe it was the staff who spoke to the press, not the Council. The children were informed by the school directly.

13. What about Year 6 children? Where will they have the option to go next year? What happens between November and when the decision is made?

These proposals are that closure will take place over a 2 year period to help with the numbers in other schools. How many places needed in each year group and how they can be provided will be explored.

14. You state that parents have right to choose schools. I wanted my child to go to Hillcrest and we had to go through appeals whilst in the meantime my child was taking their SATs at Cradley High School. Two days later we then got offered a place at Hillcrest. You've messed my child's education up once – why do it again?

We would be happy to discuss your particular circumstances at the end of the meeting if it would be helpful.

15. The school is in the same condition now as it was seven years ago. It is the condition of the school that puts parents off. Why was this not addressed?

The money to invest in the school is just not there. Money comes from the DfES based on the number of children at each school. We have very limited resource beyond that therefore no opportunity to invest. The school is only 20 years old and should not be in a bad condition.

16. So why close down a 20 year old school?

These proposals are not about the age or standards of the school, they are purely about pupil numbers and the fact that Cradley High School simply does not have enough pupils coming to the school to continue to be viable.

17. My daughter couldn't get into other schools so we had to come to Cradley High School. Where will the room in these other schools come from now? Will they have to expand? How far can they expand? What will happen when they are all full? What happens when classes get crowded?

Again these proposals are for the school to close over a two year period to help with the numbers in other schools. It will give us time to explore how many places will be needed and how these places can be provided.

The Government policy has constraints on sites to stop schools expanding too far so they can only expand up to their site limits.

18. The shortage in pupils now stems from primary schools. Many 10 and 11 year olds are being told not to come here because they are clever. Negative comments like this does not help Cradley High School attract pupils.

Investigations will take place into this matter. The school has worked with local primary schools to ensure there is an understanding but we will look into comments.

19. For example a Year 6 child at Colley Lane told her primary school teacher that she was moving up to Cradley High School and the teacher's response was 'what a shame'. Most local primary schools work with Windsor, why can't they work with Cradley?

We do recognise what you are saying. It is not acceptable for a teacher in a primary school to make such comments. We will raise the matter with primary schools.

20. Will it make any difference if you change the name of the school?

We don't know. The real issue is that there are not enough children. Changing the name of the school may have little effect.

21. Having been in this situation before, i.e. poor staffing and overpopulated classes (50 pupils), I feel that you are letting my child down in his most important year. I now feel I should move him before all this happens as I don't want my child to go through the same things I did.

This is a real concern and we can only offer assurances that no decision has yet been made. As soon as a decision is made, officers will work with the school to ensure there is a consistent staffing structure. We are trying to assure staff that if they decide to stay until the school closes they will still be looked after through redeployment. You do have very committed staff at Cradley High School who seemed more concerned about the children than themselves at their consultation meeting. With this in mind then hopefully teachers can be encouraged to stay on.

22. The GCSE results have improved over the last few years, how do you justify closure?

This is a good school with rising standards and the only reason for our proposals is the fall in pupil numbers, it is nothing to do with standards. Only 34 parents made this school their first choice. This means that there will be less money for staff and standards will deteriorate.

23. Old Swinford figures are worse than ours.

When we were collating the figures we wanted to bring them together for the whole of the borough to give parents an overall view. We had to communicate directly with some schools as they are not on our system. Old Swinford Hospital School was one of these schools so we asked the school for their figures, and they were supplied directly by school. The information provided by Old Swinford Hospital School was accurate but as a state boarding school their figures were not directly comparable to other Dudley secondary schools. This is the reason that they look to have more surplus than other schools when in fact they do not have any surplus places.

A clearer picture of this schools position is shown in the table below.

Old Swinford Hospital School			
PAN	Year	Current pupil numbers	Number of surplus places
60	7	48	12*
60	8	57	3*
75	9	81	-6
75	10	72	3*
75	11	79	-4
135	12	138	-3
113	13	124	-11
Total for school		599	0

*Boarding places only

24. We are concerned about the handout at the meeting tonight, has everyone received a copy? Has everyone received the Transforming Secondary Provision consultation document?

Copies of the handout were placed out on chairs and have been handed out to people as they have come in so everybody should have a copy and if anyone wants one we do have spares.

The Transforming Secondary Provision consultation document is available on the website for anyone who wishes to view it or participate in the consultation.

25. You were asked if you would do a proper consultation to avoid failures from the primary school review. However, the secondary review document has only just come out and then you put Cradley High School out separately. Why have you put Cradley High School

forward before you have had the results to the secondary review? Why hasn't the Directorate got a better answer? Why children aren't attending should have been looked at years ago. The only school that can provide provision for our children is The Pedmore School which is way too far. Why don't you go back to what you said at Cabinet and explore putting all schools back in the pot and not just one school. Your Maidensbridge Primary School consultation increased numbers considerably which shows that with more work, more people will come. Why can't we have the opportunity to do this work?

The secondary provision document is about securing funding for schools across the borough. The DfES will not even entertain that proposal while we have so many surplus places which is why we have to deal with this issue now. We did make a commitment to look at all schools and this is what we are doing. However, you have heard the concerns and viability issues which relate solely to Cradley High School right now and we want to protect these children.

We were very impressed by the staff and their hard work. It is important that everyone concerned acts as Ambassadors for the school.

26. What about parents who chose this school we do not want our children in a maxed out, oversized classroom. How can the teachers cope with this?

Transferring pupils to other schools does not mean larger classes. We plan to ensure that class sizes remain broadly similar as now by using additional teaching spaces and staff.

27. The Grange and Thorns are too far for some of our pupils to get to.

Comment noted.

28. This Government was elected on their policy Education, Education, Education.

Comment noted.

29. Children's education should be paramount but now children face supply teachers, disruption etc.

Please see questions 3 and 10.

30. We chose this school because of its size and its staff. Our children went to Leasowes which was too big, the teachers did not know pupils by name and did not notice that our child had disappeared for three days. Why not invest in quality and keep small, personal schools open?

The school is becoming smaller year by year and is no longer viable. We do not have the resources to keep Cradley High School open.

31. How will you guarantee that children's options will be honoured?

We will work with individuals to ensure options are followed through with other schools?

32. Why are these discussions taking place if it is not a done deal?

Because this has to be done as part of the legal process of consultation.

33. When we received and read the consultation document we contacted LEA and requested an admission form but were not guaranteed it would be dealt with.

All transfer forms received will be dealt with.

34. You have now condemned the school yourselves with these proposals. We elected you to look after our children, why aren't you doing this?

We do care passionately about the children, this we why we need to ensure a viable education in the future for all.

35. So keep the school open then.

The funding is just not there and difficult decisions have to be made. The problem faced by the school is its small intake in September 2006 and, if no change, September 2007. If the school is still too small this would have detrimental effects on the children.

36. How do you know how many children will be here in two years time?

We work on the current and historical figures and by looking at the number of children in primary schools and at the birth rates. Less and less children are coming to Cradley High School and numbers are falling. With only 34 first place preferences this year the school is losing numbers quickly.

37. Shouldn't you have encouraged people from local primary schools to come? Are you saying it's our fault the schools is closing?

Everyone is an ambassador in different ways for every school. It is a pity more children do not come to the school. If all the local children come here we wouldn't be here tonight. The fall in pupil numbers and the impact it could have on the school did not come as a surprise to the Governing Body as they have known about this for a while. They also need

to promote the school. We have done many things to help but cannot promote one school over another, this is up to the school.

38. Hillcrest was in the same position years ago but they appointed a new Headteacher and the situation got better. Why can't we do that?

The main issue is that there are about 20% fewer children coming through from primary schools to secondary schools. There are not enough children to fill all of the secondary school places.

39. Your own statistics have proven that smaller class sizes are better for children.

That's not in question. The question is, what will performance be with a lack of money, staff and resources. This is a very serious drop off of pupils and the school cannot maintain the quality of education.

40. I am a concerned parent because I live in Sandwell but I don't want to send my child to Heathfield. When my children were at primary school everything was geared for children to move to Thorns, there was no representation from Cradley High. We were given the impression that this school was purely an overflow school.

Comment noted.

41. How about the emotional side of this for the children? Year 11 and Year 7 are both very critical years.

The educational side will be maintained and regular updates will be provided. We will work with the school, children and parents to ensure children are supported and are not alone. Cradley High's strength is its pastoral systems and the commitments of the staff.

42. Why have figures been allowed to get so bad and other schools so oversubscribed? Why have parents been allowed to express oversubscribed schools?

As stated earlier, parental preference is an issue and we cannot dictate to parents which school they should opt for. The DfES has a policy of expanding popular schools. What they mean by "popular" is that schools are regularly oversubscribed. Popular schools are allowed to expand and therefore take in the extra pupils.

43. I opted for my children to attend Earls or Windsor but was told no because I'm a Sandwell resident. I was offered a further way school instead, why wasn't I offered Cradley High as an alternative as it is closer to where I live?

The admissions criteria are published in the Parents Guide to Admissions to Secondary Schools which also has information about appeals. There should be no difference in how you are treated because you live in Sandwell.

44. But I had to source this school myself, why wasn't I even offered this school when it was obvious that it was a Dudley school I wanted?

I would need more information about the specific circumstances before responding.

45. My child only started at this school today, they couldn't get in because of administration. We were told there were no places here because Cradley High School was closing down.

We are disappointed to hear this, as you should not have been told that. Staff do have to advise the parents of the situation as it would be unfair not to but should not say there are no places. Please provide the details and we will investigate.

46. These proposals are financially led. If there is no money coming into the school then it is a done deal. Why not give us the opportunity to bring more money in? Why not invest yourselves or allow us to find other investors?

This is a consultation process and we have to have one solid proposal, we cannot propose lots of ideas. You are being consulted and all your comments recorded and published. After the consultation period is over all comments will be considered and we will then go to a period of Statutory Notice. It could then go to Schools Organisation Committee to be considered. If a decision is not made or the process is flawed it could then go to the Schools Adjudicator. With all these processes to go through then the situation could change. We will consider any alternative proposals.

47. But you have said that if the school stays open it will not be sustainable anyway.

Unless the numbers rise significantly it will be unsustainable. We do not believe it is possible to attract sufficient pupils to change the position.

48. Are you open to suggestions?

All comments and suggestions will be noted and considered at the end of the consultation process.

49. You need more communication in your department. Your figures incorrect, there are no surplus places in schools as shown.

The figures were correct at the time of printing, however, with the number of transfers taking place normally, the situation changes regularly in each school.

50. This proposal is a last resort due to birth rates going down. It must have been known for a while so why weren't we told before that we have a problem?

The Governing Body have been aware of this problem.

51. But why weren't we told? Why not lower oversubscribed schools and send their children there?

The Government expand those schools, not the Council. We cannot dictate that parents come to Cradley High when they have a place at the school of their choice,

52. So why wasn't the problem highlighted before?

If we had said in public that the school is in trouble then this would have started closure expectations and caused panic. We did not want to cause all this trouble which is why we have worked through a genuine consultation. Send us your views and suggestions. Meetings will take place but in the meantime keep doing all you can to promote the school.

53. The Governors were not aware of the proposals to close before the parents

The Governing Body will have been aware of the declining pupil numbers and the pressure on school budgets. Governors were not made aware of the proposals before parents.

54. What schools will be available for year 6 pupils to attend if not Cradley? Where do we stand? Will we be able to get into Windsor?

Meetings will be held with existing parents and information circulated to Year 6 parents. Information will be provided on all secondary schools.

Meeting with pupils of Cradley High School - 22 September 2006 – 11.30am

36 pupils were present at the meeting along with Julia Campbell and Ross Anderson. Councillor Walker and Ray Watson attended from Dudley Council. Vicky Cook took the minutes.

Councillor Walker opened the meeting by introducing herself and Ray Watson and also by giving a brief overview of the reason for the meeting and why we were proposing to close Cradley High School. The success of the school with their rising exam results was applauded and it was explained that the closure was not based on standards but on the fact that too few

children were choosing Cradley High and that because of this Government funding is dropping. The school cannot work effectively if it does not find at least another 150 pupils to bring in the funding needed. Councillor Walker then introduced Mr Ray Watson to the meeting.

Mr Watson first offered his apologies for his lateness due to road works in Cradley Heath. He then went on to repeat the congratulations regarding the school's results. It was explained that there are fewer primary school pupils and this is feeding through to secondary schools causing Dudley schools budget to be £2.5 million less this year than last. The impact that this would have on the facilities and opportunities were explained.

Questions and answers

1. Why don't you report GCSE results to the public to improve the reputation of the school?

A press statement was issued with all the results and Cradley High was mentioned. They are also all in the consultation document. We do not criticise the school in any way. The reason is simply because of financial cuts due to the fall in pupil numbers.

Councillor Walker asked what the children thought they themselves could do to let people know how good the school is.

The answers

- a. letters / leaflets to primary schools
- b. placing an article in the school newspaper

Councillor Walker then asked why they would not put something in the local papers.

The answer was because they haven't been good to Cradley High.

Councillor Walker encouraged the children to write and said that she thought if they did then the press would probably print it.

2. Wasn't it the wrong time to announce the proposals? Now people won't come anyway.

Parents would have already known where they were sending their children before our proposals came out.

3. But after hearing the news people will change their minds and pull out of Cradley High again.

Only a few of these people would have pulled out. The last intake had 68 pupils expected to come to Cradley High School, some of which had appeals to other schools which were

successful and they would have already gone before the proposals were announced. There are fewer pupils around to attend Cradley High School and other schools.

4. We think the numbers are good. If there are less pupils in a class they get more time with the teachers and this does have an impact on our GCSE results.

Comment noted.

5. Why aren't pupils on waiting lists at other schools coming to Cradley?

The law has changed and now we have to let parents choose the school they want for their children. We cannot encourage people to choose schools they don't want their children to attend.

6. In year 6 our parents had that choice and they chose Cradley but if you close us our freedom of choice will be gone.

We will work with all pupils and their parents to try and ensure you find an alternative school that you are happy with.

7. There are not many places left in local schools. Will you just put us anywhere?

The current year 11 will leave and the current year 10 will move into year 11 and finish as normal so children currently in years 10 and 11 will not be affected. It is the children currently in years 7, 8 and 9 that will be affected and we are currently talking to other schools to try and make more choice available.

8. But year 10 will be affected. Teachers will leave and we will end up with supply teachers.

Unfortunately, if the school continues to lose money as it is now then teachers would have to leave anyway as the school would not be able to afford to keep them.

9. Birth rates fluctuate. What happens if the birth rate goes up and all the schools are full?

Birth rates are dropping annually and we know the number of primary school children in every year group in primary schools. Even if the birth rate suddenly increased it would be 11 years before it could affect secondary schools.

10. If we end up with 30 or 40 children in a class, how will the teacher find enough time to deal with all these children?

Most teaching groups in secondary schools are less than 30. We don't expect this to change.

11. We have grown up with these teachers and they have given us lots of help. If they leave we won't have the same support.

Staff change anyway as they retire or move to other schools. You will have experienced other teachers leaving before. Schools make sure you continue to get the support you need.

12. What if year 7 pupils get attacked on their way to or from school?

We don't expect pupils to get attacked. Lots of pupils travel now without getting attacked. We are working on the transport implications of moving children to other schools but we will not have a final answer on this issue until we know where children would want to go to school if Cradley were to close.

13. What about year 9 options? What if they are different at the other schools and we cannot get the subjects we want?

There are changes to the curriculum which will be coming in anyway so year 9 options could change at all schools. If Cradley were to close, we would want to manage the process correctly and would work with pupils and parents to ensure you can get the options you require.

14. Why are other schools advertised in the papers but Cradley High never mentioned unless it's bad publicity?

I'm afraid we cannot answer that. Getting the school into the local papers is an internal matter for the staff and Governors to deal with. The school do have other ways of engaging with the public. For example open days / sending out a prospectus etc. Not everyone pays attention to what they read in the papers but all schools have to go through the admissions procedure and are published for all parents so they will be aware of your good results.

15. Friendships have been broken in the past from moving schools. What about the friendships we have made at Cradley?

We cannot guarantee that you will be in the same schools as your friends but you can talk to your friends and your parents if you want to apply to the same school. The common message coming through from the primary school closures is that the pupils are happy in

their new schools and have made lots of new friends. We will put a lot of effort into helping everyone in their new schools.

16. If you do shut the school, what will happen to the land? If you build houses here then more children will move to the area and they will need a school.

No decision has yet been made about the future use of the site so therefore we cannot answer this question. The playing fields surrounding the school are public parks so they could not be built on. Also the public use clubs and sports facilities here and there is an interest in keeping those facilities open.

17. Why not pick a school with falling grades?

Cradley High's exam results may be increasing but even with this it is still not attracting the pupil numbers needed to remain viable.

18. How can you guarantee that we won't get bullied and that we will like our new teachers?

We cannot guarantee you will like your new teachers but will do everything we can to make sure bullying doesn't happen.

19. What about new housing developments around the area?

On average it is believed that for every 100 houses built there will be 4 children per year group, primary and secondary. There are not enough houses being built locally to provide the numbers of children that Cradley need to bring in the right amount of money.

20. What will you do with all the computers and equipment?

We haven't really looked into this yet. If Year 10 stay on then some will be used anyway and if the computers are in good condition they may be moved to other schools.

21. The newspapers have already given us a bad reputation and now year 6 pupils do not want to come here because of the closure.

We understand your point about the media. Unfortunately we cannot tell the papers what to write but you could write to them yourselves explaining how good your school is.

22. With regards to primary school closures, younger children do adapt better than older children and we are more likely to get bullied because we are from Cradley High. This could affect the grades we get in exams.

Change isn't easy at any age but you become more confident as you get older. You will always worry but we will provide support where needed.

23. How else can we put our points across about the consultation?

All your questions and comments are being noted and will be put on the website for you to view. We want to hear your voice but do understand it's not easy to respond to a consultation like this. You can write to us, email us or even phone us and let us know your thoughts.

24. If we can't get the school of our choice how will we pay for transport and uniforms and everything else we may need?

Money for uniforms and transport has already been agreed with Schools Forum for primary schools so there is every reason to believe that if we take the proposals through for secondary then the support will be there.

25. Geographically why have you chosen this school when others are closer together?

We have chosen Cradley High purely because of the pupil numbers. Other schools are also being affected by falling pupil numbers but Cradley are in the most difficulty as they have had the lowest intake of all schools.

26. Children who have already moved are getting bullied because they are from Cradley High. How can you prevent this?

Please come and speak to us if you know of any specific cases of bullying and we will do our best to rectify this.

27. How come other schools get money spent on them but we haven't had anything new and haven't had any money spent on us?

Cradley High gets the same kind of money spent on them as other schools. Schools that the DfES class as popular, that is those schools that are regularly oversubscribed, can apply to the DfES to expand and get the money to spend but unfortunately we do not have control over this.

28. What happens if children from our years 7, 8 and 9 have to appeal to get into other schools and then have to wait to get in?

Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils will have a new school to go to by September 2007 if closure takes place. We will start working with parents and pupils early to ensure this.

29. There is a large support unit here for people with Downs, Aspurgers and other needs. Will there still be the same support at the other schools?

SEN provision will be available in all the other schools and we will work with everyone concerned i.e. specialists, parents and staff, to ensure the support is there.

Comments received

1. I don't feel my question was answered correctly. Close another school and give us the pupils.
2. Some of us are doing our GCSEs now and we don't think this is fair on us. Now when we apply to colleges it will look bad because we are from a closing school. Other people will get places before us.
3. Small is good – the less children in a class the better.
4. We need to encourage more people to come here. Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils could do presentations at primary schools.
5. At primary schools when pupils are getting good grades, the teachers tell them not to come to Cradley High because they are too smart.
6. We were told once we were at Cradley High not to move to other schools because Cradley is better.
7. We like this school because it would be easy to get lost at bigger secondary schools but that doesn't happen here.
8. Most of the pupils enjoy this school because of the teachers and the support we get. We need to write articles to encourage other children to come here.
9. It's the personal touch at Cradley that makes it a good school.
10. Can we advertise the school to encourage people to come here?
11. We have big fields and lots of open space. Give us a chance to build and encourage more people.
12. We should have a sixth form and then more people would come.

13. Its bad enough trying to get to Halesowen now. Adding more pupils travelling to and fro will make it worse.
14. We have friends that have to get to Stourbridge schools and they have to leave the house at 7:30am because most of the buses are full with college students and there's no guarantee that you will get a bus to get you there on time.
15. The document is not very child friendly. Children need to be added to the formal consultation list.

Councillor Walker requested that if anyone had anything they wished to add could they please contact us and let us know as there had been some very interesting points of view expressed. It was explained that the Council do not like to bring proposals forward to close schools but unfortunately sometimes it has to be done as we have to make the best of what we've got for all the children in the Dudley Borough. She then went on to state that all the children present at the meeting had done themselves proud and were a pleasure to consult with.

Mr Watson added that the children were a credit to the school and any other school should be proud to have them.

Councillor Walker then closed the meeting by reiterating that Cradley High is a good school and the pupils are good. The Council have never disputed this and have said it at every occasion possible throughout this process.

Additional Governing Body Meeting – 22 September 2006

1. What consideration was given to alternative options? What forum where they discussed in?

Many alternatives were discussed and some are in the document. None are achievable e.g. amalgamation – the cost of two sites would be too high, still too few children, too expensive to run.

2. You have done that work then?

It didn't take loads of work to come to conclusion. We did look at costs and different things informally to decide if it was worth making proposals. All figures are in the public domain.

3. Was any form of amalgamation considered with regards to AEN / SEN? Lots of children are supported with this at Cradley High School. Lots of work has been done in this area, all of which is positive. Have you considered that?

The way schools are funded is by an amount per pupil which is allocated via a formula. Funding for SEN is made in the same way so it wouldn't make a difference if the school was amalgamated in this way.

4. Why not make Cradley High a school for special needs? Why was this not considered as an option?

It comes back to parental preference – parents of children with SEN get to choose their school. Special schools already provide for children with statements. All schools have SEN pupils and we could not take children from these schools and put them into Cradley.

5. But the Rationale is there. Other schools fought against SEN.

There are a limited number of children with statements who would need the provision. Special schools have surplus places too and we would have to close one special school to do that.

6. But it should be an option. There is not sufficient evidence that the authority has considered enough alternatives. Can we look at other options e.g. co-location (as in the Secondary Review)? Has it been considered to co-locate a special school on site?

Linked proposals can be very difficult. We would not want to confuse the two. Other options have been looked at by different people for years. We don't want to close a school but need to judge how best resources can be used. We could keep looking at alternatives for a long time but situations change and need to stop somewhere and make a decision.

7. You may need to look at better value choices for Dudley.

Headteachers have been consulted on this for many years.

8. But the SEN decision alone was made without taking into account these falling rolls.

We have to show how we looked at alternatives suggested and have to look at it closely. However by that time you will have very few pupils and will be struggling anyway. Tell us the advantages you feel will come from a special school and we will investigate.

9. We have concerns about the Secondary Review being an overarching document. A thorough review is needed but decisions are being made out of context.

Expressions of interest in BSF were made about 3 or 4 years ago with proposals but no detail. Secondary heads and others decided the quality of bids was not good enough and it was unsuccessful. The DfES ranked LAs by GCSE performance and deprivation and

Dudley was right in the middle. We couldn't be in the first wave at this level. Look at the different LAs at the top of the list, they are LAs in intervention and not the top 30 at all. The feedback is different from reality. We are ranked between waves 7 and 9 which means funding would not be given until between 2009/10 and 2011/12. The DfES want a strategic vision from the whole of DMBC and want to look at schools individually i.e. efficiency issues, value for money etc. We need to address surplus places now or we will be forced to in the future. If we wait until then we will be looking at redundancies which will affect standards, morale etc.

10. Why close us but increase admissions elsewhere?

The proposal to close Cradley is because of the impact on the school in particular and is not about the Secondary Review. Increasing capacity at other schools has nothing to do with this, that was done 4 years ago (Earls and Windsor).

11. But that doesn't make sense if the birth rate is falling.

At that time schools were full. Hillcrest were getting a very high number of applications so they decided to apply to the DfES for approval and funding to expand.

12. Could the Council have intervened then and said no?

We would not object because evidence showed they had the applications to back up their proposal. We could have objected but the Governing Body came up with the proposals then went to SOC. If they had been turned down then the school could have gone directly to Schools Adjudicator and then the Secretary of State so not much could have been done. It was a similar situation at Old Swinford Hospital School except that's a boarding school. We are always trying to balance conflicting policies but the real issue still comes back to budget.

13. No, the real issue is children. We have taken children with many problems and difficult starting points and have made amazing progress. That skill base will now be lost and you need a strategy to enable that to continue. You need to learn from our school and apply this elsewhere. Year 10 are being sacrificed. This needs full consultation as you'll have no staff for them and no other pupils left. We won't be able to deliver the curriculum.

We will ensure sufficient staff expertise.

14. But the children are in an environment where they trust, know others and succeed.

We do not believe we will be sacrificing children. We will ensure there are sufficient staff for children.

15. We have looked at this closely and disagree with you. There is a commitment from staff for this year but it goes no further. We do not think it will work. If we let teachers travel between schools to help teach at Cradley High it would cause time problems i.e. stress and pressure on staff. It would not work. The staff know the children which is not unique but the area is unique and has its own character. We know children, if teacher comes to school they given a hard time in first year but if they stay they are accepted. Children feel they have been betrayed otherwise. Keeping year 10 will be a disaster. Are you open to discussing alternatives to the movement of children?

We will discuss this but where would year 10 go as spaces are not available in this year group?

16. If they want another place and you can't find it where will they go?

The best option is to retain staff and continue year 10 here, there are not enough places in year 10 elsewhere.

17. If I asked "could you guarantee my child's education" what would you say?

It would have to be no whether the proposals go through or not because you would not be able to retain all the current staff anyway given the budget situation.

18. We don't have KS4 expertise – only KS3 will take a high number of staff.

We recognise that. What would you do to sort the problem?

We would take more teachers for year 10 than for years 7, 8 and 9.

But where would year 10 go?

19. The children know their teachers.

Not all the teachers will leave. You would have to make redundancies anyway.

20. If you close the school it's a different concept.

January's roll count was approximately 500. That's 80 down from last year and means around £250k less.

21. By going through consultation you have damned us.

Your September intake was set in March / April. We didn't announce our intention to consult until after that. Your numbers have been dropping for five years. Our consultation would not have affected your current numbers.

22. But it affects future numbers?

It may do but the number of children in year 6 to come to secondary school is less, and numbers will not rise. There is no evidence to suggest a rise. Our consultation may have affected some people but the numbers needed wouldn't be there anywhere. This is about children and their education. Your school is doing well but is still not popular.

23. The newspapers will not publish anything good about Cradley High, only negative things. We employed a media expert but this did not help. In the consultation you never asked the question why the school isn't popular. Why didn't you do this?

It is not the LAs responsibility to promote individual schools. We do not need to survey why parents do not choose Cradley. The fact is that there are not enough children and not enough choose Cradley.

24. But look at how you are putting your consultations across. There are just decisions in the document and no questions. You need a response steer.

We had response forms in the Primary Review consultation but found that it was highly criticised i.e. leading questions etc. We also received many responses that we could not verify as genuine as it was easy for people to tick different parts of the form and engage in "strange practices". We just wanted to receive comments this time to allow for a more open and honest response.

25. Then you should have done your research with consultation.

We understand what you mean by that but again, no matter what we put out to the community, it's still about pupil numbers and budgets.

26. Did you consider Colley Lane (PFI) when it was just an idea of this school being part of the PFI. We put out a very comprehensive plan but it just disappeared.

That decision was taken a long time ago. I don't know the history I'm afraid but it would not help the current situation.

27. But we should have been part of that PFI. It would be interesting to look over last 15 years. Where has our capital expenditure been?

With the exception of Summerhill, Cradley High is the most recent building for a secondary school in the borough.

28. There is more to capital expenditure than that. This school has worse facilities than other schools. Money was spent elsewhere on schools with already better facilities. We have asked for this on numerous occasions and now feel let down.

A large amount of investment was used to make this school into a secondary school and there has been investment since it opened.

29. But it doesn't help to attract people. What about housing developments? There are four in the local area, what effect will this have?

Extensive research is done on this and we look into all developments in advance and the potential number of children. For every 100 houses built they only tend to produce 3 or 4 pupils per year group. You would need at least 3000 houses to fill Cradley High and that number is not there. The second factor is that there is no guarantee that children would come to Cradley as there is still surplus places in other schools.

30. How many of those developments are local to Cradley?

This is all in the public domain. We don't think this matters as even local children choose not to come to Cradley.

31. But they can travel via one transport route but those schools are now full. Any schools now would need two bus routes.

More surplus is being created every year, we cannot afford to keep unviable schools open. If needed, transport can be arranged.

32. Have you done surplus place studies by wards?

Yes.

33. But will children from other LA's also be able to get into those schools?

At the moment the decline in Dudley is helped by children coming in from Sandwell to boost our numbers. However, Sandwell are now looking at academies and if that happens it could have a worse effect on our schools. We get around 700 children per year from other boroughs but it could go the other way.

34. At the moment the Yemeni community do not understand anything and have not been fully informed. The feedback from them is that they will keep children at home and DMBC should pay for home schooling. The community looked at the Labour Government and took a stand and voted conservative, after this they will look to vote elsewhere.

We have said several times that if they want separate meetings to discuss any issues we are very willing to do that.

35. They don't want to be segregated. We thought you would have retyped the document in Arabic but this wasn't done.

We cannot translate the whole document but we did offer to use interpreters who could speak the appropriate languages to contact anyone who needed any help to explain what was being said. Again, we also offered meetings.

36. How can we attend a meeting if we don't understand?

We can't turn whole document into Arabic because the document is a legal cornerstone and any problem in the translation could lead to confusion or criticism. We did say we would provide interpreters for oral translation to allow questions to be asked. We will still do that whether in or out of the consultation period.

37. How could we start that?

If people want a meeting just contact us and we will arrange one.

38. What about home tuition?

It is not the local authority's responsibility to pay for this.

39. This school has really helped the Yemeni community and taken into consideration religious beliefs. Other schools in the area have not been doing that. Shouldn't the Governing Body have been told to do something about the falling numbers earlier? We did not think we'd see you making children suffer.

Around 70 schools have closed in Dudley over the last 30 years or so. It does not appear to have destroyed anyone's education. Dudley schools are good.

40. What commitment are you prepared to give to give children their first choice preference?

We cannot guarantee it but we will do everything we can. With Beauty Bank and other primary schools the vast majority got their first choice.

41. Will there be a three mile commitment?

We would support parents wherever they want to send their children. We would want to provide the best for parents and children and want to give them a choice. We don't want the children to be isolated by Cradley High being an 'SEN' school etc.

The legal processes on consultation have to be followed. This means that consultation ends on 28 September. The consultation responses will then be presented to the lead member who will take the decision whether or not to publish statutory notices. If this decision is taken then there will be a statutory period of 6 weeks. If there are a lot of representations made during this period we will then need to allow time for paperwork before the matter can go to SOC. This would possibly be early January. If it goes to the School Adjudicator this would be another delay. We want to work with students and parents before that to ensure all is prepared in case the decision to close does go through so we are prepared and it can run more smoothly. This will help with transport issues as we could arrange dedicated school buses if we have the time to do it. The decision of model needs to be made first.

42. What are admissions criteria?

We would try and get all first choices but we would need to work with parents to see what we can do to help this.

43. If a sufficient number of pupils pledged to come here would you change your minds?

Councillor Walker will make a decision that will then go through numerous processes. Admission numbers will be known by the time this happens.

44. We only had 13 parents at our open evening showing people have been put off by proposals. There is a group of active parents engaging in conversation with other parents about coming to Cradley High. There is a difference between form and feeling.

Your action group need to get contributing evidence. The electronic admission process is now in place online so we would know preferences quite early on.

45. The fear for people is that if they put this school as their first choice then they won't get their second. Can't you change the second choice to first if Cradley closes?

We cannot go outside admissions guidelines. We do not know what would happen if the school suddenly filled up and we don't want to give you false hope. If you argue against

closure on the grounds that you have pledged then you need to prove that your data is robust and factual. We will look at everything you provide.

Additional Staff Meeting – 22 September 2006

1. How long will TLR payments be protected?

For a maximum of 4 years.

2. Is that 4 years from date of redeployment?

Yes.

3. Is that if we just move within the borough?

Yes there is also management safeguarding for people who apply.

4. If redeployment takes place and the only position available requires further travelling, how will we be supported or can you guarantee that we will not be expected to travel any further than we currently are?

Procedures are in place.

5. During the pupil meeting, it was suggested that pupil class sizes would remain stable and not get higher due to the transfer of Cradley High Staff and other factors. Can you explain this?

If Cradley High closes then we would transfer staff as well as pupils to increase staffing at the schools that take the children. We would use additional and current accommodation to allow for extra classes and therefore keep class sizes down. Year 7 class sizes of approximately 17 or 18 like you have at Cradley cannot be sustained. They would more likely be in line with the pattern in other schools. They would not go above 30.

6. Our children love their small classes and are frightened they wouldn't have the same amount of attention in larger ones. This is a big concern for children.

If we do nothing then the school will suffer a budget reduction because there are about 80 pupils fewer than last year and would have to reduce staff. Class sizes will grow anyway.

7. If the proposal goes ahead, what is the proposal to maintain the consistency for year 10 and year 11 pupils.

The model we are looking at is of Year 10 and 11 staying. Currently Year 11 will leave as normal in August 2007. Current Year 10 will become Year 11 and leave August 2008. We understand there is concern over maintaining quality of education but we are looking in detail at the expertise needed and will come back to you with more details when we know how this will work. We need to ensure the quality is maintained and staff workloads are managed. We need to ensure staff and pupil welfare.

8. Will staff be expected to travel between Cradley and another school that they have been redeployed to?

No not necessarily. It will depend on the timetable and individual workloads. It is possible there may be some staff working on more than one site but we will have to look at needs closely.

9. Would that mean moving around during the same schools day or different days at different campuses?

A group of staff will be here anyway and we want those staff to feel that they have a proper workload. This may mean staff travelling to teach classes or we may need to use some temporary staff. The possibility of moving campuses in one day is there but we would hope that this minimised.

10. The timing of the document now seems more damning than before. With our recent excellent results, this has indeed caused a great improvement in school status. However very few parents are even considering this school as the threat of closure hangs over it and we are unable to work off the good results that we have. You have not given us the opportunity to improve school numbers for 2007.

We genuinely applaud your results. The timing of the proposal was announced after the end of year 11 GCSE's to avoid disruption. The numbers of children are too low and we needed to make the proposal. Discussions have taken place with the school over the last 5 years about standards and they have greatly improved but this still did not encourage more children to attend. Parental preference has to be adhered to and we can't make parents go to another school if they don't choose to. This is not a done deal and we don't try to make it sound like one. The decision has not been made but we wouldn't have brought proposals forward if we did not think it was right thing to do. Again, we applaud your efforts.

11. But releasing the proposals now you have stopped year 6 coming here because the threat of closure is there.

Whenever consultation is announced you will get that reaction but it is a legal requirement that we have to consult so I'm afraid it could not be helped. Year 6 preferences were made before consultation was announced.

12. Couldn't you have done it after the year 6 pupils were chosen for next year?

We could always end up waiting if we think like this. The decision to consult needs to be made at some point.

13. But why not wait? There is a chance it would improve.

It is very unlikely it would improve. Numbers have dropped every year for 5 years.

14. We have major competition locally and our exam results could have enticed people but your timing didn't allow that. The proposals were made before the exam results were published. Should you do this again is it worth your considering doing it at a different time e.g. the Autumn term? It would have avoided this issue.

Whenever you decide to consult someone will complain. If we consult in the Autumn just after new starters have joined then the parents of these starters would complain. We do apologise but nothing can be done. Your GCSE results are going up but your year 7 intakes are still going down. Your expectation of results pulling in students isn't reflected in the numbers. We will always have good schools in the area. There is a long process to go through with consultation and the later in the year you start the harder it is to complete the process within that academic year. It is unhelpful if the decision is made late and could cause even more problems and uncertainty. Students would be concerned with their references to college. You have high GCSE results now but if lack of funding causes staff reductions then your GCSE results may go down. The perception of your staff and school right now is good. If we wait and school standards go down then the perception may change meaning that this may affect pupils chances of getting into college and chances for staff to find alternative employment elsewhere.

15. The Council state that should the closure continue you will work with the staff and unions to ensure appropriate future placements. With so many staff seeking suitable employment how can the Council guarantee that employment will be found within the borough?

There were no redundancies in the Primary Review and we would like to repeat that. We would hope that all staff are redeployed within the borough. We can understand your concerns but have managed to place people who want it into redeployment. Ancillary staff will also be redeployed.

16. But you are dealing with a very different situation than the primary school closures. Secondary staff have specialisms. Can you guarantee staff a job in their own specialism?

There is a turnover in the borough for all specialisms. We can guarantee that almost everybody will be placed where they need to be but there is no way that we can provide the level of assurance you are looking for. However, we are confident. Out of the 140 primary staff there are only approximately one dozen left to place. We will do whatever we can to support you.

17. Cradley High School has an important role to play within the community. If parents still wish for their child to attend Cradley High, why are they being denied their right? Surely the Council has a duty of care to support local parents?

The Council's duty is to make places available, not a school. The numbers are dropping and we have to reconfigure. We did this by looking at children attending and that is why Cradley High was chosen. It is not in any community's interest to have a struggling school as it will mean a poorer education and the school and children will suffer.

18. In your response to a previous question 'can other schools meet the rise in pupil numbers satisfactorily?' you responded by saying that 'discussions are taking place with other schools about the number of places that could be created'. How can you make the decision to close a school when you do not even have a definite answer for this?

Discussions are taking place with other schools. We only want to move years 7, 8 and 9 and there are more places available in these years across the borough than there would be students moving. We know Earls and Windsor will be more popular so discussions are taking place to ease this demand and also with Sandwell. Until parents express preferences there will be uncertainty and we cannot give definite answers until then.

19. A lot of your responses in the original staff questions are not backed up by any evidence whatsoever. Questions no 9, 10, 11, 12, 31, 33 and 35. These are just a few examples. Ofsted are always asking the question, and we ask it now of you – "how do you know?"

The fact remains that the birth rate has dropped and is now feeding through into secondary schools. Children travel further for secondary as demonstrated by parental preference. Less popular schools tend to suffer from this. Local pupils can choose other schools instead of Cradley and many do so.

20. The answers provided by yourselves you claim to have back up evidence but what about question 31? The answer was yes and we want to know how. Question 32 was answered as no but in fact yes they have changed. Hillcrest sent out letters offering places to take our pupils

Question 31 – yes they have and we can give you details. Question 32 – the answer is correct, there has been no change to admissions policies at all in the last few months.

21. But how did they get addresses?

Hillcrest applied to the DfES to expand their school. They had an admission number of 152 but appeals took them over this. They had a high number of applications so there was a smaller chance of getting in. They ran consultation, published notices and went to SOC in July. No objections were received so it was approved. Some year 7 Cradley children had applied as first choice to Hillcrest. When the appeals came through they then went to Hillcrest as they would have done anyway. At Earls and Windsor the admission numbers will increase as they were looked at 4 years ago. Hillcrest would have had the addresses for people who applied there anyway. However, we do not condone poaching.

22. Is closure down to birth rates or down to expansion of other schools?

The falling birth rate is substantial. It fell by 18% over a decade and this overrides expansion. Hillcrest was so popular, as were Windsor and Earls, and so many people were getting in. As numbers of children drop off there is huge impact on less popular schools. All schools were full five years ago. Hillcrest was unpopular but did something about it whilst the pupil numbers were there. You don't have time to increase popularity.

23. Regarding your response to question 13 from the previous meeting with staff; "Cover Point successfully helps disaffected pupils and those with different emotional needs re-integrate into school life. What provision would be made for these types of pupils in other schools or by Dudley MBC?", you mentioned that other schools have similar arrangements to Cover Point. I am aware that when this was set up, the only other secondary schools in the Borough to take this on board were Thorns and Earls. Have other schools developed such centres and if so, which?

We can look into this and respond in writing if required. Other schools do have provision and it is needed in other schools. SEN and AEN are now a key feature of the inspection process. There is good provision in other schools.

24. Given the number of children at Cradley High with SEN, the people who deal with these children are experts and have done this job for years.

We recognise that. Other schools would probably snap you up.

25. Regarding your response to question 48 from the previous meeting with Staff it appears that your response refers to a different year group than that mentioned in the question. The query was about the possible fate of our (now) year 10 pupils should the closure go ahead.

The current Year 10 will stay at Cradley High until they finish secondary education. The current Year 11 will leave as normal in August 2007. Current Years 7, 8 and 9 will transfer for September 07.

26. Clearly, were the proposals to go ahead, there is likely to be some staff movement before these pupils sit their examinations in 2008. You have already mentioned that you do your best to support these pupils by providing specialist teaching where needed but realistically, would you agree that your ability to provide an acceptable quality of staff in a situation such as this is surely limited.

We are currently working on a curriculum and staffing model for Year 11 from September 2007.

27. How realistic is this? How realistic is it for children to cope with staffing changes / syllabus changes etc?

We appreciate the point and we need to protect the interests of these pupils. It is not possible to be certain at this stage as circumstances could change, staff redeployment could affect the situation – we could move staff later. If the proposals are agreed then we have more flexibility with funding and could ask Schools Forum for additional support. Pupils only have one chance so we would look to you and others to support and help with the pupils. We do recognise your commitment and success and also the difficulties for Year 10. It is not fair to allow any drop in the standard of education provided to these pupils. We care about pupils and don't want to let things drift, we want it to be done well.

28. We appreciate there are a lot of unknown factors but can you tell us when the decision will be announced? Can we have a timescale?

Consultation is a legally determined process. The consultation finishes on 28th September. This will then be followed by publication of statutory notices and a 6 week representation period which could take us into December. If we receive many objections during the representation period this will take time to process so we may not get to SOC until January. If SOC cannot make a decision the matter could then be referred to the Schools Adjudicator which could take us to March. We are not trying to say don't respond but trying to make you aware of the time it takes. We will let you know SOC dates as soon as possible as a school representative can attend.

Additional questions received during the consultation period

1. What is the purpose of the consultation and can alternative proposals be given?

Consultation is the most effective way of explaining the need for change, details of proposals and gaining feedback. This includes submission and discussion if appropriate of alternative proposals. Consultation is also required by relevant legislation and guidance.

2. What support is available to those wishing to work up alternative proposals?

The Council has very limited resources but we would provide support for developing alternative proposals wherever possible. This could be agreed following further discussion regarding alternative proposals.

3. What criteria would be used to evaluate proposals submitted?

The proposals are based on the falling numbers at Cradley and the impact on future standards. Any alternative proposals would have to address this key issue.

4. Who would evaluate any proposals submitted?

Alternative proposals would be considered by senior officers with recommendations made to the Cabinet Member. It could be helpful to arrange confidential discussions with ward members before recommendations were made.

5. How could numbers for year seven be increased in time for September?

There are no obvious ways of increasing pupil numbers significantly for September (or in the foreseeable future).

6. Please confirm how much would be saved by the closure of the school?

The proposals will not lead to savings. Money released from closing Cradley will be reinvested in education. It is important to say that the costs of not addressing this issue, particularly if pupils receiving a lower standard of education are not enabled to develop full contributions to their own lives and Dudley could be very significant.

7. How will savings be used and what specific benefit is there for the 300 children from Cradley who will have to transfer to other schools?

Any resources released will be reinvested in education. Some monies such as Schools Fund will be determined following consultation with parents / other contributors. As with the

Primary School Review, the main principle is that the money follows the child to the receiving school.

8. Will any funds be ring fenced for the purposes of transition from one school to another?

Yes

9. Longer term strategies for the Black Country indicate additional housing in Dudley of approx 75,000 households. Please describe what consideration has been given to this – specifically in terms of its impact on this consultation and that of the Transforming Schools agenda.

This has been considered and will be a major element of the Transforming Secondary Education consultation and further stages. The effect of the new housing will have very limited impact on Cradley's current situation. There are not enough developments locally to make any significant difference to Cradley admissions.

10. Reference is frequently made to the extension at Hill Crest and other local schools. Full information is requested on the LEA's strategic planning activity in connection with secondary school provision how individual proposals have impacted on capacity and costing along with details of criteria for closure. There is an expectation the response should show how this has changed during the course of the last ten years.

This would be better addressed as part of a longer discussion. There is a great deal of information such as the School Organisation Plan 2003-08 already in the public domain. Work is also in progress regarding the Transforming Secondary Education consultation and where this would complement the whole Investing in the Future Strategy. Please advise if you would like a meeting about this.

11. Confirm what made this consultation an imperative.

The governors at Cradley will be aware of the budget situation this year (2006-07) and may have discussed the implications of further falls in numbers. The local authority cannot allow schools to continue given the circumstances facing Cradley High School.

12. Advise if the school was ever consulted on alternatives – prior to the proposal for close being made.

The school was not consulted on alternatives but the school has been aware of the situation for some years.

13. Provide details of what is considered cost effective for

- A. all schools in Dudley.
- B. for Cradley High.

The assessment of whether a school is cost effective or not is relatively straightforward at one level. It becomes much more complex as other factors are included (see Q6). Cradley's unit cost per pupil is currently around 14% above the Dudley Secondary School average. It is a matter of debate whether the current quality of education justifies this higher cost per pupil. As numbers fall the unit cost will increase and it will become more difficult to argue that it is cost effective.

14. Para 4 on page 5 refers to ..."other changes". Additional and full information is asked for.

These "other changes" refer to the overall impact of declining birth rates and fewer primary school pupils on secondary school funding and the changes arising from the Primary Schools Review.

15. What is the total cost of maintaining surplus places in Dudley and where do these costs fall?

Some years ago the Audit Commission calculated the cost of surplus places as £250 (primary) and £350 (secondary).

The most recent indications from the Audit Commission in May 2006 are:

- each primary school surplus place costs £300
- each secondary school surplus place costs £420

The total cost to Dudley is in the region of £1.4 million.

The cost of these places is borne by school budgets as Dudley receives its funding on the number of children attending Dudley schools. There is less money to pay for the places that continue to exist.

16. Page 6 gives details of admissions for year 7 in 2003 please confirm overall school capacity at this time and if the school was over-subscribed.

The overall capacity at Cradley is assessed as 750. The school was last full in 2003.

17. Why haven't PAN's been modified for secondary school admissions in the same way that Primary School PAN's have?

Secondary school admission numbers are consulted on every year. This year consultation took place from January 2006 for admissions to Year 7 in September 2007. Primary school admissions follow the same process.

18. Last paragraph concludes that without action then the numbers on roll will continue to fall. What action can still be taken to change the current situation and what consideration has been given to these options? Which officers would have done this and when? Finally please confirm if consideration was given to either closing other schools or reducing PAN elsewhere.

There are no obvious actions that can be taken. There are not enough children to fill the places and not enough of these children want to attend Cradley. The introduction of parental preference some years ago prevents local authorities from 'marketing' specific schools or operating catchment areas. The admissions arrangements are entirely transparent and set out in accordance with the relevant legislation. Closing other schools would have resulted in a greater level of disruption for a greater number of pupils, families and staff. Reducing the PAN at other schools may not have been achieved as schools can object to the Schools Adjudicator and it would have been difficult to support the case for reduction.

19. School profiles show Cradley High has 50% of pupils with SEN. Full disclosure on SEN provision is requested for Cradley High along with a detailed statistical analysis of SEN pupils in all other schools. (Please note no individual data on pupils is required.)

This information is available from the school

20. PAN, please give an explanation to meaning in general terms, how this translates into classroom sizes, choice, budgets, cost per pupil and effectiveness. Information is requested on what levels (% + or -) of variation is acceptable, what the current range is in Dudley and how Cradley compares. If tolerances have changed during the course of the last ten years then please advise with reasons being given.

The DfES prescribe the methodology for measuring the capacity of schools. If you are interested in this I can arrange a briefing from an officer with the relevant expertise. Please advise.

21. What facilities have Cradley High got that other schools have not?

All of the secondary schools have basic facilities for meeting the curriculum and pastoral needs of their pupils. The range and quality of facilities varies significantly between schools depending on their area of specialism e.g. languages and sport. The size of the

school also has a bearing on the amount of capital and revenue that is available for investment in facilities. I can arrange a more detailed briefing if required. Please advise.

22. Provide details of the pupil support unit.

This is available from the school.

23. Provide information on Earls and Windsor PAN's why these have increased between March 2006 and September 2006 and how this has informed the decision to close Cradley High. Information is sought as to what role the LEA played in developing proposals and proposal to close Cradley came as an intended consequence of these commitments.

Earls and Windsor are both regularly oversubscribed. The schools were asked to take additional pupils some years ago as a condition of a basic need. Recent building work at both schools has led to an increase in the capacity of both schools and the need to increase the PAN. Neither change has had an impact on Cradley. Only 34 parents expressed first preference for Cradley for September 2006.

24. At what point did the authority become aware that new and additional places coupled with surpluses at one other local school would be sufficient to accommodate the closure of Cradley in September 2008?

The decision to consult on closure was taken following monitoring of pupil numbers over the last few years and the very low number of first choice preferences (34) for admission to Cradley in September 2006. Discussions with parents and with other schools will help us to plan where pupils are likely to transfer to.

25. What is the point of parental preference; does it have any legal significance or give priority to the children of Cradley High?

Parents have a right to express a preference for any school but they do not have a right to a place. This is a factor of the admissions criteria that each admissions authority (local authority, foundation school etc) is required to publish and apply. When supporting parents we would do everything possible to ensure that parents make informed choices and get their first preferences.

26. What is the trigger that made this proposal an imperative?

See Q 24.

27. Detail is requested on “other income”, how this is made up? What percentage is pupil specific and if so has this been used for the purposes of determining average cost per pupil at Cradley High?

Other income comprises of other funding streams such as School Standards Grant, Standards Fund Grants, and Pupil Retention Funding (all of which are 100% pupil specific). These are all in addition to funding delegated to the school under the Authority’s Fair Funding Formula, and as such are excluded from the average cost per pupil data quoted (see Q 28).

28. Give the formula for average cost and data used for calculations.

The average cost data relates to the average unit of funding per pupil delegated under the Authority’s Fair Funding Formula, and represents the total funding delegated to the secondary sector divided by the total number of pupils in the secondary sector. (This information is detailed within the Fair Funding Section 52 Information document which is a public document and available on Insidedudley or by hard copy on request).

29. Confirm SEN provision across the Borough in terms of facilities.

Do you require the number of pupils on the SEN register in each school expressed as a percentage?

30. What is the optimised cost criteria for secondary education and what percentage is fixed?

Please be more specific.

31. Almost 300 children will need to be transferred if proposals are approved; how many are planned to be accommodated at the school of their choice?

All of them. There is no expectation that they will want to go to the same school. The transfer process will be supported as parents express their initial preferences.

32. Which schools can increase capacity and by how much?

We will not know the complete picture until the governing body of each school has considered the options and agreed a position.

33. What level of choice is expected?

Parents have a right to express a preference for any school in Dudley, or Sandwell or anywhere else. We will provide as much support as possible.

34. What influence will the Authority have in terms of ensuring placement at the point of the individual exercising?

We will provide as much information as possible and as much support as required by parents. This includes support in English and other languages.

35. Confirmation of educational entitlement and parental rights on placement.

Please be more specific.

36. What schools would not be appropriate considerations for parents?

Dudley secondary schools are good schools. It is a matter for parental preference and we will work with them to help make a decision.

37. How will places be allocated to pupils (include full process and support service detail, time scales, process stages and appeal mechanisms)?

We would prefer to manage the transition process so that pupils transfer at the beginning of the education year – that is September 2007 and September 2008. This would enable parents' time to make decisions and time to create capacity and provide support where it is needed. This will be done through meetings arranged through September and in the following months. Parents will have a statutory right of appeal as normal. Any available places at alternative schools will be allocated in strict accordance with the published admissions policy which is available on the website.

38. What obligations are there in connection to children from Sandwell?

Sandwell resident families will be treated in exactly the same way as Dudley resident families.

39. What costs are involved in creating extra places in terms of capital and projected maintenance and running costs at schools increasing capacity?

It is not possible to answer this until we have more information on how many pupils wish to transfer to each of the schools. The revenue budgets will follow the pupils to their receiving schools.

40. Dudley is asked to confirm that the consultation document is intended to support the proposal to close rather than be on objective analysis / account of conclusions, options and consequent recommendation.

The consultation document is intended to set out the reasons for the proposal and sufficient detail to explain how it would work. Some details will be developed as a consequence of the consultation and through discussions afterwards e.g. the pattern of parental preferences and where places will be available. The consultation document also explains how people can locate further information, raise questions or comment.

41. Page 12 contains a series of projections showing the effect of a number of assumptions. Officers are asked to confirm what these assumptions were and if these effects have been consistently used within the body of the document.

Projections based on the following are requested:

PAN	55
PAN	60
PAN	65
PAN	70
PAN	75
PAN	80
PAN	85
PAN	90
PAN	95
PAN	100
PAN	105
PAN	110
PAN	115
PAN	120

Table 7 shows 5 years of actual figures and one year of projections based on information provided by the DfES (2007/08) using current pupil numbers. The figures provided for Pupil Teacher Ratios are also actual figures. There is no evidence that the number of admissions to Cradley in September 2007 or in later years will be any higher than for 2006. As the total number of pupils falls there will be a reduction in staffing. The published admission number is based on the area of the school calculated as the number of pupil spaces in each year group – not the number of pupils actually attending. It might be easier to think of it as every pupil adds income and every empty place adds cost with no income.

42. Last line on page 12 refers to this major impact – please confirm what this is.

This is set out in the previous points on p.12 – fewer staff, less people to carry out the range of tasks, less expertise, higher workloads. Fewer opportunities for pupils and lower standards achieved.

43. Provide details of how Cradley High varies from the average for Dudley.

Please advise which average.

44. Confirm the use of school reserves for the period reviewed.

This is available from the school.

45. What are the fixed costs for Cradley High?

This is available from the school.

46. What are the running costs associated with Cradley High?

This is available from the school.

47. How much will the closure of Cradley deliver to school budgets when will savings materialise and who will get these funds?

This is not possible to calculate as the figures for 2007/8 are estimated on current numbers which could fall further and the figures for 2008/9 are not available yet. The resources released will be reinvested in education. The main principle is that the money will follow the pupils to their receiving schools.

48. How have the increases in capacity (planned or proposed) be financed?

The increases will be funded through the Council's Asset Management funding which is provided by the DfES. The cost of any additional accommodation will be planned when the details are clear.

49. What assumptions have been made about the closure of Cradley in connection the funding of increase capacity at Hill Crest, Earls and Windsor?

None.

50. What are the significant features of Cradley's pupil profile in terms of diversity?

Every school has a unique pupil profile. All of the pupils at Cradley will be supported as individuals to ensure that their needs are met as far as possible.

51. What would make the authority reconsider this proposal?

The impact of falling pupil numbers on Cradley will be severe. There is no obvious alternative to closure. The consultation process may bring forward more appropriate proposals which would be considered.

52. What is the actual impact, to date, of the falling birth rate on Cradley?

The governing body will already be aware of the difficulty in balancing this year's budget. From September there will be specific implications for managing a very small Year 7 in terms of sufficient numbers to group for the full range of curriculum activities.

53. What is cost effective for the purposes of this consultation (in terms of education provision / per pupil)?

See Q13.

54. How much capacity is sufficient to provide a degree of parental choice?

It is not possible to answer this question. We do not know what parental preferences will be. This information is needed to plan any increases in capacity that may be needed.

55. How much capacity is required to deal with variations in pupil numbers?

The normal approach to place planning requires analysis of live birth data, numbers in primary schools and a strategic approach to ensuring that there is sufficient capacity to meet demand. Some surplus capacity is needed to enable casual transfers when families move in and out of areas. Excess surplus capacity wastes money. Local authorities have different approaches.

56. Why has the assumption been made that demand will continue to fall?

There is no evidence in the year groups moving through primary schools or in the number of planned housing developments that there will be any significant increase in demand. The accuracy of pupil forecasts is very good and is detailed on the Dudley website.

57. What action could be taken to halt the decline or reverse it?

There are no obvious ways of increasing pupil numbers significantly for September (or in the foreseeable future).

58. Will time be given for a solution to be identified and implemented?

There is sufficient time for people to understand the situation and the proposals. If alternative proposals are brought forward they will be considered.

59. Confirmation of what schools are local to Cradley High.

The nearest secondary schools are marked on the map at the end of the consultation document. These are Pedmore (formerly Grange), Windsor, Earls, Leasowes, Thorns, Red Hill, Ridgewood, Wordsley, Crestwood, Pensnett, Hillcrest and in Sandwell, Heathfield and St Michaels.

60. How many children attending Cradley High come from Dudley?

503 out of 607 which equates to 82.3%.

61. Where do the children of Cradley High come from, who represent them?

Please be more specific.

62. What proposals are there for community activities at the School after it closes? Who would be responsible for this and what competing priorities are there for these facilities?

Discussions are in progress with Directorate of Urban Environment (Leisure) regarding the future use and management of such facilities.

63. Provide information of significant community use of Cradley High.

This is available from the school. Users currently include badminton and football clubs, martial arts, dance group, fitness group and a social club.

More questions received

1. What involvement has there been with heads and governors at proposed receiving schools - aside from the distribution of the consultation document? Please indicate when, with whom and what indications have been made about a willingness or ability to accommodate pupils.

All schools are aware of the proposals to close Cradley from the initial announcement in June of the Council's intention to consult on proposals for closure. Secondary headteachers have been asked to consider how they might support Cradley if the proposals are approved particularly in regard to ensuring appropriate curriculum provision at Cradley and with regard to pupil places. It is not appropriate to comment further until Governors have finally considered the matter.

2. What attempts have the LEA made to avoid a situation where closure is inevitable as opposed to desirable?

The national funding formula results in Dudley receiving minimum levels of funding for education. The Director is in regular contact with the DfES in regard to the impact of national funding decisions. Many other authorities and the Local Government Association consistently lobby for more money. To date this has had little impact and in Dudley's case, the early response refers to the wasted resources in surplus places. The key issue at Cradley High is not enough children want to attend the LA has to respect the law in relation to open enrolment.

3. The school appears to have adopted a strategy based upon improving performance in terms of results - at what point did LEA officers become decide that this was not, in itself, sufficient to ensure a future for the school?

All schools are concerned with raising standards and improving performance. Cradley High has maintained improvements over the last few years. Sadly, the numbers of applications have continued to fall year by year. The Director has advised the Cabinet Member that numbers have reached a level where there will be insufficient money to sustain the school.

4. What evidence is there that officers have acted to prevent admission rates falling?

Officers work within a legislative framework covering admissions. Decisions to attend Cradley High or alternative schools are taken by parents in accordance with the relevant legislation and published admission procedures.

5. Is there an official policy on the size of secondary schools in Dudley?

No.

6. Has the school confirmed that it expects not to be able to balance its budget?

The school has not been asked to confirm if it expects to balance its budget for 2007/08.

7. Provide details of what support the authority has given in the past to other schools facing financial shortfalls and advise if this money has always been paid back. Where monies have not been returned give individual circumstances? (OSH and half a million pounds.)

Dudley schools are not allowed to operate deficit budgets. If schools believe they need such a facility it has to be agreed by the Director in accordance with the relevant

procedures. No agreement would be reached unless the case was strong and there was a clear plan for repayment.

8. When (what date) did officers recommend this proposal to the Cabinet Member?

The Cabinet Member was briefed on a wide range of issues by the Director and other senior officers following appointment. The Decision Sheet was signed by the Cabinet Member and Director in late June.

9. When and how did the Director/ate of Children's Services obtain permission to by-pass normal processes (constitutional and policy) relating to decision making? Please include reference to source of this authority - verification processes, when this was approved by full Council and when amendment notices were issued.

Please provide specific details.

10. How long did it take for officers to formulate the proposal for the closure of this school?

The issue of surplus places has been known in Dudley as early as 1999 following a report by KPMG. The impact of falling birth rates on demand and surplus places was referred to in the 2000 and 2002 Ofsted Reports. Attention was initially focussed on primary schools but the impact would inevitably start to affect secondary schools. Local Authorities are required to review the supply of school places regularly. In this context Cradley has become increasingly vulnerable, as pupil numbers have fallen consistently over the last five years.

11. At the point the Directorate became aware / concerned that admissions would not be sufficient to sustain the school in the long term. What, if any, invitation was given to the Head and or governors to participate in the discussion on the formulation of proposals / options?

The headteacher and governors were not invited to participate in the formulation of the proposals.

12. Why did officers choose to recommend closure as opposed to taking action, which would ensure the schools long-term viability?

Senior officers considered a range of actions and concluded that the only feasible option was closure. To date no alternative proposals have been brought forward that will address the falling pupil numbers.

13. Comment on the merits of the notion that the action to close the school is premature and opportunist?

The proposals to close Cradley High with effect from 31 August 2008 are neither premature nor opportunist. The Council cannot allow a school to continue when it is no longer sustainable. Pupils and staff should have access to the full range of opportunities available in schools of sustainable size.

14. What consideration was given to the impact of the Pathfinder Trust in the context of this proposal and how would it be considered to effect the options available to pupils from the Cradley Area?

The Education Bill has not yet received Royal Assent. The admissions policy that will be adopted by the Pathfinder Trust is required to serve children from the local area. This will include those children that currently attend Cradley. Applications for places will continue to be a matter for parents.

15. Why is the LEA prepared to close the only secondary school site, which is completely accessible to wheel chair users? How will this fit with the Directorate / Corporate position on Equality and Diversity?

The school was surveyed in 2003 with regard to Disability Access. This highlighted a range of shortcomings across the school. The only recorded expenditure is for one area of the school. The data does not indicate that Cradley is 100% accessible to people with disabilities.

16. What consideration has been given to effect of moving 300 pupils with SEN / AEN statements / plans out of Cradley High and in to other schools - response required for both the individual and community impact?

Around 250 pupils are listed as required School Action. This means a programme of support to meet the child's individual need and the level of need will be relatively minor. There are approximately 37 pupils that are considered to require School Action Plus because they are not making enough progress. In this case the school may need to employ specialist support services. There are approximately 16 children with statements. Every child will receive sufficient support should a move to an alternative school be necessary. It is not clear what is meant by "community impact".

17. Advise what constitutes a community and if the numbers of pupils at Cradley High with identified additional educational needs form such a community.

"Community" can be defined in many ways. Please be more specific.

18. What analysis has been done on the Cradley School community and what in terms of this profile are the significant features of this group of pupils?

The critical factor is that not enough children attend Cradley High. As numbers fall, budgets and staff reduces and it is not possible to maintain the present level of education and care. Dudley secondary schools already provide for pupils with a very wide range of needs. We are confident that they would meet the needs of any pupil transferring from Cradley High.

19. If the cost of SEN and other additional educational needs provision at Cradley High is removed what is the actual cost per pupil?

As stated in the Consultation Document, the total budget for Cradley 2006/07 is £2.4 million. Divided by 607 pupils this gives a budget share of £4,000 per pupil compared with the Dudley secondary average of £3,516 per pupil. Cradley received £147,000 for Special Educational Needs (pupil led). If this was removed the cost per pupils would still be considerably higher than the Dudley secondary average.

20. What specific and particular SEN facilities are provided at Cradley High?

A briefing has already been provided. Please contact the school for more details.

21. What specific and particular SEN facilities are provided by (all) other schools on a location by location basis and how these would be accessed if the proposal to close are approved?

Children's Services would work with parents, pupils, staff and where appropriate specialist services to ensure special educational needs are met. All Dudley secondary school provide for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

22. Advise on integration strategies at other local schools for both race and disability and outline how this informed officer recommendations?

Children's Services would work with parents, pupils, staff and specialist services where appropriate to ensure the transition and integration is as smooth as possible. The proposals to close the school are based on falling numbers and the conclusion that the school is not sustainable.

23. Advise on numbers and categories of registered SEN / AEN pupils in other schools?

The table below shows that Cradley is not the only school that provides for pupils with SEN. It is not exceptional in terms of pupils on School Action Plus or Statements.

SEN Secondary Summary		11-16		
School	A	N	P	S
Thorns	114	1161	56	19
Summerhill	43	932	23	15
Dormston	69	1037	11	16
Crestwood	67	655	11	39
Coseley	177	702	44	8
Wordsley	132	514	28	8
Grange	82	699	14	12
Earls	126	992	21	17
Leasowes	102	1021	44	17
Cradley	250	304	37	16
Hillcrest	169	628	28	22
Pensnett	14	517	42	19
Redhill	105	984	59	18
Ridgewood	99	762	47	23
Castle	197	784	46	29
Bishop Milner	32	566	32	8
Old Swinford	59	355	-	-
Ellowes	118	865	11	13
Kingswinford	84	814	24	8
High Arcal	134	997	25	14
Windsor	99	1216	38	16
Holly Hall	25	615	23	13

Key:
A – School Action or Early Years Action
N – No special educational need
P – School Action Plus and Early Years Action Plus
S – Statement of Special Educational Need

The allocation of funding for children with SEN but without a statement of Special Educational Needs is based on two proxy measures.

- a) Less than average SATs results for all stages
- b) Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals based on a three year rolling average.

The distribution of funding is available in the Section 52 statement available on InsideDudley. See table in Q. 23 for numbers of pupils with SEN.

24. Advise on number and context of reported racist incidents at other local schools?

In keeping with the Local Authority's responsibilities under the relevant legislation the local authority does collect and publish certain information regarding racist incidents in schools. However, in keeping with the guidance provided by the Home Office and after wide consultation with schools and other interested parties the Local Authority produces this information relating to all Dudley Schools as one group. It does not produce this data on a school by school basis.

25. Advise on the number and context of incidents related to bullying at other local Halesowen schools?

All schools are required to inform the Local Authority of exclusion from school. This can be for a fixed period or permanently. Bullying is a category listed by DfES as a reason for exclusion. The table below indicates the reporting from Halesowen Schools under that category. The Local Authority does not record any other contextual data around this subject.

	Cradley High	The Earls	Windsor High	Leasowes Community College
Fixed term exclusion	3 occurrences 3 students 7 school days lost	0 0 0	0 0 0	10 occurrences 10 students 16 school days lost
Permanent exclusions	0	0	0	0

26. Explain why you believe that Cradley High is included in the consultation on transforming secondary education and why you would consider the basis of contribution equal to that of other schools.

The Investing in the Future: Transforming Secondary Provision Consultation is concerned with developing a common vision for secondary education. This vision will be the foundation of any inclusion in the DfES Building Schools for the Future. It is not about individual school proposals. Cradley High will remain as a school until a decision is taken to discontinue. No such decision has been taken. All those involved with Cradley High have the same right and opportunity to express their views as anyone else.

27. How many extra car journeys / miles are expected as a result of closing this school?

Parents have not been asked for preferences and it is not possible to estimate whether there will be more or less car journeys.

28. The Lead Member and officers for the Directorate have been asked on a number of occasions why the Council's own policies on consultation have not been used when dealing with school closures. To date this question has never been directly answered. Would you please explain if the Directorate is aware and understands the importance of the policies being referred to and the initial that question has not been answered?

Local Authorities are required to comply with the relevant legislation related to making school organization changes. Once a proposal to close a school is announced there is a high risk of premature movement of staff and pupils which could further destabilize the school. It is not in anyone's interest to prolong this period of uncertainty. Additionally, a very strong message received during the Primary Review Refresh Consultation was that once proposals were made the process should be as quick as possible. The approach to consultation complies with legislation and the avoidance of unnecessary instability.

29. Why were constitutional procedures on decision making ignored?

Please be more specific.

30. Why and by what authority is a proposal (such as the closure of Cradley High) which is both controversial and which effects a significant number of people not part of the Council's forward planning process?

The forward plan for key decisions does not include Cradley High for the reasons set out in Q28. The only decision taken regarding Cradley High is the decision to consult on proposals.

31. How did the Children's Directorate obtain exception from the Council's constitution on matters like key decision-making and why weren't processes designed to cover off urgent decisions used?

Please be more specific.

32. Would Officers ever consider small schools to be viable in the context of either secondary or primary education in Dudley?

There are no small schools in Dudley. The accepted definition of a small school is less than 100 pupils and very small below 50. Cradley High is not sustainable within the current national and local funding.

33. What evaluation has been done on the risk of injury or fatality resulting from the additional traveling required by the pupils of this community to locations other than Cradley High?

Children's Services will work with parents regarding preferences for alternative schools. When there is a clear indication of preferences a proper assessment of risks can be made and measures introduced. This could for example, include dedicated school transport if necessary. It is not expected that there will be significant increases in travel.

34. Please advise, as a comparison to Cradley High what the levels of spending are, on a school-by-school basis, on Additional Educational Needs. In addition to value please do by FTE and by category i.e. teachers, youth workers support staff. If the official response is to refer to information contained else where but not specific to this request then demonstrate how this informed the decision making process. If this information was not considered by officers then give reasons why.

All of the resources currently allocated to Cradley high for additional educational needs would transfer to other schools in accordance with the locally agreed formula (see Q23). The information requested is not relevant to the proposals to close Cradley High because the key factor is not enough children attend the school.

35. Please advise, as a comparison to Cradley High what the levels of spending are, on a school-by-school basis, on Ethnic Minority Service. In addition to value please do by FTE and by category i.e. teachers, youth workers support staff. If the official response is to refer to information contained else where but not specific to this request then demonstrate how this informed the decision making process used by officers. If this information was not considered by Officers then give reasons why.

Please see Q34.

36. Please advise, as a comparison to Cradley High what the levels of spending are, on a school-by-school basis, on Learning Support. In addition to value please do by FTE and by category i.e. teachers, youth workers, support staff. If the official response is to refer to information contained else where but not specific to this request then demonstrate how this informed the decision making process used by officers. If this information was not considered by Officers then give reasons why.

Please see Q34.

37. Please advise, as a comparison to Cradley High what the levels of spending are, on a school by school basis, on attendance and further behavioral support. In addition to value please do by FTE and by category i.e. teachers, youth workers support staff. If the official response is to refer to information contained else where but not specific to this request then demonstrate how this informed the decision making process used by officers. If this information was not considered by Officers then give reasons why.

Funding for attendance and behavioural support is not allocated through the formula. Support is specifically targeted to individual children or families and is not comparable between schools. Cradley High have the authority to allocate resources within the school budget should they wish. The proposals to close Cradley high were not based on concerns about attendance or behaviour.

38. Please advise, as a comparison to Cradley High what the levels of spending are, on a school by school basis, on spending for LA Counselling support. In addition would you advise on the impact this will have on the LA Counselling Support Service, if Cradley no longer buys into this service. If the official response is to refer to information contained elsewhere but not specific to this request then demonstrate how this informed the decision making process used by officers. If this information was not considered by Officers then give reasons why.

The LA Counselling Service has a very small budget which is used for referred pupils. The service is also available where schools buy in as a traded service. Cradley pupils are expected to transfer to other Dudley schools and it is unlikely that there would be significant impact on their service.

39. Please advise, as a comparison to Cradley High what the levels of spending are, on a school by school basis, on Local authority support service. In addition would you advise on the impact this will have on the LA Learning Support Service, if Cradley no longer buys into this service. If the official response is to refer to information contained elsewhere but not specific to this request then demonstrate how this informed the decision making process used by officers. If this information was not considered by Officers then give reasons why.

In 2005/06 95 schools bought into the traded service for Learning Support. If Cradley was closed pupils would most likely transfer to schools that subscribe or make alternative arrangements. Impact on the LA Learning Support Service would be negligible.

40. In response to questions about Cradley being involved in the consultation "Transforming Secondary School" provision Officers stated that "funding would not be given if we did not address the situation at Cradley High". This response appears to suggest that the only way other schools can be improved and government funds accessed is if the proposal for closure is approved. Is this a correct interpretation of the officer's views?

The DfES require proposals within BSF to demonstrate value for money in a range of areas. As Cradley High already exceeds the 25% threshold for surplus places and the DfES approval processes are extremely rigorous, it is extremely unlikely that approval would be given for any LA wide strategy that did not address wasted resources. Given the

evidence available now it is also likely that questions would be asked about the LA's capacity to deliver should action not be taken on Cradley.

41. During the course of this (and previous) consultations there have been numerous allegations about parents being prevented from obtaining places at the school (subject to the consultation) by the LA's Admission Office. Officers have consistently stated that this is not the case. What investigations have been made to establish why allegations like this should be made, what evidence have they that people are lying and what action has been taken to ensure that pupils can easily and readily enroll at these schools?

A small number of people have raised this issue and it has been voiced by a few Councilors on numerous occasions. Immediately after the first reference the matter was personally investigated. It is appropriate to advise parents that the school is subject to consultation on closure proposals as people should not be misinformed. Should parents wish to apply places will be allocated and there have been new admissions since the consultation started. It is understandable that people may not fully understand what is said. The Parents Guide to Secondary School Admissions is very clear.

42. On several occasions request for the translation of documents have been made; during the course of this consultation Officer's responses seem to have changed from being apologetic for the lack of availability / this omission (with the promise that this would be rectified) to we don't do translations just summaries. Would Officers please confirm what the exact position, with justification as appropriate?

At the 11 September consultation meetings reference was made to the translation of the consultation document. It was explained that the document would not be translated as the accuracy of any translation could not be guaranteed. It was also explained that meetings could be arranged by request with interpretation in different languages. An apology was given because the list of languages at the front of the consultation document did not include Arabic. To confirm the position, the consultation document will not be translated into other languages. The summary papers are intended to set out the key points in the Consultation Document to enable people to respond to the document. These papers have been translated into Arabic as requested.

43. Please provide a response via the consultation to the issues raised in this email received by me this morning - and as follows. For information I consider the issues being raised here are about pride, belonging, opportunity to succeed, to inspire, to be inspired and about having a sense of well being that comes from having a school in your community.
[Attached email] *Dear Councillor*

*I would like **our** school to stay open. My brother and I both attend Cradley High School, we are very upset because someone is thinking of closing our school.*

I only started the school this term I am in year 7, there was the only one boy {me} and two girls that came from my primary school {Dudley Wood} to Cradley High, most of my friends went to other schools because they were afraid of coming to Cradley High, they had listened to rumours spread by people who had not even been to this school .My friends all thought that I was mad to come to Cradley, I said they were wrong. My brother is getting on well at Cradley and so will I if I have the chance.

My brother is in year nine and if you close the school it will be very hard for him to settle into a new school me too, he has joined the football team they have just won their first match today and he is very proud, he would probably not get into a larger schools team. He also does very well in class.

My mom, aunt, uncle, two granddads , grandmother and cousins all went to school on Homer Hill Cradley I hope my other cousins will able to when it is their turn to go to high school.

I have wrote this email hoping you will take notice of what we want for the future MY FAMILY DON'T WANT OUR SCHOOL TO CLOSE.

I am sending this email with backing from all of my family.

Please forward the email to enable a response direct to the author.

44. What is the meaning of the word "consultation" in the context of the proposals to close Cradley High and as being used by this Directorate?

The meaning of consultation is set out in the legislation and guidance related to making school organization changes. The detail is available on www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolorg

45. Why did Dudley MBC chose not to consult on options for Cradley High? (Please note this question is about options for Cradley and not for provision in general.)

It is appropriate to consult on options if there is more than one feasible option. In this case the alternatives considered were to achieve some form of amalgamation with one or more schools. This would have required both schools to close and open a new one. It is very unlikely that another school would be persuaded to close given the numbers of pupils attending, for example, Earls or Windsor. Alternatively, Cradley High could close which would enable Earls or Windsor (for Example) to expand. There are too few pupils at Cradley High to meet the additional expense of running two sites and there is not enough space at either school to absorb all of the Cradley High pupils. None of these options are feasible. The only other possibility is to do nothing. If no action was taken the impact of falling numbers on the school budget and its ability to sustain standards has already been set out. Dudley Council cannot allow this to happen.

46. Officers have used the justification that only 34 people gave Cradley High as first preference - would the Directorate please advise on the allocation, on a school by school basis, of the allocation of first places choices in the authority.

Please see the table below:

Number of first preference applications for Secondary Schools 2006			
	2006 InBor 1sts	2006 OutBor 1sts	Total 1sts
Earls	189	64	253
Cradley	28	6	34
Leasowes	90	45	135
Windsor	280	38	318
Pedmore T	80	1	81
Oldswinford **	17	24	41
Thorns	228	9	237
Redhill	316	3	319
Ridgewood	116	3	119
Bishop Milner	113	25	138
Castle High	181	8	189
Hillcrest	213	9	222
Holly Hall	128	1	129
Coseley	75	68	143
Dormston	172	47	219
Ellowes Hall	146	1	147
High Arcal	267	18	285
Crestwood	110	1	111
Kingswinford	225	8	233
Pensnett	73	0	73
Summerhill	214	6	220
Wordsley	142	2	144

**Oldswinford as a boarding school has its own admissions procedures

47. Pupils with complex needs have already been advised that they cannot be placed at the alternative of their choice - please advise where they can be accommodated.

It is not clear what is meant by complex needs. If this refers to pupils with statements the nature of support needed and where it should be provided is specified in the statement. This is normally agreed on the basis of assessment by the Education Psychology Service taking into account parental circumstances and preferences.

48. Halesowen Area Committee refused to allow question on Cradley High in the session given to matters of public concern. This decision was taken after written questions had been submitted-what happened to questions handed in at the meeting of 13th and why were they not referred to the special HAC meeting?

Questions submitted to the 13 September Halesowen Area Committee will receive written answers. They were not referred to at the Special Meeting because the matter was not raised. Written responses have been made to Halesowen Area Committee.

49. Halesowen Area Committee held a special meeting to discuss local school closures. What was the status of this special meeting in terms of the consultation and why was no attempt made to obtain a consensus from the people attending in terms of either a general view or the view of the elected representatives.

The questions and responses will be considered as part of the consultation and will be reported to the Cabinet Member. It is not appropriate for officers to comment on the conduct of the meeting.

50. A recording was made of the meeting held on the 26th September please advise if a verbatim transcript will be part of the consultation and if copies of the transcript will be made available to the public.

Notes of all meetings have been taken as part of the consultation. It is possible, given the context of the previous meeting that some comments may have been missed by a note taker. To support this process an attempt was made to record the meeting. Should the recording prove successful it will become part of the consultation record along with all other notes and correspondence.

51. Why did officers give the same rationale for the proposal to close a primary school as they did for closing a secondary school?

Please be more specific.

52. Why did officers not advise that some questions were outside the scope of the consultation and that a response would take time away from the discussion of other pertinent matters? (This relates specifically to issues on future use of the site).

Consideration of the potential use of a site constitutes a high risk. The process is open to criticism of a decision being taken on the potential value of the site and building rather than educational reasons. It is safer to avoid such discussions. This does not prevent questions or comments and they would be noted without response. It is not appropriate for officers to advise on what questions should be asked.

53. Can you confirm who has the constitutional authority to issue statutory "proposal to close consultation" notices and what the role of Councillors is in this matter?

Statutory notices are issued by the Director of Children's services following a decision by the Cabinet Member.

54. Please confirm, on a yes or no basis, if the proposals to close Cradley High includes an automatic first choice parental placement guarantee.

No. Every effort will be made to support parental preferences.

55. Why would a school have a different view on its financial viability, to that of the authors of this proposal and who in the final analysis is in the best position to know which is true.

Cradley High School have not yet offered an alternative view regarding financial viability in any of the consultation meetings or in correspondence. The facts provide clear evidence. The number of admissions has dropped progressively over the last few years despite the improvement in GCSE results. The decline began long before the announcement of consultation. The Governing Body should have a very clear view of financial viability particularly as they will be faced with very difficult choices next year – regardless of whether the proposals are approved.

56. Why was there no specific consultation with the School Head, School Governors or Local Councillors on the alternatives being considered by officers in the immediate run up to the decision to propose closure?

No alternative options have emerged prior to the start of the consultation or since. Speculation in the media and at previous consultation meetings on secondary school closures has been widespread. Unfounded rumours create unnecessary instability for schools and others. As soon as a decision was taken to consult it was made public (see Q8).

57. The Children Services Directorate has confirmed that it does not adhere to LA general and published policy on consultation strategies and that it believes that a one option / no alternative recommendation is the only way to deal with a proposed school closure. Please confirm what assessment has been done on the levels of risk associated with poor decision making / pupil outcomes, later malpractice action against the authority and the probability of having to issue further proposals to close?

Where feasible alternatives exist it is entirely appropriate to consult on these options. It is also appropriate to state the preferred option if there is a preference. As stated previously the only feasible option for ensuring pupils have access to the wide range of opportunities that should be available in KS3 and KS4 is to close Cradley and transfer to alternative schools of sustainable size. The requirements for consultation on changes to school

organization are set out in legislation and guidance. Dudley has fully complied with these requirements.

58. Many questions are asked where comparative information is not necessarily available; why don't officers state that the specific information is has not been considered and if needed give their reasoning behind this.

Information covering a very wide range of areas has been provided where it is available. Proposals to close schools are not made without very careful consideration of the evidence and alternative actions. Although the detail is complex the key facts are compelling and clear. These include:

- The government has increased revenue and capital funding for schools across the country and has helped address some of the problems of decades of under funding.
- The impact of this funding is diluted in Dudley because so much of it is wasted in maintaining too many surplus places.
- The failure to address this has resulted in a growing number of schools that are no longer sustainable. Action has been taken to close three primary schools and reduce capacity in many others.
- The impact of falling birth rates over the last 12 years continues to affect primary schools and is now directly affecting secondary schools.
- The overall fall in pupil numbers means less money to distribute to schools and schools have less money to pay for teachers, premises, supplies and services – all of which cost more year on year.
- Cradley High's numbers have fallen year on year and there is no evidence that this will change.
- As the budget falls Cradley High will be forced into reducing staff which will increase class sizes and all the other problems described in the Consultation Document.
- All other secondary schools are in a stronger position in terms of finance and sustainability.

Although it is understandable that people wishing to keep Cradley High School open will look for comparative information, the key components are the number of pupils on roll and sufficient money to pay for education. Cradley High does not attract enough pupils to organize a viable curriculum and there will not be enough money to pay for the staffing required to sustain performance.

Press coverage during the consultation period

Detailed closure plan delayed by 24 hours – Halesowen Chronicle – 6 July 2006

Parents at closure-threatened Cradley High will finally get details of Dudley Council's plans to

axe the school today – 24 hours later than expected.

A consultation document outlining the scheme to close the Homer Hill school was due yesterday (Wednesday), but will now be released at noon today. The document signals the start of six weeks of consultation - three weeks before the summer holidays and three weeks in September when pupils return to classes.

Parents are already gearing up to campaign against the closure, while ward councillors have claimed the proposal is ill-conceived and will leave parents in limbo.

Cradley High parent Tanya Priest said she felt the council lacked organisation and had not thought about the effect on children. "I think it's absolutely disgusting they're closing it down. It's diabolical," she said.

"If it does shut the children will lose all their friends and some are taking their GCSEs. It's going to affect them emotionally and psychologically.

"Cradley High School is the only thing Cradley people have got. It's a perfectly good school and the teachers are so dedicated and enthusiastic.

"This is going to ruin our school holidays and it's put a big black cloud over the school."

Opposition councillors for Cradley and Foxcote ward have invited potential campaigners to contact them to organise resistance, while Labour MP Linda Waltho has branded the scheme "a bolt from the blue".

Tory councillors from Belle Vale have also criticised the timing of the announcement and questioned the capacity of other secondary schools in the area to cope with extra students.

Cradley High has capacity for 750 students. Its current roll is 609 and fewer than 80 pupils are expected to join in September despite there being space for 150.

Cradley High Closure Proposal – Yampy – 10 July 2006

Consultation has started on a proposal to close Cradley High School. Dudley Council has published the proposals for the school to close from August 31 2008.

Just 68 pupils are due to start the school this September, compared to a published admission number of 150. The fall in numbers year-on-year follows the decline in the birth-rate and the reduction of primary school numbers. Currently, 19% of places at Cradley High School are unfilled and this will rise to 27% by September 2006.

With fewer pupils opting to start their secondary education there and, as funding falls, it will be unable to continue to offer the present high quality of education.

Parents will receive copies of the consultation document explaining the proposal. The consultation starts today (July 6) and will run for six weeks - three weeks before the summer break and three weeks at the start of the autumn term.

Councillor Liz Walker, cabinet member for children's services, said: "It is very sad when schools have to close because of falling rolls, but it is in the best interest of children that they attend a school with stable numbers.

"We are at the mercy of government funding which will only maintain actual pupil places in each school; it will not fund surplus capacity in any school.

"Schools have to have sufficient funds to employ specialist staff to teach the appropriate curriculum so pupils can exercise the choices and options which should be available to all pupils in the borough.

"During the consultation there will be a series of meetings for parents, staff, governors and pupils and I want to assure anyone that takes part in this that all views will be listened to."

School crisis meeting – Halesowen News – 13 July 2006

Parents were set to meet last night (Wednesday) at under-threat Cradley High to discuss plans to axe it.

Proposals to close the Homer Hill school in August 2008 due to falling pupil numbers are on the table from Dudley Council.

The six-week consultation period started on July 6, with parents receiving copies of the consultation document explaining the proposal.

Councillor Richard Body said the document showed that most Cradley pupils would end up transferring to Pedmore Technology College. He said: "It's a chance to tell parents the truth. A lot of the children will not attend school in the Halesowen area."

School closure not 'done deal' – Halesowen News – 13 July 2006

Education bosses assured councillors a proposal to close Cradley High due to falling pupil numbers is not "a done deal" at a meeting of Halesowen Area Committee.

There were complaints about the timing of the announcement to give the 30-year-old Homer Hill

school the chop, just before the school holidays leaving staff and pupils in limbo.

Cradley councillor Tim Crumpton said he was fearful the decision to close the school in August 2008 had already been made and the consultation period was just a formality, at the meeting last week. He said: "It looks like a done deal.

"It worries me profusely that only two years ago a report came out that said there are no spare places in Halesowen and we were over subscribed in Halesowen schools.

"Can you imagine what it's like to be a parent of a child who has been told their children might not have a school to go to?"

But Cindy Peek, assistant director for partnership and children's trust for Dudley Council, said: "No decision has been made on the future of Cradley High, but there's concern that there's been a loss of numbers at the school and that it will suffer financially and educationally as students will begin to drop and budgets fall."

The consultation will start on July 5 and run for six weeks - three weeks before the summer break and three weeks at the start of the autumn term.

Councillor Bob James expressed concern over where pupils would go if the school closed. He said: "I accept numbers have fallen at Cradley High, but if we take Halesowen secondary schools we haven't enough places for the children, so where do they propose we send the children from Cradley High - as I believe Stourbridge is in the same position?"

Councillor Jenny Dunn called for a special Halesowen Area Committee meeting to discuss plans.

Crisis talks as axe looms – Halesowen Chronicle – 13 July 2006

Campaigners fighting to save Cradley High have met Dudley education bosses for showdown talks about controversial plans to close the school.

A 1,000-name petition was handed to director of children's services John Freeman at the meeting last night, while parents expressed their fears that other secondary schools in Halesowen don't have enough space to accept all of Cradley's pupils.

Dudley Council released the official proposals to close the school last week, signalling the start of six weeks of consultation. If the plans go ahead, Cradley High School will close in August 2008.

Now the petition, started by a student at Cradley High barely two weeks ago, has become the

early focus for parents and residents to oppose the scheme.

Cradley High mother Tanya Priest, who helped collect names, said the rocketing number of signatures – including traders and residents – highlighted the town's anger at the plan. "We are all in uproar about this closure because it's going to damage the whole community," she said.

"For the children, it's going to be hugely unsettling and it will be like going to a ghost town for them in the year before the school closes."

Mrs Priest said she had no confidence in Dudley Council's willingness to listen to alternatives and questioned the ability of other Halesowen schools to provide places. "I think it's a done deal," she said. "I've rung admissions departments at various schools and there are no spaces available.

"There's plenty of motivation to keep the school open and we are 100 per cent determined to fight for its future," she added.

Cradley and Foxcote councillors have backed the campaign said they were encouraged by the size of the petition. Councillor Gaye Partridge said: "We have been taken aback by the strength of feeling that has been demonstrated by the petition. The plan to close the school is really worrying us."

Councillor Tim Crumpton said any plans to close Cradley High School should have formed part of Dudley Council's ongoing review into secondary education. "We seem to see closure as the only option, but taking the issue outside the overall consultation negates our ability to investigate alternatives," he added.

Assistant director of children's services Ray Watson said plummeting pupil numbers meant there was little option but to close the school and said space would be expanded at other secondaries to cope. "Other secondary schools at the moment don't have space, but we are in discussion with all of them to see how we might provide extra places," he said.

Parents in protest at school closure bid – Express and Star – 13 July 2006

Scores of angry parents packed into a hall to attack Dudley Council's proposal to close Cradley High School.

More than 100 people turned out last night to listen to council representatives explain the reasons the school in Homer Hill has been earmarked for closure. There were heated scenes as parents stood up to voice their opinions and make comments about the proposed closure. But they were told only 68 children would be joining the school for the new term in September and standards would soon start to drop because of falling pupil numbers.

They were also told how the consultation process would develop over the coming months, with a final decision on the fate of the school pencilled in for later this year or early next year.

Consultation started last week and will run for six weeks – three weeks before the summer break and three weeks at the start of the autumn term. Letters have been sent out to people concerned by the closure and education chiefs say they will listen to their views.

Changes are being considered because a dramatic fall in birth rates across the borough has created scores of surplus places.

The move means teenagers half way through their secondary education could be forced to resettle in neighbouring schools, including Earls and Windsor high schools and Pedmore Technology College.

Director of children's services John freeman warned parents that although the school was improving year on year, falling pupil numbers meant standards would soon start to drop. "This is a good school but the reason why we have brought this proposal forward is because only 68 children have chosen to come here in September and, of those, only 34 made the school their first choice.

"If we had 300 children coming here rather than 200 going somewhere else we would not have a problem."

Parent governor Wesley Earpen said: "My initial reaction to hearing the proposals was one of sadness and upset.

"I have six children, five of whom have been to Cradley High School."

Leisure centre may stay open – Halesowen News – 20 July 2006

A leisure centre could live on at Cradley High even if plans to give the school the chop get the go-ahead. The school sports halls and rooms are regularly used by a host of community groups including three football clubs, martial arts groups and a social club.

Now it looks like there is a glimmer of hope that if the Homer Hill school did close, part of the building would be kept for use by community groups.

Part of the consultation document prepared by Dudley Council, which is proposing the closure citing falling pupil numbers, states: "There is significant community use of the facilities at Cradley High.

"The school is utilised by nine badminton groups, three football clubs, two martial arts groups, a dancing group, a fitness group and a social club.

"Discussions will take place over the next year with these and other community groups, other council services including sports and leisure, adult learning and further education colleges.

"These discussions will include the possible retention of part of the existing school buildings for community use.

"Agreement will need to be reached on the management of the facilities and how they will be paid for."

Councillor Richard Body said it would be a travesty if community facilities were lost altogether. He said: "The area needs the building - it's not only the leisure facilities we have a whole school building there that could be used for adult learning, or for tuition.

"There's groups that meet there - it could also be used as an OAP day care centre.

"There's such a lot to lose - it would be such a waste.

"It would be a crying shame.

"It's just not an option of losing the building for community use."

The consultation ends three weeks after the start of Autumn term. If proposals are agreed the school will close on August 31 2008.

Closure meeting anger - Halesowen News – 20 July 2006

Hordes of angry parents attended a meeting to question Dudley Council's education chiefs over controversial proposals to axe Cradley High school.

More than 100 people were at the meeting last week which saw director of children's services John Freeman, education boss councillor Liz Walker, and assistant director for children's services Ray Watson, come under fire.

Concerned parents were told only two thirds of children living in the school's catchment area chose to attend it, with just 68 children set to start in September. But they argued the school was top-notch and that the closure had already been decided on.

Councillor Richard Body said: "At times it got quite rowdy, parents believe they have let the children down over the years and haven't invested in the school. There was overwhelming feeling against the closure and allegations that it is a done deal.

"The feeling is of hopelessness - it's what they want to do - they are hell bent on closing the school."

Schools verdict: Exonerated - Express and Star – 20 July 2006

A government inquiry into controversial school closures in Dudley has exonerated the council and concluded education bosses "did not act unreasonably".

Schools minister Jim Knight has ruled that Dudley Council's consultation into the closure of three borough schools met statutory requirements and would not be investigated.

In an exclusive interview with The Chronicle, assistant director of children's services Ray Watson said the findings were proof that the authority had children's best interests at heart. "There's nothing to apologise for," he said. "Our primary aim is to make sure all children have access to properly resourced education.

"You can always do things better, but we'll learn from previous experiences and apply the lessons to future consultations."

After almost a year of bitter rows and desperate protests, campaigns to save primary schools Holt Farm, in Halesowen, Sycamore Green, in Dudley, and Highfields, in Coseley, now seem in vain. Two others earmarked for the chop - Beauty Bank, in Stourbridge, and Halesowen CofE Primary - will also be disheartened by the finding.

And early calls to block the planned closure of Cradley High School - currently in the consultation stage - will find little encouragement from the decision.

Mr Watson stopped short of criticising interference from the four borough MPs, but appealed for their support to make the closures run as smoothly as possible. "The MPs' comments have had an impact in damaging public confidence in what we are doing," he said. "We want to work with MPs because they've got a valuable role to play in building public confidence."

Mr Watson said the decision vindicated education bosses' determination to compensate for falling birth rates by closing schools. "There's no evidence of a significant upturn in the birth rate," he said. "Predictions are predictions, but these are actual figures and all immigration and new housing estates are taken into account."

And with another storm brewing over recently released proposals to close Cradley High, Mr Watson insisted the dwindling numbers of children applying to join the school could not be ignored. "Cradley's numbers are falling through the floor and there haven't been enough children born in the last five or six years to make a substantial difference," he said.

Mr Watson assured worried parents that capacity at other secondary schools in the area would be increased to meet the demand from Cradley.

In Stourbridge, criticism has been levelled at Dudley Council for the decision to plough on with revised plans to close Beauty Bank Primary School despite an independent schools adjudicator throwing out the original proposals.

Mr Watson said: "The proposal to close Beauty Bank was always the right one. The viability of the school was clearly dissipating as the numbers fell fast."

The assistant director also played down Halesowen CofE campaigners' claims the council has "betrayed" the school by scrapping four years of planning to build a £5million flagship school on the site of Hasbury CofE.

Council won't have easy ride – Halesowen News – 27 July 2006

A campaign is underway to save Cradley High from closure - with more than 1,500 names already on a petition and protestors vowing to fight to the end.

A campaign committee has been formed by parents Tanya Priest and Nahad Yafai who are determined to do all they can to save the school. They are urging people to attend a meeting on September 1 at the school in Homer Hill to discuss how to derail plans to axe it in August 2008 due to falling pupil numbers.

Around 100 jobs - including teachers and people working at the site's leisure centre hang in the balance.

Tanya said: "We are going to get all the parents together at the meeting to coordinate a strategy we are not standing for this.

"The council thought they would have an easy ride but they won't.

"The whole community is getting together and we are 100 per cent going to fight against the closure.

"Some parents think their children will be moved to a Halesowen school, but they will be disappointed - the figures don't add up.

"The council should look at alternatives to closure.

"There's a lot of children with special education needs at Cradley and we are worried they will be lost in the system."

Tanya said the petition was started by a pupil.

Councillor Tim Crumpton and his fellow Cradley councillors Gaye Partridge and Richard Body are backing the campaign. Tim said: "It's a challenge but we have to give it our best shot.

"The kids will have nowhere to go if it closes.

"We want to know why the council didn't include plans for its closure in the general Primary Schools Review and look at education as a whole in the borough, rather than doing it piecemeal."

The meeting starts at 7pm.

School closure is not 'putting children and young people first' – Halesowen News – 27 July 2006

What are we to make of the Cradley High School consultation document issued by Dudley Council?

The front page doesn't bode well: "Investing in the future ... putting children and young people first". Only the modern fascination with spin-doctoring could use such hyperbole when the actual proposal is to close a school.

After this opener, the reader is more, rather than less, suspicious of the arguments made in the document. For example, there is a statement on page 6 that the "number on roll will fall to around 370 by September 2009". This is "based on continued intakes of around 69 pupils". But this is the lowest figure in the series, the next page shows a cyclical trend between 1997 and 2006. The total number in the school rose from 619 in 1997, peaked at 769 in 2002, and has fallen to 607 in 2006. If the pattern is cyclical, might we not expect the number to start rising again at some time in the future?

That the council is taking a short term view is confirmed by a comment on future housing developments and population change on page 16. "Any future changes to the situation would occur too late as urgent action is required now". But they must have a view, for example, about the disposal of the school. If it is sold for housing, how does this affect the case: more children but fewer schools?

As regards the consultation, the council seems to be making the same mistake as it did over the primary school closures. It wants to close the school but hasn't decided where the pupils will go. Page 8 says, "discussions are taking place to ensure that sufficient places are created in other schools". How do they feel about this? Do they have sufficient capacity? The same page shows that only one school in the group associated with Cradley has significant spare places.

How practical will it be for Cradley pupils to go to other schools? If say, the central Halesowen schools are the only ones within convenient travelling distances, how does this affect the numbers? And will they, consequently, become overcrowded?

Finally, there is an interesting table on pass-rates. Although I think it is invidious to make comparisons, it is interesting to note that whilst Cradley's numbers have been falling, and therefore its pupil-teacher ratio has been improving, its pass rates (A*-C grades) have improved more than any of the schools associated with it. Is this evidence for smaller classes? The school which is proposing to raise its admission number has not, between 2002 and 2005, been able to improve its pass-rate as Cradley has.

The consultation document therefore raises a number of questions. There must be a genuine consultation including a public meeting. Can the council really claim that taking a decision, based on a simple conclusion from current trends, is "putting children and young people first"?

NUT slams council – Halesowen News - 27 July 2006

The National Teachers Union has hit out at Dudley Council over proposals to close Cradley High due to falling pupil numbers, while increasing the number of students at Old Swinford Hospital School in Stourbridge.

The NUT issued a statement which reads: "The sudden decision to propose the closure of Cradley High School, whilst at the same time supporting the increase of the number of pupils, most of whom are borders, at the Old Swinford Hospital School is the logical outcome of the Educational Bill. The assertion the Bill will lead to greater parental choice is nothing more than a smokescreen."

Riddle of crucial missing minutes - Express and Star – 27 July 2006

Stourbridge MP Lynda Waltho is backing moves under the Freedom of Information Act to force the council to show what options other than closure were considered in the schools debate.

Rubbishing claims that the council had been exonerated, Mrs Waltho said crucial minutes of meetings to discuss alternatives had still not emerged. "I asked the council to show us the evidence of how they came to these decisions and the minutes of the meetings," she said. "I

think that's key because they either didn't discuss options or they did discuss it and haven't given us the benefit of reviewing it.

"The way they've handled this is like a lesson in how not to do a consultation."

Mrs Waltho criticised Dudley education bosses for forcing protesters to use the Act to prise information out of the council about the decision making. "It's absolutely inappropriate," she said. "The campaigners needed that information and it all should have been available."

Halesowen MP Sylvia Heal also challenged the claim that the council had been vindicated following the exclusive interview with education boss Ray Watson in The Chronicle last week. "I read the headline in The Chronicle with disbelief. The schools standards minister does not exonerate the council and I've never yet seen a consultation document that offered alternative proposals," she said.

"People just want to be dealt a fair hand. The more recent announcements to close Halesowen CofE and Cradley High School do not give any confidence the authority has learned anything."

Ray Watson said schools minister Jim Knight's inquiry found the council "did not act unreasonably" and vindicated education bosses' determination to compensate for falling birth rates by closing schools.

But the two MPs highlighted later sections of the minister's inquiry expressing concern about the impact on public confidence and expecting the authority to "consider very carefully how it handles future reorganisations".

In the wake of the findings, three primary schools - Holt Farm, in Halesowen, Sycamore Green, in Dudley, and Highfields, in Coseley - have closed. But three others earmarked for the chop - Halesowen CofE, Beauty Bank, in Stourbridge, and Cradley High School - are still mounting protests.

Mrs Waltho said claims the council was in the clear had been received with despair by campaigners. "The fact that Beauty Bank school wasn't mentioned in the inquiry should make people realise the council hasn't been exonerated," she said.

"That school has been manipulated to a point where it can't survive and that's a shameful way to handle anything."

"It's not dissimilar to what they are doing to Cradley High. I'm trying not to be a conspiracy theorist, but why decide to close that school at the same time as conducting a secondary school review?"

"The consultation was flawed and still is flawed," she added.

No intention of hearing our views – Halesowen News – 17 August 2006

I totally agree with John Payne's comments in Your Views (July 27). It is my opinion that our children's education is definitely not being put first. In fact we need to consider if we are all part of a large council experiment whereby they just want to shut small schools and ram our children into large already oversubscribed schools.

Their motto: "make them into big concrete jungles - your child can become just a number and not an individual and we can save money" even "who cares if the birth rate will increase - just let someone else pick up the pieces in the future."

As John states, their figures are being based on an annual intake of 69 pupils.

The trouble would appear that they have no intention of promoting the school or even listening to people's views, children's views or parents' views.

There will be a Public Meeting on Friday September 1 at 7pm at Cradley High School and perhaps if we can all stick to our guns we will save this excellent school from closing.

Record results - The archive @ <http://www.thisistheblackcountry.co.uk>, 31 August 2006.

The headteacher of an under threat Cradley school has praised students who have helped score a record 73 per cent GCSE pass rate.

Cradley High School, Homer Hill, has seen 73 per cent of students gaining five A*-C grades, the fourth successive increase in results. This is the second highest rate in the borough behind Oldswinford Hospital School. Top achievers included Dale Gregory, who scooped one A*, one A, three Bs and five C grades.

Dudley Council has proposed to close the school due to falling pupil numbers but angry parents are fighting against the plans

Headteacher Toni Fowler said: "I would like to thank the staff and parents, and of course the pupils, for their wonderful effort this year.

"Last year we were ranked amongst the most improved schools in the country and on the strength of these results we are confident of holding that position."

Cradley councillor Tim Crumpton said: "I'm absolutely thrilled for the staff and pupils, everyone must have put in a lot of hard work. It's a fabulous achievement. These exams have not got easier for pupils.

"It brings the decision to close the school seriously into doubt."

Dudley Council's education department and John Freeman in charge must seriously question his decision to close this school and seriously look to find out why he can't find pupils to go to the school.

"The fight still goes on to save it."

Congratulations would choke in their throats – Halesowen News – 7 September

Well done to Dudley Borough's children for their excellent GCSE Results! It was fantastic to see Cradley High School scored 73% second only to Oldswinford Hospital School and it is a crying shame as one of the top scoring schools to be considered for closure. It is a pity the Education Chief did not mention their excellent results in her praises! Perhaps Cradley High has already been long written off by Dudley Council or perhaps they could not praise this excellent school for fear of choking on their words.

Give school a chance to keep on going from strength to strength – Halesowen News – 7 September 2006

Repeated as

Give my school hope for the future – Express and Star – 7 September 2006

Re: Proposed Closure of Cradley High School

I would like to start by congratulating the pupils of Cradley High School on their fantastic GCSE results this year. We should all be very proud of them. They produced the best results of any comparable school in the Dudley Borough - 73% of these young people achieved at least 5 A* to C grades which means that they have a very bright future in front of them indeed!

However, the future does not seem to be so bright for the school itself as unfortunately Dudley Council seems to feel the school is no longer viable. How they can say this given the record exam results that were produced this year and the success stories this school has produced in the past I don't know. Surely they can see what our local community will lose if they close this school.

I personally feel very strongly about the situation that the school is in as I have personal experience of how great the school is. I attended Cradley High from 1994-1999. I always found the staff to be helpful, approachable and incredibly encouraging at all times, to all pupils. If it

hadn't been for them and their patience and faith in me then I am sure that I would not have achieved the GCSE grades that I did. I left Cradley with 8A*s, 1 A and 1 B and this enabled me to fulfil my dream of studying medicine.

This year I graduated from University of Birmingham and am now a doctor and I owe much of what I achieved to the help and assistance I got from the staff of Cradley High.

I know of many other people who have similar success stories to tell, where their education at Cradley has enabled them to go on to do great things academically and in other fields.

Basically, what I am trying to say is that the council would be mad to close a school with so much potential and so much to give to the local community. Who knows what the school can achieve in the future if it was only given the chance!!

So come on council, give the school and its pupils a chance to keep on going from strength to strength.

Hundreds gather to praise school – Halesowen News – 7 September 2006

Hundreds of campaigners heard praise heaped on Cradley High at a meeting to discuss how to save the 30-year-old top-performing school from the axe.

Around two hundred parents and pupils crammed into the school hall to hear campaigners, Councillors Tim Crumpton and Gaye Partridge and MPs Lynda Waltho and Sylvia Heal speak.

Dudley Council wants to close the Homer Hill school due to falling pupil numbers but protestors say their GCSE results - which saw it come second only to Oldswinford Hospital School in Stourbridge - prove it warrants saving.

Ex-pupil Becky Willetts (pictured standing left), now a doctor at New Cross Hospital in Wolverhampton, joined the committee to save the school along with a host of others. She told the meeting: "I'm disgusted they are trying to close this school. I'm so proud to say I went to Cradley and that I have made a difference."

Parent Nahad Yafai said his son came to England in 1991 at age 11 and couldn't speak a word of English but now he is applying to become a policeman. Mr Yafai said: "There's a large Yemeni community in the area, most of them go to Cradley High.

"My son came to this school and the support the teachers gave him enabled him to do something good for himself. Why don't they look at these success stories - we all work together in this school - it helps the ethnic community.

"Let's unite together to save it."

Governor and Councillor Gaye Partridge told the meeting: "It's important we have a voice.

"The closure will be difficult to overturn, but the results have been stunning this year."

Lynda Waltho MP assured campaigners: "We can win this through people power - you have got to make them listen to us" and Sylvia Heal MP backed the campaign and asked why other options including federation or amalgamation weren't considered.

Cllr Crumpton said campaigners were set to meet with governors this week and other meetings were in the pipeline.

Under proposals from Dudley Council the school, designed to accommodate disabled pupils, would close in August 2008.

Fighting Chance to save school – Halesowen News – 7 September 2006

Repeated as;

Inspiration for change – Dudley Chronicle – 21 September 2006

THE RECENT public meeting at Cradley High School was well attended and shows that local people are keen to save their secondary school.

A variety of points were made in defence of the school and there were plenty of volunteers for the campaign committee.

As I tried to make clear in my previous letter, this is a campaign which can be won. The case made out in the consultation document is weak and leaves several questions unanswered.

I would encourage local people to take heart; they have the example of Mary MacArthur and the Cradley chain makers for inspiration. In the 1984 miners' strike, the miners' wives suddenly found that they could get involved in the campaign to save the pits.

They could speak at meetings, they could challenge the authorities. A campaign always provides opportunities for ordinary people to develop skills they never thought they had.

The next key meeting is the Halesowen Area Committee on Tuesday, September 26th at 6.30 at Colley Lane Primary School. It must be well attended and the campaign committee must refute the case made out in the consultation document.

It can be done.

GCSE results speak volumes – Halesowen News – 7 September 2006

Also repeated as;

What next on the list? – Express and Star – 7 September 2006

Fantastic results for the pupils of Cradley High - a whopping 73 %. Looking at the past history the results are improving year on year. That speaks volumes for the Head and all staff involved.

Yet here we are again Dudley Council intend to close a damn good school. Purely based on falling birth rates.

Birth rates increasing, housing estates springing up on every available patch of land, migration on the increase. The Yemeni and other minority communities may suffer if these proposals go ahead,

Why does the Education Department not spend resources trying to attract more pupils to this school, instead of destroying an important part of Cradley?

Please take time and air your views to Cllr Elizabeth Walker, Dudley MBC, Education Department, Westox House, Trinity Road, Dudley, DY1 by 28th September.

Remember with Dudley Council, first it was the swimming baths then primary schools, now its high schools. What next our local libraries??!!!

Police restore peace during school protest – Dudley Express and Star – 13 September 2006

A public meeting descended into chaos when police were forced to step in as scores of protesters vented their fury over the planned closure of a Black Country school. Almost 100, angry campaigners stormed out of Halesowen Area Committee last night after repeated attempts to debate the controversial move were snubbed by councillors.

Committee chairman Councillor Harold Jackson insisted that any comments on the proposals could only be aired at a special meeting on September 26.

But the dozens of parents, pupils, ex-pupils and campaigners said they should have been told they could not ask questions on the school beforehand and said; they were being censored.

Police, who had been on hand at the meeting to discuss neighbourhood crime issues, were forced to step in as scores of campaigners remonstrated with flustered council bosses outside the hall.

Becky Willetts, who had attended the school until 1999, said she was fuming. "I was under the impression it was a public meeting about Halesowen and you could bring up anything you

wanted to about the area," she said. "I assumed from adverts for these meetings that we could talk about any issues of local concern, but clearly I was wrong

Campaigner Tanya Priest, who had dressed up as the Grim Reaper for the meeting, said: "The special meeting is just two days before the end of the consultation.

"Does anyone really think that is enough?"

Senior council officer Mike Williams told the protesters they would have ample opportunity to voice their feelings.

Councillor Jackson said the issue should be restricted to the special meeting at Colley Lane Primary later this month.

Police quell angry protest – Halesowen Chronicle – 14 September 2006-11-09

FURIOUS campaigners fighting to save Cradley High had to be moved on by police when they made a rowdy exit from a public meeting.

Trouble started on Tuesday night after the chairman of Halesowen Area Committee refused to let them speak out about the school. Officers stepped in when scores of protestors vented their frustration and stormed out of the meeting at Earls High School.

Pupils, parents, ward councillors and campaigners had staged a demonstration before the meeting and were expecting to be able to ask questions about the proposals to close Cradley High when the session began.

But committee chairman Councillor Harold Jackson insisted the panel would not be discussing school reorganisation because a special meeting had been arranged for a later date.

Ward councillor Gaye Partridge said Councillor Jackson was censoring campaigners. "I am raising my objections to the way this meeting is being conducted," she said. "This is a form of censorship by the chairman."

Former pupil Rebecca Willetts, who is now working as a doctor in Wolverhampton, expressed her anger to the committee at not being allowed to talk about her old school. "I was under the impression we could bring up any matter about the Halesowen area at this public meeting. Clearly I was wrong," she said. "It seems we are allowed to discuss anything so long as it is not our school."

Parent Tanya Priest, who dressed up as the Grim Reaper for the meeting, said she was angry that her request to put questions to members was denied. "We have come here tonight to get

answers to some of the questions we have handed in and you are not letting us” she said.

Another campaigner said: “The special meeting is two days before the end of the consultation on the proposals, and it is not giving us a chance to air our views and get the answers we need.”

Area liaison officer Mike Williams told the audience there would be “ample opportunity” for the results of the special meeting to be fed into the consultation process.

Campaigners walked out halfway through the meeting.

Several police officers, who were attending to discuss neighboured policing issues, moved the protestors on when the group attempted to continue its protest outside Earls High School.

Councillor Jackson later thanked officers for attending the meeting, saying: “At one point I was glad you were here. Mass shouting like that does nothing to further the cause.”

A special Halesowen Area Committee meeting is set to take place on September 26 to discuss the proposals to close Cradley High and Halesowen CofE Primary. The meeting will start at 6:15 pm at Colley Lane Primary School, in Colley, Halesowen.

Cradley High gave my kids the support they really needed – Halesowen News – 14 September 2006

A mum has spoken out in a bid to save Cradley High which she claims transformed the lives of three of her children who suffer from a variety of disorders.

Alison Summers said her daughter Eloise, now 17, is a changed girl after attending the under-threat school. She got six GCSEs, is now at Halesowen College and hopes to go on to get a job – something she never dreamed possible.

Eloise suffers from Aspergers syndrome - similar to Autism - and Turners syndrome which means her growth is stunted.

Alison's sons Thomas, aged 13, and Steve, aged 15, are pupils now. Thomas has an individual educational programme and gets extra support in the classroom because he is a slow learner and Steve, aged 15, had his ADHD picked up straight away something Alison said other schools had failed to do.

Around 50 per cent of children at the Homer Hill school have special educational needs – - making this year's GCSEs – which saw the school come second only to Old Swinford Hospital School - a tremendous achievement.

Alison said: "At Cradley High there's a personal touch. The staff do a fantastic job."

GAGGED: Area committee chief silences school closure campaigners – Halesowen News – 14 September 2006

Furious campaigners have vowed to "fight on" after Halesowen Area Committee members refused them the chance to discuss the proposed closure of Cradley High School.

A crowd of 50 passionate protestors, including current students, teachers and councillors, jam-packed Halesowen Area Committee on Tuesday but chairman Harold Jackson said he would not take any questions on the issue. But he did promise campaigners would be given the chance to voice their opinions at a special Area Committee meeting on September 26, just two days before the public consultation ends.

Cllr Jackson said: "We are not dealing with schools re-organisation as an item. There is a special meeting in two weeks time which residents are welcome to attend."

Dudley Council wants to shut the Homer Hill school's doors due to falling pupil numbers.

A Cradley High teacher, who did not wish to be named, said: "The meeting has caused a lot of ill feeling. Every child should matter.

"By not allowing us a voice they have fired us up now."

Rofik Yafai, pupil between 1991 and 1996, said: "They have not given the children a voice. They don't want to hear us and what we have got to say."

Current pupils branded the the denial to speak on the issue a "joke" while Cradley councillor Gaye Partridge called it a "form of censorship".

"Disgusted" Cradley cllr Richard Body said: "This is completely and utterly wrong. I cannot see the point in continuing with the Area Committee in its present format if when people turn up to voice concerns to local councillors the Chairman is allowed to treat people with such contempt. If this is the way they want to run their area committee then I'm not interested."

Campaigners can have their say at a special area committee at Colley Lane Primary School on September 26 from 6.15pm.

Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP Sylvia Heal, who attended the meeting, said: "People's views were not being heard at the meeting. I am unhappy about it."

School closure obsession is a cancer – Halesowen News – 14 September 2006

There is another type of cancer affecting the community. Like the medical condition, this form of cancer causes abnormal divisions and divides surrounding areas and can spread rapidly.

I am talking about decisions being taken by the Tory-controlled Dudley Council to close down very good schools.

Unfortunately we all know too well it is too late to save some - Beauty Bank, Holt Farm, etc etc. But who is next?! We all as a community MUST make a stand NOW.

The death-knell is proposed for Cradley High. This school has just achieved the highest pass rates for GCSEs - 73% - over all other secondary modern schools in the borough.

The school was purpose-built to look after and care for disadvantaged children.

The headteacher and staff are all doing an excellent job and have gelled all the different types of the community together in harmony.

Do we want this wrecked? I think not!

If council had promoted Cradley High it would not have falling pupil numbers – Halesowen News – 21 September 2006

On Tuesday September 26 at 6.15pm there will be a Special Halesowen Area Committee Meeting at Colley Lane School to discuss Dudley's Conservative-run council's plan to close two of its schools. One of which is Cradley High. One of the last Secondary Schools to be built in the Borough of Dudley.

The main reason the Director of Children's Services John Freeman gives, is the fall in pupil numbers at Cradley High.

I have lived in Wollescote, not a stone's throw away from Cradley all my life. My eldest son, now 20, attended our nearest school, The Grange (now renamed Pedmore Technology College). My youngest attends that school at this present time.

However If I'd had known what a good school Cradley High is when it came to choose a secondary school for him, I would have had no hesitation in sending my child to Cradley High. The trouble is no one knows unless you attend Cradley High what tremendous work is going on because the council failed to promote Cradley High.

Is that because Cradley High is one of the smallest secondary schools in Dudley and John Freeman and Ray Watson only want large secondary schools to remain?

What has been achieved at Cradley High is a testament to the hard working and dedicated staff - 73% achieving grades C and above, better than all other surrounding schools. This you would expect in more affluent areas - but no it's happening right here in Cradley.

Other schools such as Pedmore Technology College have had millions spent on them to become specialist schools, however this is not the case at Cradley High, yet it still achieves better results.

The council should be proud of Cradley High and agree with me, the reputation Cradley High has of been a troubled school is nothing but a rumour that this council knew about yet did nothing to stop Cradley children travelling to schools further a field.

It's only now people are finding out what a great little school they have on their doorsteps. This is down to the parents fighting to keep Cradley High open for their kids and future generations.

The falling numbers would never had happened if this council had promoted the school.

When more Cradley parents were wanting their kids to attend other schools rather than Cradley High the directorate of Children's Services should have stepped in to assist the School Governing Body.

We know now why they didn't. They want to close small schools like Cradley High and the drop in numbers is their only evidence.

Yet if every child aged 12-16 who's nearest school is Cradley High wanted to attend it there would be nowhere near enough places.

Please do all you can to attend the special Schools Area Committee and show your support for Cradley High and help put a stop to Dudley Council shutting small yet big achieving schools like Cradley High.

'Show support at schools meeting' – Halesowen News – 21 September 2006

A special area committee meeting into controversial plans to close two Halesowen schools will be held next week - with protestors appealing for people to attend.

Proposals to shut Cradley High and Halesowen C of E Primary due to falling birth rates will be discussed at the meeting at Colley Lane Primary on Tuesday September 26.

Cradley councillor Richard Body is backing the campaign to save Cradley High from the axe and appealed for people to attend. He said: "It's only now people are finding out what a great school they have on their doorsteps.

"This is down to parents fighting to keep it open for their kids and future generations.

"I appeal for people to do all they can to attend the meeting and show support for Cradley High and help put a stop to Dudley Council shutting small, yet big achieving schools like Cradley High."

Under plans Halesowen C of E would be closed and pupils moved to other schools of their parents' choice. Most are expected to choose Hasbury C of E which would be remodelled.

A report to councillors notes there are around 131 pupils at Halesowen C of E with 79 places free. It states the school needs £103,000 worth of repairs to bring it up to scratch and notes there are too few toilets and inadequate changing and cloakroom facilities and no school playing field for football and athletics.

Parent Jilly Bradbury spoke of her disappointment original plans for a £5 million flagship school on the Hasbury site were scrapped. She said: "Having been promised a merging of two wonderful schools, a state of the art building and a new name whilst maintaining the same traditional Christian values, we were looking forward to the phoenix rising from the ashes.

"Instead we have been trampled on and buried.

"The community of Halesowen will be dismembered with children's lifelong friends split up, the amazing team of teachers and support staff disbanded and parents once again starting the long journey to establish a safe caring environment for the children within their care."

The meeting starts at 6.15pm.

The consultation on Cradley High ends on Thursday September 28. The Halesowen C of E Primary consultation ends on Friday October 18.

Education should not be held to ransom by politicians – Halesowen News – 21 September 2006

Repeated as;

Put children first please – Dudley Chronicle – 21 September 2006

One can't help wondering what strange world Councillor Walker and her colleagues who are supposed to be the guardians of our children's education live in.

Any other authority would be celebrating the success of Cradley High not seeking to close it. This rich and diverse multi-cultural school has helped its pupils (some 50% of whom are identified as having special educational needs) achieve outstanding results and is a testament to the professionalism, dedication and hard work of its staff, governors, pupils and parents. It is something we as a community should be proud of and determined to defend.

The pile'em high education cheap approach of the Conservative council is deeply damaging to our children's education. Hell-bent as they are on closing the schools with the highest unit costs per pupil and shoehorning more and more children into the remaining schools.

It's about time we had an educational policy at both local and national level that puts our children's educational needs first; instead of them being held to ransom by politicians who know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Bizarre reflection on Policy – Dudley Chronicle – 21 September 2006

LINDA Waltho MP (Chronicle, September 7) strains to exonerate her Labour government from any blame for the closure threat hanging over Cradley High School.

Whilst no-one should be in any doubt that the Tory council is wielding the axe, it is the market approach to education which has paved the way.

The Conservatives first introduced the market approach in the 1988 Education Reform Act which, in effect, converted schools into competing businesses.

This was the point of league tables, per capita funding and all the rest of the market paraphernalia.

When New Labour came to power in 1997, Tony Blair insisted that these Tory policies should be retained. He called it modernisation. There are a number of examples in the consultation document on Cradley High School which illustrate how the market policy has worked against the school in recent years. Yet the situation in 2006 contradicts the conclusion the Tory council has reached.

Cradley and Halesowen have both seen new housing estates go up in recent years. We know the government is in the middle of a house building programme nationwide. If the school closes, this will release a substantial plot of land, possibly for more housing.

We have also just learned that the school has achieved record exam success. In the middle of the consultation document, it is explained that another Dudley school is applying for an increase in its admission number under the DfES's Expansion of Popular and Successful Schools scheme.

Isn't it a bizarre reflection on current policy therefore, that this year's top school for exam passes (amongst the borough's standard secondary schools) is the very one threatened with closure?

Appalled at the response – Dudley Chronicle – 21 September 2006

Repeated as;

Council has failed to consult – Halesowen News – 28 September 2006

Having attended the Halesowen Area Committee meeting I am appalled at how the good folk of Halesowen and Cradley were treated.

They attended the meeting, submitted a question for the public forum, yet were informed by Councillor Harold Jackson they would not take questions relating to school closures. Despite attempts by both the public and councillors at the meeting to allow questions, they refused.

How is this democratic? The people and children of Cradley wanted answers to questions relating to the consultation. They will not get this chance to speak directly with councillors again until September 26 at a special schools meeting – less than two days before the end of the Cradley High consultation period.

A definition of consultation is "an exchange of views in an attempt to reach a decision" and public forum is "a public meeting or assembly for open discussion." In my opinion Dudley Council have failed in both of these areas.

Fury after school axe questions are denied – Express and Star – 27 September 2006

Angry scenes erupted as parents and campaigners battling to save a Black Country School were denied the chance to ask questions.

Protesters fighting for the future of Cradley High School descended on a special meeting determined to have their say after being 'gagged' at a Halesowen Area Committee meeting earlier in the month.

But the same campaigners were incensed when committee chairman Councillor Harold Jackson – who had refused questions on the school's closure at the earlier meeting – called time just before 9:20pm, despite several people still waiting to speak.

Police were on hand to keep order as parents shouted protests. Earlier in the meeting Director of Children's Services John Freeman said money was being wasted in paying for empty places at borough schools.

His colleague Ray Watson said there had only been 56 admissions to the school at the start of the term compared to an average of 120 at most other schools, and added that only 34 of the 56 had picked Cradley High as a first – choice.

But parent's pointed to Cradley's recent 73 percent GCSE pass rate – the second best in the borough – as evidence it should stay open. After the meeting, Councillor Jackson said standing orders were in place which prevented any council meeting running later than 9:30pm.

School closure plan 'perverse' – Halesowen News – 28 September 2006

Stourbridge MP Lynda Waltho and Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP Sylvia Heal have joined forces to condemn "perverse" plans to close Cradley High School.

They are concerned the decision to close Cradley High School is being treated as a separate case outside of the Dudley Secondary Review and the school is being picked off.

The two MPs have submitted a joint response to the Dudley consultation and are asking questions to find out what the LEA is planning to do.

Both MPs are meeting with the Minister during this week's Labour Party Conference to discuss what they see as serious shortcomings in the consultation process, which closes today (Thursday).

Mrs Waltho said: "I am very disappointed that Dudley Council has decided to close Cradley High in this ad hoc fashion.

"The school has been an important part of the Cradley community for sometime and provides a sound education for pupils who attend."

Mrs Heal said: "I am concerned that the school appears to have been picked off in this manner.

"To plan to close this school is quite simply perverse."

Anger at schools meeting – Halesowen News – 28 September 2006

There was standing room only as hundreds of campaigners turned out to a special Halesowen Area Committee meeting over plans to close two Halesowen Schools.

Education bosses John Freeman, Ray Watson and councillor Liz Walker and meeting chairman Harold Jackson were heckled at the meeting which saw angry scenes over plans to shut Cradley High and Halesowen C of E Primary due to falling birth rates.

Jim Preston, head of Halesowen C of E Primary told the meeting “Closing Halesowen C of E and redistributing children won’t solve surplus places”. “In a few years another head will be standing here saying don’t close my school and parents sitting back there for the second time”.

Councillor Bob James said initially a new £5m flagship C of E School was promised to merge Halesowen and Hasbury C of E Schools. He said: “What is proposed now will have a terrible effect on some of the most needy children in the borough. We were promised money was available – a lie – a total lie”

Cradley High protestors presented John Freeman with a petition from 269 parents of primary school children pledging to send them to the school and spoke about it achieving the second best GCSE results in the Dudley borough.

Campaigner Tanya Priest said “If there are falling numbers at Cradley High and waiting lists at other schools, why didn’t the education department do something about it?”

Councillor Tim Crumpton appealed for the consultation period to be extended.

John Freeman denied claims parents who were phoning Cradley High to enrol children were being told they couldn’t because it was closing and cabinet member for education Liz Walker said she would not resign when a call was made.

Mr Freeman told the meeting the council would get £2m less government funding for schools because of falling pupil numbers. He said “People say ‘is this a done deal?’ – ‘has a decision already been made?’ – ‘is it a sham consultation?’. We are consulting on a proposal we think is correct, but it’s a genuine consultation”

The consultation on Cradley High ends today (Thursday), Halesowen C of E ends on Friday October 18.

[Tory councillors should get their priorities right and focus on our children's educational future – Halesowen News – 28 September 2006](#)

So the Turner Party manage yet again a front page in the Halesowen News. This time complaining about the traffic chaos In Belle Vale and that the new traffic system may be a black spot of the future.

Yet they do not comment or support or even bother to come to a public meeting organised by some of their own constituents against the closure of Cradley High School.

Both decisions, the new junction and the closure of the school, have been made by their own Conservative-controlled council, both decisions based on cost cutting. It seems to me that the

Turners pick and chose depending on the opportunity of a headline.

I will be interested to hear if they and other local Tory Councillors support local people when the closure of the school is raised at the Halesowen Area Committee. Will they support the staff and pupils of the school that has come top in Dudley in the GCSE results? Will they support the school that has improved so much over the past few years? Or will they continue to support a party that simply does not care about the future for the children they are supposed to represent?

I, along with hundreds of local people, know which matters most and it isn't buses running faster.

Meeting 'display' did little to help cause – Halesowen News – 28 September 2006

I read with interest your report on the disgraceful behaviour of a large group who attempted to disrupt the meeting of the Halesowen Area Committee, ostensibly to raise the question of schools reorganisation.

It was made absolutely clear by me as Chairman in opening the meeting that the subject was not on the agenda, for the very simple reason that a special meeting to discuss the matter had been arranged for the 26 September at which the proposals could be fully and sensibly discussed. It would have been totally impracticable to attempt to deal with the schools issue as well as all the other items on the agenda within the time constraints available.

The consultation document on Cradley High was sent out to interested parties on 6 July, and I would have thought anyone with a genuine interest would have been better advised to make a formal response to the Department, rather than seeking to disrupt a Committee meeting of the Council. This kind of display does little to further the cause.

Not the Tories doing the censoring – Halesowen News – 28 September 2006

Far from seeking to stifle genuine public debate about the future of Cradley High School, it had been announced long before the fiery meeting of the Halesowen Area Committee to which your story ("Gagged", 14/9/06) referred that, given the self-evident concern about the matter, the arguments for and against its closure should be debated more fully at a separate Special Area Committee meeting later in the month.

This would, in turn, free up the normal Area Committee meeting to deal with matters other than school reorganisation, of which there was a full agenda already. Surely this arrangement is not a particularly difficult concept to grasp and the Chairman made it perfectly clear at the opening of the meeting that questions about Cradley High School would not be taken for that very reason.

Yet, whilst one can forgive some of the parents for trying the meeting's patience by attempting to speak on what is obviously for them a burning issue, what is astonishing is that the Labour

members of the Committee - knowing full well that a special meeting had been called for just that purpose - even so still sought to impede business by using any and every ruse in order to keep raising the matter.

No doubt the Labour Party is counting it a victory that it has grabbed a headline, along with accompanying sound bites and photographs. However, the price their councillors paid is to not only expose themselves as being either stupid or wilfully mischievous but also by whipping up the parents to the point where they were heckling and abusing ordinary members of the public who wished to speak about other matters - to have done a tragic disservice to the cause they claim to be fighting for.

So, yes, "a form of censorship" was indeed in evidence on that unfortunate evening. However, it was not the Conservative Group that was doing the censoring.

Money better invested in our kids' education – Halesowen News – 28 September 2006

I attended my first Halesowen Area Committee meeting on Tuesday September 12 and I was not impressed in the slightest.

They are supposed to listen to the public but I am getting the impression that they are putting more effort into choosing "Halesowen by the Sea" sticks of rock that were placed on everyone's chair than listening to the public's views.

Many people who had important issues were simply cut off by the board and quickly moved on to the next question.

Perhaps they ought to invest this money into children's education rather than wasting tax payers' money on sticks of rock.

Obviously we know where their priorities lie.

We should all stand up to council 'bullies' – Halesowen News – 28 September 2006

Bullying is supposed to be classed as anti social behaviour by any right thinking person. We all know it should not be allowed or condoned.

Anyone in high authority should set an example. The powers that be in Dudley Council seem to be an exception to the rule. They are bulldozing their proposals through to close good school after school down.

They must be stopped now! Let us all stand together as a community to defend the foe within.

Shock over school axe – Express and Star – Unknown date

A Dudley secondary school has been earmarked for closure under a shake up planned by education bosses, the Express and Star can reveal.

Today letters from Dudley Council dropped through the doors of parents with children at Cradley High School as the shock news spread. It means that teenagers halfway through their secondary education could be forced to resettle in neighbouring schools.

The latest proposal comes after a similar shake-up at primary school level which saw three out of five proposed closures given the go-ahead.

Changes are being considered because a dramatic fall in the birth rate has created scores of surplus places. Only 81 pupils are due to start at Cradley High this September; despite there being space for 150.

The proposal is to axe the school, which has 607 pupils and nearly 50 members of staff, from August 31, 2008.

But parts of the school will be phased out next year, with no year seven pupils allowed places from September 2007. Consultation will start on July 5 and run for six weeks – three weeks before the summer break and three weeks at the start of the autumn term.

Cabinet member for children's services Councillor Liz Walker said there were no plans to close other secondary schools. She said: "It is very sad when schools have to close because of falling numbers.

"There is no sign of a significant increase on the horizon; by September 2008 the school will be unsustainable."

Cradley councillor Tim Crumpton said: "I am absolutely disgusted by the proposal, which seems like a done deal. Cradley needs a school at the heart of the community."

Chair of Governors Steve Freer, said: "I would like to express my deep sadness at the news."

Mixed feelings over school set to close – Express and Star – Unknown date

Parents surprised, but not all upset by move

Stunned parents today expressed mixed feelings at the news Cradley High had been earmarked for closure by education chiefs.

Ward councillors Tim Crumpton and Richard Body met the school's head teacher Toni Fowler this morning and pledged to fight the closure. Councillor Body said: "In the past three years the school has improved massively." Councillor Crumpton added: "After the primary schools review, we don't have confidence in the council's consultation process."

The proposal to axe the school in August 2008 was announced in a statement from Dudley Council last night, but parents were still in the dark as they dropped off pupils this morning.

The first they heard of the news came from an Express & Star reporter. And while some spoke of their sadness at losing the school, others were more than happy with the move.

Karen Evans has a daughter in year eight at Cradley High, so will have to find another school for her if the closure goes ahead.

"I'm shocked to be honest," she said. "That would be right before the most important year for her, so it could have a big effect. Pupils will have to go to Halesowen - much further. We'd heard rumours, but you know how people talk."

Mandy Wood's daughter is in year 10 and will leave before the planned closure, but she claimed there were better schools in the area. "It's a bit sad but there are other schools around," she said. "I think it's good the school is closing though, because it has had its problems."

"If there aren't enough pupils enrolling then what else can you do?"

Joanne Priest also said her daughter would leave before the axe fell. She said: "I think it's a good idea. There are some good things about it but a lot of teachers have left in the last few years."

"I know they don't have a big intake this year, whereas other schools are oversubscribed. There are much better schools out there."

Alan Horton's 13-year-old daughter goes to Cradley High and he said other local schools would be adversely affected. "They'll all get overcrowded," he said. "I don't want to send her to another school."

Parveen Akhtar was dropping her two sisters at the school. "It's a good school and I don't understand why they are closing it."

Education boss Councillor Liz Walker said: "Cradley High School has made real improvements, results are comparable to other local schools."

"The head teacher and her staff have had real successes with very many - thousands - of young

people, and these achievements must not be forgotten.”

Fears on plans to shut school - Express & Star – Unknown date

Plans to close a Dudley school has come under fire from the council’s own ruling Tory party.

The proposals for Cradley High are being blamed on falling pupil numbers, although the wisdom of this claim was repeatedly questioned at a Halesowen Area Committee meeting last night.

Belle Vale’s Conservative councillor, Robert James said: “I accept that Cradley High numbers have been falling, but what about other schools in Halesowen? Where do we propose to send all the kids from Cradley High? Has anyone given any thought to that?”

Fellow Conservative Belle Vale representative, Councillor Jennifer Dunn, criticised the timing of last week’s announcement. “I just thought, poor staff,” she said. “They have worked so hard all year and are a few weeks from the holidays. Now they will just be worrying about their jobs. What timing.”

Halesowen resident Derek Edmonds said he was concerned about plans to close Cradley High. “Will the members of the ruling group be throwing their weight behind the fight against the closure?” he said. “If this closure does not work out well, it will be our children and grandchildren who will be forced to go to overcrowded schools. The future of councillor’s could be at risk if they are seen to be doing nothing about it.”

Another Halesowen resident at the meeting, John Payne, expressed doubts about the proposed consultation period. “We are talking about the closure of one of the four schools in Halesowen,” he said. “How is this committee going to get involved in the consultation?”

Dudley’s Assistant Director of Children’s Services Cindy Peek stressed no decision had yet been made. “That is what consultation is all about,” she said. “It is considered that with the loss of intake, the school’s pupils would suffer if nothing was done. It would not be able to employ the teachers it needs to maintain proper delivery of the national curriculum. The closure, if it did come about, would not be an immediate one and there would have to be a discussion with other schools in the area about admissions.”

Blow for parents as school to shut – Unknown paper and date

Pupils, parents and staff were reeling today after shock news that council chiefs want to close a school in the Black Country.

The axe is set to fall on Cradley High School, at Homer Hill, Cradley, by the end of August 2008 - because too few pupils are choosing to go there.

The news, announced today, comes just a week after Dudley Council education bosses did a U-turn over plans to close Maidensbridge primary school at Wall Heath, which earned a reprieve to the delight of parents and pupils.

Coun Liz Walker, who was only elected to Dudley Council last month after an absence of 22 years but has been made cabinet member for children's services on Dudley Council, said today that Cradley High was no longer sustainable.

She claimed that the school had a capacity of 750 but there were currently only 500 pupils on roll. "Only 81 pupils are due to start at Cradley High in September, compared to a capacity of 150.

"The fact is that not enough pupils are choosing to go to this school – 30 per cent of the pupils come from over the borough border in Sandwell.

"A lot of people see Cradley High but choose to go somewhere else. No-one likes to take these sorts of decisions and I am in danger of quickly gaining a reputation but I have to do my best to deliver the best possible education for all the children in the Dudley borough," she added.

Coun Walker said there were too few pupils opting to start their secondary education at the school and, as funding fell, the school would be unable to offer the present high quality of education.

Parents were receiving a letter from the school today explaining the shock proposals after Coun Walker and Dudley's director of education John Freeman held a meeting yesterday with Cradley High School head Toni Fowler.

A consultation period will start on July 5, running for six weeks either side of the summer holidays and including a series of meetings for parents, staff, governors and pupils.

The closure will take place on a phased basis, with some pupils moving before the closure date and no Year 7 pupils starting in 2007.

Coun Walker said there were too few secondary pupils in the Dudley borough to maintain 22 secondary schools and numbers were continuing to fall. She stressed there were no plans to close any other secondary schools.