

Bob Wilkins

Comments to Cabinet Meeting 14th July 2011

Culverhay School Proposed Repeal of Closure

I support the long awaited objective of providing a co educational school at the Culverhay Site.

The wrong school, Culverhay, had been identified for closure as a result of a flawed Consultation process.

The process set objectives to reduce the number of spare school places, provide local schools, improve choice for Bath pupils and parents, and maintain high educational standards. Information on school numbers and number of Bath based pupils was supplied.

No specific school educational issue was identified as a key objective until the first choice for reorganisation, two schools north of the river being chosen to close/merge, was overtaken by events. These events being fast track Academy status being available for Oldfield and a Federation arrangement for St Mark's and St Gregory's. The decision to have a single school north of the river, and a school north of the river to close had to be abandoned.

The consultation data supplied showed that Oldfield and St Marks, both north of the river, were relatively unpopular schools with Bath based pupils and parents. Oldfield having a large number of pupils from out of Bath.

At the first round of consultation meetings Mr Parker had commented that only one school was needed north of the river because the majority of potential pupils lived south of the river, two thirds to one third approximately. Slides of catchment areas were shown at the meetings but comments on each slide were related to the problem of shutting one school north of the river.

The Council reviewed the changed status of the two schools and only had one school left to close, Culverhay, and chose it despite all the objectives set at the start. Neither Oldfield nor St Marks could be closed if Oldfield received Academy status and the Diocese refuses to close St Marks.

The then second choice was to close Culverhay on the basis of educational standards, an issue which had never made before for any school.

The second round of consultations were held for Culverhay closure and slides used again. However the comments were then related to why Culverhay should be closed, this time educational issues were highlighted which had never ever been mentioned as issues in any previous Council considerations. Even the travel arrangements as to how easy it was for southwest Bath pupils to go to Oldfield were highlighted. Again never previously highlighted in previous consultations. At this meeting no mention was made of the higher number of pupils living south of the river and only one school needed north of the river.

To sum up:- A primary objective of the reorganisation was 'to provide local co educational schools to all parents and pupils'. Culverhay's retention meets this objective for a the third of the population of Bath in the south west.

It should also be noted that the federation schools having their Sixth Form Centre at the St Marks site would achieve the other objective of a reduction in surplus places. Much less costly than the current proposals and prevents an incursion into the Green Belt