

**QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF EXECUTIVE
COUNCILLORS AT THE COUNCIL EXECUTIVE
MEETING 12th JANUARY 2005**

1. 2 questions from Andrew King, on behalf of Governors of St John's Primary School

As Governors of St John's RC Primary school we find ourselves in a very difficult situation. We also understand that the Council are in a different but equally difficult position.

We are in desperate need of a new site for our school as recognised in successive OFSTED reports and by central Government via the DfES. Funding has been awarded by the DfES which represents a significant contribution to education of the children of B&NES, that does not have to come from Council Tax funds. It is however the duty of B&NES to find a site for the new building. The process of finding a site has taken many years so far, hit a series of setbacks and It is now over a year ago that the planning application to build the school on the Lymore Avenue site was withdrawn on the advice of the Council. Since that point in time it feels like we have progressed little. We understand that there is a shortage or even absence of brown-field sites suitable for a school building, and the Council is faced with a series of potentially unpopular options.

We understand that the Council is currently considering three sites. Of these three sites, two seem to be potentially more suitable for a school in terms of proximity to pupil base, educational requirements and apparently in planning terms. These two sites are Glasshouse and Odd Down Playing Fields. Of the three, it is however these two sites which have already and are likely to continue to evoke the strongest voiced opposition.

We have been given initial information on the Glasshouse site as part of last Autumn's discussion paper, and have thus far, formally expressed a preference for this site to the Council. We have however received little information about the Odd Down Playing Field, and so have not been able to fully discuss our views and formulate a response to you about this site. Whilst on superficial examination it seems to a number of governors that Odd Down Playing Field could perhaps offer a suitable solution, in the light of the above, we would be somewhat concerned were you to narrow the consideration down to this site alone at this stage.

QUESTION 1: It is imperative to the School and I suggest to the Council's reputation that in another year's time we have not withdrawn yet another planning application with heads being scratched over a new array of sites. Are the Executive prepared to make a decision that is likely to be extremely unpopular in certain quarters and are they prepared to stand by this decision and do everything necessary to ensure that a new school is built on that site?

Answer by Executive Councillor Jonathan Gay

The Executive has a record of making difficult decisions and defending them publicly. I agree that a failure to progress the scheme will be very damaging to the Council's reputation. In relation to St John's I remind everybody that at the meeting of the Executive on November 3 we stated publicly that progress on the project was of critical importance and that is reiterated in the report in front of us today.

QUESTION 2: In the light of the inevitable opposition that is likely to arise in relation to any of the currently proposed sites what do the executive plan to do in order to:

- a) Correct any misinformation (some of which is already circulating) about the size of the school and its likely effect on other schools in the area.
- b) Reassure other school in the locality
- c) Protect St. John's school itself from becoming the brunt of ill feeling, over a decision that is out of our control?

Answer by Executive Councillor Jonathan Gay

The report in front of us today proposes that a full consultation exercise is undertaken with people and organisations surrounding one or more of the sites under discussion. I believe that this will serve to correct any inaccuracy and defeat any misinformation that may be circulating. This will of course include those schools in the area who may perceive the addition of St John's to the community as a threat.

3. Question from Rev Alan Bain, Vicar St Philip St James, Odd Down

There are 100 spare places for primary children in St Martin's Garden Primary School and a further 20 in St Philips primary leaving 120 spare places at present. If a new St John's RC Primary school is built in the area it is acknowledged that this will provide at least another 60 spare places even with pupils travelling in from other areas. This will amount to 180 spare Primary places on Odd Down which will inevitably precipitate a crisis for the existing schools. It is unjust to ask the existing schools to lower their numbers to allow a larger new school into the area to take pupils from them.

Why then, are the council suggesting building a new school on any part off Odd Down so precipitating a crisis for the existing schools and providing 60 more places that cannot be filled when there are already 120 empty places? How will they prevent either closure of one of the existing schools or lowering of numbers in the existing schools?

Answer by Executive Councillor Jonathan Gay

Neither of these schools have been asked to reduce their admission number as a result of the potential relocation of St John's. Neither school is at risk of closure in the medium term.

Members and others will remember that on December 1st we agreed, as an outcome of the Area Review of Primary Schools in South East Bath, that capacity at St Martin's Garden Primary should be reduced in line with Governors plans.

St Philip's is effectively full and there is no requirement or plan to reduce capacity at this school.

It is not acknowledged that St John's will provide at least another 60 spare places. Numbers on roll at the school fell from 315 to 255 between September 2002 and September 2004. As is stated in the report some of this is probably attributable to the general fall in the numbers of children affecting the majority of our primary schools. However, we also attribute the fall in numbers to the continued uncertainty regarding the location of the school and the way in which the school is organised by Key Stages on two sites a considerable distance from each other.

We believe that a school of 315 places more accurately reflects the level of demand and do not anticipate adding to the unfilled places in the area over the medium term.