

## **Ishbel Tovey** Secondary School Reorganisation Meeting – 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010

The three schools under threat have one thing in common – they are all under-used by their communities. Tonight, I am here to assure you that if Oldfield were coed it would not remain underused for long. A massive 98% of the parents we surveyed in Newbridge and Weston have expressed a desire for just such a school.

But, before you make your decision tonight I would urge you all to look at the map of Bath and see where the schools are currently located. You will see that if Oldfield were closed it would leave a significant area of the city without a school. And two of your aims are, after all, to make local schools the natural choice and avoid long travel times for children.

Any school closure is devastating for the children at the school but to close Oldfield would disadvantage all the children in the North West of Bath. They would last on the list for entry to all the remaining schools. There are no other schools nearby. Ralph Allen is 5 miles from Weston. Culverhay is over an hour's walk and 50 mins in a bus. Beechencliff and Hayesfield involve crossing the river. Although it is argued for the purposes of this consultation that Hayesfield and Beechencliff be considered as central, I doubt that even the most unscrupulous of estate agents would dare to advertise a property neighbouring Beechencliff as central. That leaves the only other school in the north - St Marks. It is an hour away by bus and takes you through some of the worst congestion in town. It would not be sensible to have children crossing from the North west to the North East or vice versa. The congestion along the London Road is one of the biggest challenges facing this council, surely it is madness to add to it.

Culverhay, however, is close to many other schools such as St Gregs, Hayesfield and Beechencliff and only a 15min bus-ride from Ralph Allen.

If Oldfield were to become co-ed, it would put right a school system which has been wrong for years. Boys in our area have been forced to travel long distances to Beechencliff (their nearest school) – 50 mins by bus, £3.10 a day or an hour's walk (check) and their sisters have followed them to Hayesfield as it makes sense to parents to have their children in the same part of the city and to drive them when they can. Imagine how congestion on the Windsor Bridge would be relieved if those children were schooled in their own area north of the river. If the council is serious about tackling congestion and reaching their carbon emissions targets, they must stop this daily flow of school children across the river.

Bath is a city divided into North and South by a river. 45% of children live in the North and 55% in the South. Any solution which fails to take that into account is doomed. It is ludicrous to have one school in the North and 5 in the South.

The argument that Culverhay School should remain open because it serves a deprived area is a compelling one but, not if the only way to do so is to deprive the children of the North West of Bath for generations to come. I remain unconvinced that it is necessary to close one of Bath's seven secondary schools in order to save just £250K a year but if one is to close, then it should not be Oldfield.