

Public Meeting at Somerhill School held on 2nd April 2009 at 19.00hrs

The meeting was attended by the head teacher, chair of governors and a number of other governors of the Somerhill Junior School, The head teacher and governors of Davigdor Infant School, Gil Sweetenham and Gillian Churchill from the Local Authority, a number of local councillors, Celia Barlow MP and approximately 12 members of the community.

The meeting was publicised in a consultation document that was distributed by the school, approximately 750 copies of the document were distributed to parents and carers of pupils at both Somerhill Junior School and Davigdor Infant School. Copies of the document were made available to anyone who requested a copy.

The Chair of Governors (COG) of Somerhill Junior School opened the meeting and gave a brief introduction outlining the proposal to expand the school by one form of entry from September 2011. He explained that this meeting was to discuss the education reasons for the expansion.

Gil Sweetenham made a presentation on the reasons for the proposal and the statutory framework.

Following the presentation the floor was handed to the community to ask questions on the proposal.

The CoG asked about the building programme. It was explained that at present proposals for any associated building works were at a very early stage and that there would be opportunities in the future to discuss the building form should the proposals progress. A meeting between the school and the Local Authority (LA) had recently taken place, at this meeting the LA gave an undertaking that the schools visions and ideas would be an important part of the development process. If the decision is made at the Cabinet Member Meeting on 20th April 2009 to progress with the proposals work would start in earnest on the design of the proposed extension. It is anticipated that a planning application would be submitted in September 2009. There will be considerable dialogue with the school (including governors, staff, pupils and parents) and local residents during the summer term prior to submitting the planning application.

How many additional pupils would be in each of the schools and what additional support would be offered to the schools? There would be 90 additional pupils in Davigdor Infant School and 120 additional pupils in Somerhill Junior School. The additional support offered will be tailored to meet the needs of the schools. Ensuring that standards are maintained is paramount.

Celia Barlow MP asked if children would be admitted into Years 4, 5 and 6 or just into year 3. It is the intention that the school will fill from Year 3

onwards. However it cannot be guaranteed that the appeals panel will uphold decisions made by the LA.

Will there be a joined up approach to the expansion proposals? The governing bodies of both schools have been consulted and the schools have now set up a joint working group. It has been agreed that the two proposals are inextricably linked and therefore neither proposal will proceed in isolation. The two schools share the kitchen and dining facilities and therefore any proposals affecting this area in particular will be jointly discussed with both schools.

There has only been limited information about the extension proposals to date. It was explained that at present the only work that had taken place was options appraisal to ensure that the required internal accommodation could be accommodated on the site without encroaching on to the outside space. The proposals for the extension at Davigdor Infant School are more advanced because the school had engaged in the process at an earlier date.

What would happen if the proposals are rejected? It would be necessary to find spaces for the children at other schools. It is possible that this would be at schools in different parts of the city.

There is no mention in the consultation document about the outside space. It is accepted that the schools have limited outside space, however it is not possible to increase the amount of outside space under these proposals. Consideration can be given to making use of public spaces such as parks although often these arrangements are not well used.

Concern was raised about what would render the proposals unacceptable if it is accepted that there is inadequate external space. The LA uses the recommendations of BB99 Briefing Framework for Primary School Projects as the basis of its works. If it was not possible to meet the internal requirements of BB99 we would not continue with the proposals.

What would happen if the planning application was refused? If the decision is to be made to implement the proposals the LA is legally bound to implement the proposal. We will need to work with planning officers to ensure that a scheme is developed that meets the needs of the school and that is acceptable in planning terms.

Who will be the Decision Maker? It will be Councillor Vanessa Brown the Children and Young People Cabinet Member.

Concern that the decision on the education element of the proposal will be determined prior to the design being finalised. This is unfortunate, however if the decision is taken to proceed with publishing the statutory notice the design work will commence in the early part of the summer term. This will mean that the design will be significantly developed prior to the final decision being taken on the education proposal on 6th July.

What guarantee is there that the budget for the scheme will not be cut?

There can be no absolute guarantee on this point. However the funding allocations for the 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years are known and it is this funding that will be used for the project should it proceed.

Is it the need for places that is the driver for these proposals? Primarily yes. The head teacher at Davigdor said that although this is the case he feels that the school have benefited from receiving a very good quality design and that the school are very happy with the interaction between themselves and the LA and the outcome.

The meeting closed at 20.15hrs.

