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Draft Minutes of Consultation with Parents on selling of school land
Held on
Thursday 6th February 2014 at 6.30pm in the Drama Studio

Present

Pauline Conway (PC) – Vice Chair of Governors
Faith Lusted (FL) – Parent Governor
Daniel Sadler Head teacher (DS)
Ross Stuart - Chair of Governors (RS)
Clare Thurston – Parent/Neighbour
Neil Thurston – Parent/ Neighbour
Mr Barnet – Parent
Mr Scoley – Neighbour
Kate Orchard – Parent/Neighbour

In Attendance

Leena Wisely – Clerk
Leigh Rawlins – Sonning Common Parish Council

Welcome

The chair welcomed everybody to the meeting and introduced the Governors present, the Head Teacher and Leigh Rawlins.

The Head Teacher, Mr Daniel Saddler explained the objective of the meeting and outlined the content that would be covered.

It was noted that there would be a presentation followed by questions from the floor.

It was reported that it was statutory to have a 6 week consultation period before applying to the Secretary of State to seek permission to sell the school land. The members learnt that the school were applying for permission with the view to sell some school land following discussions with the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) committee. The school wanted to ensure any development would be mutually beneficial for both the community and the school.

It was explained that the school has halved in size in recent years and the land is too big for future and current needs. It was noted that the NDP had surveyed the site to see if development would be suitable and the area past the school and to the right was an areas of outstanding natural beauty. The NDP divided the site into two plots Son15a and Son15b and it was concluded by the NDP following numerous studies that Son15a had been designated as a possible site for development for housing. This would go to a village referendum and be subject to normal consultation if permission was given to sell the land from the secretary of state.

The audience learnt that the proposal could not proceed to a village referendum until it was confirmed that the secretary of state would grant the sale of the land. It was confirmed that Son15a has been included in the NDP.

The attendees of the meeting learnt that the school site is 10.7 hectares and an old site that needs updating. The school has an ageing infrastructure of drains, heating and computer cabling and high maintenance costs are high due to the age of the building with limited covered areas for students. DS confirmed that it was highly unlikely that OCC would pay for much of the works to be done, as there were many schools in a worse state of dis-repair.

The group studied the plans and site drawing and it was confirmed that the school fell under Kidmore End parish council.

The group learnt that the school is in a deficit and although monies are available to Academies, the school has Foundation status is and unable to move forward to Academy status due to its financial situation.

The group noted that the land in question is currently used for lunchtime recreation and would need to be valued before the application to the Secretary of state to seek permission to sell. An approximate value was £1.8m

Q. Would £1.8m allow the school to complete all the working needed for the site? Some monies would be saved for future works. The priorities such as the drains would be given immediate attention. Then the focus would be on upgrading the IT so students would not be at a disadvantage. There is a lack of student sheltered areas for wet weather and this would be a consideration and money would be set aside to match funding for sports facilities. The head teacher stressed that no amount has been allocated to any project until permission has been confirmed and valuations completed.

The presentation continued with a slide to show the ratio of students to the minimum area needed per student. The school has 509 pupils and the audience learnt that even if the school increased to 900 pupils, the school area without SON15a was still much more than the recommended area suggested by the Government.

The audience were shown a slide of the site and where Son15a would be and were recommended to engage with the NDP committee to discover the specific reasons for their decision.

The presentation continued with the schools aspirations for the future to give the audience an understanding of what the future of the school could be with the development going ahead.

The Chair of Governors asked the floor for any questions.

Q. Will the school be able to influence what is built on the site e.g. sports facilities? The NDP have already ear marked a site for sports facilities

It was stressed that the school didn't go to the NDP or a developer and try and squeeze in as many houses as possible on to the site. The school wanted to engage with the village to have a conversation for a mutually beneficial development and nothing has been planned yet.

Q. Has the school looked at other sources to try to gain funds from? Yes, the Bursar has been on several courses to ensure the school has applied for any funds available.

Q. Did a letter go to all the parents inviting them to the meeting tonight? Yes, all parents had a hard copy of a letter inviting them and a parent mail twice. The invitation has also been on the school face book page when the letter went out hard copy, yesterday and today and on the twitter feed.

Q. Would the school be no longer viable if the numbers continued to drop? Conversations have already been had regarding this and even if the numbers dropped to 300 pupils, the cost to close the school and transport the local children elsewhere would not be viable. The threat is not that the school will close but that it will not be competitive with other schools.

Q. Can you explain the process with the NDP and is the site shortlisted for development? At present if any site isn't cast iron then when the NDP go to the examiners, it will be deleted from the plan. So until the Secretary of State has made a decision whether the land can be sold, the process cannot go any further. In principle the site ticks all the boxes subject to consultation process, but until the permission has been given to sell the land the process cannot move on.

Q. Has this process been communicated to the Nursery? The lease for the nursery is up soon and although contact has been made with the nursery, no meeting has taken place yet. The nursery may want to buy some land or be part of the plan. The nursery is movable and the school are in charge of decisions as the lease owners. Until permission has been granted, there is no point in any conversations.

It was noted that DS contacted the owner but has had no response.

Q. If there was a development, where would the all-weather pitch and covered areas sit? No plans have been put in place until permission is granted. There would be no point in duplicating any facilities the NDP have put in place, so would engage with the NDP committee before planning anything.

It was noted that it is a real disadvantage for a 21st century school not to have an AWP and within the plan the tennis court would need to be moved too.

The audience noted that the governors haven't made a decision to sell the land but have just agreed to go to the Secretary of State to seek permission to sell it. The Governors' next decision will be whether to go ahead with the sale.

Q. Will there be any control once the land is sold? It is the plan to liaise with the NDP committee and have outline planning permission before the land is sold. This will ensure a developer could not over crowd the site and it is not in the interest of the village or the school to create a monster.

Q. Can the empty or unused buildings at school not create extra revenue? The school are in discussions with Bishopswood to extend and move into some unused space. No plans have been made until the permission has been granted to sell the land.

The floor was asked if there were any more questions. There were not

The audience were told that any further questions could be sent via the website or hardcopy to reception at school.

It was noted that the minutes would be on the website.

There was no other business

The meeting closed at 7.20 pm.

Next meeting: TBA