

CABINET

13 MAY 2014

OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION FOR THE PROPOSED PRESCRIBED ALTERATIONS AT ABBEY COURT SPECIAL SCHOOL

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mike O'Brien, Children's Services (Lead Member)

Report from: Barbara Peacock, Director of Children and Adults

Author: Paul Clarke, Strategic Planning Analyst

Summary

This report outlines the outcomes of the informal consultation period on the Council's proposals to 'Increase pupil numbers' and 'transfer to a new site' at Abbey Court Special School, by way of statutory prescribed alterations and requests Cabinet authorises the Director of Children and Adults Services to commence the period of statutory consultation.

1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1 The proposals to make prescribed alterations to Abbey Court Special School are consistent with the provision of the School Organisation Plan 2011-16 and the Special Educational Needs Policy and Strategy, and with the Council Plan Priority of 'Children and young people having the best start in life', are within budget and therefore this is a matter for Cabinet

2 Background

- 2.1 Following consultation Medway Council published "Special Educational Needs – An Inclusive policy and strategy for Medway 2009 – 2014", which set out the ambition that wherever possible the special educational needs of Medway children should be met so that they are able to learn and achieve in local provision, close to where they live. Generally, provision for children with SEN in Medway is good and children with SEN make good progress. However, the number of children from Medway educated outside local mainstream or maintained special schools is too high, which includes a number of children educated outside the Medway area or in independent provision.
- 2.2 Medway has agreed the principle that the trend to place children out of area or in independent provision should be reversed where possible and aims to educate as many children as possible close to where they live and to reduce the number of children and young people being educated outside of mainstream or local maintained special schools.

- 2.3 In recent years, there has been a significant growth in the number of primary age pupils in Medway with severe and profound learning difficulties. We expect numbers to continue to grow, resulting in a need for additional capacity. This capacity will be required initially in the primary phase, but also in the secondary phase in the longer term.
- 2.4 Abbey Court Community Special School is an outstanding school for pupils aged 3-19 with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), and is currently the only school in Medway able to cater for children with these most complex needs. Children at Abbey Court often have significant medical needs, including life limiting and life threatening conditions, and over 50% of pupils are in wheelchairs or have mobility aids.
- 2.5 Abbey Court School is located on two separate sites, one in Rainham and the other in Strood, 12 miles apart.
- 2.6 The School Organisation Plan, which was approved by Cabinet on 1 November 2011 (Decision 142/2011) sets out the commitment to explore the opportunities for all of Abbey Court provision to be based on a single site and to increase the amount of overall accommodation available to the school.
- 2.7 In recent years, the Council has allocated basic need capital funding to develop additional SEN provision. More recently, the council was successful with bids for funding through the targeted basic need growth fund, including a bid for funding to support the expansion of Abbey Court to provide up to 68 additional places. This, combined with other identified sources of funding, provides the opportunity to take forward a scheme for the relocation and expansion of Abbey Court onto a new site.
- 2.8 On 26 November 2013 a report was presented to the Cabinet, who considered and approved proposals to expand and relocate Abbey Court Special School.
- 2.9 Under decision 197/2013 the Cabinet approved proposals for the relocation and expansion of SLD (severe learning difficulties)/ PMLD (profound and multiple learning difficulties) at Abbey Court Special School to the former Temple site. At the same meeting under decision 199/2013, the Cabinet approved proposals to commence the statutory consultation for the relocation and expansion of Abbey Court Special School.
- 2.10 The first stage in the statutory process required the council to hold a period of informal public consultation. This took place over a seven-week period between 20 January and 9 March 2014 and the results of this are set out in sections 4 and 5 of this report.

3 The Proposals

- 3.1 The proposals consulted upon were, by way of statutory prescribed alterations;
- To 'Increase Pupil Numbers' to allow for the expected increased demand for places at the school, and
 - The 'Transfer to a new site' to enable the school to expand its physical capacity to ensure there is sufficient and suitable space for the increased numbers of children. The identified site suitable for the relocation is the former Temple and Chapter site in Strood.

- 3.2 It is proposed, subject to the outcome of the consultation period and subsequent period of statutory representation, to implement the changes on 1 September 2015.

4 Results of the Consultation

- 4.1 2014 regulations recommend that an informal consultation be conducted where the views of all interested parties can be expressed, and all views taken into consideration.
- 4.2 The period of informal public consultation, where proposals were published and made available to interested parties, ran for seven weeks from 20 January to 9 March 2014. The process included;
- public consultation documents circulated to the stakeholders and organisations listed in Appendix 1
 - publication of the consultation document (Appendix 2) on Medway Council's website, and on the schools' forum website
 - hand delivered consultation documents to residents local to both the Rainham and the Temple sites (maps highlighting distribution attached as Appendix 5)
 - a public meeting held at the school on 6 February 2014 (transcript attached as Appendix 3).
- 4.3 There were 150 written responses in total to the consultations in the form of reply slips and emails, which were broken down as indicated below.

5 Proposals to 'Increase the number of pupils' and to 'Transfer to a new site'

- 5.1 The public consultation document (attached as Appendix 2) asked for a ticked response to one or other of the following statements:
- "I approve of the proposal to 'Increase the number of pupils' and 'Transfer to a new site' at Abbey Court Special School."*
- "I object to the proposal to 'Increase the number of pupils' and 'Transfer to a new site' at Abbey Court Special School."*
- 5.2 150 responses were received to this consultation, of which 144 (96%) supported the proposal. Five objected and one, from Temple Mill Primary School which shares the Temple site, ticked neither box but raised some concerns around parking, access and traffic management.
- 5.3 Of the responses that supported the proposal, 47 were from parents, 61 from members of staff at the school, 23 from residents (4 from Rainham and 19 from Strood), one from the chair of governors at the school and one from the students at Abbey Court (Appendix 6). There were eleven responses from other sources, which included The Rochester Diocesan Board, former teachers at the school, and specialist professionals who, whilst not employed by the school, do visit the school from time to time.
- 5.4 The five objections came from three parents, one resident from Strood and one resident from Rainham.
- 5.5 The response form also provided space for further comment. The comments have been summarised against a series of categories matching the comments

and concerns of the respondents in the tables below. *Some respondents offered more than one comment, and some reasons were included in more than one response, which has resulted in there being a higher number of reasons shown in the tables below than actual response sheets received.*

144 approvals were received which included the following reasons

No. of responses	Reasons for response
16	No reason given
43	Co location is a good idea/essential/crucial/saves time/ important
40	Better for the pupils including less time spent travelling between sites
31	More children will benefit from the expansion
22	More space is needed
22	Will provide better access and facilities
19	Better for staff including time spent travelling between sites
15	Good to see the Temple site utilised for education
14	Exciting/marvellous/good idea
14	Cost and time savings
11	Current buildings/site not suitable
7	Long overdue
7	Excellent idea but can FE to age 25 be included too
7	Enables the school to play a bigger part in community involvement
3	Better transition between primary and secondary phases
2	Better parking facilities needed
2	Reduces the numbers of children educated out of area.
1	Least disruptive way of developing school
1	Closer to home
1	Easy access to Broomhill Park for outdoor activities

5 objections were received which indicated the following reasons

No. of responses	Reasons for response
1	No reason given
1	Approved of the transfer but not the increase in pupils. Suggesting that School “cannot handle the number of students they already have”
1	Expansion would lead to increased traffic at the Rainham site
1	Suggested that pupils would not benefit from increased numbers as not requirements are being met at the moment.
1	Objected unless the Council provide adequate free transport for pupils

6 Advice and analysis

6.1 It is proposed that the relocation onto one site is phased. This is due in the main to the level of funding currently available. Whilst significant, it would not support the transference of both current sites to the new buildings.

6.2 The proposals set out the intention that the primary phase from the Rainham site will transfer initially in September 2015, with the secondary aged students relocating from Rede Court Road to the new Temple site as funding becomes available.

6.3 The remainder of this section sets out officer responses to the issues and concerns raised during the consultation period and highlighted in sections 5 above; not only from the written responses received but also from the public meeting.

6.4 **There were concerns over the timing of the second phase of the project to relocate the Strood students to the new school.**

6.5 *Officer response*

Cabinet has set out the commitment to relocate Abbey Court onto a single site and that is what we want to achieve as soon as is possible. We believe that the proposals represent the best approach because in the short term the provision across two sites will be significantly closer together, only 1 mile apart rather than 12. The second phase will be dependent upon sufficient funding becoming available.

6.6 **The question was raised as to when the funding would be available for the second phase**

6.7 *Officer response*

The Council and the school have worked hard to pull together a significant sum of money to fund phase one of the project and will continue to do so to identify additional sources of funding to complete the project. Cabinet has set out the commitment to relocate Abbey Court onto a single site and that remains our aim.

We cannot say for certain what opportunities to draw in funding will be available in the future, but we will be seeking to take advantage of any opportunities that present themselves to complete the project as soon as we can.

6.8 **Is the Temple site big enough to support a whole and expanded Abbey Court?**

6.9 *Officer response*

The site is big enough, and we are already working with the school and the design team to ensure that we make the optimum use of the available space.

6.10 **Will the first phase be ready for September 2015; what happens if not?**

6.11 *Officer response*

The programme is being designed to ensure that the buildings will be ready for September 2015. If it is not then the school will not relocate until the buildings are ready.

6.12 **Will the new school be a refurbishment of the current buildings?**

6.13 *Officer response*

No, the proposal is to demolish the current buildings at the Cliffe Road site and to build brand new purpose built accommodation for Abbey Court.

- 6.14 Has traffic safety, management and access been considered at the new site?**
- 6.15 *Officer response*
Yes, a major part of the design process considers all traffic and vehicular impacts. All projects have to go through the planning process, which includes consultation with traffic and highways officers. They will have input into how and where access to the site is suitable.
- 6.16 Is the CDC still going to be located on the former Temple site?**
- 6.17 *Officer response*
The Council is supportive of the proposals to develop the CDC on part of the site and also feel that there are real synergies between the health and school provision. The Council is planning to sell part of the site to the NHS to allow them to develop the provision and plans are in development.
- 6.18 Will Abbey Court utilise the whole of the Temple site, and if not, what will happen to the remainder?**
- 6.19 *Officer response*
Abbey Court will be housed in new buildings on the current Cliffe Road site and will have access to some of the playing fields. Some additional playing field will be allocated to Temple Mill Primary School but the Council will ensure that Abbey Court has sufficient external space that is at least in line with the recommended guidelines for a school of this size and type. There is a proposed housing development on the Brompton Farm Road site.
- 6.20 What will happen to the vacated Rainham site, will it be sold for development?**
- 6.21 *Officer response*
No firm decision has yet been taken. It is intended, however, that the school buildings will be utilised by another school for children with special educational needs, which will relocate from its current unsuitable location. There are no plans to sell the site for housing. Any proposals to relocate other school provision to the site will require full and extensive consultation and would be decided by the Council's Cabinet, and all views will be taken into account before any decisions are made.
- 6.22 What if available funding is insufficient to complete the project?**
- 6.23 *Officer response*
The design process will take available funding into account. The project will be phased so that the children at the Rainham site will be able to relocate initially. Sufficient funding is available to complete phase one.
- 6.24 Will there be provision for 19 to 25 year olds?**
- 6.25 The first phase will concentrate on relocating the primary phase from Rainham to the Temple site. Ideally we would like to include a provision for 19-25 year olds, although no decision has been made at this stage and will be dependent upon the availability of funding and space.

7 Provision for 2 year olds

- 7.1 During the consultation period, the question was raised about incorporating provision for two year olds into the nursery phase. The school and the Local Authority are supportive of this.
- 7.2 Amending the age range was not one of the original proposals, however, it is intended that this proposal will be added to the statutory notice. The prescribed alteration will be the 'Alteration of the lower age limit at a special school'.
- 7.3 The timeframe does not permit informal consultation on the age range change, which is not a statutory requirement. Since no other school makes provision for two year olds with such complex needs, it is not anticipated that there would be objections from other schools and parents.
- 7.4 By including the proposal to include two year olds within the statutory notice, the council will be fulfilling its obligations and affording any person who did want to object the opportunity to do so.

8 Public consultation meeting

- 8.1 The public meeting took place at the school on the evening of 6 February 2014, where interested stakeholders were invited to listen to the proposals and then to ask questions and raise concerns. The meeting was chaired by the Children's Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor Mike O'Brien, with an officer panel present comprising of; Helen Jones (Assistant Director Partnership Commissioning), Juliet Sevier (Assistant Director Inclusion) and Chris McKenzie (Head of Performance and Strategic Planning). An Observer panel was also in attendance.
- 8.2 The Observer Panel comprised of a member from each of the political groups represented on the Council. These were Councillors Juby, Cooper and Royle. Councillor Brake attended representing the Cabinet. The role of the Observer Panel was to ensure that all the points and concerns that arose at the meeting, and the responses given, are accurately reflected in this report.
- 8.3 A drop-in open session took place on Wednesday 12 March 2014 at Gun Wharf. Members of the Observer Panel, Cabinet and the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to review the written responses to the consultation and the transcript of the public meeting to ensure that the concerns raised at the meeting are fairly and accurately reflected in this report.
- 8.4 A transcript of the public meeting is available as Appendix 3.

9 Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 9.1 The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the responses to the informal consultation on 25 March 2014.
- 9.2 The Committee made a number of comments regarding the report and proposals, and paid tribute to the work of the Headteacher, the school and local authority staff who had been involved in the development of the proposals. Discussion then took place around the subjects highlighted in sections 9.3 to 9.5.

- 9.3 **Size and use of the site:** Officers confirmed that the proposed site can accommodate all of the required educational accommodation and that design work was progressing with initial agreement on classroom sizes and shared space areas. Further work is underway, in consultation with the school, to develop a design that meets the needs of the school and also allows some flexibility for future development taking into account the work of the school, as a Beacon school. This would include careful consideration of the aspirations of the school to provide continued education and support for young people aged 19-25.
- 9.4 **Training facilities on the new site:** Members expressed concern that the current funding for the proposed development does not include provision for a training facility on site that can be used for training Medway school-based staff and people from other authorities. A member also explained that one of the reasons why the Schools Forum had been supportive of the proposals was because of the commitment of Abbey Court School to provide outreach and training support. Officers advised that the school could provide training and outreach support without the need for a dedicated facility, but that the design of the school would allow for training facilities to be included at a later date, subject to the identification of an appropriate source of funding. Funding for the first phase of the project has been prioritised on delivering core educational provision for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Phase 2 of the project will focus on the provision for Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils.
- 9.5 **Operating services across two sites:** A Member pointed out that the revenue costs of continuing to operate across 2 sites, even if only 1 mile apart, would be a drain on the operational budget of the school and questioned whether there would be any redirection of any capital funds generated through the site disposal. Officers advised that this would be unlikely, because of the need to use the site to support the development of additional provision for other SEN needs but assured the Committee that they would be doing all they could to generate additional sources of funding for the future phases of development.
- 9.6 The Committee endorsed the on-going efforts of officers to obtain the additional funding required for the future phases of development. The Committee noted the report and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration.

10 Diversity Impact Assessment

- 10.1 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) screening form is attached as Appendix 4. The DIA looks at how the proposed changes could impact upon various groups. The report indicates that there could potentially be some impact upon certain groups, however it shows that any impacts are expected to be positive ones.

11 Impact of the proposal on arrangements for looked after children

- 11.1 Looked after children receive the highest priority for admission to all Medway schools. If necessary, the Admissions Code allows the Council to place looked after children in schools that would otherwise be deemed full. This ensures that the Council can secure appropriate provision for children that are looked after by the Local Authority. This strategy covers both mainstream and special schools and as such includes Abbey Court Special School School.

12 Publication of a statutory notice

- 12.1 If Cabinet accepts the recommendation to progress the proposals further, it would be necessary to publish a statutory notice and formal proposals of the proposed changes to Abbey Court Special School, by way of prescribed alterations, to provide an opportunity for formal objection. This would run for a six-week period from 2 June 2014 through to 13 July 2014. The process would follow the guidelines set out in 'School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.
- 12.2 The statutory notice and full proposals will highlight and explain in detail the three prescribed alterations which are;
- Increasing pupil numbers at a special school
 - Transferring to a new site
 - Alteration of the lower age range at a special school
- 12.3 Cabinet are also requested to approve that should no objections be raised during the statutory period, the determination on the proposals be delegated to the Director of Children and Adult Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services. However, if any formal objections are received during that time then the decision will revert to Cabinet.

13 Risk management

- 13.1 The following table highlights some of the key risks relating to the proposed project.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Increase in cost of placements	Failure to develop additional provision would result in an increase in the number of pupils educated in independent / out of area provision, thus increasing cost pressures for SEN provision and transport	The development of additional SLD/PMLD provision will reduce the reliance on independent provision for pupils.
The available budget is insufficient to cover the full costs of the scheme	Detailed design work is currently being undertaken, and it is expected that a suitable scheme can be delivered within the current funding available.	Phasing the building project will ensure that sufficient funding is available for the initial phase to relocate the primary phase children onto the new site.
Significant objections from key stakeholders	Key stakeholders could formally object to the proposals at the statutory representation stage	Engagement with the school and other key stakeholders has taken place both prior to and during the informal consultation stage, to ensure the proposals and their benefits are comprehensively communicated to stakeholders.

Pupil forecasts do not accurately predict future level of need	Recent increases in the birth rates and inward movement of families with children has resulted in significant additional need	The relocation and expansion of Abbey Court along with other SEN provision proposals will ensure that more capacity is available to cater for additional future demand.
The timescale to deliver the additional capacity by September 2015 is not met	A condition of the targeted basic need funding is that the additional 68 places be delivered by September 2015	The aim is for the first phase of the project to be completed by the target date of 1 September 2015. However, lines of communication have been opened with the DfE to discuss the implications of not having all the additional places available by the target date.

14 Financial and Legal implications

- 14.1 Funding for Medway's maintained schools comes from central Government via the Local Authority in the form of the dedicated schools grant, which is a ring-fenced sum of money for the provision of education across all Medway maintained schools. This money can only be used for schools (and certain specified services to schools), and cannot be used to fund other council services.
- 14.2 It is intended that the project to expand and relocate Abbey Court Special School Proposals for building works will need to be funded via the Children's Services Capital Programme which is mainly funded by Government and targeted grants.
- 14.3 The local authority has £2.9m allocated in the current approved capital programme to fund additional SEN provision.
- 14.4 In addition through the targeted basic need grant scheme, the council has been allocated £2,405,915 to support the expansion of Abbey Court.
- 14.5 The receipt of additional targeted funding means that up to £4.5m of basic need funding could also be allocated to a scheme to relocate Abbey Court.
- 14.6 A business case has been presented to, and approved by, the Schools Forum proposing the use of £2m of funding from DSG reserves to support the development of additional provision.
- 14.7 This means that a total of around £11m is now available to develop proposals for the expansion and relocation of Abbey Court. In addition, further funding could be added to the budget, for example from developer contributions, future years' capital allocations or other sources.
- 14.8 The availability of this level of funding provides a unique opportunity to develop additional SEN provision in Medway, to address the increasing pressure on places and reduce reliance on out of area placements.

- 14.9 The Council has the power under sections 18 and 19 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to make “prescribed alterations” to a maintained school. The procedure for making prescribed alterations is set out in ‘School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.
- 14.10 From 24 January 2014 there is no longer a prescribed ‘pre-publication’ (informal) consultation period for prescribed alterations, there is however a strong expectation on Local Authorities to consult interested parties in developing their proposal prior to publication as part of their duty under public law to act rationally and take into account all relevant considerations. This consultation satisfies that expectation.

15 Recommendations

- 15.1 Cabinet is requested to consider the responses to the informal consultation process together with the comments of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to instruct the Director of Children and Adult’s Services to commence the period of statutory representation of the proposals for the expansion of Abbey Court as set out in section 12.2 of this report, when statutory notices and full proposals will be published.
- 15.2 The Cabinet is requested to delegate authority to the Director of Children and Adults Services, in consultation with Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services, to determine whether to approve the proposals at the end of the statutory consultation period if no objections are received. However, if any objections are received during that time then a report will be prepared and presented to Cabinet for determination.

16 Suggested reasons for decision

- 16.1 Approval to proceed to a period of statutory representation will ensure the Council complies with its duty to follow the full consultation process when proposing changes to school organisation.

Lead officer contact

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Background papers

- 1) The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2007/1289/schedule/4/made>
- 2) Medway’s School Organisation Plan 2011 - 2016
<http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/School%20Organisation%20Plan%202011-2016%20revised.pdf>
- 3) Special Educational Needs – An inclusive policy and strategy for Medway 2009-2014
<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Ild=4073>

Appendices

- 1) List of consultees
- 2) Consultation document
- 3) Transcript of Public Meeting
- 4) Diversity Impact Assessment screening form
- 5) Maps showing which residents received hand delivered consultation documents
- 6) The response from the children of Abbey Court

Appendix 1

Abbey Court - List of Consultees for Initial Public Consultation Documents Jan 2014
John Avey (Con)
Ted Baker (Con)
Nicholas Bowler (Lab)
David Brake (Con)
Matt Bright (Con)
David Carr (Con)
Diane Chambers (Con)
Rodney Chambers (Con)
Rehman Chishti (Con)
Jane Chitty (Con)
Trevor Clarke (Con)
David Colman (Lab)
Pat Cooper (Ind)
Sam Craven (Lab)
Howard Doe (Con)
Jane Etheridge (Con)
Philip Filmer (Con)
Dorte Gilry (Lab)
Paul Godwin (Lab)
Christine Godwin (Lab)
Sylvia Griffin (Con)
Glyn Griffiths (Lab)
Pat Gulvin (Con)
Adrian Gulvin (Con)
Paul Harriott (Lab)
Vaughan Hewett (Con)
Peter Hicks (Con)
Stephen Hubbard (Lab)
Isaac Igwe (Lab)
Josie Iles (Con)
Chris Irvine (Con)
Alan Jarrett (Con)
Geoff Juby (Lib Dem)
Sheila Kearney (Lib Dem)
Barry Kemp (Con)
Craig Mackinlay (Con)
Andrew Mackness (Con)
Raymond Maisey (Con)
Vince Maple (Lab)
Tom Mason (Con)
Teresa Murray (Lab)
Mike O'Brien (Con)
Tristan Osborne (Lab)
Adam Price (Lab)
Wendy Purdy (Con)
Peter Rodberg (Con)

David Royle (Con)
Julie Shaw (Lab)
Diana Smith (Lib Dem)
Andy Stamp (Lib Dem)
Kelly Tolhurst (Con)
Rupert Turpin (Con)
Tony Watson (Con)
Les Wicks (Con)
David Wildey (Con)
Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny members
Medway Youth Parliament members
Mark Reckless MP
Rehman Chishti MP
Tracey Crouch MP
Patrick Leeson, Director of Educational Services, KCC
Alex Tear, Director of Education
Professor Anne Bamford, Director of Education
Mark Devlin, Chief Executive (PA – Michaela Jones)
Dr Peter Green, Shadow Accountable Officer for Medway Clinical Commissioning Group
Neil Davies, Chief Executive
Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community & Culture
Barbara Peacock, Director of Children's & Adult Services
Simon Wakeman, Communications
Mark Holmes, Early Years (cc Richard Cooke & Caroline Webber)
Helen M Jones, AD Commissioning & Strategy
Phil Watson, AD Children's Social Care
Juliet Sevier, AD Inclusion (SEN)
David Quirke-Thornton, Deputy Director of Social Care
Richard Hicks, AD Customer First, Democracy & Governance
Stephen Gaimster, AD Environment & Regeneration
Stephanie Goad, AD Communications, Performance & Partnership
Tricia Palmer, AD Organisational Services
Andrew McGrath, AD Frontline Services
Perry Holmes, AD Legal & Corporate Services
Mick Hayward, Chief Finance Officer
Richard Unsworth, Principal Accountant
Tracey Stephens, Schools HR Manager
Ralph Edwards, Head of HR
Anne Robinson, Governor Services
Norman Gregory, Insurance Officer
Tracey Thompson, Health & Safety Adviser
Christine Wilson, Head of Legal Services
Steve Hewlett, Head of Integrated Transport
Dave Harris, Development Control Manager
Jill King, Section 106 Monitoring Officer
Customer First Team Leaders
Simon Harrington, Student Services Manager
Shelley Marsh, Student Services Operations Manager
Hilary Gerhard, School Challenge & Improvement

Jacqui Moore, School's Commissioning & Traded Services
Chatham Contact Point, Riverside One
Rochester Contact Point
Gillingham Contact Point
Rainham Contact Point
Strood Contact Point
Medway Park
Splashes Leisure Centre
Deangate Ridge Sports Complex
Hundred of Hoo Swimming Pool
Kings Rochester Sports Centre (formerly Sterling Centre)
Strood Leisure Centre
Chatham Library
Cuxton Library
Gillingham Library
Grain Library
Hempstead Library
Hoo Library
Lordswood Library
Luton Library
Rainham Library
Rochester Library
Strood Library
Thomas Aveling School Community Library
Twydall Library
Walderslade Hook Meadow Library
Walderslade Village Library
Wigmore Library
Mr Mike Ongley
John Somers
Ms Julia Harris
Allan Deacon & Nicola Brocklesby
Ms Sue Calder & Mr Nick Childs
Mr Michael Barton
Julia Bell
Assistant Branch Secretary Medway Towns LG Tania Earnshaw
Ms Sharon Wentworth & Ian Methven
Baha'I Community of Gillingham – Mr F Forghani
Bangall Language School Shishu Kishor Club – Nilufar Chowdhury
Community Interpreting Service – Elizabeth Bird
Hindu Sabha – Mr Ajay Attra
Kent Muslim Welfare Association - Dr Craig Kennett AKA Azeem Nader General Secretary
Kent Ramgarhia Darbar Sikh Temple & Community Centre – Mr M S Paddom
KUT O Chinese Association
Medway English Training Community Interest Company – Cathy Rahmanzadeh
Medway Town Gurdwara Sabha – Parminder Singh Upple
Siri Guru Ravidass Bhawan
Swarah Arts Foundation – B Balagopal
Medway Human Rights & Equality Council – Azhar Mahmood

Polish Saturday School – Monika Limanowska
Czechoslovak Society in Medway – Lenka Wyatt
All Playgroups, Pre schools & Nurseries within Medway
Adjacent Residents to school
All Governors, staff & students
Chairs of Governors
All Headteachers (schools forum & SIB)
Medway Website
Local press
On the school gate(s)
Any additional bodies i.e parish council

Consultation on the expansion and relocation of Abbey Court Special School 20 January to 9 March 2014



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Proposals to make prescribed alterations to Abbey Court Special School

This document is designed to:

- **Notify you of Medway Council's proposals to make statutory prescribed alterations at Abbey Court Special School with effect from 1 September 2015, which will result in;**
 - 1) **An 'Increase in Pupil Numbers' to allow for the expected increased demand for places at the school**
 - 2) **The 'Transfer to a new site' to enable the school to expand its physical capacity to ensure that there is sufficient space for the increased numbers of children. The transfer to a new site will be phased with the Rainham school relocating onto the new site in the first instance.**
- **Explain why these changes are being proposed**
- **Invite your comments on these proposals**
- **Inform you of, and invite you to, a public meeting to be held in Abbey Court Special School's Rainham site hall on Thursday 6 February at 6.30pm where these proposals will be discussed and questions answered.**

Background

Abbey Court Community Special School is an outstanding school for pupils aged 3-19 with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), and is currently the only school in Medway able to cater for children with these most complex needs. Children at Abbey Court often have significant medical needs; life limiting and life threatening conditions, and over 50% of pupils are in wheelchairs or have mobility aids.

In recent years, there has been a significant growth in the number of primary age pupils in Medway with severe and profound learning difficulties. We expect numbers to continue to grow, resulting in a need for additional capacity. This capacity will be required initially in the primary phase, but also in the secondary phase in the longer term.

Abbey Court School is located on two separate sites, one in Rainham and the other in Strood, 12 miles apart.

Medway's School Organisation Plan, which was approved in November 2011, sets out the commitment to explore the opportunities for all of Abbey Court provision to be based on a single site and to increase the amount of overall accommodation available to the school.

In recent years, the Council has allocated capital funding to develop additional SEN provision. More recently, the council was successful with bids for funding through the targeted basic need growth fund, including a bid for funding to support the expansion of Abbey Court to provide a minimum of 68 places. This combined with other identified sources of funding provide the opportunity to take forward a scheme for the relocation and expansion of Abbey Court onto a new site.

Why is there a need to expand Abbey Court Special School?

An assessment of the current number of Medway children with statements requiring specialist provision by the main disability need type has been undertaken, alongside forecasts of the likely number of children with statements requiring specialist provision in Medway over the next five years. These forecasts are based on information held by the council (Special Needs Team, Medway NHS Maternity System, Social Services and Planning Services) and external sources for national trends (Department for Education and the Office for National Statistics).

We expect that the number of children with statements requiring specialist provision in Medway will continue to increase over the course of the next five years. The reasons for the expected increase are:

- A recent increase in the birth rate, which will increase the overall number of primary age pupils
- The raising of the participation age, which will result in some more pupils remaining in education for longer
- An increase in the proportion of children with statements of special educational needs nationally
- Inward migration to the Medway area, including an increasing number of children moving into the area with high level needs requiring specialist provision
- Increase in survival rate of pre-term babies.

Medway is currently experiencing a period of significant demographic growth in the overall number of primary age pupils in Medway. Our mainstream forecasts show an expected increase in primary age pupils in Medway of 10% between 2011 and 2016 (Source: Medway's School Organisation Plan 2011-16) resulting from an increased birth rate and significant amounts of net inward migration to the area.

The increase in the number of primary age pupils with statements requiring specialist provision in Medway is increasing at a quicker and more significant rate. In the last 4 years the number of primary age pupils with statements requiring specialist provision has increased from 281 in 2009 to 526 in 2012, representing an increase of 87%. This growth is a result of a combination of the increase in the number of primary age pupils overall, and an increase in the proportion of those children with special educational needs.

Additionally the complexity of need is increasing, which is contributing to a sharper increase in the numbers of pupils with the most complex needs, for whom Abbey Court represents the most appropriate provision. The latest Ofsted report for Abbey Court School from October 2012 recognises this and says "The school continues to experience a shift in the complexity of levels of need, including severe challenging behaviours."

Pre-school pupils requiring specialist provision over the two years 2011 and 2012 have averaged 44 per year, representing a significant increase in number prior to 2011 when an average of 20-23 pre school pupils per year required specialist placement. Of the 44 (per year) (2011/2012), an average of 15 pupils required SLD/PMLD placement.

There has been, across a range of needs, an historical lack of sufficient capacity in Medway based provision, which has resulted in a number of pupils needing to be placed in independent/non-maintained provision. The development of additional Medway based provision would result in more children being educated in provision closer to home.

In addition, whilst it is possible to place children in the independent sector with most need types, recently this has been more difficult when trying to place children with profound and complex needs as there has been a lack of appropriate provision in the independent sector, particularly in the primary phase.

Because neighbouring authorities are facing the same pressure on places as Medway, the ability to secure placements in other local authority provision is likely to be limited in the future. It is therefore reasonable to assume that any future placements not in Medway maintained provision would be in the independent sector.

As at the last school census in October 2013, Abbey Court had 141 pupils on roll, including six in the nursery. The Department for Education has allocated funding through the Targeted Basic Need Funding Programme to provide expansion for 68 additional pupils. However, the total amount of funding available could provide capacity for up to 80 additional places overall.

Benefits of relocating Abbey Court to a single site

There are five different departments within the school, spread over two separate sites 12 miles apart. The current school accommodation on both sites was not purpose built and has significant constraints. Further expansion on those sites to address these constraints would be challenging as site areas are small. The constraints of the buildings include a lack of space for specialist equipment and storage, a lack of appropriate therapy and medical spaces, inappropriate changing/personal care need provision, small and cramped classrooms and specialist rooms for music, drama, art and design and technology. In addition, there is insufficient space for those pupils with challenging behaviour to access quiet space away from other very vulnerable children, which compromises pupils' health and safety.

Despite this, pupils at Abbey Court achieve well and make very good progress. The school has been judged "Outstanding" at the last two Ofsted inspections.

Split site working directly affects the ability of the school to manage the curriculum, and of specialist agencies to provide effective support:

- Subject leadership is not readily achievable across the school, as relevant staff are not easily accessible
- Teaching is not possible across a range of ages to aid professional development and share skills
- Specialist staff such as Speech and Language, music and physiotherapies are at one site or the other, and hence often not available when needed
- Recruitment of staff can be affected by the possibility of being deployed at either site;
- Meetings are difficult to convene as there is always travel involved
- Curriculum provision is restricted - for example opportunities for older children to do 'work experience' with younger children
- Parents are not able to meet parents of older children for vital sharing of experience.

The educational impact on children with severe and complex needs directly resulting from the split site arrangements is significant. The loss of valuable teaching and learning time due to the need to transport children from one site to another to access valuable facilities, such as the hydrotherapy pool, is a significant issue. Other site constraints and deficiencies also impose severe limitations on students' access to the curriculum.

The development of new facilities on a new site would address these issues, provide capacity for additional pupils and allow for additional future expansion should demand continue to rise in the future.

Expansion on a new site would also give greater flexibility for the school to be able to develop provision to meet other local needs, such as the development of enhanced outreach/training facilities to support other schools, and pupils in other settings.

Where would Abbey Court School be relocated?

The former Temple School site in Strood is proposed as the optimum site for the relocation and expansion of Abbey Court School.

The former Temple School site is located only one mile in distance from the current Abbey Court secondary school site. This means that the project is able to be phased, with KS1 and KS2 provision relocated initially from the Rainham site.

In addition, the relocation of Abbey Court to a single site would address the significant constraints of the current split site arrangements and present the opportunity to address suitability issues relating to the current sites.

The relocation of Abbey Court, and the release of the current sites, would also provide opportunities to develop and expand other Medway based SEN provision in the future to meet the growth in numbers for other need types, particularly pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD), Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulty (BESD) needs.

Funding for the scheme

A total of around £11m is available from a number of sources to develop proposals for the expansion and relocation of Abbey Court.

The availability of this level of funding provides a unique opportunity to develop additional SEN provision in Medway, to address the increasing pressure on places and reduce our reliance on out of area placements.

The proposals will enable Medway Council to offer places to pupils with a wider range of needs previously placed out of area or in independent provision. This will generate a cost saving and, more importantly, will lead to better overall control of the coordination of SEN provision, not only at Abbey Court itself but across Medway. It will also ensure that the council is in a stronger position to monitor the quality of the delivery of the provision. This in turn will improve the outcomes for children according to their individual needs by:

- Providing settings with skilled staff able to provide high quality teaching, with access to specialist help, support and guidance
- Giving greater access to an early years Foundation Stage curriculum that addresses learning needs at an earlier stage
- By enabling closer ties between education professionals and parents/carers taking into account the views of individual parents/carers in respect of their child's particular needs.

The next stages and proposed timeline

It is intended that following the seven-week consultation period, Medway Council's Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review a report on the responses and comments received.

Following this Medway Council's Cabinet will consider the responses to this consultation and the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. They may then decide not to proceed with the proposals or to authorise a six-week period of statutory representation when notices will be published to give interested parties the opportunity to formally object or comment.

If there are no objections to the Statutory Notice period, Medway Council can decide to go ahead with the proposals. If there are one or more objections, Medway Council as Schools' Commissioner, under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, will consider the objections before determining the outcome.

This consultation is concerned with the statutory and legal framework to make changes to schools. The project to provide the physical premises will be consulted upon separately at the appropriate time; this will include the planning process.

Indicative consultation timetable

Seven week Public Consultation period	20 January 2014 to 9 March 2014
Public Consultation meeting in Abbey Court (Rainham site) school hall	Thursday 6 February 2014 at 6.30pm
Report to Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with Outcomes of Consultation	25 March 2014
Report Outcome of Consultation to Cabinet	13 May 2014
Six week Statutory Notice period	2 June 2014 – 13 July 2014
Council decision on proposals	August 2014
Implementation of expansion proposals if approved	From 1 September 2015

This timeline is subject to change. No decisions will be made until the consultation has been completed and local views have been carefully considered.

How to make comments

We would like to hear your views on these proposals. Please let us know by completing the reply slip at the end of this leaflet or by writing a letter to:

Engagement and Strategic Planning

Medway Council
FREEPOST RRUY-XYXR-SGYY
Level 4, Gun Wharf
Dock Road
CHATHAM ME4 4TR

Alternatively hand the form or letter in to the School Office at Abbey Court Special School, who will forward it on your behalf.

You may also email your comments to prim.reorg@medway.gov.uk

All responses must be received by Sunday 9 March 2014.

Unfortunately it will not be possible to acknowledge receipt.

Proposals to make prescribed alterations to Abbey Court Special School

REPLY SLIP

Please complete this form, and add any comments you wish below.

Forms and letters should reach us by **9 March 2014**.

Please return to:

**Engagement and Strategic Planning
Medway Council
FREEPOST RRUY-XYXR-SGYY
Level 4, Gun Wharf
Dock Road
CHATHAM ME4 4TR**

Alternatively hand the form or letter in at either of the School Offices at Abbey Court Special School in Long Catlis Road, Parkwood, Rainham ME8 9TX or Rede Court Road, Strood ME2 3SP, who will forward it on your behalf.

It would be helpful to have the following information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

I am (please tick)

- Parent / Guardian Governor None of the above (please specify)
 Member of Staff Local Resident

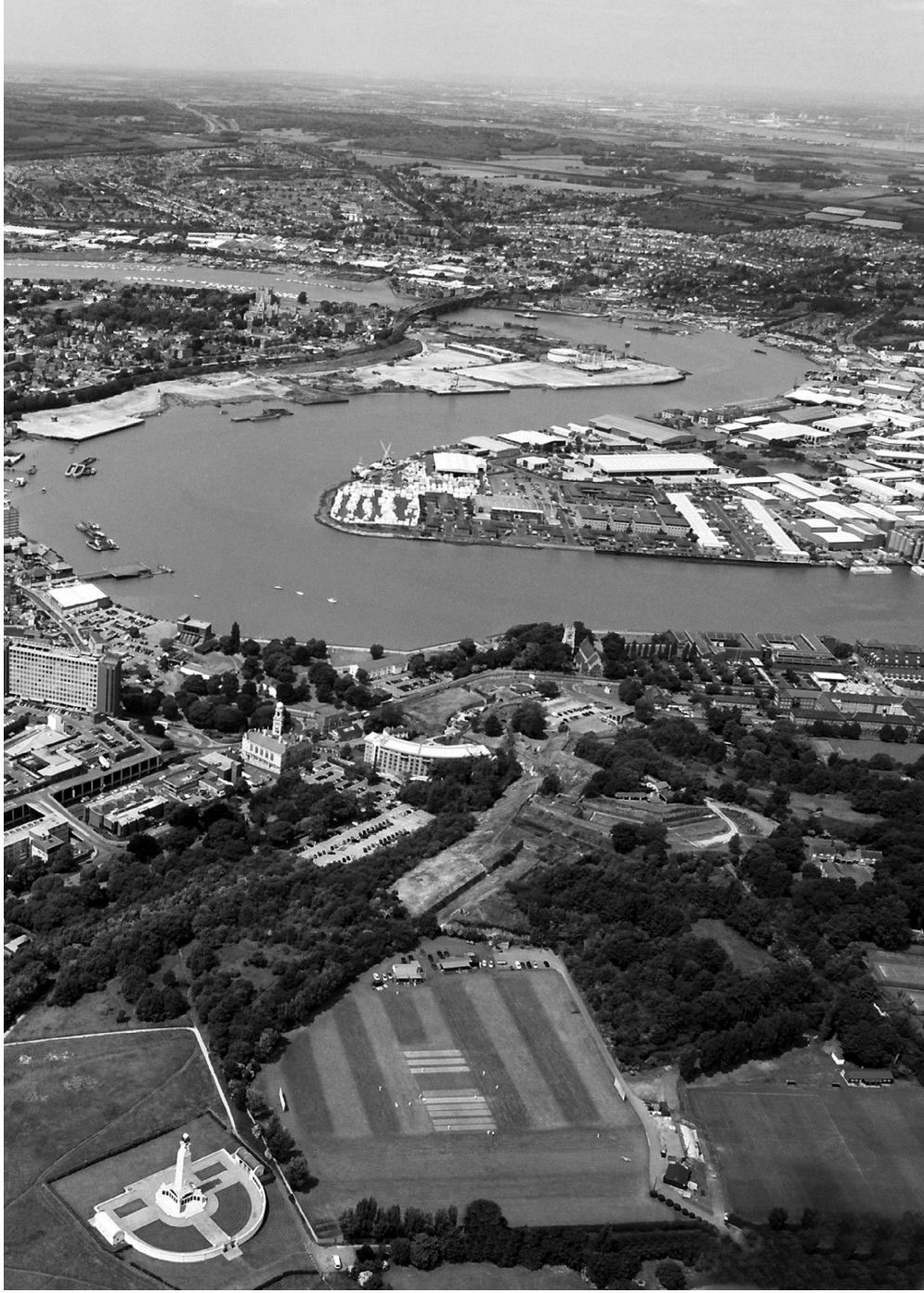
With regard to the proposals to 'Increase the number of pupils' at Abbey Court Special School to enable the school to expand in line with demand and to 'Transfer to a new site' to ensure sufficient and appropriate capacity is available for the expected increase in numbers:

Please tick one box

- I approve of the proposals to 'Increase the number of pupils' and 'Transfer to a new site' at Abbey Court Special School
 I object to the proposals to 'Increase the number of pupils' and 'Transfer to a new site' at Abbey Court Special School

Comments

Please give your reasons as fully as possible. This will help careful consideration to be given to the arguments in favour and against the proposal. You are able to provide additional sheets of paper as required.



Who to contact

✉ Engagement and strategic planning, Medway Council, Level 4, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham ME4 4TR

✉ Email: prim.reorg@medway.gov.uk Website: www.medway.gov.uk/educationlearning

📞 Minicom: 01634 333111

This information can be made available in other formats from **01634 333333**

If you have any questions about this leaflet and you want to speak to someone in your own language please ring **01634 335577**

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PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING
FUTURE OF RELOCATION AND EXPANSION OF ABBEY COURT SPECIAL SCHOOL

HELD ON 6TH FEBRUARY 2014

Chaired by: Cllr Mike O'Brien

Listening Panel: Cllr David Royle, Conservative Group
Cllr Mrs Pat Cooper, Labour Group
Cllr Geoff Juby, Liberal Democrat Group
Cllr David Brake, Cabinet

Officers: Helen Jones, Assistant Director for Partnership Commissioner
Chris McKenzie, Performance, Intelligence and Strategic Planning
Manager
Juliet Sevier, Assistant Director, Inclusion

Welcome by Mike O'Brien who chaired the proceedings.

Welcome to this public consultation of the relocation and expansion of Abbey Court Special School.

My name is Mike O'Brien, can I first of all thank the Head, Karen Joy and the governing body for kindly allowing us to use this hall this evening for this public consultation.

It is the process that we have to go through to get the ball rolling for what we want to do which is provide a single site for the Abbey Court School. We want to make sure we reflect the views of everyone here this evening and to enable us to do that we have what is called a Listening Panel, (introduced members).

We want to ensure that the proposals are fairly represented and are fully and accurately reflected in the subsequent report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee of which David Royle is the chairman and to the Cabinet of which David Brake is a member.

Firstly I will pass you over Chris McKenzie to give a presentation of the proposal, which will set out the process, there will then be a video by the school and then I will ask the chair of governors to say a few words and then we will open it up to your questions. So everyone will get an opportunity to ask a question.

Chris McKenzie

Good evening everyone. Thanks for coming this evening to this evening; this is the council's proposals for the expansion and relocation of Abbey Court School. This evening's public consultation meeting forms a key part of our wider consultation process. What I am going to do for the next five minutes is explain what is being proposed and why we are proposing. As Cllr O'Brien said we will invite questions and comments on the proposals. It is really important if you do have questions and don't understand the proposal then please do ask questions because part of the purpose of this evening is to make sure that everyone understands the proposals really clearly and make sure they all know what is happening. You can also give your comments as we said earlier, your comments are recorded and we will forward those comments to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet as well. If you don't want to make your comments publically in the meeting today, you can complete the form at the back of the consultation document, if anyone hasn't got one of those, we have some extra copies, so please collect one when you go out. If you want to complete one this evening, then please do. You can send them back to the Council, you

can write us a letter, send us an email there are many different ways you can consult with us as well.

What we do try to do through the Consultation process, is based on the sorts of questions we get this evening, we try and update our website where the consultation document is published as well, to publish some of those questions and our responses to those, anything not covered in the consultation document itself. So do look on the website as well if you want to see what sorts of questions have been asked through the consultation.

What I will also want to do today is explain what happens next. This is the first part of what is quite a lengthy process and potentially quite a complex process so I will try to ensure everyone understands what it is we are doing and why.

Some background first of all. In 2009 Medway Council published a Special Educational Needs strategy, which included the following aims; we want to educate as many children as possible close to where they live. Where it is in the best interests of children we would look to educate children in the mainstream provision but where it is not possible, we would want to educate them in local special schools.

In recent years, because the demand for places in special school provision within Medway has been greater than the amount of spaces available we have had to place some children either in independent provision or out of area provision. One of the aims of our special education strategy is we want to reverse that trend and want all children to be educated in locally maintained provision within Medway.

We face a number of challenges to those aims. In recent years we have seen year on year increases in the number of children born in Medway so every year, certainly for the last few years we have seen increasing numbers of children born in the Medway towns. At the same time we have also seen an increasing number of families moving into the Medway area and that has put additional pressure on places within Medway, and that is for mainstream places as well as for children with special education needs.

We have got a number of new housing developments being built, and a number in the pipeline that are due to be built as well, so as well as planning for the here and now, we need to be planning for the future and are making sure that the provision we have doesn't just help today but meets our needs in the future as well with the growing population in Medway. Because of all of those factors and the growth of families and number of children overall within Medway it follows that there has been an increase in the number of children with special educational needs requiring placements as well and this is from a starting position and the capacity we have isn't enough to meet all of the needs that we have got currently.

An analysis of pupil numbers in Medway shows that the number of children with special educational needs is growing at a faster rate than children that need mainstream provision, so the proportion of children that have special educational needs is increasing. We are also seeing, and this is borne out by Ofsted reports for this school and other schools, is the complexity of need is also increasing and becoming more challenging, so what we are finding is this school and other schools that provide special educational needs' provision in Medway are taking on children who have more complex needs.

Because the number of places available has not kept pace with this increased demand, this has resulted in us having to place some children in independent, non-maintained provision and out of area provision as well.

So Abbey Court is an outstanding school, it is for pupils aged 3 to 19 and it caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. A significant proportion of the children that attend the school also have significant medical needs as well, this obviously puts pressure on the accommodation, it means that the accommodation has to be a certain type and

size to ensure that those children get the best possible care and the best possible support whilst they are at school.

The current school as I am sure you are all aware, is split across two sites, those sites are currently 12 miles apart, so we have got the site here in Rainham and another site over in Strood. That obviously places pressure on the school, in terms of its use of resources, people can't be in two places at once, it means that certain provision is only available at one site or the other and often means transporting pupils from one site to the other and all of the challenges that presents.

As well as those challenges and use of resources, it also results in additional cost to the school as well, so it cost the school more money to transporting pupils from one site to another and their teachers from one site to the other and all of the other associated costs as well, so that is money that could otherwise be used to improve the educational needs of the children attending the school and is being used on other things.

The current accommodation, certainly in the case of this school building, it is not purpose built, it wasn't built as a school for children with the sorts of needs that attend Abbey Court, it has been adapted over time and certainly what we would want for the children that attend Abbey Court, is a purpose built school, a school that really and truly meets their needs.

So what we want is for Abbey Court to be based on a single site and this would result in significant benefits for the school and its pupils. It would save time in travel as I said earlier and also the cost of travel would be reduced as well. Specialist staff would be more readily available to all pupils that attend the school, it widens access to the curriculum and associated facilities, it would enable the school to better develop its provision to meet other local need as well and to support with outreach to other schools and other provision in the area. It also offers older children to help younger pupils with similar disabilities. They are just a few of the benefits, there are other benefits within the consultation document as well and I am sure the chair of Governors and headteacher would also be happy to share from their perspective what the potential benefits would be.

The proposals themselves are to use a site, which is a former educational site, it's a site that previously housed Temple Secondary School in Strood, so it is actually just a mile up the road from the Abbey Court Strood site. What we won't be doing is using the buildings that are already on that site, they wouldn't be fit for purpose. I can see there's hopefully some agreement with that. What we want is a purpose-build facility that best meets the needs of the pupils that attend Abbey Court so the proposals would be to demolish those buildings and build a purpose-built facility on that site to ensure it best meets the school's and the pupils' needs.

Really important to say that this is not a project that has been designed by the Council that will be presented to the school as a finished product. The school are heavily involved in the design process and we also will ensure that other key stakeholders including, governors, including pupils, including parents have the opportunity to input into the proposals the design as well. You have got a fantastic leadership team here at this school and we need to make sure that they are leading on the design to make sure that it best meets the needs of the school and the pupils that attend the school.

The project will initially be phased. We thought really hard and the school have helped us with this, to pull together a significant amount of money to help get this project off the ground. We have so far identified £11m to use for the project. Unfortunately £11m won't rebuild the whole school and we need to be clear about that. What it will allow us to do is to build the first phase of the project with the intention then to deliver the final phase to allow the school to be based on a single site. The council's Cabinet have made clear their intention to base the school on a single site. The money that we have available allows us to get part way towards that, so the intention initially will be to relocate at the very least the current Rainham provision on to the former Temple school site so at least in the short term, the provision albeit initially on a split site will only be one mile apart but the intended aim is to have AC on a single site. The design that we are developing is designing a

single school building on the Temple site so we are looking holistically at the needs of the overall school and not just one part of it in developing that design.

Now I get to the fairly technical aspects of the proposal, this is really just to make sure you understand the process that we are going through and the legal basis of it. This consultation is part of a legal process that we have to follow and it will allow the Council to do two things, which are to increase pupil numbers at the school, so as well as relocating the school, at the same time we want to increase the number of pupils that the school is able to take in. That will help us to address the issues that I raised earlier about increasing demand and increasing number of pupils within Medway. Abbey Court is the only school in Medway that caters for children with the most complex needs and the number of children requiring that provision is increasing, so it makes sense for us to increase the size of the school to accommodate those additional pupils.

The other part of the proposal is to transfer to a new site and that really is to allow the school to relocate to those more suitable premises. This is a legal process and this meeting today forms part of what is called the informal consultation process, which is the first part of that process. This evening is not a consultation on the building itself or what the building will look like. We will need to go through a formal planning process, and as part of that planning process there will be formal consultation on the buildings and what they will look like and like I said, we will also engage with other stakeholders on the design of the building. Today is not about the building and what it will look like.

This is the first part of the process. It is prescribed by the Department for Education, we have 7 weeks for informal consultation, so this is fairly early in that process and there is lots of opportunity after this meeting to consider, take time to reflect before you respond to the consultation. What will happen next is we will then bring a report to the Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee; they will review both the outcome of this meeting and the responses we receive into the Council and will have the opportunity to put forward any views to the Council's Cabinet who are the decision maker.

Medway Council's Cabinet will then review the responses and the views of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in May, they will take on board all of the points raised and at that point the Cabinet can make a number of decisions. They can either decide to stop the proposals and not take them any further forward. Or they can approve the next stage of the statutory process. Unfortunately that is not the end of the process, there is another step that we have to go through and that is known as the statutory representation period, that lasts 6 weeks and that's an opportunity for anybody who wishes to lodge any formal objections to the proposals, to do so.

What happens after that depends on whether we receive any objections or not. If we don't, then typically the Cabinet would delegate the authority to the Director of Children Services in consultation with Cllr Mike O'Brien the portfolio holder for Children's Services to decide to take the proposals forward. If there are objections, then typically it will go back to Cabinet for them to consider the objections before taking the proposals forward to the next stage.

If they do at that stage, decide to approve the proposals then that is the end of the consultation process and we move forward. The slide here just really summarises the timetable, we are in the public consultation period at the moment. You've got until 9th March to submit any comments. Please do so, either at the public consultation meeting this evening or in writing to the Council, or by completing a form, you can hand the forms into the school as well if you prefer. We will then go to O&S on 25th March then on to Cabinet 13th May. All being well, we go through the statutory notice period from 2nd June to 13 July. The proposals are for the implementation of these proposals, so when they will take effect from, that will be 1st September 2015, and the work we are doing on designing the school, getting a contractor on board and starting the building works, also are aiming for that date as well.

Cllr O'Brien

As Chris sits down I should also take this opportunity to advise you that Chris and his team have worked tirelessly over the last year or so in bidding for the money that we needed for this project. Every now and again you get a bit of luck, and we had a bit of luck so it's thanks to Chris and his team that we have got that and it's also thanks to the schools' forum which is a body made up representing all the other schools in the authority also all of whom are solidly behind this proposal, so it is very, very much a team effort. So thanks for that Chris. We now have a video presentation.

A video presentation by the school now shows to the audience.

Cllr O'Brien

A tremendous privilege and it's also been a tremendous privilege to me to be invited back both to this site and the Strood site to see first-hand the passion, experience of both the headteacher Karen Joy and the governing body and all those in the teaching and everyone that is helping with the teaching, so well done to you all. That is the end of the presentations, we are almost into the question session, but before we do that could I please ask the Chair of Governors if you would like to say a few words before we move into the questions.

EJ.

Good evening. Abbey Court School is a unique school; I think any of you that know the school know how unique it is. You've heard from Chris tonight and I am sure you've read your consultation document to read of all the deficiencies that the school has in its accommodation. Added to that the two sites are 12 miles apart. The school could have said, we can't do anything, we can't do this, we can't do that, because of this, because of that. But the school hasn't said that, the school has overcome all the barriers and those challenges to achieve for the children.

It is an aspirational culture to achieve the very best for the children and it is really good to see what the children do achieve. There are not too many schools around that have children who achieve their Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award, so that just gives you an idea. So they are an exceptional, unique school.

It is also unique in the fact that it doesn't gather children in from the local vicinity. Children are placed at Abbey Court because of their very, very particular special needs and they are placed by the local authority. This means that they come to the schools, to both sites from across Medway, it doesn't mean that at 8.30 or 8.45 in the morning, 300 cars turn up and all the parents and children come out, it doesn't work like that. Children are collected from their homes in the main and delivered to the school site, not outside the school site, but inside to the school building. So that all they have to do is walk from the car park into the school. So that is another way in which the school is really, really unique.

The school roll has continued to rise and the indications that we have tonight and the projections for the future are that they will continue to do that, so we have the years benefitted from Medway and lots of things have been added on to the school. We've had the provision of the nursery added and we've had lots of other building work, which has been very much on a make, do and mend basis. I think Cllr O'Brien and the councillors realise now that we have reached make do and bust because there is no more space. Those of you who know both sites geographically know there is no more room and the governors have long held the ambition of having the school on one site so we are absolutely delighted that we are having the support of the Council to do this.

We realise that more pupils will be needing access to Abbey Court and it is really important for them that instead of being transported out of Medway and waking up and getting off in their taxi very early in the morning that they won't have so far to go, so that is a really important thing for the future it is very much an invest to save project and we recognise that. I want to thank you all for coming tonight, on this really awful night; it's so good to see so many of you here. I am sure there

are people, residents over Strood way that have lots of questions and I am sure that we look forward to hearing those questions and hopefully putting your minds at rest on that, but thank you also to those people who are part of the extended Abbey Court community. They often come to our awards evening and it is great to see so many of them supporting us here tonight so thank you, we do appreciate all that you do, we do aim to work with the local community and extended community as the school does.

Karen and her team are absolutely fantastic. The governors are extremely proud of all that they do and they are the specialists in this field, the experts in this field. I know and the governors know that they will work through and overcome whatever challenges get thrown at them in the next few months and we recognise that it is vital to achieve a purpose-built school so that we are all on one site. Thank you.

Cllr O'Brien

A big thank you for those words and a big thank you to all of you for coming out on this miserable night. Also I think it is one of the largest audiences for a school consultation that I have personally ever experienced, so thank you for that as well.

I will be asking you for your questions I won't be answering those questions of course, because I have a team of experts here that I have already introduced here behind me and I am sure we will get all the answers that you want.

DB, Brompton Farm Road, Resident

It is not a question it is a comment and I noticed that you said we could make comments earlier. I know the work of Abbey Court for a variety of reasons and it's for that purpose that I would like to speak on behalf of my family who have been very close to the school for donkey's years as neighbours and friends of the school.

Firstly, superb presentation by Chris, thank you so much, virtually anything I would have wanted to put on my consultation document in support of this process has been gone through this evening. Superbly helpful presentation, which just says it all as far as I'm concerned. There can be little question about the need for expansion, there can be no question about the excellence of the school, of its board of governors support and the Council in this process so I just want to reinforce that as a local resident I would be delighted to see the school site at Temple to be used again for an educational purpose. I think it's vastly preferable to having a huge estate there to be perfectly frank, but regardless of all that, even more important than the children that come to this school, the team that runs it, the governors, the local Councillors have been so supportive moving this forward, so I would like to thank all of those people and Karen Joy in particular, who I think is utterly inspirational as a leader.

I do know how hard the Council must find getting money for this type of project and how difficult the context of that is at the moment. It is very easy to moan about local authorities and no doubt we do from time to time, but there has been a superb effort to drive this forward and the board of governors have driven it equally as hard if not maybe a tiny bit harder, so my huge thanks as a local resident, as a friend of the school to say we are a thousand percent behind this proposal. I would really welcome seeing the Temple school site coming back into educational use again and for the school to become part of that community. There can be no question about the common sense of having one school on one site. It will be great when we can see Phase 2 and movement towards Phase 2, one step at a time, I really welcome it and I do hope all of you tonight will also do the same.

IB, Vicar of Frindsbury

In my parish is the former Temple school and in my parish I will really look forward to the prospect of this new school coming as well. We enjoyed good relations with Temple School and I am sure

that my parish and people in my church will enjoy similar relations with Abbey Court School, I do endorse and encourage the proposal, it looks terrific and I do look forward to working with the school.

Rev Canon JK, Governor

I also bring greetings from the Bishop of Rochester who couldn't get here in time. He does want to endorse the absolute joy of knowing that Abbey Court will be on one site. I have a question that follows on from Mr B's question it's about Phase 2. I really appreciate what has been said tonight and perhaps it's a question you can't really answer but I think it needs to be aired. But it is the commitment to finding the finance Phase 2. I hear what Chris said that the planning is for one site. But if we are talking timespan, my fear is we are going to end up waiting forever and ever. So I am asking you to be a bit prophetic Chris, can you tell us, give us the miracle of the money.....

Cllr O'Brien

Firstly I know that Chris is continually working on this, looking at other avenues of funding, he hasn't just stopped and you have my commitment as the leader of children's services, you have the Cabinet's commitment and I am confident in fact that you will have the whole Council's commitment to this project, so it is an ongoing thing Chris do you want to add further to it.

Chris McKenzie

I wish I could give a very specific answer to that question but unfortunately I can't. There are so many variables, so many potential sources of funding and we have tapped into as many of those as we can to get us where we are today. We do receive regular sources of funding from the government but as I explained earlier in our presentation, our needs are great and many so as well as needing special educational needs provision within Medway we have got a growing overall population and increasing number of pupils requiring mainstream provision as well. We need to use our resources sensibly to make sure we can meet all of those needs. I am really delighted that we have got the funding that we have in place to do Phase 1 and I am really confident that we will get the funding for Phase 2 but unfortunately I can't give a timescale on it.

DS. Governor

I have concerns that the site that has been earmarked for the school on the old Temple site will actually be large enough to accommodate for the needs of our children to learn, socially and educationally considering in the documents it said the funding available could provide capacity for up to 80 additional places overall, and I am just wondering if the officers are confident that the site that has been earmarked will be large enough to accommodate everything we need. Lots of our children have very large pieces of equipment to help their mobility and to help them learn. Just as you walked in, if you saw the walkers and that outside, and they need space, they need space to be able to move around the school and to reach their potential. So I am concerned and I would like the officers to give their assurance that the site that has been earmarked is large enough.

Chris McKenzie

I can give that assurance. We have assessed the size of the site and it is big enough to accommodate the school. It will require some intelligent design and one of the reasons we are taking the approach we are taking..... We are appointing a contractor or are about to appoint a contract and they are working with us at the moment to develop a design and working with the school. The advantage of that approach is that we have the contractor and their architects on board at a very early stage. They can understand the needs of the school, any concerns around space and so on and so forth and make sure that is taken into account in the design of the school. We will be using the space that is available in the best possible way to deliver the best school but it is big enough to accommodate the school and we will be using the published government guidelines to look at the space that is required as well.

Cllr O'Brien

Of course Karen is playing an integral part in those conversations.

M. Parent Governor

You just touched on part of the question I was going to ask, I wanted your assurance that Karen Joy is going to be part of the whole process, she is a key element of the whole game, really.

Cllr O'Brien

I am sure Karen will say that herself but also Karen and I had a conversation before we came in and she has very kindly agreed to.... I suggested I would like to see younger pupils being part of that process as well and she has very kindly agreed to that, so hopefully M, you have got that confirmation.

Ms W, Resident

I do agree with all the proposals, I was just wondering if there is clarification, there probably are plans but what are you calling the Temple school site, is it the Temple and the Chapter school site or is it just the building and the area where the Temple School was?

Chris McKenzie

It's the area of the.... and unfortunately I haven't got a map I can point to on the screen, the area of the site that we are talking about is the part which is the main part of the Temple building as you enter the site from Cliffe Road. There are proposals for the lower part of the site, which is accessed via Brompton Farm Road, some of that part of the site will be developed for housing and there are separate proposals around that. The part of the site you access from Cliffe Road is the part of the site we are looking to develop for the school.

Mr M, local resident, Brompton Farm Road, Parish Councillor

This has all been described as development on the Temple site, now you're talking of the Chapter site. There were two schools, Chapter and Temple, you are now suggesting you are going to develop this project on the Chapter part?

Chris McKenzie

It is on the Temple School site.

Mr M

So what will happen to Chapter?

Chris McKenzie

Chapter is now Strood Academy.

Mr M

Is it occupied now?

Chris McKenzie

Yes it is, there is a new school building on what was formerly the Chapter school site, which is now Strood Academy, which takes girls and boys from the local Strood area.

Mr M

I have already had representation from people about the entrance on Cliffe Road, the overcrowding during mornings and evenings and the dangers and really wouldn't like to think that is going to be added to in any way.

Chris McKenzie

We will need to satisfy the planning authority that we have got appropriate systems in place to manage traffic both on to the site, off the site and around the site as well. One thing I would say and I am sure Karen and the governors would echo this and I think the chair of governors made reference to it in her presentation, is that the vast majority if not all pupils who attend Abbey Court School are dropped off in the mornings either by mini buses or in taxis. One of the things we will ensure in the design is that there is a drop off point within the site so there will be no dropping off of pupils outside of the school site and we are in discussions with planners about how we can ensure the best access onto site which minimises disruption to the local area so we will be taking that into account and as part of the planning consultation process local residents will have the opportunity to put forward any views and concerns in relation to that. Today isn't about the planning process it is about the principal of relocating the school onto that site and the local residents will have the opportunity to put forward any concerns about that at a later date.

Mr M

I think generally speaking the people in our part, our area, I have canvassed them and pretty much everybody is in favour of the proposals.

Cllr O'Brien

I am sure that Strood Academy would love to show you around, it is a fantastic establishment if you give the office a ring.

AC, parent governor

This is just going further to that question..... I think there is some confusion because I was at Chapter school, which is Cliffe Road. When you refer to Strood Academy that was Reed School. Chapter and Temple were the two original schools and I think that's confusing.

Cllr O'Brien

Shall we just stick to Abbey Court then?

AC

I think the conversation about the two buildings, the gentleman is right that it was Chapter school, so it is whether it is clear which of those two buildings or both of them.

Cllr O'Brien

We are clear we are talking about the Temple site.

AC

But does Temple site cover the two buildings?

Chris McKenzie

Can I make a suggestion? Unfortunately I haven't got a site map here that I can display for everyone and to avoid us having to pass around a couple of paper copies. I will make a suggestion if it is okay that we will publish on our website a map of the site and will show the areas that we are describing in terms of the areas where the school will be based and will also provide copies of that to the school will be based. We will also provide copies of that to the school so if parents wish to see that then the school can distribute that to parents as well.

??

The school is going to be built where the old Chapter School was and the tower block that was Temple is not part of the site for Abbey Court.

I don't know anything about that, but I'm just saying that is where Chapter was, that brick school on the Cliffe Road end, that is where this school is going to be built. The Authority calls it the Temple site and that is where the confusion is. Temple, which is the tower block further down on Brompton Road, I don't know what is happening to that but that is not part of the proposal.

Cllr O'Brien

Not part of the conversation. But the area map will be put on the web page, for you is that okay A?

AC

Yes that is fine.

DL, local resident

I didn't actually go and see it but there was a proposal to build 60 odd houses is that still going ahead as well as Abbey Court, are those the houses you are referring to?

Chris McKenzie

Yes, and that will be built on the part of the site where the tower block is.

DL

Thank you for clarifying that. I approve of the school by the way.

IL, resident Brompton Farm Road

I think where the confusion lies with the entrances, there are two entrances into the two school sites, you have got the existing Temple mill and I think what the gentleman said before was the old Chapter buildings, the single level buildings. We thought when we saw the proposal that the bottom entrance nearer to the Brompton Farm Road, which goes into the multi storey building, was the road that was going to be used. But if the top road, the existing Temple Mill School entrance is going to be used there is going to be quite a lot of traffic in and out there but I understand what Mr McKenzie has said that there will be strategic planning on the transport in and out.

I also heard that a Child Development Centre is going on to that site as well. Can we have some comment on that please?

Chris McKenzie

We are at the very early stages of developing our designs but in our conversations with planners one of the things they have stipulated is that they would prefer to see a separate entrance and exit on to and off of the site to allow for a circulation around the site. So there are those two entrances on the Cliffe Road site, one of which leads directly to Temple Mill and one that is further down towards Brompton Farm Road. The most likely outcome will be that we will use the road that is closer to the Brompton farm road end as an entrance to the site for both the CDC and Abbey Court School, with traffic then exiting from the part of the site that Temple Mill use as an exit as well.

There is no final decision around any of that that is the early conversations that we are having with planning about that. There are proposals for a CDC on the site as well, which will involve the local authority selling part of the site to the health service for them to develop that. That sale hasn't happened yet but it is intended to happen and we are working closely with colleagues in the health service to ensure that both of our provisions can be accommodated on the site. There are actually potentially real synergies as well between the provisions because actually the CDC is to support families of children with disabilities so actually there are some real potential synergies there between those two provisions and I think having them both on the same site will bring some real benefits as well.

Parent, MC

I would like to say, to put your mind at rest and some of the other residents that if the CDC was on the same site, not only would that benefit our families and our children immensely it would actually reduce your traffic coming and going throughout the course of the day. Because currently we have to pick our children up from school and take them to hospital which is exceptionally traumatic for the children, it disrupts their education immensely and if they were in the next building or the same building, if a therapist needed to pop in and see a child, I am sure that would be accepted by the school, us parents perhaps wouldn't need to attend for what are relatively minor things but I think it would actually reduce your traffic movement and I think the traffic movement around a Special needs school is probably currently less than what it is around a normal school or mainstream school.

AL resident Brompton Farm Road

I have previously been very involved in children with disabilities having worked with the CDC, also going into Abbey Court School and many other schools as well. I can only back everything that I am hearing, I back the CDC as well obviously and I would also like to say as far as transport is concerned, having lived on Brompton farm road for 26 years, the problems we had from Temple school and the original Chapter Girls' School was absolutely abominable and I know that if Abbey Court goes in there we will have none of those problems so I defy anybody to say that the traffic is going to be worse because I promise you, it is not.

PB, Local Vicar

I am also governor at Parkwood Infant and Junior and also the chaplain of the air cadets that meet on the field behind the school here. My question is not about moving in that respect, I am really pleased having had contact with Abbey Court over the years and enjoying their Christian services in church every Christmas, I am really pleased, but my question and concern is since I have been here the last 5 years there have been fresh rumours every year that Deanwood will be closing down, will this proposal of moving this school away from here undermine the school the other side of the car park?

Juliet Seviar Assistant Director Inclusion

Deanwood is a good school. There was a commitment that was made from the local authority to keep Deanwood open at a time when there was concern about whether it would close or not. The proposal to relocate Abbey Court will have no bearing whatsoever on the viability of Deanwood.

GG, local resident

I was hoping someone else would ask this question. But wish abbey court all the best because I just love hearing those children enjoying themselves out in the field in the summer. What is going to happen here once you've relocated, successfully I hope, to Strood because I assume that the money for the second part of your plans will include whatever money you get for this site here?

Juliet Seviar Assistant Director Inclusion

We are not selling this site. In Chris' presentation he made it very, very clear that we have pressure on places across all phases and across all needs type. So part of the, the absolute imperative to relocate Abbey Court is because of the rise in numbers of children who have significant needs. The rise in the need for places for children isn't just for children who have severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties, we have pressure on places for all of our special schools and all of our special schools have run out of space on the sites that they currently are. The expectation is that there will be another special school that actually occupies this facility when it has been vacated. What I cannot say, because it is not in the public domain and because the decision is made by Cabinet, I cannot name that school but rest assured, we have many, many, many different needs types that are in need of space and the expectation is that there will be another school for children who have special educational needs that will occupy this site.

Cllr O'Brien

And G, it is wonderful to hear you say that you enjoy hearing the children.

PS, resident of Plomley Close

I wholly support the move of Abbey Court School. My concern would be, and I do have a concern with the transport. Having been a resident of Plomley Close for the last 28 years, having the buses now at the top of the road does cause a problem, where they park to wait to come into the car park to deliver the children. My question would be hopefully that if another special school did come into this site that that would be considered for residents because, not only with the buses coming in that causes a problem with the parking with Deanwood School, which is another matter but I would hope that would be considered because that is an awful problem.

Cllr O'Brien

Thank you for making that point.

KW, Governor of Abbey Court

With the talk of the development of a CDC on the site at Strood could we have an assurance that any liaison between the health service and local authority will be dealt with as a matter of urgency so that the development of the CDC does not impede the development of Abbey Court school and that the children of Abbey Court are not subjected to being part of a building site for a moment longer than is necessary.

Chris McKenzie

We can give that commitment. We are in regular contact with colleagues from the health service, in fact I met with colleagues from the health service just last week and we talking about the need to ensure that when we are designing both the school and CDC that we are working together to ensure that we take those sorts of things into account, so there is that commitment.

JM, have a child in the secondary site

I just want to know what is going to happen to the Strood site, will that become a school, what will fill Strood site, at the moment, Abbey Court?

Juliet Seviar Assistant Director Inclusion

Because we can't..... this question was sort of partly asked earlier, because we can't give a timeframe to when the Strood site will be vacated, we are not able to give a commitment to what will go into the Strood site currently because that may be a couple of years in the future and things can change between now and then.

B, I have a brother at the Strood Abbey Court

It is just a question about finance. around the whole of Medway there are a lot of academies popping up, this is the only special needs school in Medway, why isn't the focus on getting us on to one site more urgent than a mainstream academy going up? We see a lot of them popping up; it seems £11m is a lot being put towards one site.

Chris McKenzie

If the question is, why have we invested the money that we have in the mainstream academies, it is because we have invested a significant amount in three new secondaries in Medway, Strood Academy, Brompton Academy and Bishop Of Rochester Academy. The source of funding for those three buildings was attracted solely for that purpose so as part of those schools' conversation to an academy, the central government allocated Medway Council specific money to deliver those projects that couldn't be used for anything else so we had to deliver those buildings, they are fantastic buildings but we wouldn't have been able to use that funding for any other purpose. In each of those schools, we took the opportunity when we were building those, the local authority did put some of our own money into those buildings to ensure we had inclusive special educational provision in each of those schools as well. So actually we are using our money in the best way possible to deliver the best facilities across Medway.

KM, Parent

First off I would like to say I completely support the move, I think it is a fantastic job to get it to this stage. My main worry is things for the second phase will move too slowly because of funding and I find it quite sad that my son is already in year 2 and may not benefit from some of the benefits that will be in the new building and I think it is a shame that we are putting our children's potential at risk here through dragging our heels and I would like reassurance that the second phase will not grind to a halt and it will move forward and maybe we can be reassure with some sort of a timeframe.

Cllr O'Brien

K, as a politician I would like to stand here and say we are going to do that. It has been a complete sea change over this past year to get where we are now. At the start, we all said we are committed to a single site to Abbey Court School, we are doing it as fast as we possibly can as we can arrange the finance, we are committed to doing it. We can't give a timescale. The only

timescale we can give is by 2015 we have to have this project completed. In the meantime we are faced with all sorts of challenges, all of which we are facing head on and rest assured our commitment is total.

KM

I believe it is and I am really grateful for that. I have had the privilege to see the work that is done at Abbey Court and I know what is brought out of our children through the facilities that are at Abbey Court presently I just know that so much could be achieved with added facilities and it is the potential of our children that is on the line here. My son has come on leaps and bounds being here, but sadly he probably won't benefit from the new site and it makes me wonder what he would have achieved if he had been in the new facilities, I want to emphasise that.

Cllr O'Brien

It is a valid point and can I assure you that Karen and her team tell me every time that we meet, we are all well aware of that. You have our commitment that is all I can say at the moment and that is a complete sea change to where it was a year ago.

KM

Thank you.

AK, parent governor

Are there any plans currently for the 19 – 25 provision?

Chris McKenzie

This is a slightly tricky question because actually aspirationally we as a local authority and the school would love to see post 19 provision as part of the school and what we are committed to doing is making sure that as part of our design of the building that we identify what would be required and make sure that there is sufficient space to add that provision in. The challenge we have is in terms of legislation and whether that legislation allows us and the school to run that type of provision because typically post 19 sEN provision has to be provided by a college and it would require a change of designation for the school. As part of the consultation, we did look at whether we could extend the consultation, extend the age range of the school, we are not permitted to do that as part of this consultation we are running.

AK

But it will be looked at later on?

Chris McKenzie

We as a local authority would want to see that as part of the school and we know that the school would want to see that as well.

Cllr O'Brien

Summing up then it seems that we have broad consensus of support for the principle of moving. There have been issues raised touching on planning, which of course will be another issue as we get further along the way but I think what I would like to do now is ask members of our listening panel, do you have any questions that you would like to ask?

Cllr Royle

I am also a member of the planning committee so the proposals for Abbey Court will eventually come to the planning committee and I can assure you they will look at it very carefully, they will particularly be very concerned about parking, access for children and minibuses and taxis and so on, so rest assured that will be looked at very carefully and we are quite happy as a committee to challenge officers if we don't like what they put forward, particularly on parking.

???

I think that is really important that we get that right, not just for our children, it's very important for them but it's really important for the residents as well because we want them to be our friends.

Cllr Mrs Cooper

I was very pleased to see the video with all the children smiling because that is something that is really good. I have been around the school and was very impressed, I went around with Cllr Diana Smith and we didn't want to leave so that just shows how much we liked it. I am very pleased to see you all here tonight and one thing I wanted to say, was to have the map, because I think that is important.

Cllr Geoff Juby

I think this is mainly for the officers, we have to be careful that we don't put too much stuff on this site and leave enough space for the second phase to go on.

Cllr David Brake

I certainly know Abbey Court school, not only from my time in Strood but also from the work that goes on here in Rainham. An exceptional school, I would describe Abbey Court as being. I am most impressed by the comments that being made this evening by so many parents and supporters and I really wish abbey court well, certainly wish to see one school, one site and certainly as a Cabinet member I can assure you that as Cllr O'Brien said the Cabinet are absolutely committed to make sure this happens. I am sure that Cllr Royle would also not mind me saying that when I actually say that both of us served as mayors of Medway in consecutive years and believe me, to visit both schools as mayor was probably one of the highlights of the year and certainly I know that my own wife often recalls visiting the schools, recalls speaking and dealing with the youngsters, to help them in what they were doing, to be part of the programme in what they were doing, where we were made so welcome when we visited the schools. I certainly wish Abbey Court well for the future, I know you are going to do well, I know you will succeed and that success will come from the support, certainly of the Cabinet and of Medway Council and its officers, I am sure. Thank you.

Cllr O'Brien

I think to come all the way across from Strood for this meeting tonight is absolutely fantastic and shows the support of all the parents and the residents, I think it is absolutely awesome. It is also great that we have local residents from Rainham here as well; I think that's awesome too. Thank you very much indeed. I think we have explored everything now, has everyone had the opportunity to speak, I think so.

Diversity Impact Assessment: Screening Form

Directorate Children and Adults	Name of Function or Policy or Major Service Change Expansion and relocation of Abbey Court Special School		
Officer responsible for assessment Paul Clarke	Date of assessment 7 March 2014	New or existing? New	
Defining what is being assessed			
1. Briefly describe the purpose and objectives	Abbey Court Special School currently occupies two sites 12 miles apart. This creates logistical issues for the school, and takes up significant time in transferring children between the two sites to make use of the facilities available. The buildings are not totally suitable for the needs of the children, and this inhibits teaching and learning. By relocating the two sites into one new purpose built modern school these issues will be overcome enabling better management of the school, better teaching and learning spaces and in turn improved outcomes for the children and young people.		
2. Who is intended to benefit, and in what way?	<p>The children at Abbey Court who will benefit from more spacious and appropriate accommodation. From more time given to learning rather than travelling between sites, and better equipment and facilities.</p> <p>The staff at Abbey Court who will be organised at one site enabling better teaching and learning environments. This will lead to a more cohesive approach to the school's organisation. The teaching staff will also benefit from having the whole scope of expertise, knowledge and experience to draw on.</p> <p>Parents of the students who will see the benefits enjoyed by their children reflected in their education, integration and well-being. All parents will be able to share experiences and support to a wider group.</p> <p>The additional children who will be able to access the school and enjoy the benefits that Abbey Court can offer to a child's education and well being as the expansion will create at least 68 additional places.</p> <p>Medway Council who will have more places available to accommodate children with severe and profound learning difficulties where currently they may be placed in an expensive independent or out of area provision, or a less suitable setting within Medway.</p>		
3. What outcomes are wanted?	That Abbey Court Special School be relocated onto one site instead of two, and that it is expanded to enable more students to attend. Better and larger spaces and facilities are expected to lead to better teaching and learning capabilities and therefore even more positive outcomes for the children than currently exists at this Ofsted rated 'outstanding' school.		

<p>4. What factors/forces could contribute/detract from the outcomes?</p>	<p>Contribute Support of the school, council and community to focus upon delivering the physical project of the new school to enable the relocation.</p>	<p>Detract Insufficient funding to complete the phased expansion. The council are committed to this project subject to additional funding becoming available for the second phase of the project</p>
<p>5. Who are the main stakeholders?</p>	<p>The children, staff and parent at Abbey Court school. The community as a whole and Medway Council.</p>	
<p>6. Who implements this and who is responsible?</p>	<p>Barbara Peacock – Director for Children and Adults</p>	

Assessing impact		
7. Are there concerns that there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to <i>racial/ethnic groups</i>?		NO
	NO	
What evidence exists for this?	A public consultation has been carried out over a 7-week period when views were expressed and any concerns regarding this issue could have been raised. Of a number of concerns raised and comments made, none related to the potential for any differential impact due to racial groups. Local authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality and all schools in Medway are responsible for ensuring equality in their schools and for promoting community cohesion. Any impact upon any person would not be due to racial or ethnic group.	
8. Are there concerns that there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to <i>disability</i>?	YES	YES. Abbey Court provides education and care for children and young people with severe and profound learning difficulties.
What evidence exists for this?	Whilst there could be a differential impact due to a person's disability, it is intended that any impact will be positive. The proposals will lead to the creation of better learning environments for the children, better facilities and surroundings, which will lead to better outcomes.	
9. Are there concerns that there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to <i>gender</i>?		NO
	NO	
What evidence exists for this?	A public consultation has been carried out over a 7-week period when views were expressed and any concerns regarding this issue could have been raised. Of a number of concerns raised and comments made, none related to the potential for any differential impact due to gender. Local authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality and all schools in Medway are responsible for ensuring equality in their schools and for promoting community cohesion. Any impact upon any person would not be due to gender	
10. Are there concerns there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to <i>sexual orientation</i>?		NO
	NO	
What evidence exists for this?	A public consultation has been carried out over a 7-week period when views were expressed and any concerns regarding this issue could have been raised. Of a number of concerns raised and comments made, none related to the potential for any differential impact due to sexual orientation. Local authorities have a statutory duty to promote	

	equality and all schools in Medway are responsible for ensuring equality in their schools and for promoting community cohesion. Any impact upon any person would not be due to sexual orientation.	
11. Are there concerns there <u>could</u> be a have a differential impact due to <i>religion or belief</i>?		NO
	NO	
What evidence exists for this?	A public consultation has been carried out over a 7-week period when views were expressed and any concerns regarding this issue could have been raised. Of a number of concerns raised and comments made, none related to the potential for any differential impact due to religion or belief. Local authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality and all schools in Medway are responsible for ensuring equality in their schools and for promoting community cohesion. Any impact upon any person would not be due to religion or belief.	
12. Are there concerns there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to people's age?	YES	YES. The proposals will include widening the age range to include two-year-old children with complex needs.
What evidence exists for this?	The proposals to include two-year-old children at the school could lead to a differential impact. However, any impact is expected to be a positive one. Currently there is no suitable or appropriate setting for two-year-old children with severe learning difficulties. The expansion of the age range will address this, and the children who attend from age two would be expected to benefit positively from this.	
13. Are there concerns that there <u>could</u> be a differential impact due to <i>being transgendered or transsexual</i>?		NO
	NO	
What evidence exists for this?	A public consultation has been carried out over a 7-week period when views were expressed and any concerns regarding this issue could have been raised. Of a number of concerns raised and comments made, none related to the potential for any differential impact due to being transgendered or transsexual. Local authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality and all schools in Medway are responsible for ensuring equality in their schools and for promoting community cohesion. Any impact upon any person would not be due to being transgendered or transsexual.	
14. Are there any <i>other</i> groups that would find it difficult to access/make use of the function (e.g. speakers of other languages; people with caring responsibilities or dependants; those with an offending past; or people living in rural areas)?		NO
	NO	
What evidence exists for	The expansion and relocation will make the school	

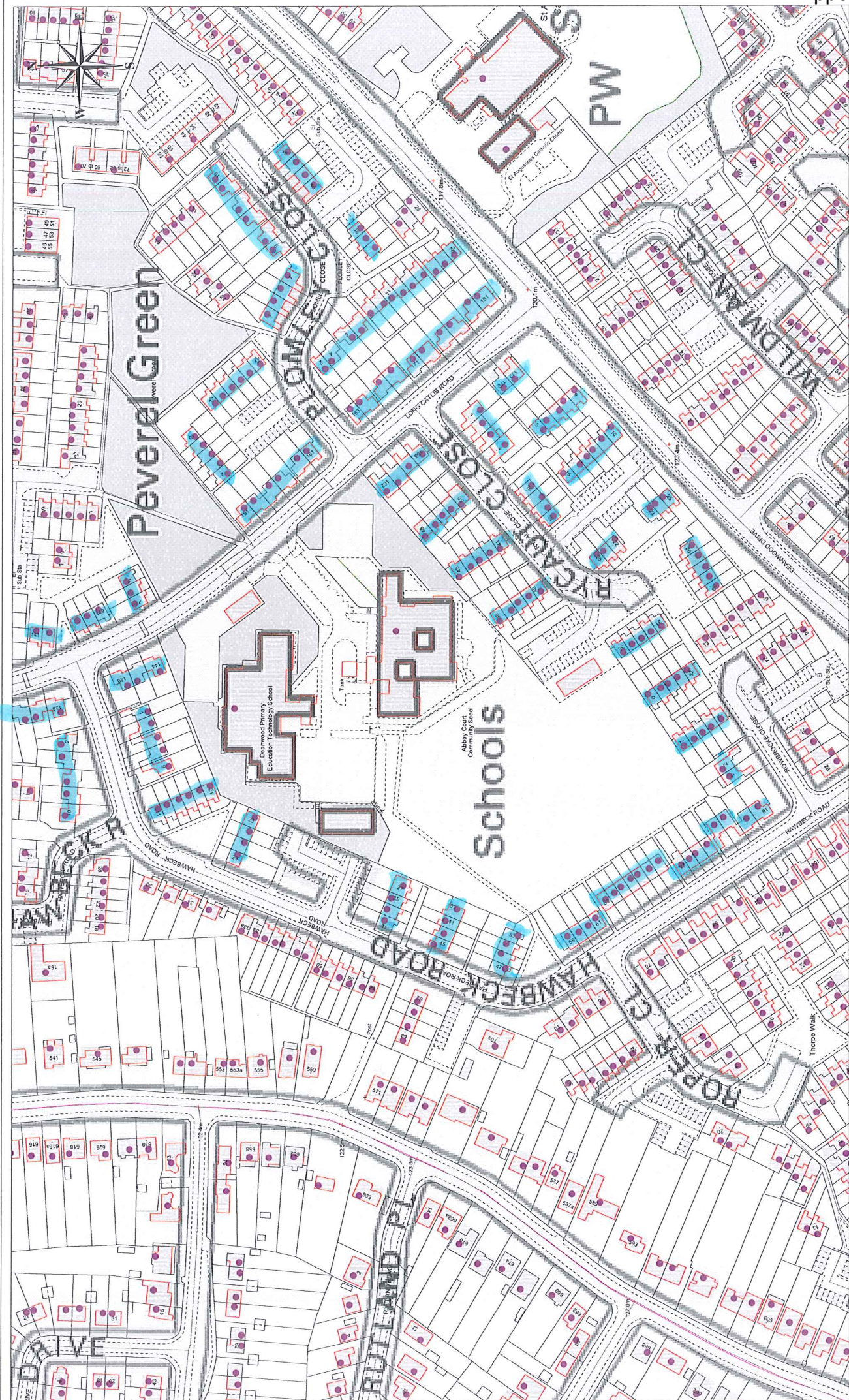
this?	more accessible for children, students, parents and visitors and the community as a whole.	
15. Are there concerns there could be a have a differential impact due to <i>multiple discriminations</i> (e.g. disability and age)?	YES	YES, Disability and age
What evidence exists for this?	As set out above there could be a differential impact on people due to their age and disability, but all impacts and outcomes are intended and expected to be positive ones. The expansion and relocation will improve teaching and learning facilities and therefore benefit the children	

Conclusions & recommendation		
16. Could the differential impacts identified in questions 7-15 amount to there being the potential for adverse impact?		NO. All impacts are expected to be positive ones.
	NO	
17. Can the adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group? Or another reason?	YES	N/A
	NO	
Recommendation to proceed to a full impact assessment? NO		
NO	This function/ policy/ service change complies with the requirements of the legislation and there is evidence to show this is the case.	
NO, BUT ...	What is required to ensure this complies with the requirements of the legislation? (see DIA Guidance Notes)?	
YES	Give details of key person responsible and target date for carrying out full impact assessment (see DIA Guidance Notes)	

Action plan to make Minor modifications		
Outcome	Actions (with date of completion)	Officer responsible

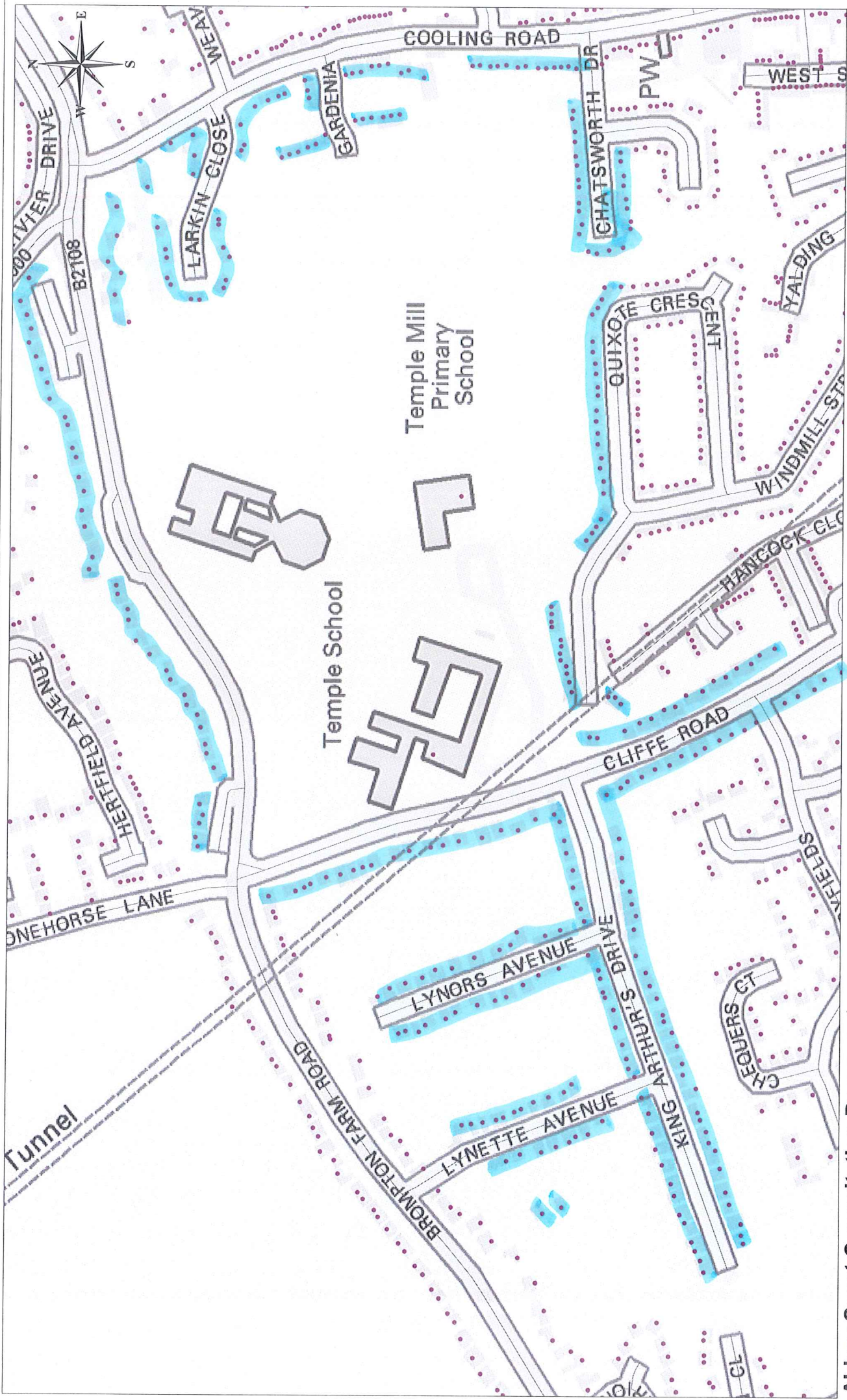
Planning ahead: Reminders for the next review		
Date of next review	None advised, unless further proposals for Abbey Court School are put forward in the future.	
Areas to check at next review (e.g. new census information, new legislation due)	N/A	
Is there <i>another</i> group (e.g. new communities) that is relevant and ought to be considered next time?	NO	
Signed (completing officer/service manager)	Date	
Paul Clarke – Strategic Planning Analyst	7 March 2014	
Signed (service manager/Assistant Director)	Date	
Juliet Seviar – Assistant Director Inclusion	10.3.14	

NB: Remember to list the evidence (i.e. documents and data sources) used



**Abbey Court Public Consultation;
Residencies hand delivered a consultation Document;**

Docs delivered Tuesday 21 January 2014 8am to 9:30 am
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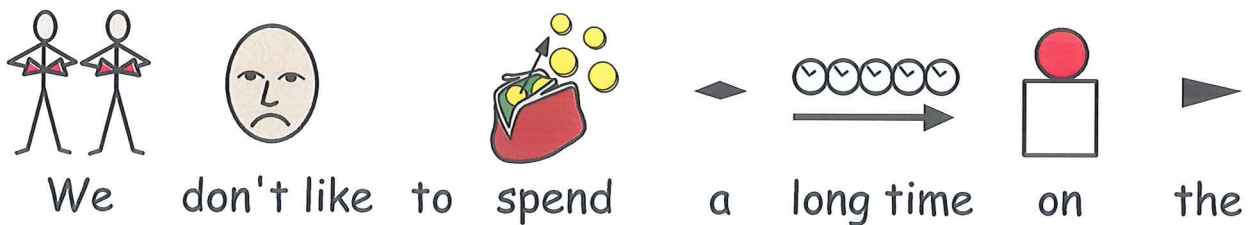
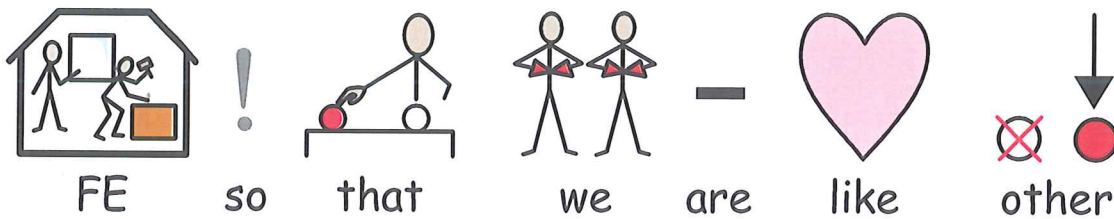
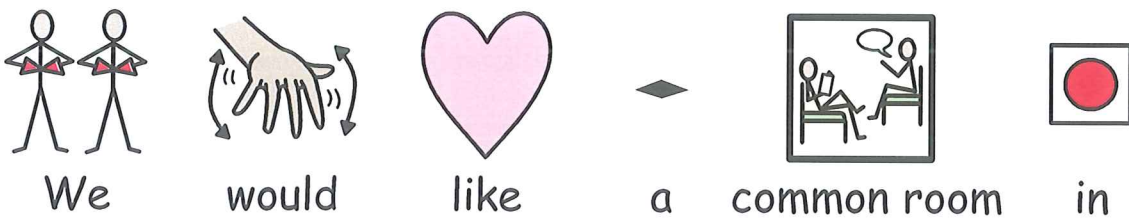
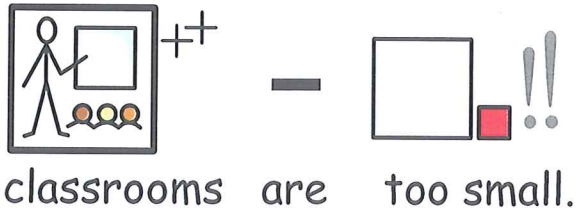
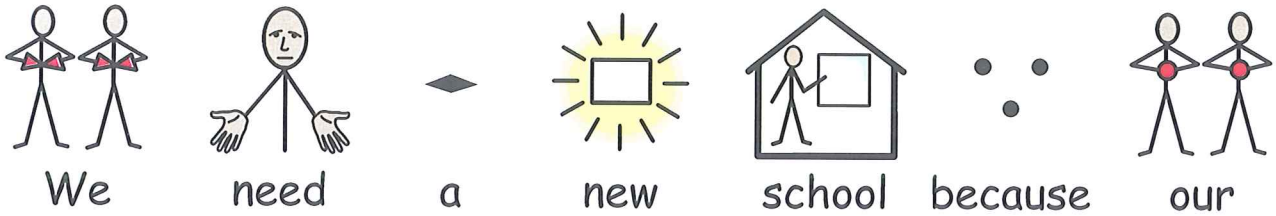


**Abbey Court Consultation Document:
Residencies hand delivered a consultation document.
Delivery took place on Monday 20 January between 9.30 am and 11.30 am.**

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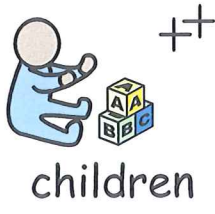


Scale: 1:3750
06/02/14
© Medway Council, 2013





younger



children



who



have to



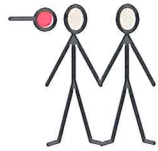
travel



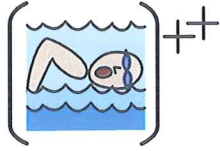
to Strood



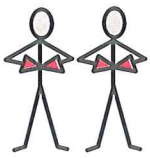
for



their



swimming lessons.



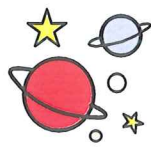
We



don't



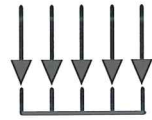
have enough



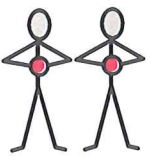
space



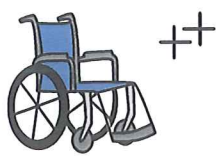
for



all of



our



wheelchairs



and



standing frames.



We



don't have



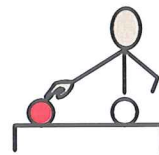
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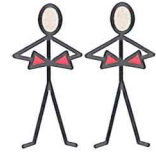
sports hall



so



that



we



can



play



sports



in



our



leisure



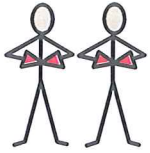
and



recreation



time.



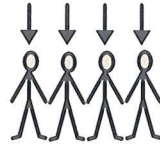
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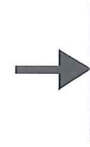
would



like



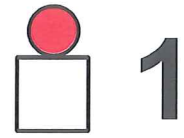
everybody



to



be



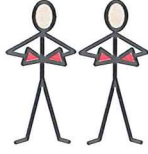
on one



site



because



we



would



be together.



We



could



help



the



younger



children



to



do



more



work experience



without



having to



go



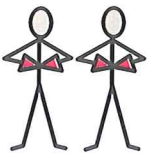
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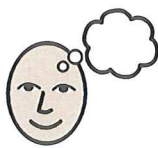
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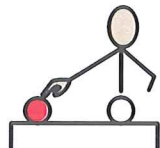
bus.



We



think



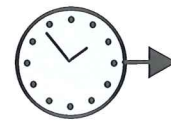
that



one



school



will



be



great



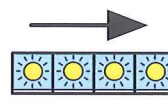
for



our



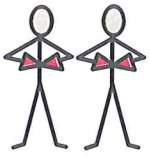
friends



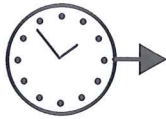
in the future



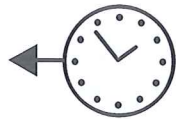
because



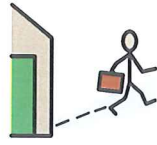
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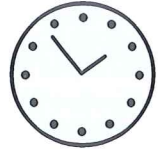


have



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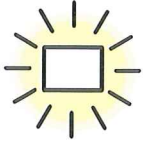
Abbey Court



when



the



new



school



is



built.




FE School Council Minute 7th February 2014

- 1    
1. Traffic in the car park

said that he thinks traffic in the car park is bad! Especially at the beginning and the end of the day.

said that we need to have a bigger car park because we have got 'loads of people who drive cars'

said that he can't use his eyes properly and the traffic is dangerous so this means that he has to have an adult to help him to go out to his bus because he feels unsafe because the buses and cars can go very fast and the school doors open straight onto the car park. He said that we have to be careful because the buses can reverse and somebody might get hurt because there is not a lot of room outside!

- 2 
2. Parking

says that there are not enough parking spaces in our carpark

said that parking bays with numbers so that everybody could find their bus would be useful.

and said that they have to pick 7 pupils up in the bus on their way to school every morning; said 'it takes ages!' Then when they all arrive at school they have to wait at the back of the queue and sometimes it is cold and then waiting on the bus if it is last makes everyone grumpy.

said that parking bays would help us to get into school quicker in the morning and out in the evening.

3

3. Safeguarding

We all feel safe in school.



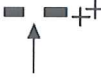
says that it is hard for strangers to get into school.







says that we have automatic doors and they help to keep us safe. Only staff can open the front doors and this keeps us safe, the swimming pool doors keep us safe.



Everyone spoke about the fire alarm and how we need to act when we hear this, the fire drills help to keep us safe, we all know that we need to walk and be calm as this helps us to be safe too.

says we have to keep safe even in the gym and we have an adult with us. We have to be safe and sensible.

Everyone said that we would not like to have any doors that are locked because we like to be able to move around the school freely and independently.

4  +  
 4. Classroom and learning spaces

     
 What do you like about your

 
 classrooms now?

likes his classroom because he likes the teachers in FE and it is really nice

likes FE3 because it has the washing machine and tumble dryer







likes the classrooms because they are big and bright with good colours and spaces



likes her classroom because it has a door that shuts

likes FE3 because it is close to FE2

likes her classroom because it is big likes it because he can come out of his chair and do yoga

We all like that FE have their own corridor that makes us different from the rest of the school

     
 What don't we like about our

 
 classrooms?

FE2 and FE3 share a room and we always disturb each other.

We don't like that we have to eat in FE3 and that we have to finish our work and can't leave it out on the tables during lunchtime because our tables are used for dining.

We don't like that we do not have enough lockers

FE2 and FE3 would separate classrooms

We would like drinking water in all of the classrooms

We like our own dining room

We would like to have a meeting room where we could hold our FE council meetings.

Next meeting Wednesday 12th February 2014