

1



GILLAS LANE ACTION TO SUPPORT SCHOOL (GLASS)

**Submission to Council Objecting to the
Proposal to Close Gillas Lane Primary
School (June 2009)**

Report Author - David Coulbeck, Chair of GLASS
Email: dcoulbeck@googlemail.com

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Executive Summary.....	4
3. Issues.....	5
3.1 Surplus Places.....	5
3.2 Assessment Criteria.....	6
3.3 Option Appraisals.....	7
3.4 Formal Complaints.....	7
3.5 Demographics and House Building.....	8
Population.....	8
House Building.....	9
3.6 Parents' Voice.....	10
3.7 Parental Choice.....	10
3.8 Pupils.....	11
3.9 Teachers.....	12
3.10 Community Voice.....	13
3.11 Education standards.....	13
3.12 Nursery Provision.....	14
3.13 Financial Appraisal.....	15
3.14 Inconsistency.....	16
3.15 Statutory Guidance on School Closure.....	16
3.16 Sunderland City Council Behaviour.....	17
4. An Alternative Strategy.....	17
5. Appendices.....	18
5.1 Assessment against Statutory Guidance on School Closure.....	18
5.2 Formal Complaints.....	18
5.3 Sites in Houghton from SHLAA report (March 2009).....	18
5.4 Consultation Meeting Minutes - October 2008 and February 2009.....	18
5.5 GLASS Survey of Parents - March / April 2009.....	18

1. Introduction

Gillas Lane Primary School is located in Houghton-le-Spring, Sunderland. The school is situated within an old coal mining area which is the subject of extensive regeneration plans. It is a small neighbourhood school in an acknowledged area of deprivation with 130 or so pupils which punches well above its weight in terms of attainment. Even though it has a substantial number of pupils on the SEN register (about 30%) it thrives with the support of a dedicated Head and teachers who are seen as almost extensions of their family by the pupils. It has a nursery unit attached to the school which is well attended and provides a good transition to the school environment. The parents and carers have a very high regard for the school; the pupils love being there and feel safe and happy; during times of social unrest, the local community has seen it as a safe haven for the children. In its latest Ofsted report in November 2008, the school was classed as Good overall and was Outstanding for learners enjoying their education. Parents choose to send their children to Gillas Lane because of its good reputation not because they have to.

The school has a large surplus places problem which brought it into the limelight during the current school place planning exercise in Sunderland. This was caused by the local housing company set up from Sunderland City Council's Housing Department demolishing several hundred dwellings on the Racecourse Estate which is a feeding ground for admissions to both Gillas Lane Primary School and Bernard Gilpin Primary School (the proposed receiving school under the closure proposals). The Head Teacher formulated plans to deal with the surplus places about two years ago but Sunderland City Council failed to act at that time.

The school can still meet its reduction of surplus places by reducing the Published Admission Number (PAN) and remodelling the school to fit its net capacity according to the Council's own reports. The Council has chosen, however, to propose the closure of Gillas Lane Primary School and its pupils will be transferred to Bernard Gilpin Primary School against the wishes of parents and carers of both schools.

GLASS (Gillas Lane Action to Support School) is a small group of interested parents and carers of pupils at Gillas Lane Primary School who are representative of a much larger group of parents and carers and have been campaigning to save Gillas Lane Primary School whilst tackling the problem of surplus places. This report examines the issues that GLASS has with both the decisions already taken and the process that led to these decisions being taken.

2. Executive Summary

As members of GLASS, we believe that Gillas Lane Primary School should not be closed for many good and valid reasons namely,

- Gillas Lane Primary School is a good school providing a good standard of education and this has been externally verified
- Gillas Lane pupils and parents want to remain at Gillas Lane Primary School and not move to Bernard Gilpin
- Gillas Lane Primary School has the support of its local community
- Gillas Lane Primary can meet its requirements to reduce surplus places by reducing its PAN and some remodelling without the closure of the school

In addition,

- The school place planning process has been badly flawed
- It has failed to take account of some of the Council's own strategies and policies
- Gillas Lane parents and carers have been misled and badly treated in the consultation stages
- Education standards and financial comparisons have been omitted from the option appraisal assessment criteria
- Option appraisals have been badly skewed by building issues
- Decisions have been made using out of date information and projections made have a high degree of uncertainty
- The decision making process has not been transparent
- Important parental views and wishes have been ignored
- Sunderland City Council has treated Gillas Lane Primary unfairly in comparison to other primary schools with surplus places in excess of 30%
- Sunderland City Council has not complied with statutory guidance on the closure of schools in the case of Gillas Lane

Sunderland City Council should listen to the views and wishes of parents and carers of Gillas Lane pupils and follow statutory guidance on school closure. It should work with the Gillas Lane community to reduce the surplus places at Gillas Lane by reducing the Published Admission Number and remodelling the school to realign net capacity (Option 3). This is in line with similar actions being taken at schools with greater surplus places problems than Gillas Lane. It should also monitor the situation carefully over the next 3 to 5 years and engage properly with the parents and carers in further school planning issues. A formal review should take place after 3 years have elapsed.

3. Issues

3.1 Surplus Places

We are told by Sunderland City Council that the closure of Gillas Lane Primary school is primarily about reducing surplus places. And we have been told that the local authority has a duty to reduce surplus places in its area.

However, the Statutory Guidance on school closure states:

"Surplus Places

It continues to be important that education is provided as cost-effectively as possible. Empty places represent a poor use of resources. LEAs have been encouraged to take action to remove surplus places, especially where schools have a quarter or more of their places unfilled and at least 30 surplus places. However, standards at the schools also need to be taken into account, as does the effect on any community use of the premises (see paragraphs 51 and 52). As noted in paragraphs 18 to 24 above, the Secretary of State wishes to encourage LEAs to organise provision in order to ensure that places are located where parents want them. In the case of any unfilled places at any schools in the area, especially where these are increasing, the LEA should take positive action to remove those at schools where parents do not choose to send their children, and which are least successful in raising standards. The removal of surplus places must always support the core agenda of raising standards and respect parents' wishes by seeking to match school places with parental choices".

A comparison of the council's actions against the statutory guidance for school closures is provided at Appendix 5.1

We have been told recently in a discussion with the council that Ofsted reports are not used in this exercise when clearly they should be. Standards at school should be taken into account. Gillas Lane provides a good education for its pupils as evidenced by the recent Ofsted report in November 2008. Its attainment levels are good and better than Bernard Gilpin's.

Whilst there may not be much community use at present, the school is well respected in the community and is a key component in the community's cohesion.

Clearly, the council has not heeded the Secretary of State's encouragement in order to organise provision to ensure that places are located where parents want them. Parents want their children to be taught at Gillas Lane. Parents choose for their children to attend Gillas Lane. The major reason why Gillas Lane, and Bernard Gilpin for that matter, have significant surplus

places problems is because of the demolition of hundreds of houses in the Racecourse estate. It is not because parents are taking them away from unpopular schools with poor standards.

However, the most telling sentence of the guidance is at the end. It talks about "respecting the parents' wishes". Where has been the respect for parents' wishes in this process? Where is the evidence that the council has sought to match school places with parental choice?

The most frustrating and provocative action taken by the council, so far, is to ignore the views and the wishes of the parents and pupils of Gillas Lane Primary School. The views have been reported it is true but pushed to the back of reports in appendices and then no mention of how they have been factored into the decision-making process. The mere publication of responses and minutes of meetings is not enough.

It seems clear that the Sunderland City Council has not followed the spirit and the detailed statutory guidance when making the proposal to close Gillas Lane Primary School.

We are not saying that the surplus places issue should not be addressed, far from it. We understand that the Council has to do something. But, in our opinion, Option 3 - Reduce the PAN and remodel the school to fit the remaining capacity - satisfied the requirement to reduce surplus places and we would support the school to achieve this option. And we were told by the Council that this is a viable option.

3.2 Assessment Criteria

The option appraisal assessment criteria (principles) were drawn up nearly a year ago and, with hindsight, were highly skewed towards the issues relating to building fabric and design and the alternative uses of spare capacity.

There was no consideration of existing educational standards and provision, the impact on the pupils of each option and the wishes of the parents and carers. We have even been told by a senior officer in Children's Services that Ofsted reports are not taken into account in this exercise. The only principle that talks about educational attainment is the principle:

"Organise school capacity to maximise effective use of available resources to deliver high quality learning and raise attainment".

There is no assessment criterion relating directly to financial assessments of each option. What does each option cost in detail? Are there any savings to be made? Where is the money coming from? We just cannot compare the options financially with the information available.

We understand the council's aim to make best use of resources but equally a school is not just a collection of buildings.

3.3 Option Appraisals

We believe the option appraisals were flawed. Not only because of the assessment criteria lacking any serious consideration of educational standards at both schools but also because of the errors and lack of information some of which is only being provided now.

We have consistently challenged the robustness and the validity of the data in the options appraisals.

There has been misleading information given on nursery provision as part of the options appraisal and an implementation date (2011) was originally set by officers that was the worst possible time to changeover. Officers clearly were not prepared and had not done sufficient research to identify these issues before they entered into consultation with parents. Indeed, it was parents who pointed out the disastrous implementation date to officers at one of the consultation meetings. These issues should have been resolved before any consultation started.

We highlighted errors in the option appraisals. It was stated that Gillas Lane kitchens provided the meals for Bernard Gilpin which is not correct. It also stated that the impact on Gillas Lane teachers of Options 1 and 2 would be the same. This is clearly wrong as Gillas Lane teachers would have a better chance of securing a new job under Option 2 - Amalgamation of the two schools.

If data is to be kept up to date, then the house building and population projections need amendment. The assessment at the beginning of the consultation process is clearly out of date and now shows a very different picture - please see the section 3.5 on "Demographics and House Building".

The lack of any detailed financial assessments of the Options to allow a financial comparison is a serious flaw in the options appraisal process. How can an informed decision be made without this information?

3.4 Formal Complaints

Early on in the school place planning process, after the first consultation meeting, a number of parents and carers from Gillas Lane had legitimate concerns about the whole process and the method of decision making. They expressed their concerns as formal complaints through the Sunderland City Council's own system expecting to have their concerns investigated.

The complaints were about the design of the consultation process which appeared to conflict with a number of the council's strategies and policies; the poor execution and handling of the consultation by officers; the lack of robustness of the options appraisal process involving misinformation, lack of relevant information and the lack of educational factors in the assessment criteria; the lack of transparency in the decision making, in particular, ignoring the important wishes of the parents; and, finally, the apparent conflict with the statutory guidance on school closure. Details of the Complaints are shown in Appendix 5.2.

These are not inconsequential matters yet the council chose to consider them as "negative responses to consultation". The complainants then forwarded the complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman after it was clear that the avenues for dealing with their concerns had been exhausted.

The Local Government Ombudsman has responded by agreeing with GLASS that these appear to be legitimate complaints and he has commenced investigations of the 5 formal complaints. He clearly disagrees with the Council's interpretation.

As one of the complaints being investigated by the Ombudsman concerns the Council acting in a potentially unlawful manner in breaching the statutory code of guidance on school closure, would it not be in the best interests of both the Council and the parents and carers of Gillas Lane for a final decision on the closure to be delayed until the Ombudsman has reported back?

If a decision to close is taken early and the Ombudsman finds later that, in his opinion, Sunderland City Council has not complied with the statutory guidance on school closure then this opens up the Council to legal action, possible sanctions by the Department of Children, Schools and Families and will tarnish its reputation, locally and nationally, as a four star authority.

3.5 Demographics and House Building

We believe that the population projections and the house building estimates have been significantly underestimated.

Population

The national trend for live births has been increasing since 2002 And the Houghton area has followed the national pattern. Anecdotal evidence shows that the live birth rate is increasing even further at this time. Maternity wards at Durham and Sunderland were closed to new cases recently and there is generally great pressure being put on maternity resources. This may be the "recession effect" that has been seen in previous downturns that causes a blip in births on top of the normal increases experienced.

Live births have been rising over the past five years as evidenced by the OPCS figures. However, the statistical model used by officers to calculate population figures in the catchment area appears to be underestimating the potential for admissions over the next 5 to 10 years. Parents and carers were extremely surprised by the low figures quoted at the consultation meetings and questioned their validity at the time.

The whole of the Hetton / Houghton Coalfields area is a massive regeneration area with potential for significant in migration of population over the next 5 - 10 years. Any significant large business relocations to Rainton Bridge could have a significant effect on the in migration of population into the area.

House Building

In terms of sites for house building, the Hetton / Houghton area has capacity for many new houses. We believe the capacity for house building in the Houghton area over the next 5-10 years has been underestimated in the school planning process.

In fact, sites in the Coalfields area and a list of sites in the Houghton area are shown in Appendix 5.3. The Coalfields area has approximately 20% of the total capacity for house building within the Sunderland City boundaries and is therefore a potentially dynamic area for growth as the country comes out of recession.

We were told during the consultation exercise that there would only be 100 or so dwellings built in the next 5 year period that would affect the admissions at Gillas Lane and Bernard Gilpin. This is clearly an underestimate as the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment report in March 2009 shows 213 dwellings deliverable in the next 5 years in the Gillas Lane area. There is also a site nearby where a further 75 dwellings could be developed in the slightly longer term.

We also know from the SHLAA report that the Coalfields regeneration area has the capacity for 1,731 dwellings deliverable in the next 5 years and a further 1,324 dwellings in 6-10 years which will put pressure on all primary schools in the area.

During the recession it is only expected that Gentoo and other developers will provide cautious estimates about building programmes. However, this could change quickly when the housing market recovers and the speed of development will follow demand at that time.

Clearly there is uncertainty at this time about the rate of housing development. But there is much more land available in the area to meet demand than is shown in the school place planning reports to Cabinet.

In view of these statistics, it makes no sense to reduce the number of schools. By all means tackle the current surplus place problems but keep your options open and monitor population and house building trends carefully and regularly. The area has the ability to develop quickly when the recession comes to an end.

3.6 Parents' Voice

Throughout the school place planning exercise, Gillas Lane parents and carers have sensed that a decision had already been made and that the consultation was a formality that had to be observed.

Very little effort has been made by the Council reach all parents in this acknowledged area of deprivation. Two consultation meetings at times designed to suit officers rather than parents has fed the impression that the views raised at the meetings would not be taken seriously or given any priority. The minutes of those two meetings are shown in Appendix 5.4 and show the questions raised by the parents and carers and the clear support for Option 3.

The reports to Cabinet have included the minutes of the consultation meetings and the written responses but the executive summaries have made little or no reference to these important views providing a very one-sided officer's view.

Parents' views, through the consultation meetings and the written responses, have been reported but roundly ignored. There has been no attempt by the council to explain how parental concerns and views have been taken into account during the decision making process. GLASS also conducted a survey of parents recently and asked them how they felt about aspects of the process. The results are in Appendix 5.5.

Again, the statutory guidance states "*the Secretary of State wishes to encourage LEAs to organise provision in order to ensure that places are located where parents want them*". The statutory guidance shows that parents are an important element of this process and their views and wishes should have a high degree of priority. They and their children are the people most directly affected in this process. Parents have made their views known on many occasions yet Sunderland City Council persists in ignoring a key priority group of stakeholders in this exercise.

3.7 Parental Choice

Parental choice has been missing or ignored throughout the whole of the school place planning exercise in relation to Gillas Lane Primary School.

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families has, on many occasions recently, proclaimed the need to extend parents' choice. It does seem that this message is not getting through to Sunderland City Council.

It seems highly surprising that the local authority is so out of touch with central government policy. Closing Gillas Lane Primary School would reduce parental choice for parents at Gillas Lane. Most would be forced into accepting Bernard Gilpin as the school for their children as other options would be either too far away or would not have the places.

Gillas Lane parents want their children to remain at Gillas Lane Primary School. This has been clear from the start of this exercise. Let the parents have their choice. The statutory guidance says that Sunderland City Council should "*respect parents' wishes by seeking to match school places with parental choices*". So why has this not been done?

3.8 Pupils

Pupils needs and wishes have been omitted from consideration in this process so far. Only a late intervention by the Head Teacher and GLASS involved the pupils as stakeholders in the consultation exercise. Many of the older ones have views that matter. Many of the younger ones may be affected badly by this proposal.

Their educational needs have been poorly served in the school place planning process. There appear to be no educational factors taken into account in the assessment of options. Sunderland City Council seems to equate newer buildings with better education and better opportunities for young people.

It is worthwhile to re-iterate a paragraph in a letter that was sent to the Cabinet prior to the February 2009 meeting:

"A school is not just a collection of buildings. Schools are forged from people - the parents, the teachers and the pupils - working together. You could have the best and most up to date buildings and facilities in the world but if you don't have the school partnership between parents, teachers and pupils then it is not guaranteed to be successful. At Gillas Lane you have the successful school partnership and all you have to do is invest some money in the infrastructure to maintain it into the future. And we have been told that Option 3 is viable. So why is this not being proposed?"

Pupils have given their views and they want Gillas Lane Primary School to stay open. They enjoy learning at Gillas Lane. This was evidenced as "Outstanding" in the recent Ofsted report. The levels of attainment are good. The parents are confident that the special educational needs are met sensitively and professionally.

One telling question from a Gillas Lane parent in the audience at the final consultation meeting in February was "How will my child benefit from moving to Bernard Gilpin school?" After a long silence from the officers, the only answer they could muster was "They will be able to complete their education". This hardly inspires confidence and speaks volumes for the disregard shown to the pupils of Gillas Lane by officers in this exercise.

The pupils at Gillas Lane will be the major casualties if Option 1 is approved. They will be forced to move to another school and be seen as the outsiders. There are bound to be tensions between the two sets of children. Bernard Gilpin pupils will inevitably feel that the Gillas Lane pupils are invading their space. It's only human nature. Gillas Lane pupils will feel even more alienated as the teaching staff will be predominantly existing Bernard Gilpin staff. There will be few familiar faces in the transition phase.

If Gillas Lane had to close (although we still believe this does not need to happen) then the better of the two remaining options is definitely Option 2 for the pupils of Gillas Lane. Option 2 is similar to Option 1 but would involve amalgamation of the two schools to form a new educational entity. This would have been a "clean slate" option where the pupils and their teachers and staff would have a fair chance of becoming part of a new school with a new identity. It would lessen the undoubted difficulties in any transitional phase.

We are sure that most parents at Gillas Lane would prefer the lesser of these two evils if the school had to close. This option seems to have been dismissed very quickly without much explanation. We assume that this option would involve too much effort for officers and also invites the dreaded element of competition. But from the pupils of Gillas Lane perspective it would be less alarming and probably help to improve the standards of the new school quickly. Option 2 has more to commend it than Option 1 in our view.

3.9 Teachers

The teachers at Gillas Lane Primary School have been given a raw deal in this exercise. They have proved themselves to be particularly dedicated and loyal as well as very good at their jobs. The recent Ofsted report is testament to their hard work and skill and competence.

If Option 1 is chosen, they will have no priority in finding a new job. The teachers at Bernard Gilpin, on the other hand, as present incumbents, have the security of knowing their jobs are safe. Only the additional posts necessary as a result of larger pupil base would be open to displaced teachers from Gillas Lane.

This is shabby treatment and poor reward for those teachers who have been instrumental in raising the educational standards at Gillas Lane in recent years.

Just as Option 2 would be a fairer option for the Gillas Lane pupils, the teachers would benefit from this option as well. The teachers would at least have a fair chance of getting a job with a new school formed from the amalgamation of the two schools. All existing teachers from both Bernard Gilpin and Gillas Lane would have the same opportunity of applying for the teaching posts at the new school. This makes it more likely that pupils from Gillas Lane would see familiar faces in the difficult transition period.

3.10 Community Voice

The local community has shown its commitment to Gillas Lane Primary School. 206 written responses were made during the final consultation phase. This was more than half of the total number of responses for the whole of the school place planning exercise across Sunderland. Over 60 of these responses were from local residents with no child affiliation with the school. This illustrates the strength of feeling in the local community for the school.

These are people who have no vested interest in the school but realise its value to the community in terms of the contribution it makes and its stabilising influence.

If the nursery building was to be converted to a community resource then we are sure it would be very successful and provide a better placed meeting point for adults and children in the Gillas Lane area.

The existing community association building is in poor repair and we understand the community association would be amenable to moving in to the nursery building should it be made available. Sunderland City Council could then sell the existing building and get a capital receipt from the sale.

This option, and others, was never explored as part of the Option Appraisal process and we were told that there was no evident community use in the area for any surplus accommodation available from a remodelling exercise.

The local Ward Councillors and GLASS believe that this is a viable option and could reduce any costs of remodelling Gillas Lane Primary School to meet its lower PAN.

3.11 Education standards

We were told by a senior member of the Children's Services directorate, during a discussion in the Civic Suite at Sunderland Civic Centre following

the Protest Picnic event, that existing education standards have taken no part in this process. We were told that Ofsted reports count for nothing and should not.

How does this square with the statutory guidance which states,

“LEAs have been encouraged to take action to remove surplus places, especially where schools have a quarter or more of their places unfilled and at least 30 surplus places. However, standards at the schools also need to be taken into account, as does the effect on any community use of the premises...”?

Gillas Lane Primary School has been improving in terms of attainment and ranks well amongst other primary schools in the Sunderland area. Its recent Ofsted report in November 2008 achieved a Good rating with Outstanding for pupils enjoying their learning.

It is not a failing school in terms of standards and popularity. Quite the opposite. It is popular and its surplus places problem was caused by the demolition of a large number of council dwellings on the Racecourse estate that affected the intake of pupils at both Bernard Gilpin and Gillas Lane schools. Parents choose to send the children to Gillas Lane. This is evidenced by the fact that 65% of Gillas Lane pupils actually live nearer to Bernard Gilpin school.

In our view, education standards have not been taken into account in this exercise and they should have been according to the statutory guidance.

3.12 Nursery Provision

The issue of nursery provision has been a particularly contentious one throughout this exercise.

Gillas Lane has a nursery unit attached to the school in a separate building catering for 20-25 children at any one time. It works well as a good transition for children into the reception class in the main primary school.

It has a good reputation and parents and carers have been particularly vocal in trying to find out what the future nursery arrangements would be if the school had to be closed.

This area has been particularly badly handled by officers in consultation meetings and in reports.

At the October 2008 meeting parents and carers were told, after an open disagreement between two Children's Services officers, that new nursery facilities would be provided at Bernard Gilpin as part of the new arrangements. Many parents went home a little comforted by this.

However, at the final consultation meeting in February 2009, we were given an apology and told that nursery children would use existing provision in the Houghton area. This caused alarm for many parents and particularly those who had a child at primary school and a child going to the nursery and their problems of getting their children to school/nursery on time.

Only recently have we been told that the Houghton Nursery could cater for all of the demand created by the closure of the Gillas Lane unit as it is currently running at 50 places under capacity!

Why was this not known at the outset of the consultation process? This is clearly an important area of concern for parents. Parents were misled and by the time of the second consultation meeting a decision had been made to whittle the options down to Option 1 leaving them with no choice but to accept the new arrangements.

This decision was made despite the current horrendous traffic problems outside the nursery that will only be made worse by the addition of another 20-25 cars each morning trying to get young children as near to the entrance of the nursery as possible.

There has not been any forethought or planning given to the future nursery provision. This has ended up with policy being made "on the hoof" and is symptomatic of the whole option appraisal process.

3.13 Financial Appraisal

No financial appraisals of the options were apparent during the option appraisal stage of the process. In fact very little financial information has been evident during the consultation stages and the reports to Cabinet.

Surely, an important element to any options appraisal process is the financial element. How much is each option going to cost? How much might the option save? Are these revenue or capital costs? Where is the money going to come from? All of these are relevant questions to ask so that options can be compared objectively and comprehensively.

So where were these financial appraisals? The financial information on all option appraisals was scarce at best and selective. On the face of it, the only financial information is provided on Gillas Lane as it seems to have been ear marked for closure from an early stage.

How can a proper option appraisal be carried out without knowing the detailed financial impact? If this was a business then a financial appraisal would be an integral part of the process. But here it appears to be low priority.

We believe Gillas Lane has been singled out and provides revenue savings that can be used to help other primary schools in the Sunderland area.

3.14 Inconsistency

It does appear that Gillas Lane Primary School is being singled out and other schools in the Sunderland area with similar problems are being treated very differently.

In the option appraisal stage of the school place planning exercise there were 5 other primary schools with the same or worse percentages of surplus places than Gillas Lane.

Two of them, Grange Park (39% surplus places) and Seaburn Dene (51% surplus places) are to be retained with remodelling and reducing the Public Admission Number (PAN). In the case of Grange Park, this was done in the face of an option appraisal that, officers admitted in the Cabinet report, pointed to closure of the school!

How can there be such inconsistency of treatment between schools? If the decision on Grange Park was taken as a result of uncertainty of numbers of admissions in the area, then surely there is a case that the same should be applied to Gillas Lane. There is uncertainty with the population projections and the house building projections over the next 5 -10 years. So why not wait and monitor, as with Grange Park?

Decisions appear to be made to suit officers' whims with no regard for fairness and consistency.

It is also important to point out that of the schools proposed for "amalgamation", Gillas Lane / Bernard Gilpin is the only site where there will be no new, purpose-built school for the pupils to move into. Even this seems to discriminate against Gillas Lane Primary School.

3.15 Statutory Guidance on School Closure

As we have shown throughout this report, Sunderland City Council has acted against statutory guidance as well as its own policies and procedures.

A detailed analysis of Sunderland City Council's actions compared with statutory guidance on closure of schools is attached in Appendix 5.1

The Local Government Ombudsman is currently investigating a complaint, among others, that the council has not complied with statutory guidance on school closure in the case of Gillas Lane.

We believe that it would be reckless to make a decision on the possible closure of Gillas Lane Primary School while such a complaint is being investigated. The ramifications of such action could damage the council's

reputation and leave it open to legal action and possible sanctions by the Department of Children, Schools and Families.

3.16 Sunderland City Council Behaviour

GLASS has been highly critical of Sunderland City Council in its treatment of parents and carers of Gillas Lane pupils. The council has ignored the views and wishes of the parents in consultation meetings and reports. It has refused to discuss the issues and concerns with parents and carers face to face until recently. It has tried to deny legitimate complaints from being considered through the proper channels.

As council tax payers, Gillas Lane parents and carers have a right to some respect from the Council but this appears to be lacking. Despite a recent face to face meeting with the council, Gillas Lane parents and carers still have many questions that the council appears to be unwilling to answer. It appears that the council is not prepared to admit that it has possibly made mistakes.

This is not the behaviour of a progressive and supposedly excellent council. Behind the façade of fine words lies a very different council.

4. An Alternative Strategy

If the main reason for the closure of Gillas Lane Primary School is the reduction of surplus places, this can be achieved through Option 3. Sunderland City Council has stated this is a viable option.

GLASS believes the best option for the pupils is Option 3. In view of the uncertain nature of the house building and population projections over the next 5 - 10 years, GLASS believes that this is the most prudent option as it allows time to monitor trends in a volatile period.

We think that there should be a formal review after 3 years that involves the parents and carers in a way that truly engages them rather than using the inadequate consultation methods in this recent school place planning exercise.

In order to achieve Option 3, the nursery class would come into the main school building and the school would be remodelled to achieve this. We understand this option will inevitably involve mixed year groups but we are confident that the current head teacher and teaching staff would be able to successfully manage these classes.

However, rather than demolishing the nursery building, minimal works could be carried out to make it suitable for the local community association and

their activities. Currently, they occupy a council-owned property away from the school which is in poor condition. They would be moving into a better maintained, better located property with some parking space available.

The current community association property could be sold by the council and realise a substantial capital receipt to offset against any works required. This would benefit the local community and improve access to a popular facility for the whole of the Gillas Lane Community.

This has been proposed by the local ward councillors and GLASS would support this alternative wholeheartedly.

5. Appendices

5.1 Assessment against Statutory Guidance on School Closure

5.2 Formal Complaints

5.3 Sites in Houghton from SHLAA report (March 2009)

5.4 Consultation Meeting Minutes - October 2008 and February 2009

5.5 GLASS Survey of Parents - March / April 2009

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>1.2 The Secretary of State considers that those bringing forward proposals should consult all interested parties. In doing so they should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allow adequate time; • provide sufficient information for those being consulted to form a considered view on the matters on which they are being consulted; • make clear how their views can be made known; and • be able to demonstrate how they have taken into account the views expressed during consultation in reaching any subsequent decision as to the publication of proposals. 	<p>In the case of Gillas Lane Primary school, Sunderland City Council has clearly not provided “sufficient information for those being consulted”. The option appraisals lacked information about the effects on educational standards, the effect on the local community, the impact of the increase of traffic at Bernard Gilpin and a detailed financial appraisal of each option. This list is not exhaustive.</p> <p>There were also mistakes about kitchen and meals provision and the effect on staff in option 2 (School Amalgamation).</p> <p>Officers could not answer legitimate questions from concerned parents at the February 2009 consultation meeting.</p> <p>In the consultation exercise, there was great confusion over nursery provision, one officer saying that there would be nursery provision at Bernard Gilpin another saying that there would not. Eventually, we were told that nursery provision would be provided in the area but not at Bernard Gilpin. Parents feel misled on this issue. However, we understand that the nursery provision proposed in Houghton is already at capacity. There is still much confusion surrounding nursery provision and a lack of confidence in the local authority’s assertions that there is sufficient provision to cater for demand.</p> <p>The Council have not shown how they have taken into account the views expressed during the consultation period in reaching any decision. Appending the notes of consultation meetings and an analysis of responses is not enough. They have not shown what weight these views have been given in the decision making process. In fact, there is no mention of the parents’ and carers’ views in the synopsis of options and no discussion of them at the Cabinet meetings.</p>
<p>1.3 Where, in the course of consultation, a new option emerges which the proposers wish to consider, it will probably be appropriate to consult afresh on this option before proceeding to publish proposals.</p>	<p>Councillors and parents suggested different alternative uses for the surplus nursery unit accommodation for Option 3. No action was taken by the authority to research this in more detail.</p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>1.4 The Secretary of State considers that the interested parties who should be consulted by proposers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the governing body of any school which is the subject of proposals (if the LA are publishing proposals); • the LA that maintains the school (if the governing body is publishing the proposals); • families of pupils, teachers and other staff at the school; • any LA likely to be affected by the proposals, in particular neighbouring authorities where there may be significant cross-border movement of pupils; • the governing bodies, teachers and other staff of any other school that may be affected; • families of any pupils at any other school who may be affected by the proposals including where appropriate families of pupils at feeder primary schools; • any trade unions who represent staff at the school; and representatives of any trade union of any other staff at schools who may be affected by the proposals; • (if proposals involve, or are likely to affect a school which has a particular religious character) the appropriate diocesan authorities or the relevant faith group in relation to the school; • the trustees of the school (if any); • (if proposals involve, or are likely to affect a school which has a particular religious character) the appropriate diocesan authorities or the relevant faith group in relation to the school; 	<p>The governing bodies of both schools (Gillas Lane and Bernard Gilpin) are against the closure options.</p> <p>The families, teachers and staff are strongly against the closure options.</p> <p>The teaching unions are against the closure proposals.</p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the trustees of the school (if any); • (if the proposals affect the provision of full-time 14-19 education) the Learning and Skills Council (LSC); • MPs whose constituencies include the schools that are the subject of the proposals or whose constituents are likely to be affected by the proposals; • the local district or parish council where the school that is the subject of the proposals is situated; • any other interested party, for example, the Early Years Development and Child Care Partnership (or any local partnership that exists in place of an EYDCP) where proposals affect early years provision, or those who benefit from a contractual arrangement giving them the use of the premises; and • such other persons as appear to the proposers to be appropriate. 	<p>Not sure whether the MP was formally consulted.</p> <p>We understand that Houghton nursery (the major receiving body for children displaced from the Gillas Lane Nursery Unit) was not consulted in the initial stages and has reservations about being able to accommodate the numbers of children involved.</p> <p>Local Gillas Lane residents have shown they are against the closure options - see appendix on responses to consultation in final reports.</p>
<p>1.5 Under Section 176 of the Education Act 2002 LAs and governing bodies are also under a duty to consult pupils on any proposed changes to local school organisation that may affect them. Guidance on this duty is available on the Teachernet website: www.publications.teachernet.gov.uk and is entitled "Pupil Participation Guidance: Working Together - Giving Children and Young People a Say".</p>	<p>The school initiated sensitive consultation with the pupils in the absence of specific direction from Sunderland City Council. Otherwise, it was a case of "put it on a response form".</p>
<p>4.16 The following factors should not be taken to be exhaustive. Their importance will vary, depending on the type and circumstances of the proposals. All proposals should be considered on their individual merits.</p>	
<p>A System Shaped by Parents</p>	

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>4.17 The Government's aim, as set out in the Five Year Strategy for Education and Learners and the Schools White Paper <i>Higher Standards, Better Schools For All</i>, is to create a school system shaped by parents which delivers excellence and equity. In particular, the Government wishes to see a dynamic system in which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weak schools that need to be closed are closed quickly and replaced by new ones where necessary; • the best schools are able to expand and spread their ethos and success; and • new providers have the opportunity to share their energy and talents by establishing new schools - whether as voluntary schools, Trust schools or Academies - and forming Trusts for existing schools. 	<p>Sunderland's school system is clearly not shaped by parents if the Gillas Lane consultation is an example.</p> <p>Gillas Lane is not a weak school. It is a GOOD school verified by Ofsted in November 2008. In fact, it punches above its weight in terms of attainment despite the fact that is in an acknowledged area of deprivation and has a high percentage (30%) of pupils on the SEN register.</p>
<p>4.18 The EIA 2006 amends the Education Act 1996 to place new duties on LAs to secure diversity in the provision of schools and to increase opportunities for parental choice when planning the provision of schools in their areas. In addition, LAs are under a specific duty to respond to representations from parents about the provision of schools, including requests to establish new schools or make changes to existing schools. The Government's aim is to secure a more diverse and dynamic schools system which is shaped by parents. The Decision Maker should take into account the extent to which the proposals are consistent with the new duties on LAs.</p>	<p>Sunderland City Council, by proposing the closure of Gillas Lane Primary, have reduced the diversity in the provision of schools.</p> <p>Gillas Lane is a small school compared to Bernard Gilpin school (the proposed receiving school) but parents made a deliberate choice by sending their children to Gillas Lane because they wanted a small school atmosphere where their child will be cared for and treated as an individual. Even Ofsted in their publication - "Small Schools: How Well Are They Doing?" - have pointed out that small schools can succeed in providing quality education. It states,</p> <p><i>"There is much from the first cycle of inspections to encourage those who work in small schools. Higher unit costs notwithstanding, a good case emerges for the place of small schools in the education system as a whole, when the quality of their educational performance is added to the broader contribution they make to their communities."</i></p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>The Secretary of State, Ed Balls, has recently stated publicly,</p> <p><i>“The important thing that I want to do is make sure that year by year that we ensure that in every area there is a choice of good schools”</i></p> <p><i>“It is not enough to have a good local school in every community. There has got to be more than one so that if you don’t get into your first choice, there are other options available.”</i></p> <p>Sunderland City Council have also reduced opportunities for parental choice. Bernard Gilpin is the only viable choice for most parents in the Gillas Lane area as other primary schools are too far away.</p>	<p>Nowhere in the report has it been shown how the proposals to close Gillas Lane Primary school will boost standards and opportunities for young people from Gillas Lane. There seems to be a presumption by the Local Authority that new buildings and facilities equals better education. It should be said that whilst there are outstanding repairs required to the Gillas Lane school buildings, the school is by no means in bad repair.</p> <p>Parents’ and pupils’ needs and wishes have been removed from any decision making in this school place planning exercise.</p> <p>Many of the pupils come from deprived backgrounds and yet the standards of attainment are high at Gillas Lane. This is because of the skill and dedication of the teachers and Head Teacher and the support of the local community for the school. There has been no research carried out into the effects of moving these young people to another, larger school.</p> <p>Existing Gillas Lane teachers will be at a disadvantage in attaining a job at Bernard Gilpin school under the current proposals as they will be made redundant and have to apply for any job that becomes available. Teachers who are familiar to Gillas Lane pupils will be in short supply and the pupils will be at a serious disadvantage if they move to Bernard Gilpin.</p>
<p>Standards</p> <p>4.19 The Government wishes to encourage changes to local school provision which will boost standards and opportunities for young people, while matching school place supply as closely as possible to pupils’ and parents’ needs and wishes.</p>	<p>4.20 Decision Makers should be satisfied that proposals for a school closure will contribute to raising local standards of provision, and will lead to improved attainment for children and young people. They should pay particular attention to the effects on groups that tend to under-perform including children from certain ethnic groups, children from deprived backgrounds and children in care, with the aim of narrowing attainment gaps.</p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure

School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)

There are many transition issues that will cause difficulties for pupils, teachers and staff. Teachers need to secure their futures and Gillas Lane may lose dedicated staff over the period up to any closure. Parents may want to take their children out of Gillas Lane and put them in Bernard Gilpin early. The transition itself from one school to another will be difficult for Gillas Lane pupils particularly with high numbers of SEN pupils. And there will be the inevitable dip in performance as research shows.

The council cannot prove that this closure will contribute to raising improved attainment for children and young people. Every management studies handbook suggests that where a merger takes place there is a marked dip in performance before it improves. Neither can it, with any degree of confidence, demonstrate that attainment will even rebound to the previous Gillas Lane levels.

Merging a successful school (Gillas Lane) with a less successful school (Bernard Gilpin) would, in theory, bring the new entity up to the standard of the most successful school. This is highly questionable in this case where the infrastructure (people, ethos and facilities) that supported the successful school will have been demolished leaving the Gillas Lane pupils at a distinct disadvantage.

Note. If closure is unavoidable (although we do not believe this), then Option 2 would be a fairer option for the pupils at Gillas Lane. They would be going into a new school with a new identity. All pupils and staff will start from the same base. Their teachers would have a fairer chance of getting a job at the new school. There is a greater likelihood of more familiar teachers for the Gillas Lane pupils which would help during any transitional period. However, this option was dismissed without any rationale. One has to question why Option 2 - the formation of a new school entity based on the Bernard Gilpin site - was not seen as the second best option for pupils of Gillas Lane.

4.21 Decision Makers should be satisfied that when proposals lead to children being displaced, any alternative provision will meet the statutory

Little has been said or written yet about how the alternative SEN provision will be managed. Officers have been very vague so far about this.

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
SEN improvement test (see paragraphs 4.55 to 4.61).	
<p>4.22 Where a school is to be closed so that it may be amalgamated with a more successful and/or popular school, the Decision Maker should again normally approve these proposals, subject to evidence being provided by the LA and other interests that the development will have a positive impact on standards.</p>	<p>Bernard Gilpin is not more successful nor more popular than Gillas Lane. There is no guarantee that the amalgamation will have a positive impact on standards. In most amalgamations of institutions following reorganisations there is a dip in standards before there is an improvement. But will any improvement get back up to current standards at Gillas Lane?</p>
<p>Diversity</p> <p>4.28 The Government's aim is to transform our school system so that every child receives an excellent education - whatever their background and wherever they live. A vital part of the Government's vision is to create a more diverse school system offering excellence and choice, where each school develops its own ethos, sense of mission and a centre of excellence or specialist provision.</p>	<p>Bernard Gilpin and Gillas Lane schools are very different in nature from each other. They both deserve to flourish but separately. They provide a diversity of choice for parents in the local area. To close Gillas Lane would reduce parental choice. At the moment parents have the choice to send their children to Bernard Gilpin - a newer school with newer facilities - or Gillas Lane - a smaller school with nursery provision that is excellent in creating a homely atmosphere in which pupils excel and thrive, particularly those on the SEN register.</p>
<p>4.29 Decision Makers should consider how proposals will impact on local diversity. They should consider the range of schools in the relevant area of the LA and how they will ultimately impact on the aspirations of parents and help raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps.</p>	<p>Parents at Gillas Lane made a conscious choice to send their children there because of the characteristics and qualities described above. If Gillas Lane is closed that parental choice will be lost.</p>
<p>Every Child Matters</p> <p>4.32 The Decision Maker should consider how the proposals will help every child and young person achieve their potential in accordance with Every Child Matters' principles which are: to be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution to the community and society and achieve economic well-being. This should include considering how displaced pupils will continue to have access to extended services, opportunities for personal development, access to academic and vocational training, measures to address barriers to participation and</p>	<p>Pupils are saying to the decision makers now that they feel healthy, safe and enjoy their school and achieve well. They do not want their school to be closed. Parents also support Gillas Lane because it takes the Every Child Matters agenda and places it at the heart of everything that is done in school and this is recognised by Ofsted.</p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>support for children and young people with particular needs e.g. looked after children or children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities.</p>	
<p>NEED FOR PLACES</p> <p>Provision for Displaced Pupils</p> <p>4.33 The Decision Maker should be satisfied that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils in the area, taking into account the overall supply and likely future demand for places. The Decision Maker should consider the quality and popularity with parents of the schools in which spare capacity exists and any evidence of parents' aspirations for those schools.</p>	<p>No doubt there would be sufficient capacity at Bernard Gilpin eventually but much construction work will need to be carried out to accommodate the children from Gillas Lane and, in the short term, we believe that temporary classrooms would be required. We are told that at least £750,000 is required to carry out the capital works required in the timescale suggested. Parents do not want their children to be taught in temporary classrooms for any length of time but fear this will happen in view of Sunderland City Council's previous record.</p> <p>In any event, the teaching environment at Bernard Gilpin is cramped because it was built under different education building standards. This will be compounded by the addition of 140 or so pupils from Gillas Lane. Existing facilities, including the IT room, will be lost in the effort to accommodate the extra bodies.</p> <p>In terms of nursery provision, Sunderland City Council has not convinced the Gillas Lane parents that there will be sufficient alternative nursery provision in the area to cope with the numbers now provided for in the Gillas Lane nursery unit. We hear from many different sources that the existing nursery provision in the Houghton area is at capacity now. Bearing in mind the government's wish to extend nursery provision to the over 2s, the council's assertion that existing nursery facilities can cope with the expected number of displaced children seems hollow.</p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>Surplus Places</p> <p>4.34 It is important that education is provided as cost-effectively as possible. Empty places can represent a poor use of resources - resources that can often be used more effectively to support schools in raising standards. The Secretary of State wishes to encourage LAs to organise provision in order to ensure that places are located where parents want them. LAs should take action to remove empty places at schools that are unpopular with parents and which do little to raise standards or improve choice. The removal of surplus places should always support the core agenda of raising standards and respect parents' wishes by seeking to match school places with parental choices.</p>	<p>Under option1 - closure of Gillas Lane - places will not be available where parents want them. There has been no effort by Sunderland City Council to "respect parents' wishes by seeking to match school places with parental choices".</p> <p>The Head Teacher put forward proposals to deal with surplus places recently in the last two years yet the Local Authority took no action.</p> <p>Surplus places can be removed at Gillas Lane without closure as the Local authority has acknowledged in Option 3 of the option appraisals. This option is sustainable and has the support of the vast majority of parents/ carers.</p>
<p>4.35 The Decision Maker should normally approve proposals to close schools in order to remove surplus places where the school proposed for closure has a quarter or more places unfilled, and at least 30 surplus places, and where standards are low compared to standards across the LA. The Decision Maker should consider all other proposals to close schools in order to remove surplus places carefully. Where the rationale for the closure of a school is based on the removal of surplus places, standards at the school(s) in question should be taken into account, as well as geographical and social factors, such as population sparsity in rural areas, and the effect on any community use of the premises.</p>	<p>Even though Gillas Lane Primary has a high percentage of surplus places currently, standards are high and, we are assured by the Head Teacher, can remain high after the removal of surplus places.</p> <p>Also no social factors have been taken into account in the option appraisals. Given that Gillas Lane is in an acknowledged area of deprivation and has been a stabilising influence in the community during more recent times of social upheaval, this is a major omission in the option appraisals.</p>
<p>IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY AND TRAVEL</p> <p>Impact on Community</p> <p>4.36 Some schools may already be a focal point for family and community activity, providing extended services for a range of users, and its closure may have wider social ramifications. In considering proposals for the closure of such schools, the effect on families and the community should be considered. Where the school was providing access to extended</p>	<p>Whilst Gillas Lane Primary does not provide a great deal of extended services, it is a focal point for the local community. Gillas Lane is primarily a disadvantaged community with high benefit dependency and low incomes. There have been significant social tensions in the last 10 - 20 years resulting in social unrest. During that time the primary school has</p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure

School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)

<p>services, some provision should be made for the pupils and their families to access similar services through their new schools or other means.</p>	<p>always been accepted by the community as a safe haven for young children.</p> <p>It is also a community lacking confidence that has struggled to find its voice and needs to be supported by the local authority to give it empowerment opportunities and strengthen partnership working as envisaged by the Local Government Association in its Community Empowerment Action Plan.</p>
<p>4.37 The information presented by those bringing forward proposals to close such schools, particularly when they are in receipt of funding as part of regeneration activity, should therefore include evidence that options for maintaining access to extended services in the area have been addressed. The views of other relevant agencies and partnerships with responsibility for community and family services should be taken into account, alongside those of the local police, Government Offices and Regional Development Agencies having responsibility for the New Deal for Communities.</p>	<p>Just because Gillas Lane does not have extended services attached directly to the school does not mean that it is not an important and integral part of the Gillas Lane community.</p> <p>There are services being provided in the outlying area of Gillas Lane funded through regeneration activity ie the Houghton Racecourse Community Action Point (HRCAP). There are also other community facilities such as the Community Association premises which could be reviewed and present an opportunity for rationalisation and relocation in the building currently used by the nursery under Option 3. There is also the Council’s drive toward locality working which could be catered for as an alternative use for the nursery building under Option 3.</p> <p>The Council has not examined these issues in any depth yet contends that there is no evidence of demand for alternative uses for the nursery building. Local Ward councillors have already suggested these options but no work was carried out by the local authority during the options appraisal stage to look at feasibility. The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children’s Services refused a request by local ward councillors to establish a “task and finish” group to research these options which the Gillas Lane community supported and wanted to be involved in.</p>
<p>Community Cohesion and Race Equality</p> <p>4.38 When considering proposals to close a school the Decision Maker</p>	<p>One of the major supports to community cohesion in the Gillas Lane area is</p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>should consider the impact of the proposals on community cohesion. This will need to be considered on a case by case basis, taking account of the community served by the school and the views of different sections within the community. In considering the impact of the proposals on community cohesion the Decision Maker will need to take account of the nature of the alternative provision to be made for pupils displaced by the closure and the effects of any other changes to the provision of schools in the area.</p>	<p>the primary school. It provides a unifying focus for the community that people respect and support. Take this away and there will be consequences in other areas most assuredly.</p>
<p>Travel and Accessibility for All</p> <p>4.39 In considering proposals for the reorganisation of schools, Decision Makers should satisfy themselves that accessibility planning has been properly taken into account. Facilities are to be accessible by those concerned, by being located close to those who will use them, and the proposed changes should not adversely impact on disadvantaged groups.</p>	<p>Transport and safety issues at Gillas Lane are minimal as only relatively few cars are used to drop off pupils. There is sufficient parking in quiet areas to accommodate this in the morning and at home time. And all this is done in a safe manner.</p> <p>Contrast this with Bernard Gilpin where at the critical times there are many more cars, much busier roads and less accessible car parking. There is a much higher risk of accidents and near misses at Bernard Gilpin. There have been accidents on the main road outside Bernard Gilpin school which has resulted in major traffic calming measures being constructed. This can only become a greater risk as more parents take their children to school by car if Gillas Lane is closed.</p> <p>Yet the local authority has undertaken no scientific assessment of the traffic increase and a proper risk analysis in coming to their conclusions on option appraisals.</p>
<p>4.40 In deciding statutory proposals, the Decision Maker should bear in mind that proposals should not have the effect of unreasonably extending journey times or increasing transport costs, or result in too many children being prevented from travelling sustainably due to unsuitable routes e.g. for walking, cycling etc. The EIA 2006 provides extended free transport rights for low income groups - see Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance ref 00373 - 2007BKT-EN at www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications. Proposals should also be considered on the basis of how they will support and contribute to the LA's duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school.</p> <p>Equal Opportunity Issues</p> <p>4.41 The Decision Maker should consider whether there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that arise from the changes being proposed, for example, that where there is a proposed change to single sex provision in an area, there is equal access to single sex provision for</p>	<p>There are disabled access issues at Gillas Lane Primary school but we believe that the council has had sufficient time to address these Disability Discrimination Act requirements but has chosen not to do so.</p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>the other sex to meet parental demand. Similarly there needs to be a commitment to provide access to a range of opportunities which reflects the ethnic and cultural mix of the area, while ensuring that such opportunities are open to all.</p>	
<p>Early Years Provision</p> <p>4.46 In considering proposals to close a school which currently includes early years provision, the Decision Maker should consider whether the alternative provision will integrate pre-school education with childcare services and/or with other services for young children and their families; and should have particular regard to the views of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership.</p>	<p>Gillas Lane school currently has a nursery unit provided on site which provides a very good transition to school for children. Bernard Gilpin school has no nursery facilities.</p> <p>In the consultation exercise there was great confusion and parents were misled over nursery provision, one officer saying that there would be nursery provision at Bernard Gilpin another saying that there would not. Eventually, we were told that nursery provision would be provided in the area but not at Bernard Gilpin although we understand that the alternative nursery provision proposed at Houghton is already at capacity. There is still much confusion surrounding nursery provision and a lack of confidence in the local authority's assertions.</p> <p>There is an additional problem for Gillas Lane parents who have children at both school and nursery. Currently, they can make sure that the children arrive on time for school and nursery as they are attending one place. If the closure proposals go ahead, this will not be possible as the primary and nursery facilities are separate geographically causing difficulties for parents.</p>
<p>4.47 The Decision Maker should also consider whether the alternative early years provision will maintain or enhance the standard of educational provision and flexibility of access for parents. Alternative provision could be with providers in the private, voluntary or independent sector.</p>	
<p>SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) PROVISION</p> <p>Initial Considerations</p> <p>4.55 When reviewing SEN provision, planning or commissioning alternative types of SEN provision or considering proposals for change, LAs should aim for a flexible range of provision and support that can respond to the</p>	<p>Little has been said by officers about the SEN provision other than vague assertions that this will be provided. Parents have little faith in the assertions of officers of Children's Services. No details have been provided</p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>special educational needs of individual pupils and parental preferences, rather than necessarily establishing broad categories of provision according to special educational need or disability. There are a number of initial considerations for LAs to take account of in relation to proposals for change. They should ensure that local proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. take account of parental preferences for particular styles of provision or education settings; ii. offer a range of provision to respond to the needs of individual children and young people, taking account of collaborative arrangements (including between special and mainstream), extended school and Children’s Centre provision; regional centres (of expertise) and regional and sub-regional provision; out of local authority day and residential special provision; iii. are consistent with the LA’s Children and Young People’s Plan; iv. take full account of educational considerations, in particular the need to ensure a broad and balanced curriculum, including the National Curriculum, within a learning environment in which children can be healthy and stay safe; v. support the LA’s strategy for making schools and settings more accessible to disabled children and young people and their scheme for promoting equality of opportunity for disabled people; vi. provide access to appropriately trained staff and access to specialist support and advice, so that individual pupils can have the fullest possible opportunities to make progress in their learning and participate in their school and community; vii. ensure appropriate provision for 14-19 year-olds, taking account of the role of local LSC funded institutions and their 	<p>at this stage.</p> <p>Gillas Lane parents would prefer their SEN children to stay at Gillas Lane rather than move to Bernard Gilpin.</p> <p>They know that the school takes the “Every Child Matters” agenda seriously and puts the principles into practice. The teachers know all the children and their families and the difficulties they face. The small class sizes and the homely environment contribute greatly to the development of the children. Being forced into the very different environment of Bernard Gilpin without familiar teachers is bound to have an impact on them.</p> <p>We have not seen detailed proposals yet but as soon as they are available we will comment on them.</p>

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>admissions policies; and</p> <p>viii. ensure that appropriate full-time education will be available to all displaced pupils. Their statements of special educational needs will require amendment and all parental rights must be ensured. Other interested partners, such as the Health Authority should be involved.</p>	
<p>4.56 Taking account of the considerations, as set out above, will provide assurance to local communities, children and parents that any reorganisation of SEN provision in their area is designed to improve on existing arrangements and enable all children to achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes.</p>	
<p>The Special Educational Needs Improvement Test</p> <p>4.57 When considering any reorganisation of SEN provision, including that which might lead to some children being displaced through closures or alterations, LAs, and all other proposers for new schools or new provision, will need to demonstrate to parents, the local community and Decision Makers how the proposed alternative arrangements are likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of educational provision for children with special educational needs. All consultation documents and reorganisation plans that LAs publish and all relevant documentation LAs and other proposers submit to Decision Makers should show how the key factors set out in the paragraphs below (4.58 to 4.61) have been taken into account. Proposals which do not credibly meet these requirements should not be approved and Decision Makers should take proper account of parental or independent representations which question the LA's own assessment in this regard.</p>	
<p>Key Factors</p> <p>4.58 When LAs are planning changes to their existing SEN provision, and in order to meet the requirement to demonstrate likely improvements in provision, they should:</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the details of the specific educational benefits that will flow from the proposals in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) improved access to education and associated services including the curriculum, wider school activities, facilities and equipment, with reference to the LA’s Accessibility Strategy; b) improved access to specialist staff, both education and other professionals, including any external support and/or outreach services; c) improved access to suitable accommodation; and d) improved supply of suitable places. • LAs should also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. obtain a written statement that offers the opportunity for all providers of existing and proposed provision to set out their views on the changing pattern of provision seeking agreement where possible; ii. clearly state arrangements for alternative provision. A ‘hope’ or ‘intention’ to find places elsewhere is not acceptable. Wherever possible, the host or alternative schools should confirm in writing that they are willing to receive pupils, and have or will have all the facilities necessary to provide an appropriate curriculum; iii. specify the transport arrangements that will support appropriate access to the premises by reference to the LA’s transport policy for SEN and disabled children; and iv. specify how the proposals will be funded and the planned staffing arrangements that will be put in place. <p>4.60 The requirement to demonstrate improvements and identify the specific educational benefits that flow from proposals for new or altered provision as set out in the key factors are for all those who bring forward</p>	
---	--

APPENDIX 5.1

Statutory Guidance on School Closure	School Place Planning Process in Sunderland (Gillas Lane)
<p>proposals for new special schools or for special provision in mainstream schools including governors of foundation schools and foundation special schools. The proposer needs to consider all the factors listed above.</p> <p>4.61 Decision Makers will need to be satisfied that the evidence with which they are provided shows that LAs and/or other proposers have taken account of the initial considerations and all the key factors in their planning and commissioning in order to meet the requirement to demonstrate that the reorganisation or new provision is likely to result in improvements to SEN provision.</p>	
<p>OTHER ISSUES</p> <p>Views of interested parties</p> <p>4.62 The Decision Maker should consider the views of all those affected by the proposals or who have an interest in them including: pupils; families of pupils; staff; other schools and colleges; local residents; diocesan bodies and other providers; LAs; the LSC (where proposals affect 14-19 provision) and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership if one exists, or any local partnership or group that exists in place of an EYDCP (where proposals affect early years and/or childcare provision). This includes statutory objections and comments submitted during the representation period. The Decision Maker should not simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view when considering representations made on proposals. Instead the Decision Maker should give the greatest weight to representations from those stakeholders likely to be most directly affected by the proposals.</p>	<p>The Gillas Lane community and the governors of the school have provided their views throughout the process. 206 written responses to the final consultation stage are testimony to that. We are sure that this will be repeated in the statutory representation period but will it be listened to?</p> <p>It is highly unlikely that Sunderland City Council as the Decision Maker will give the “greatest weight to representations from those stakeholders likely to be most affected by the proposals”. They have ignored the wishes and views of parents, carers and pupils so far in formulating the proposals. The Sunderland City Council Cabinet has had all the information on responses yet still “rubber stamped” the officers proposals. The Schools Organisation Committee (SOC) which makes the final decision after the statutory representation period is a sub group of Cabinet. How can this body be objective and fair in its consideration?</p> <p>Where is the right of appeal for a maintained school against a bloody-minded council?</p>

APPENDIX 5.2

OFFICIAL COMPLAINTS

Official Complaint 1

I, and many other parents and carers of pupils at Gillas Lane Primary School, would like to **MAKE AN FORMAL COMPLAINT** about the consultation process carried out with us as part of the Children's Services school place planning exercise.

I, like many others, feel the consultation process adopted was poorly designed and poorly handled by officers.

It failed to comply with:

- the Council's own corporate Community Consultation Strategy (with the complementary Hard To Reach Guidelines),
- the Council's Corporate Equality Scheme,
- the Council's Community Empowerment Action Plan
- the Council's Community Cohesion Strategy, and even with
- the principles of the Children's Services own Primary Strategy for Change and
- Every Child Matters.

This left me, and many others, feeling that there had been a lack of proper consideration of the important views and suggestions made by parents and carers at the meetings.

Remedy

The decision to close Gillas Lane Primary school should be overturned as the consultation process is flawed and has not properly represented the views and suggestions of the parents and carers. This, added to the incomplete option appraisals and the less than transparent decision making process, has led to a course of action that cannot be sustained. Option 3 is a viable choice and is the preferred option of the Gillas Lane community.

In the future, design a totally new approach to consultation on highly contentious and emotive issues that is sensitive and takes on board the legitimate views, comments and suggestions of the users and other stakeholders and gives them the weight they deserve in line with the council's corporate policies and strategies.

Official Complaint 2

I, like many other parents and carers at Gillas Lane Primary School, would like to **MAKE AN OFFICIAL COMPLAINT** about the option appraisal process adopted as part of the Children's Services school place planning exercise.

I, like many others, feel the option appraisal:

- omitted, in large part, any consideration of the educational and emotional impact on pupils.

- used unrealistic population projections in relation to future house building in the area - this is a big area of uncertainty in view of the credit crunch and projection of house building rates over the next 5-10 years
- put too much emphasis on cost and financial saving factors
- gave very little exploration of alternatives in terms of other use of buildings.
- had errors of fact in some of the option appraisals.
- displayed confusion over future nursery provision.
- lacked a robust financial assessment of the comparative costs of various options.
- was not comprehensive nor sufficient to make an informed decision.

This left me, and many others, feeling that the option appraisals had been poorly prepared and selective in their use of information.

Remedy

The decision to close Gillas Lane Primary school should be overturned as the option appraisal process is not thorough, has major omissions and significant errors. This, added to the flawed consultation and the less than transparent decision making process, has led to a course of action that cannot be sustained.

In the future, design an option appraisal process, in consultation with the users and other stakeholders, that has relevant factors to compare options with appropriate weighting of those factors so that everyone is clear about how decisions can be made. Make sure information is sufficient and timely to inform the process. Officers do not have the monopoly of knowledge. Bring the users and stakeholders along with you rather than preaching at them.

Official Complaint 3

I, like many other parents and carers of pupils at Gillas Lane Primary School, would like to **MAKE AN OFFICIAL COMPLAINT** about the decision making process that led to the decision to close Gillas Lane school and move its pupils to Bernard Gilpin School.

I, like many others, feel the decision making process:

- lacked any consideration and understanding of the educational and emotional impact on pupils
- was not transparent, it was not clear how the decision was arrived at
- appeared to ignore the views and suggestions of parents and carers or give them very little weight
- was not consistent. In another area of the City Council, the apparent preferred option was put aside in favour of a more pragmatic approach to an uncertain future - see Grange Park option appraisal and proposal
- appeared to target Gillas Lane as an easy option for closure that would then help other struggling schools through the distribution of the recurrent savings made as a result of its closure.
- used financial considerations and not the often quoted reduction of surplus places as the main motivation for the decision. Gillas Lane can meet its

surplus place reduction requirements with some remodelling as shown in the option appraisal.

- appeared to be a vehicle for confirming a decision that had already been taken.

This left me, and many others, feeling that the wrong decision had been made based on selective information and fearing that our input was a sham when a decision appeared already to have been made.

Remedy

The decision to close Gillas Lane Primary school should be overturned as the decision making process is based on incomplete option appraisals and flawed consultation. This has led to a course of action that cannot be sustained. In this particular case, I don't believe that a strong enough case has been made for closure and that Option 3 is the best and most pragmatic in view of the medium term uncertainty surrounding house building and population projections in the Gillas Lane/ Bernard Gilpin area.

In the future, explain how a decision is to be made up front, what are the important factors and explain why a decision is made after it has been made to be clear and transparent. Better still, come to an agreement with all users and stakeholders beforehand on these matters.

Official Complaint 4

I, like many other parents and carers of pupils at Gillas Lane Primary School, would like to **MAKE AN OFFICIAL COMPLAINT** about the conduct and the performance of officers of Children's Services during the consultation meetings in October 2008 and February 2009.

I, like many others, felt that officers:

- displayed a lack of knowledge in the face of relevant questions from parents and carers. The response was "put it on a response form" despite the plethora of senior Children's Services staff on show at the front of the hall
- displayed a lack of knowledge of the council's corporate strategies and policies when challenged
- displayed confusion on the future nursery provision
- displayed an inflexible attitude to questioning during the second meeting. Officers were informed during the 23 February meeting of a comment by a member of the City Council Cabinet during a recent meeting that we, the parents/carers, would be able to put our views on all options at the forthcoming consultation meeting. Clearly this message did not get to the officers running the consultation meeting.
- inappropriately commented on their preferred option at the October 2008 consultation meeting stating that their preferred option would be closure of Gillas Lane.

This left me, and many others, feeling exasperated, angry, that the whole thing was a fait accompli and that our attendance was a waste of time.

Remedy

In the future, provide training for staff on the corporate policies and strategies so that they can incorporate them appropriately in to their own projects. Better design and preparation for consultation events generally. Let's have some joined up thinking and joined up action.

Official Complaint No. 5

I wish to complain about the school place planning process that has led to the decision to close Gillas Lane Primary School and seek agreement to publish statutory notices for its closure.

The process has not conformed with the spirit and many of the details of the statutory guidance contained in the document "Closing a Maintained Mainstream School - A Guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies" by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

The Council have not recognised the important and influential part that parents and pupils should play in this decision and have sought to downplay opposition to its proposals.

How are you affected by this

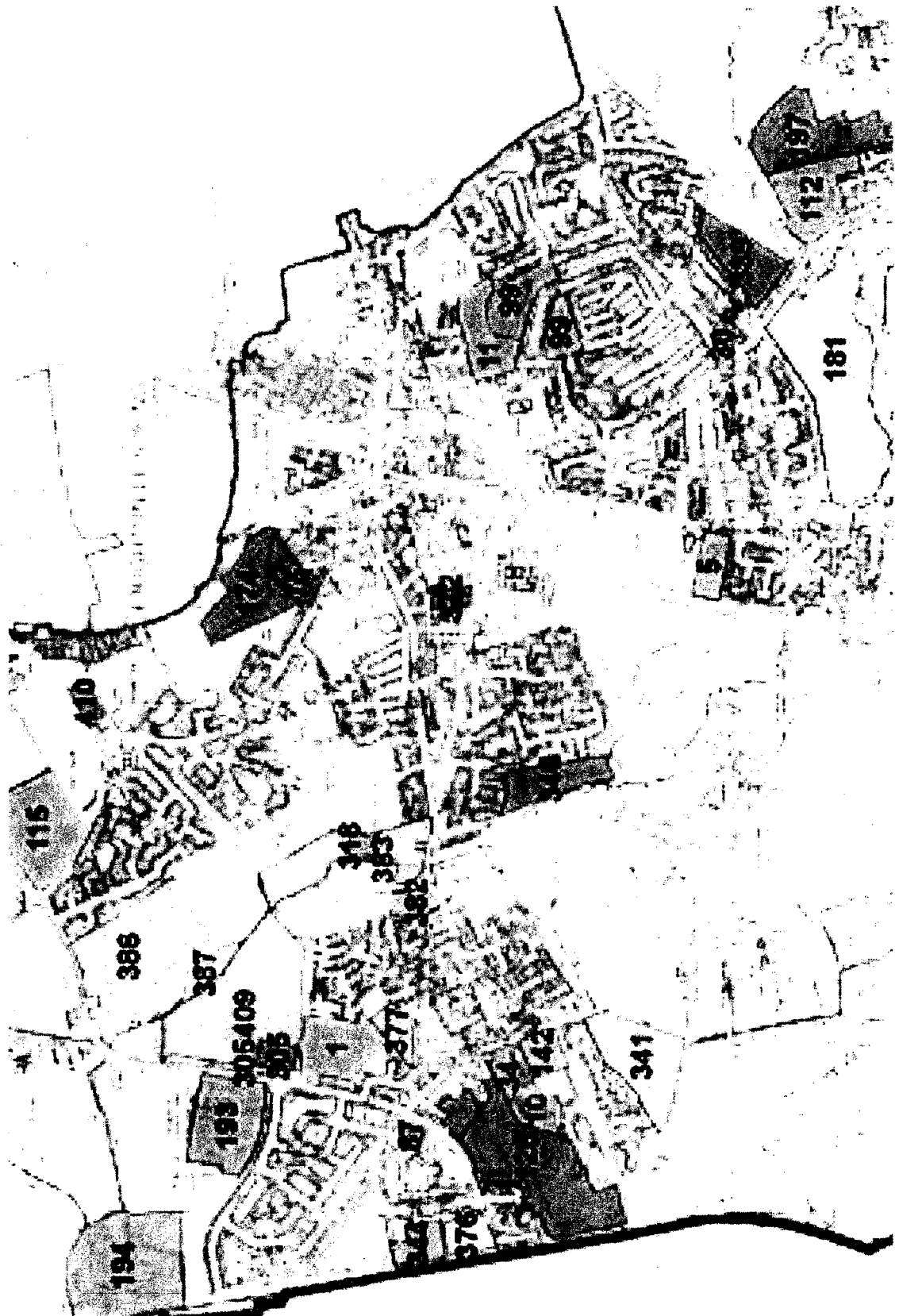
My grandson and many other pupils will be unnecessarily upset by moving to another school. His (and their) education and development may be badly affected by this decision.

Remedy

The Council should recind its proposal to close Gillas Lane Primary School and implement Option 3 to remodel Gillas Lane and reduce the PAN to meet the requirements to reduce surplus places in line with the wishes of the parents and residents of Gillas Lane..

The Council should involve the parents and carers of pupils and pupils actively in the detailed research and actions to achieve this.

APPENDIX 5.3 - LAND IN HOUGHTON - FROM SHILAA REPORT - MARCH 2009



Site Ref. No.	Site Description	Housing Capacity	Comments	0-5 years	6-10years
11	Site of Windsor Crescent / Hall Lane, Ph. 1	83		83	
99	Site of Windsor Crescent / Hall Lane, Phase 2 & 3	123		123	
5	Davenport School, Old Durham Road,	57		44	
30	Cross House Farm, Hetton Road	7		7	
339	Land at Gillas Lane	75			75
181	Houghton Road, Hetton	200	Flood risk		
112	Broomhill Estate, Ph 1 & 2	6		6	
197	Eppleton Primary School - north of Church Road	115			115

* from the SHLAA report (March 2009)

SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

MINUTES OF THE PARENTS/CARERS STAGE 3 CONSULTATION MEETING HELD AT GILLAS LANE PRIMARY SCHOOL – 6.00 pm, Monday 20 October 2008

Present

There were 64 parents in attendance at the meeting.

Clerk for the meeting

Stuart Scrafton (representing Children's Services)

Officers in attendance

Paul Campbell (Head of Resources)
Val Thompson (School Place Planning Manager)
Raj Singh (Extended Services and Attendance Group Manager)
Mike Wooler (School Improvement Officer)
Elaine Mills (Communications Officer)

School Place Planning for the Future

Cllr Miller gave a brief introduction of those officers present at the meeting. Parents were invited to listen to the presentation and ask questions at the end. Val Thompson was invited to give her presentation.

Val detailed the reasons why the LA was going through the process. The LA had a duty to manage school places to ensure the right number of places in the right locations, to manage surplus places above 10% overall in the City and to take action where surpluses are above 25% in individual schools. If the LA did nothing, surpluses in individual schools and clusters would continue to rise. The LA wanted the best possible provision for the children in Sunderland now and in the future.

It was reported that of the 83 primary schools 48 had surplus places above 10% and of those 17 had surplus places above 25%. The LA were projecting that by 2013, if no action is taken, 48 would have surplus places above 10% and of those 24 would have surplus places above 25%.

Val gave details of what the LA had done so far. At stage 1 in November/December 2007 data had been presented to Headteachers and Chairs of Governors. Stage 2 May 2008 updated data had been presented to schools, parents/carers and other stakeholders.

The principles that the LA had approved to be applied were:

- Data updated at least annually
- The highest surplus capacity targeted
- The use of accommodation by the local community
- Existing Children's Services on the site
- Alternative use for spare capacity
- The physical and financial limitations/opportunities
- All aspects of cross cluster and cross sector provision
- Alternative approaches to school organisation and governance

- Organise school capacity to maximise resources
- The Primary Strategy for Change criteria.

Val gave details of projected surpluses in the coalfield area. In 2009/10 the surplus places would be 686 (21%) which was equivalent to three one form entry primary schools and in 2013/14 it would be 470 (15%) equivalent to two one form entry primary schools. Gillas Lane surplus in 2009/10 would be 33% and would fall to 30% in 2013/14.

Details were provided on the proposed options for the Houghton cluster.

Bernard Gilpin Primary School and Gillas Lane Primary School

Option 1 – Close Gillas Lane Primary and name Bernard Gilpin Primary as the receiving school with an increased PAN of 60.

Option 2 – Amalgamation of Bernard Gilpin Primary and Gillas Lane Primary on the Bernard Gilpin site and increase the PAN to 60

Option 3 – Reduce the PAN at Gillas Lane Primary from 30 to 20 and re-model accommodation to re-align the net capacity.

Burnside Primary School

Option 1 – Reduce the PAN from 30 to 25 and re-model the accommodation to re-align the net capacity.

Option 2 – Keep under review in light of housing regeneration in the area.

East Rainton Primary School

- Reduce the PAN to 15 and re-model accommodation to re-align the net capacity.

Dubmire, Newbottle, Shiney Row Primary Schools

- No proposed changes. To be kept under review.

The finance for the implementation of final proposals would be dependent on approval of the Primary Strategy for Change and the capital funding being made available throughout the 14 years of the strategy. The timescales for the delivery of the final proposals would be determined by the priorities of the Primary Strategy for change and site availability and suitability. Any of the options would not be implemented until September 2010 at the earliest.

Val gave details on the next steps and concluded that Cabinet would make a decision on final proposals on 11th March 2009. Val reported on the statutory process for proposals involving closure or a new school.

Information was provided on how to respond to the consultation.

Parents were invited to ask questions.

Question - If the school closed and moved down to Bernard Gilpin what would happen to the staff at Gillas Lane and would there be different staff teaching their children.

Answer - The staff at Bernard Gilpin would remain at the school, however some staff from Gillas Lane may be appointed to cater for the additional pupils. If the schools were amalgamated all staff at both schools would be considered for posts.

Question - Had the LA considered how this would affect children and how they would settle in new schools?

Answer - The LA would ensure that any pupil movement would be supported and planned.

Question - Why did the LA work in strict clusters?

Answer - The LA was looking across clusters at this stage.

Question - If the decision was to go for option two this could mean that pupils would go to Bernard Gilpin and Houghton le Spring Nursery.

Comment - Mrs Hambleton reported that this matter had been discussed at previous meetings. She did feel that Sunderland LA had room within their schools to house a very distinctive school within the area. She did feel that it was very important to keep the nursery provision within the area. It was important to stress the community issue of the Racecourse community and the need to develop this as part of the community cohesion agenda. She did feel that parents were worried about the future of the school and the wording of the options document would begin to make parents take their children away from the school. Parents needed guarantees for children.

Answer - It was pointed out that no decisions had been made and the LA was consulting on a number of options. If decisions had already been made the LA would not be going through the consultation process.

Question - Were the options based on an economical view or did they take children's education and standards of education into consideration. It appeared that schools were being asked to make the best use of resources and because numbers were going down there was no consideration of standards but it was simply a consideration of the number of pupils within a school.

Answer - This was a very emotive issue and consideration of what the community felt had to be taken into consideration. Neither of the two schools discussed were in concerns however the quality has to be maintained. Both schools currently managed their budgets and staffing efficiently but this may become more difficult to sustain as numbers fall.

Question - The LA must have been aware that rolls were falling at Gillas Lane, why did they suddenly feel the need to look at this now.

Answer - There may not have been an opportunity in the past to look at this matter.

Question - If there were no nursery places at Bernard Gilpin would there be the scope to add a nursery there.

Answer - The very earliest that this would happen would be 2010. The LA would work with the school to look at the provision.

Question - There were three options, was doing nothing a possibility.

Answer - The LA was in a position where they had to do something about this matter.

Question - The options seemed limited.

Answer - The three options detailed were considered to be viable. Any other options they wished to be considered could be included in the consultation response.

Question - If it was a space issue and there was too much space within the school why couldn't the nursery school be housed within the school to address this?

Answer - The issue was about surplus places in the school. Any additional options put forward would be considered.

Question - The Options seemed to be based on money! The local community looked at what children needed and how the community trusted the staff. The school was considered a solid foundation for children's education. Children were well developed at Gillas Lane and moving to another school might have a negative affect on them.

Answer - It was pointed out that nothing had been decided and all of the options were there for consultation, not all of which involved closure.

Question - Would my child be guaranteed a place at Bernard Gilpin?

Answer - Yes your child would be guaranteed a place.

Comment - It was commented that if the pupils of Gillas Lane moved down to Bernard Gilpin School the Community would be losing a school that provided good education. The school provided good value and was well managed by the Governing Body. The best place for the children of the area was in Gillas Lane Primary School. Howard did point out that on his calculation Bernard Gilpin would be oversubscribed.

Question - Had the LA taken the travelling distance to Bernard Gilpin into consideration? Had they considered the parking issue? Working on current figures there could be an increase of 40/50 cars outside of the school. Had the LA taken into consideration the carbon footprint issues?

Answer - The LA had looked at scatter graph information on who would be attending the schools.

Comment - The Headteacher commented that the LA was looking at a set of principles when for consultation, however they seemed to forgetting the principles for the children:-

- The quality of education provided by small schools was very different than larger schools.
- The school had a large cohort of pupils with Special Needs and was in the top 10% of schools in the most deprived areas.
- Parental choice. Some parents did not want their children to attend a 400-place school. There was agreement that there needed to be changes and that there may be mixed classes if option three was agreed. This was not a negative option and staff and governors would manage it. The individual needs of the children would be looked after by the knowledge of the staff of families etc. It was a challenging prospect but the school would welcome the opportunity to move option three forward.

Question - Had the LA given consideration to the regeneration of the area and the number of places that this may generate?

Answer - The LA had considered this and had based additional places on the type of housing stock being built and from the figures generated it appeared that there would be an additional 12 pupils per hundred houses Planning could only be based on what the LA knew. All information was based on trend analysis and in 90% + cases this was right.

Question - Where had parental choice gone? If small community schools were closed down this would mean limited choice. What about parents who choose small schools because they preferred this option.

Answer - This point needed to be included in parent's comments on the consultation.

Comment - Cllr Heron reported that he had been a member of both governing bodies for over 20 years. He stressed that Gillas Lane was a unique school, which had a family atmosphere. He did point out that the estate was in an uproar about the possible closure of the school and it was important the LA recognised the social side of this.

Comment - It was commented that keeping the school open had huge benefits. The school had its own Nursery and Kitchen. The LA should consider having Gillas Lane as an infant school with Bernard Gilpin as the junior school. In respect of the reduction of places and the need to re-designate teaching areas how would this affect the educational prospects? Was the LA saying that the better educational prospects would be at Bernard Gilpin.

Answer - Paul Campbell stated he could not comment, as he was not an educationalist. There were three options and it was about how schools managed their budgets. In his opinion the school would probably face difficulties in the future managing the budget as figures continued to fall. Mike Wooler did point out that he was an educationalist and was able to comment on educational prospects. One of the key issues was to ensure that the best quality of education was provided and this was the job of the headteacher and the governing body.

Comment - It was suggested that option three was the best option for the school.

Question - Is option 3 a viable option?

Answer - Cllr Miller reported that the decision was not a personal decision of the officers. Their report would be considered by Cabinet Members and they would make the decision.

Question - Would Officers be giving Cllrs their preferred option?

Answer - Cabinet would be provided with the report with comments on all of the options and they would make the decisions.

Question - Why were no members of the Cabinet present at consultation meetings?

Answer - Cllr Miller commented that this would compromise their positions and they would be unable to take an unbiased view of the report. Cllr Heron was not a Cabinet Member but he would report back on parents' comments. The meeting would have a fully documented record.

Comment - Cllr Smith did feel that it would be helpful if parents put their names on forms if they wanted to receive additional information.

Question - I am a parent of a child who attends the school and I travel from Philadelphia every day because I want my child to attend a family community school. If there were only the choice of one primary school within the area it would be removing parental choice.

Answer - There were other choices within the area.

Question - It appeared that the Third Option was most parents' choice would this, in an educationalist's view, be detrimental to pupils.

Answer - Mike Wooler responded that it would be dependent on how the headteacher and governors managed their school on a reduced budget and across mixed age ranges.

Comment - Option three would be the best option as it would upset less people and children.

Answer - Parents needed to feed this back on their comments forms.

Question - SEN issues were picked up very quickly at Gillas Lane what guarantee would there be that this would be the same at Bernard Gilpin.

Answer - Any transition arrangements would need to take this into careful account.

Question - Why were Bernard Gilpin and Gillas Lane meetings organised for the same time and why weren't they held together.

Answer - The LA felt it was important to concentrate on a single schools consultation and give each school its own voice. There had been no intention from the outset to open debate between two sets of parents. It was arranged with the very best of intentions to ensure everyone had the opportunity to make their views known openly.

Question - In terms of future parents what assurances would be given?

Answer - There would be nursery provision within the area that would meet the needs of parents.

Question - In respect of school numbers data indicated that Bernard Gilpin numbers were going down whilst Gillas Lane remained stable.

Answer - This might be something you would want to include in your response.

Question - What would be the potential for remodelling the building and what different uses could be made of it?

Answer - This would only be investigated if Option 3 were chosen.

Question - If option 1 or 2 were chosen where would the nursery capital expenditure come from?

Answer - Whichever option was chosen the LA would have to look at the impact of funding.

Question - As a parent am I currently getting best value for money?

Answer - It would be difficult to comment on this.

Question - Why had all of the funding implications not been taken into consideration before decisions had been made? There was a potential cost for nursery in options 1 and 2 and would this cost be built into the business case for Cabinet to consider.

Answer - The consultation process was an information gathering process and costs would be investigated when proposals were formulated. Cabinet would have all of the information. It was far too early in the process to have detailed information and the next stage of the process would detail specific costs. All costing implications would be advised to Cabinet.

Question - If Bernard Gilpin had a total commitment to Option 1 how would this be fed back?

Answer - This would be available as part of the consultation process and the collation of information.

Comment - Cllr Miller advised everybody to comment on the forms provided.

Comment - Elaine Kay ex headteacher of the school informed the meeting that she had been a member of staff at the school for 16 years and she wished to add her support to what was a lovely school, that was an oasis of calm for a community that went through a difficult situation. The school had proven to be a haven for families. Small was beautiful. If the LA went for Options 1 or 2 staff would lose their jobs and if Option 3 were not chosen Sunderland City Council would need to hang their heads in shame.

Comment - Mrs Hambleton affirmed everything Elaine had said and thanked parents for their continued support.

Comment - Cllr Miller urged parents to get their responses in and thanked them for their attendance at the meeting.

SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC STAGE 4 CONSULTATION MEETING HELD AT GILLAS LANE PRIMARY SCHOOL – 6.00 pm, Monday 23rd February 2009

Present

Janine Johnson, Anna Watson, Brian Watson (MBE), Richard Watson, Steven Johnson, Leigh Taylor-Price, Julie Milner, D.Smith, T.Allen, T.Teasdale, L.Riddell, P.Riddell, V.Boona, Lindsay Lillie, Karen Craven, Louisa Barrows, Anne Hesketh, Michaela Hesketh, Stacey Forth, Rika Molloy, Laim Malloy, Joanne Johnson, G.Graham, Chris Stafford, Debbie Stafford, Anne Stafford, Sarah Smith, Pat Nichols, Shirley Smith, Kathleen Close, Colin Dickeson, Nicola Dickeson, Janine Hodgson, Marie Fenwick, Sarah Armstrong, Deborah Bolam, Darrin Bolam, Gary Lowes, Jacqui Lowes, Janet Hutchinson, Kevin Hutchinson, Michelle Ramsbottom, Karl Wood, Richard Shrimpling, Karen Shrimpling, Stuart Anderson, P.H Chesney, Gary Chesney, David Turnball, Rita Turnball, David Middleton, Judith Middleton, Charlotte Hirst, Julie Hirst, Catherine Reid, Samantha Reid, Mandy Charlton, peter Scholey, Derrick Smith, Colin Wekefield, Colin Ayre, H. Thompson, M.Walls, A.Wood, J.Johnson, C.Johnson, Elaine Cummings, R.H Hughes, Graham Hughes, Sharon Rumley, Lyndsey Atkinson, David Coldbeck, Denise Shovlin, Terry Hambleton

NB – An attendance list was circulated and the recording of attendees is as accurate as possible but once the meeting was underway latecomers may not have been recorded.

Clerk for the meeting

Katrina Peverley (representing Children's Services)

Chair of the meeting

Cllr Diane Snowdon

Officers in attendance

Sandra Mitchell (Head of Performance Improvement & Policy)
Val Thompson (School Place Planning Manager)
Lynne Casey (HR Manager)
Lyn Barnes (HR Team Leader)
Dawn Shearsmith (School Improvement Officer)
Kay Rooks (Early Years Advisor)
Elaine Mills (Communications Officer)

School Place Planning for the Future

Cllr Snowdon said that notes of the meeting were being made but requested people to highlight if they wanted to ensure that a particular question or point was recorded in the minutes. Cllr Snowdon made introductions and detailed the order of the meeting.

Sandra Mitchell gave a brief introduction of those officers present at the meeting and began the presentation.

Sandra reported that all Local Authorities had a statutory duty to plan school places. There could be no more than 10% surpluses across all schools. Falling pupil numbers were a national issue with currently 3,000 surplus primary places. There would be a drop of a further 1,000 pupils across the city in next 10 years and the position varied from area to area across the city.

Sandra reminded everyone that Stage 3 consultations were held from 20 October-28 November 2008 on proposed options involving the following schools:

- Bernard Gilpin Primary
- Gillas Lane Primary
- Eppleton Primary
- Hetton Primary
- Hetton Nursery
- Willow Fields Primary
- Hylton Red House Primary
- Hylton Red House Nursery
- Southwick Primary
- Grange Park Primary
- Bexhill Primary
- Town End Primary

Sandra provided details on the Options for Gillas Lane/Bernard Gilpin:-

Option 1 -Close Gillas Lane Primary and name Bernard Gilpin Primary as the receiving school with an increased Published Admission Number (PAN) of 60.

Option 2 -Amalgamate Bernard Gilpin Primary and Gillas Lane Primary on the Bernard Gilpin Primary site and increase PAN to 60.

Option 3 -Reduce PAN at Bernard Gilpin Primary from 50 to 45 and re-model accommodation to re-align net capacity.-Reduce PAN at Gillas Lane Primary from 30 to 20 and re-model accommodation to re-align net capacity.

Sandra handed over to Val Thompson to complete the presentation.

Val explained the formulation of the proposals. The options appraisals were based on principles agreed previously by Cabinet and through consultation. The significant issues emerging from the responses to the consultation were included in the options appraisal. There were regular reports to the Children's Services Review Committee (CSRC) and the School Place Planning Executive Board. A sub-group of CSRC was established to scrutinise in detail the process for the development of proposals.

Val highlighted the Synopsis of the Options Appraisal:-

- Community
- Buildings
- Early years and kitchen facilities
- Previous actions
- Alternative use for surplus
- Cross cluster issue
- Class size
- Competition

Val concluded that the options analysis had looked at the availability of places at Bernard Gilpin, the good condition of the building and the close proximity to Gillas Lane and Houghton Nursery. It also looked at the costs associated with the development of the facilities balanced against any savings in costs of realigning the net capacities at both schools and the capital and recurrent funding. Finally, ensuring that the funding was directed to the education of pupils instead of maintaining two under occupied buildings.

Val advised that Option 3 would reduce the surplus position to 10% which would increase if numbers continue to fall. Val stated that this was not a long term solution and it would not be economically sound to have two schools in such close proximity operating with significantly reduced rolls.

The Proposal for Gillas Lane/Bernard Gilpin was therefore, to close Gillas Lane Primary and name Bernard Gilpin Primary as the receiving school, to be implemented in line with admissions and the capacity of the receiving school.

Val advised upon the school pupil numbers from the September 2008 census.

It was noted that the funding implications of the proposal would be to ensure that the resources which were available to all schools would be targeted at the direct delivery of education to pupils. Bernard Gilpin would receive additional funding for each transferring pupil. Fixed cost funding would be released for distribution to all schools to increase the amount allocated per pupil.

Val advised that the earliest implementation would be September 2011.

The next step would be a report to Cabinet in April 2009 and if the proposal was approved, public notices would be issued. There would be a 6 week period for representations (objections) and a decision made within 2 months by School Organisation Committee (SOC) of the Council.

Information was provided on how to respond to the consultation.

Questions were invited.

Question – What benefits are there for my children for this school to close?

Answer – It's very difficult but we need to look at the funding we have for children now and the children in the future.

Question – You have not answered my question, just one positive thing?

Answer – A sustainable school in which to finish their education, the numbers in this school are not sustainable.

Question – You mean to move them to another school with high noise levels, just give me one positive thing for the children?

Answer – We have to look at sustainability.

Question – Referring to the synopsis of the options on the slide, I have read the report and there are only two things from this list that were taken into account. It's an easy option to close this school, we are used as scape-goats. Our rolls are much improved, you could just close one class and leave us alone. This is a budgetary and easy implementation exercise, option 2 was too complicated for you to consider.

Answer – We are beyond discussing the options.

Question – But the decision has not yet been made?

Answer – We have just one proposal to consult on.

Comment – This is a mockery.

Question – I was at the cabinet meeting; they said we would have the opportunity to discuss all options at this meeting?

Answer – That is not the case, we are here to discuss the proposal which cabinet agreed.

Question – Has everyone had a copy of the report?

Answer – No, it is on the website and you can request copies.

Comment – People are entitled to know.

Question – What exactly are we here to discuss? This is not a debate; you are telling us what we are doing.

Question – I am very concerned about the current year 3 pupils who will be year 6 at the proposed closure time. As the biggest year group how will you accommodate them and what about their SATs?

Answer – 2011 is the *earliest* it will be implemented, it could be delayed for another year. If it's agreed that the school closes it would be hoped that the two schools would work together to ease the transition.

Question – How will you accommodate 76 pupils?

Answer – There are various ways we could do it. One example would be a temporary classroom or to re-instate teaching space at Bernard Gilpin.

Question – My child will be in year 6 in 2011, you are taking away my choice of places as there are no spare places at any other school so she will suffer in her SATs and be taught in a prefab.

Answer – That is just one option.

Question – You said that there is little community use of the school, there are two community points close to the school, could these be incorporated? Also, I think it is grossly unfair to the staff here to close the school instead of amalgamate.

Answer – Relocating community facilities was not considered as the funding is for education not the community.

Question – There is a large housing development nearby of 400 houses. If half were typical families with 2 children, where would the 200 children go? The facility is here.

Answer – We have the data, there are 83 family homes and bungalows. For every 100 houses there are expected to be 12 children.

Comment – We have 11 children in one street.

Answer – It is a nationally proven formula.

Question – What happens when the staff here leave for a new job? Our children suffer again.

Answer – That would be for governors and the Headteacher to manage.

Comment – You are taking away my child's school and stability.

Answer – It's very difficult to plan for scenarios that may or may not happen.

Question – Do you believe that Gillas Lane is a popular and successful school?

Answer – You are referring to DCSF words which actually mean full or over-subscribed.

Question – Why are we not supported by the LA who has this as one principle from the primary strategy for change? We know there is work to be done; we could meet the requirements of option three. You seem to go against some LA policies and strategies.

Answer – The purpose of this meeting is not to revisit the options. We are here to consult on the proposal that Cabinet has approved for consultation. If you want to go comment on the options you can do so in your response but the consultation is around the proposal.

Question – That is not what we were told. When you are asked a *question* your reply is "that is not the purpose of this meeting" or you change the definition of words, I could write a better report for option 3 to be the preferred option which is best for the community. This is not a debate.

Comment – Sunderland Local Authority has a list of policies that you are going against or have no evidence that you are supporting them; Community Consultation Strategy, Primary Strategy for Change, Community Cohesion, Community Empowerment Action Plan, Quality Assessment Framework, Every Child Matters, Children and Young People's Plan and the Corporate Policy, the list goes on. I can't see how you are complying with any of these policies.

Question – Has anyone recorded the traffic at Bernard Gilpin now, without another 130 children added?

Answer – We do know the traffic situation at Bernard Gilpin, we are very aware of it. It is a lot better than at some other schools.

Question – Then why were speed bumps installed 2 years ago?

Question – At the last meeting Val, you argued with Raj over the nursery unit at Bernard Gilpin, you got that wrong so what else have you got wrong?

Answer – I have already stated that it was not correct to say that there would definitely be a nursery at Bernard Gilpin.

Question – Why was Houghton Nursery not mentioned before? How could you get 2 children to school at the same time?

Answer – You might want to make that point in your response.

Question – I thought this meeting was about *answers* from you?

Answer – I can't make the decisions, you need to put your points in writing.

Question – I did that last time, you did not listen to any of it, stuff what we all think.

Headteacher – We are past the options, we are here to consult on the one proposal now.

Comment – You are just doing what they want you to do.

Headteacher – Lots of good questions have been raised, the Year 3 issue and the nursery is not Val's decision, we have to consider what response we can give now that will help us. Bernard Gilpin want what we want. We need a school that can provide what we can provide. Bigger classes and the effect they will have on our SEN children are good reasons to stay here plus the added effect on cost. As class sizes get bigger the increased effect on behaviour will see the need for more nurture units etc which will incur far more costs. All good responses that were put in were not taken into account. We need to look at what we put now.

Comment – Any organisation knows that you should anticipate a longer period of transition as the school will dip with staff leaving and the children will suffer.

Question – Can you explain why I am here?

Answer – To offer an opinion on the proposal.

Question – People have worked hard to put their point across, what is the point? The decision is made.

Question – Where are the people who decide? Have they been here and worked with the staff?

Answer – Cabinet make the decisions and, by invitation, they have been to other schools involved in this process.

Headteacher – We will invite them.

Question (Cllr Heron) – I am a governor at both schools, both Governing Bodies are on board. Both schools have worked and will continue to work together. The LA officers here today are here to discuss the proposal. The LA needs your views and alternative views. This school needs to be saved in the short term until we rebuild this estate. Houghton nursery is over subscribed. It's dangerous for parents with the traffic, please go and look. I doubt there is enough space there. We need a Sure

Start centre in this side of Houghton, the Government are pushing for two year olds to go to nursery. We have got to get both right, I will put this forward, pre-school needs looked at asap.

Question – I would like to re-iterate the point on the nursery provision it is important.

Answer – I don't have the answers. One reason that the proposal states 2011 the earliest is because we recognise that nursery provision needs to be looked at therefore an audit of demand and capacity in the area will be undertaken.

Question – Is that not key to this?

Question (Cllr Heron) – Would any of the officers like to challenge what I have said?

A – No

Comment – This is a one-sided consultation, I don't think Cabinet care about finances. The consultation process is not over until this school is pulled down, keep fighting.

Question – What happens when new housing goes up? The classes are full to capacity now. The options are to use temporary classes or for the school to lose existing resources.

Answer – Only if implementation is 2011.

Comment – There is not much room in roll numbers if more children arrive.

Question – Are Bernard Gilpin aware that you plan to take out resources to accommodate the children?

Answer – This is all dependant on the date of implementation and may not be required.

Question – What would happen if the situation arose of an influx of children and one school was then not big enough?

Answer – That may or may not happen. There is space to deal with things as they happen.

Question – I am really disappointed. You really need to look at when you do this. It will be the time of my child's SATs in 2011 which is very important.

Answer – This is why we are having this consultation to hear your views on the proposal, including its possible implementation.

Question – I need to make a decision for my child, I cannot hang in limbo while you make a decision, there are no places in any other schools.

Answer – When the proposal is implemented is crucial, there is not a definite date yet.

Comment – I can't physically get to two schools at one time.

Answer – These are important points to make in your response. Cabinet have agreed to consultation on the proposal.

Question – You make the recommendation?

Answer – Yes, so we need your views on issues.

Question – What do I do in the meantime?

Answer – The report will go to cabinet in April.

Question – Why not wait until the current reception have left the school?

Answer – You might want to suggest that in your response.

Question – I don't believe that there are only 12 children expected for 100 houses. Why can't we wait until the development is finished?

Answer – It is a nationally recognised formula, if you doubt the validity you need to record that in your response form.

Question – There are no schools in our area, why not wait?

Answer – We have waited, we were here a few years ago. The projections are suggesting that the houses would not have a significant impact on numbers.

Question – If it does?

Answer – We will address it then.

Question – I can't believe that members of Cabinet have not visited the school. If you are planning school places, should you be waiting until 2011? You don't know what will happen then.

Answer – The proposal is to close Gillas Lane.

Headteacher – It is crucial for us to stall the process, there are tight timescales and important issues to consider like the nursery which was not an issue before and this could have impeded that consultation.

Question – My view is to keep the school open. I have three children, where will they go to nursery? Parents don't go by statistics. What extra provision will be made at Bernard Gilpin?

Answer – If the proposal went ahead, I am sure that the Headteacher at Bernard Gilpin would be happy to work with parents. The kitchen would be resolved. I know the nursery is a major issue which we will look at quickly.

Question – Will any space increase be permanent at Bernard Gilpin?

Answer – Yes, it will be taken back to a 2 form entry.

Comment – My child will be lost in a school of 422 children.

Dawn Shearsmith – I can dispute that, as an ex-Headteacher of a large school, I knew every one of my children.

Question – I am puzzled, this meeting is a repeat of the previous one. I have taught in big schools, you don't know the children like they do here. I taught at old Houghton school in prefabs which were there for years and there were busy roads. Bernard Gilpin staff will do what they can but they have no kitchen or nursery. My daughter-in-law is a midwife and there has been a large influx of babies born, what will you do with them?

Answer – We work with the relevant departments and know the live birth predictions.

Question – Not in the North East.

Answer – Yes, local information by ward.

Question – Your 2011 numbers are wrong then.

Comment – You know the answers you are just not acting on them.

Comment – Early years needs to be looked at again.

Answer – Agreed.

Question – When?

Answer – We will carry out an audit as quickly as possible.

Question – Would you move children in the middle of the academic year if the school closed?

Answer – No, it would always be a September start.

Question – It's not viable to do this in 2011, there are legal papers etc to deal with.

Answer – Once the decision has been made by the School Organisation Committee (SOC) there is no time limit on when it has to be done, that's why the responses are important.

Question – How can Cabinet change their mind on a decision when there is only one option?

Question – What information do Cabinet get?

Answer – The report to Cabinet included appendices with the responses and minutes of the meetings held in October.

Question – In reality Cabinet have not had all three options. Have they had a presentation? It's you we have to convince, so we are all wasting our time.

Answer – Your comments seem to be derogatory about Cabinet. Cabinet are elected Members who have had a presentation and all of the information they need to inform their decision.

Cllr Heron – It would taint the process for Cabinet to be at this meeting, we do have the opportunity to question officers and we do.

Comment – I don't see how they are getting a balance to the argument.

Cllr Snowdon – We get sight of all these documents and there are challenges made.

Comment – Unless you are at this meeting, you are not getting a balance.

Question – Can I confirm that we have made an invitation to Cabinet members to talk to us as this meeting is redundant?

Answer – You will need to invite them through the formal route via the Headteacher.

Headteacher – We will invite them.

Question – I read the report. Gillas Lane are being unfairly treated compared to other areas. Grange Park are now being re-modelled? It's very unfair and there are inconsistencies in the report.

Answer – Grange Park's proposal come's with a strong caveat of a review in the next couple of years.

Question – Why can't we do that here?

Question – You make the decision now when the houses have been demolished, not when they have been rebuilt.

Answer – There has been a lot of debate about the North, the number of schools with surplus places in that area requires a measured approach to produce long term solutions.

Question – We can meet those requirements, this is a viable school but not recognised as it is in a cluster.

Answer – We have looked at clusters.

Question – Yes and not individual schools, so you are therefore suggesting that a viable and popular school close.

Answer – It depends what you mean by viable.

Question – I mean what was said at that last meeting, that this school is viable.

Question – We are two schools in close proximity. We offer after school clubs etc, would Bernard Gilpin be able to accommodate that?

Question – Where's my parental choice and the provision for people who do not drive?

Answer – The distance is not unreasonable. From the children on this estate, at least the same number already go to Bernard Gilpin, so it is viable.

Question – You have no other option if you do not want your child to go there. That's not what I want?

Answer – Your comment has been noted.

Question – You keep saying that comments are minuted, how do you know which parent said what for a reply?

Answer – We can reply to response forms.

Question – The response were not acknowledged last time?

Answer – That is a concern, I believed that they were. We will acknowledge all responses.

Sandra Mitchell – Those who would like a response need to put an address on the response form.

Question – There are errors on the option appraisal that Cabinet need to be aware of. We did not supply Bernard Gilpin with meals, also option two was wrong.

Answer – it was incorrect in the report but Cabinet know.

Question – How can we have credibility in the report?

Cllr Snowdon – I can confirm that is was raised at a meeting.

Question – All responses will be considered?

Answer – Yes

Question – So they will be included in your response back?

Answer – The response will be included in the report to Cabinet.

Question – Can they be sent to parents who give their address as some parents have valid reasons for not being here tonight?

Answer – It is a public document and will be on the website.

Question – Your presumption that everyone has internet access is not socially inclusive.

Headteacher – I know you feel disheartened and I acknowledge all of your hard work with the petition on the website and the coffee morning on Thursday. Keep fighting. We will invite Cabinet to our school, thanks for all your hard work.

Cllr Snowdon drew the meeting to a close and thanked everyone for their participation and attendance.

Gillas Lane Action to Support School (GLASS)

Qualitative Survey in relation to School Place Planning Exercise

Final Report Results and Analysis

**from survey devised by GLASS
carried out throughout April & May 2009**

Introduction:

A group of concerned parents, carers and others set up an action group called Gillas Lane Action to Support School (GLASS), to coordinate a campaign to save Gillas Lane Primary School from closure as part of Sunderland City Council's School Place Planning exercise.

A great deal of concern had been expressed throughout the consultation process as it was felt that any opinions and views were being disregarded and it seemed to many that Sunderland City Council had no intention of listening and taking comments and ideas seriously as it did not fit with their preferred option. In other words, the consultation process was a tick box exercise and not even in the spirit of its own policy.

GLASS decided to carry out a survey of its own, to quantify the depth of feeling, to provide documented evidence to take the campaign further and most importantly to show that many of the Council's policies had not been adhered to. It is accepted that the questionnaire was not devised by an expert; however, the questions that needed to be asked were very clear and apparent.

It is no surprise that the questions follow the themes that emerged throughout the process i.e.

- Poorly designed and poorly handled consultation process, making little effort to engage the school community, but also the amount of errors made and misinformation given, giving rise to doubt of the validity of the whole process.
- Conduct and performance of Officers at consultation meetings – the inability to answer questions and using the 'get out' of 'just put it on a response form'. In addition, the serious errors made at meetings (particularly the Nursery provision) and errors in written reports plus the condescending manner in which they spoke to parents.
- Lack of transparency as to how the decision was made, ignoring valid views and suggestions of parents and others, also without robust financial information and no explanatory feedback.
- Lack of any robust option appraisal, making no effort to pursue the unanimous choice of Option 3 which is felt is more appropriate, achievable and viable (Council themselves stating it is a viable option).
- Questionable adherence to the Statutory Guidance on School Closures, remiss in a number of areas.

The above concerns formed the basis of formal complaints that were submitted to Sunderland City Council, all of which have been ignored, although they state that they are treating them as 'negative responses' to the consultation process. Complainants are of the view that their rights have been denied and the complaints are now being forwarded to the Ombudsman.

The strength of feeling at Gillas Lane is immense. Family orientation is the thread that runs through the whole ethos of the school. Parents, Grandparents / Carers, the Local Community and others were extremely willing to partake in the survey. Table 1 below shows the number of questionnaires completed and by whom. As can be seen, the vast majority are by parents as expected, however, Grandparents feature strongly in the survey, many of them carers to support working families. The school embraces the family networks and welcomes their contributions supporting the school and its children.

Table 1: Respondent Status

No. of Questionnaires Completed	By Parent	By Grandparent	By Other	Not Stated
52	38	9	2	3
=	=	=	=	=
100%	73.1%	17.3%	3.8%	5.8%

48 (92.3%) respondents included their names on the questionnaires with only 4 (7.7%) choosing not to.

This was optional but GLASS acknowledges and understands those who declined. It is the intention of GLASS to ensure that all those giving their contact information will be given direct feedback. The results will be made freely available and also will be posted on the website:

www.savegillaslaneschool.info

Table 2: Summary of Survey Results (Qualitative & Quantitative)

No.	Question	Total	Answer Yes	Answer No	Answer Don't Know
1	Do you support the proposed Option 1 to close Gillas Lane Primary School and name Bernard Gilpin Primary as the receiving school?	52 = 100%	0 = 0%	52 = 100%	0 = 0%
2	Would you like to see Option 3 implemented to reduce Published Admission Numbers (PAN) and re-model accommodation?	52 = 100%	51 = 98.1%	1 = 1.9%	0 = 0%
3	Do you feel your comments, views and suggestions have been taken into consideration by the Local Authority's consultation process?	52 = 100%	0 = 0%	50 = 96.2%	2 = 3.8%
4	Do you feel that the Local Authority offered sufficient flexibility of the timing and dates of consultation meetings?	52 = 100%	3 = 5.8%	48 = 92.3%	1 = 1.9%
5	Do you feel that the Local Authority made good efforts to reach those who could not or did not attend consultation meetings?	52 = 100%	2 = 3.8%	50 = 96.2%	0 = 0%
6	Do you feel that Officers of the Local Authority conducted a comprehensive option appraisal exercise?	52 = 100%	2 = 3.8%	46 = 88.5%	4 = 7.7%
7	Do you feel that sufficient importance and focus was given to the education of your child / children in the exercise?	52 = 100%	0 = 0%	49 = 94.2%	3 = 5.8%
8	Do you feel that your child / children have been given opportunity by the Local Authority to 'have their say' at any time in the exercise?	52 = 100%	0 = 0%	50 = 96.2%	2 = 3.8%
9	Do you feel that your questions were answered at consultation meetings?	51 = 100%	1 = 2%	49 = 96%	1 = 2%
10	Have you received any acknowledgement or feedback from the Local Authority on comments made on your submitted consultation forms?	52 = 100%	5 = 9.6%	47 = 90.4%	0 = 0%
11	Do you feel that Gillas Lane Primary School meets the needs of your child / children?	52 = 100%	51 = 98.1%	1 = 1.9%	0 = 0%
12	Do you feel that the proposed change will have a detrimental impact on your child / children?	52 = 100%	52 = 100%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%
13	Do you understand how the decision proposing Option 1 has been made?	52 = 100%	7 = 13.5%	43 = 82.7%	2 = 3.8%
14	Do you feel that the Officers were consistent with the information given at consultation meetings? (e.g. Nursery provision)	52 = 100%	0 = 0%	45 = 86.5%	7 = 13.5%
15	Do you have any concerns / issues if your child / children were to move to Bernard Gilpin Primary School?	52 = 100%	50 = 96.2%	0 = 0%	2 = 3.8%

Further detail, which includes the many comments made, can be found in Table 3 following the Analysis and Conclusion. The results are typed up as written by respondents.

Analysis:

With higher insight, some of the questions could have been worded differently e.g.

- **Question 2** - should have asked for comments regardless of whether the answer was Yes or No. This survey shows overwhelming support for Option 3 and although this is evident throughout this report, an opportunity was missed to collate this preferred option's comments under Question 2. Only one respondent answered NO – this may even be an error as all other responses followed the main results and the additional comment made 'the community need this school' would suggest a 'Yes' answer. However this has been left as a negative response, if changed the result would have been 100%
- **Question 4** – had the intention of gaining views regarding flexibility (or lack of) to attend meetings with choice of timings and dates. The respondents went further to give views on the length of time of the meetings which felt rushed through and not enough time to absorb information and think through the consequences of what was being said by Officers. In addition some mentioned the timing of the change as the initially suggested 2011 was ill thought through by Officers, and deemed the worst year possible for the change.
- **Question 11** – the school and its staff should be extremely proud when reading the responses to this question. Results support the view that the school provides for children in every way possible which is very much appreciated by parents and others. Only one negative answer was given. Again all other responses suggest this should be a 'YES' answer, but no comment was made to clarify. This has also been left as a negative response, if changed the result would have been 100%
- **Question 13** - set out to ascertain whether parents and others understood how the decision was reached. 82.7% said they didn't and this was a high percentage. However, some reached their own conclusion i.e. about money or hidden agenda and therefore answered, yes, they understood when in fact no explanation has been given by the Council.

The themes and similarities emerging from the results are detailed below.

Questions	Results	Emerging Themes
Question 1 Do you support the proposed Option 1 to close Gillas Lane Primary School and name Bernard Gilpin Primary as the receiving school?	100% do not support the proposed option 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Removing Choice ➤ Option 3 viable and meets PAN / surplus place issue. ➤ Nursery provision at Gillas Lane +ve ➤ Educational standards better at Gillas Lane ➤ Profit before education ➤ Settled happy children at Gillas Lane ➤ Community needs the school ➤ Class size ↑ and classroom sizes ↓ ➤ Kitchen facilities at Gillas Lane
Question 2 Would you like to see Option 3 implemented to reduce Published Admission Numbers (PAN) and re-model accommodation?	98.1% support option 3 (Possibly 100% - see analysis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Option 3 not investigated thoroughly ➤ Has education as priority ➤ Achievable and best / preferred option for children & families ➤ Already has Nursery and kitchen. ➤ Needed by community – ripe for development ➤ Housing increases will be accommodated – Option 1 offers no

		<p>spare capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Flawed, misinformation and rigid ➤ Decision made before process began. ➤ Conduct of Officers poor ➤ Views and questions ignored, not listened to ➤ Feedback poor and non-existent. ➤ Rail-roaded Option 1, discounting options 2 & 3
<p>Question 3 Do you feel your comments, views and suggestions have been taken into consideration by the Local Authority's consultation process?</p>	<p>96.2% feels that their comments etc have not been taken into consideration.</p>	
<p>Question 4 Do you feel that the Local Authority offered sufficient flexibility of the timing and dates of consultation meetings?</p>	<p>92.3% said there was no flexibility of timing and dates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No flexibility / alternatives ➤ No consideration for working families or child care ➤ Both schools scheduled for the same time ➤ Rushed – insufficient time to digest and collate information
<p>Question 5 Do you feel that the Local Authority made good efforts to reach those who could not or did not attend consultation meetings?</p>	<p>96.2% thought the LA did not make good efforts to reach those who could not attend.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No effort to consult hard to reach ➤ Policy not adhered to ➤ School & GLASS kept us informed not LA ➤ Information on internet – not all have it and even if they did, information was sometimes difficult to find. ➤ Poor or no feedback
<p>Question 6 Do you feel that Officers of the Local Authority conducted a comprehensive option appraisal exercise?</p>	<p>88.5% felt the option appraisal was not comprehensive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Missing, wrong, misleading information ➤ Education – no focus ➤ Hidden agenda by LA ➤ Option 3 not fully explored ➤ Lack of detailed financial analysis ➤ Couldn't answer questions
<p>Question 7 Do you feel that sufficient importance and focus was given to the education of your child / children in the exercise?</p>	<p>94.2% felt that there was insufficient focus on education of the children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No education focus ➤ Education should be first priority ➤ Disruption to education if goes ahead – lengthy ➤ Money before education ➤ Ignored fact that Gillas Lane offers good education ➤ Number crunching – not thinking of children.
<p>Question 8 Do you feel that your child / children have been given opportunity by the Local Authority to 'have their say' at any time in the exercise?</p>	<p>96.2% felt children did not 'have their say'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Children not involved by LA (although school engaged them) ➤ Children not had their say ➤ Children's contributions underestimated ➤ No visits to see school children ➤ No sensitive explanations
<p>Question 9 Do you feel that your questions were answered at consultation meetings?</p>	<p>96% felt their questions were unanswered at consultation meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 'Fill in response form' as unable to answer questions ➤ Officers lacking skills, experience and information. No team support or contribution. ➤ Didn't listen ➤ Design of form didn't lend to feedback

<p>Question 10 Have you received any acknowledgement or feedback from the Local Authority on comments made on your submitted consultation forms?</p>	<p>90.4% did not receive acknowledgement or feedback from comments made on consultation forms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Vast majority mainly no feedback but an occasional email or letter for few. ➤ Doubt that comments were even read ➤ Refusal to accept complaints
<p>Question 11 Do you feel that Gillas Lane Primary School meets the needs of your child / children?</p>	<p>98.1% felt Gillas Lane Primary School meets the needs of their children (Possibly 100% - see analysis)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Impressive ➤ Excellent ➤ Good attainment records ➤ Dedication of teachers, special staff ➤ Family oriented ➤ Meets needs ➤ School of choice ➤ Excellent special needs provision ➤ Happy, secure, safe, stimulating ➤ Small school success
<p>Question 12 Do you feel that the proposed change will have a detrimental impact on your child / children?</p>	<p>100% felt there would be a detrimental impact on their children with the proposed change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Individual attention lost ➤ No continuity of teaching staff ➤ Standards better at Gillas Lane – will drop ➤ Larger class sizes ➤ Lengthy disruption due to change ➤ Bullying ➤ Children are not just numbers / statistics ➤ Practical difficulties for parents
<p>Question 13 Do you understand how the decision proposing Option 1 has been made?</p>	<p>82.7% Did not understand how the decision was made.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No explanation ➤ Most think its about saving money ➤ Based on hidden agenda ➤ Based on insufficient information / exploration ➤ Easy option – solves problem elsewhere.
<p>Question 14 Do you feel that the Officers were consistent with the information given at consultation meetings? (e.g. Nursery provision)</p>	<p>86.5% felt that information given was not consistent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Major errors e.g. Nursery ➤ Changing goalposts ➤ Avoidance of questions ➤ Not enough research or information ➤ Errors in information
<p>Question 15 Do you have any concerns / issues if your child / children were to move to Bernard Gilpin Primary School?</p>	<p>96.2% said they had concerns if their child was moved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Retain Gillas Lane!!! ➤ Removes school of choice ➤ Unclear Nursery provision ➤ Lower standards ➤ Unfamiliar teachers / no continuity ➤ Cramped classrooms and open plan ➤ Building disruption / temporary classrooms ➤ Special needs not met ➤ Traffic concerns ➤ Kitchen facilities unclear ➤ Money before children ➤ Home education option

<p>Other Comments</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Views not taken into account ➤ Short-sighted – future house-building and regeneration ➤ Where is education focus rather than money focus? ➤ Conduct / ability of LA Officers ➤ Find way to keep Gillas Lane open ➤ Underlying reason – hidden agenda, solving other schools problems (allows the overall target of surplus places to be met) or secret plans for the site (rumours, which cannot yet be ratified, are that a sixth form college is planned) ➤ Real policies – not just words ➤ Special needs concerns ➤ Loss of Choice ➤ Individuality of children currently known by teachers
------------------------------	--	---

Conclusion:

It is felt that the number of respondents give credibility to the results found. Many are unhappy at the amount of times they have had to give comments during the process and also needing to ask the same questions over and over again, without any explanation or feedback from Sunderland City Council. The frustration and anger is obvious. Yet parents and others have always conducted themselves well at both consultation and public Council meetings. It is credit to them that they once again agreed to partake in this survey, expressing their views in the appropriate manner and forum.

These results should be read in conjunction with minutes of Consultation meetings, Cabinet meetings and the Children's Services Review (Scrutiny) meeting, to obtain the full picture. The latter showed that there was a case to answer and those presenting to this Scrutiny Committee had valid concerns and arguments, suggesting that the consultation had its flaws. Their responses were welcomed by GLASS and those who it supports.

The results of this survey also strongly assert that the Consultation was flawed with many deficits. It suggests that the Council's Policy regarding Consultation was not followed. There was no flexibility of timings and dates of the consultation meetings, with respondents quoting working families and child care as obstacles. Those people 'hard to reach' seemed to be forgotten, however GLASS has engaged them in this process and involvement in the petition of NO CONFIDENCE in the consultation process as well as the option appraisal and decision making processes.

The Option Appraisal exercise was not thorough with many views and suggestions thrown out without consideration. Educational attainment did not feature at all even though this very important issue was raised time and time again. Local Councillors attempted to gain the opportunity to conduct a 'Task and Finish' group but this was declined by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services. Many parents and others would have been extremely willing and happy to be part of this group or indeed any focus group. The spirit of engagement and inclusion does not seem to appear on the council's radar. Officers of the Council openly stated that all 3 options put forward were viable, yet they appear to have tunnel vision for option 1. Option 2 seemed to be quietly put to one side, although this would have been a fairer option for teachers, and in turn pupils, offering some continuity of teaching staff and the standard of teaching Gillas Lane staff achieves.

Decision making is a complete mystery. It is difficult to understand how the decision was reached, but most importantly how the many comments and views of parents and other carers were taken into consideration. The final report and decision suggests they were not taken into consideration.

Although a question was not asked regarding Statutory Guidance, GLASS has undertaken an analysis of how this was not always adhered to.

It is apparent that the following option is the preferred option of almost all parents and others (98.1%)

Option 3 – To reduce Published Admission Numbers (PAN) and re-model accommodation.

This option is supported by the Head Teacher and staff at Gillas Lane Primary School and also supported by Bernard Gilpin School. This option not only meets the Council's target to reduce the PAN in the school but also retains a very popular and successful school where educational attainment is of a good standard as evidenced by OfSTED reports. This would also retain an important resource for the local community which could be developed further to address needs of this disadvantaged community.

Table 3: Full Survey Results (Qualitative & Quantitative)

1	Do you support the proposed Option 1 to close Gillas Lane Primary School and name Bernard Gilpin Primary as the receiving school?	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
	No. responded YES = 0 0%	No. responded NO = 52 100%
	No. responded 0%	
	If you answered NO could you explain further:	
	COMMENTS RECEIVED =	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Gillas Lane is our school of <u>choice</u> ➤ NO! Option 3 is the overwhelming favoured option by all except Sunderland City Council. We were told Option 3 is viable and it could achieve the PAN target. Option 1 is the totally wrong call by the LA but they clearly must have a hidden agenda otherwise why dismiss Option 3 which is viable and meets targets. – we were told this was not just about money. ➤ Gillas Lane should <u>NOT</u> close. It is an excellent school with a family environment. The children feel safe and are happy in Gillas Lane. Moving the children to a larger school would be detrimental to their learning and happiness. ➤ It is the worst possible option for the children of Gillas Lane. Option 2 would have been better and fairer but Option 3 is the preferred option. ➤ Gillas Lane provides a good level of education and the fact that it is also a small close knit school can only benefit children. ➤ I <u>CHOSE</u> Gillas Lane for my son. ➤ It would be a shame to close the school, it's part of the community. ➤ The closure of the school will be a great upset to both us parents and all children. ➤ I dont want my son to go to Bernard Gilpin. ➤ Happy children before profit. ➤ My son attends Gillas Lane. I don't want him to go to Bernard Gilpin. ➤ My children have settled at Gillas Lane and it will unsettle children if moved and the teachers have time for the children. ➤ I chose to put my children in Gillas Lane. ➤ This school has small classes so easier for children to learn. My child is happy here. ➤ The community need this school! ➤ Would like Gillas Lane to stay open. ➤ My children are very settled at Gillas Lane Primary School and enjoy it. ➤ I have 3 children in Gillas Lane. Reception and year 2. My youngest son has taken a long time to settle in to school. He has now finally after a long period of time settled in nicely. Also this school is great with children. ➤ I have 3 children ages 4, 3 and 10 month and want them all to attend Gillas Lane together. ➤ It will not benefit the children and they are at the heart of this matter. ➤ I think Bernard Gilpin is too small to put 2 schools in 1. Plus there is no nursery on it. ➤ Gillas Lane is a close community and all the children know each other. ➤ Gillas Lane is a family school. ➤ My children are settled and enjoy Gillas Lane School. ➤ I do not agree that closing Gillas Lane and combing 2 schools together. ➤ No good will come closing the School, Bernard Gilpin will be full. ➤ I feel that school closure will be of no benefit to anyone. ➤ We feel the best interests of our children are not being addressed at all. ➤ I do not want my child uprooted from a school he loves. ➤ I don't want my child to go to a bigger class size or even move schools when she is in her final years of primary schools. I choose Gillas Lane School so why should that choice be taken away! ➤ Gillas Lane is the centre of our community. Our children are happy and feel safe in this environment. ➤ Has been an excellent community school giving sound education in an outstanding environment for years – why not continue. ➤ Bernard Gilpin is too small, has no kitchen or nursery. If no money to keep Gillas Lane 	

- | | |
|--|---|
| | <p>open surely there is no money to extend and improve provision at Bernard Gilpin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Gillas Lane is a family school and we would like to keep it that way.➤ Ridiculous option.➤ I can see no benefit to the children of both schools in the event of a merger.➤ This was the worst possible outcome for our school and our children!➤ This is the last thing I want, option 3 was the only option in my opinion.➤ Class size.➤ This would be a great loss to this community. |
|--|---|

2	Would you like to see Option 3 implemented to reduce Published Admission Numbers (PAN) and re-model accommodation?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>			
<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">No. responded YES = 51 98.1%</td> <td style="text-align: center;">No. responded NO = 1 1.9%</td> <td style="text-align: center;">No. responded 0%</td> </tr> </table>			No. responded YES = 51 98.1%	No. responded NO = 1 1.9%	No. responded 0%
No. responded YES = 51 98.1%	No. responded NO = 1 1.9%	No. responded 0%			
<p>If you answered NO could you explain further:</p> <p>COMMENTS RECEIVED =</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Absolutely YES! More exploration should have been done. It is achievable and the best option for children and their families. Solutions on how to achieve were even offered but conveniently dismissed. ➤ Best option for children and the community. ➤ This was the option which would have least affected our children. This should have been the option put forward to Cabinet. ➤ Gillas Lane Primary already has a Nursery Unit and kitchen facilities. These could be developed along with the School facilities to preserve the future of the school and promote more use by the community. ➤ It can be done. ➤ The community need this school! ➤ We all had strong arguments at both consultation evenings on our wishes for option 3. None of these arguments or suggestions have been listened to. ➤ Option 3 was not investigated thoroughly enough. ➤ This decision was in no way focussed on the education of my children. Option 3 would have been the decision if this was the case. ➤ At least we would have felt the authority was showing some consideration. ➤ Numbers would increase as many houses were pulled down and will be built again in the future. Gillas Lane is at the heart of the local community. Both schools would be able to provide best possible education. ➤ We would have had more of a chance to fight. 					

3	Do you feel your comments, views and suggestions have been taken into consideration by the Local Authority's consultation process?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
	No. responded YES = 0 0%	No. responded NO = 50 96.2% No. responded 3.8%
	<p>If you answered NO could you explain further: COMMENTS RECEIVED =</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consultation was seriously FLAWED – parents were consulted on MIS-INFORMATION. In my view it deems the exercise INVALID and has NO CREDIBILITY. Officers were incompetent, arrogant and also rude and disrespectful to parents. LA's own policies not adhered to. NO FOCUS GROUPS< TASK & FINISH or specialist children's consultation were carried out. Process was rigid, lacking flexibility and sensitivity. ➤ Feel option 1 has been rail roaded thro' at odds with all good reasonable argument. ➤ Completely ignored. ➤ The consultation process was a farce. We gave them our views clearly. They ignored them and did what they liked. ➤ At no stage did I consider this was a consultation. The officers came told us what they were putting forward and totally went against our views. ➤ It appeared that Gillas Lane was to be closed before we even had a meeting ➤ It feels to me that we have not been listed to at all and nothing we have said has been taken into consideration at all!! ➤ The views of the staff, parents and children of the school have been completely ignored during the consultation process. ➤ Feel decision has already been made, authority trying to ride out storm. ➤ None of the original questions raised at the first meeting have been suitably answered. ➤ I feel they have made a decision and it doesn't matter what anyone says. ➤ I don't feel they have even been listened to never mind taken into consideration. ➤ No questions were answered properly. ➤ Is this not already cut & dried. ➤ It would be in the childrens best interests to remain at the school they have grew up in. ➤ I think they have already made their decision. ➤ No questions were answered and have not respected any of the parents and staffs concerns and worries. ➤ I feel that decisions have already been made and public opinion has been disregarded. ➤ We hope the council will listen to our complaints. ➤ No questions were answered. ➤ Feel as if decision to close Gillas Lane was made before consultation with parents. ➤ If the comments were took into consideration the school wouldn't be closing. ➤ No we feel that the education authority have not considered many of our views especially nursery issues. ➤ We were given conflicting info eg closure of nursery & new nursery accommodation at Bernard Gilpin. ➤ The LA has paid no attention to staff or parents. The closure of Gillas Lane had already been decided. ➤ We all had strong arguments at both consultation evenings on our wishes for option 3. None of these arguments or suggestions have been listened to. ➤ Basically we weren't consulted until the decision had already been made and felt this was very underhanded and the needs and education of the children have not been addressed. ➤ Received no satisfaction, questions were not answered. ➤ Our questions were never answered. ➤ None of the questions asked have yet to be answered. ➤ At last meeting no representative from Children's Services could inform us as to what comments / suggestions etc were considered by the council. ➤ Very little personal input but not for those people who have been very proactive. ➤ I don't think that the Local Authority have included the parents' views before making any decisions. ➤ The decision had already been agreed beforehand! ➤ There was no feedback. ➤ No feedback, so how would we know? 	

4	Do you feel that the Local Authority offered sufficient flexibility of the timing and dates of consultation meetings?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
No. responded YES = 3 5.8%		No. responded NO = 48 92.3%	
		No. responded 1.9%	
If you answered NO could you explain further:			
COMMENTS RECEIVED =			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I was informed when meetings were being held by the school. No alternative times or dates were made available to my knowledge. ➤ They had no answers to any of my concerns. ➤ The meetings weren't consultation. ➤ They didn't answer any of our questions. ➤ LA has arranged all meetings for all schools at the same time. ➤ Times a problem, due to us both working. ➤ Times were no good as my husband and I don't work. ➤ As people didn't know until the options were made. ➤ People did not get to put their views across who don't use the school. ➤ No as I work til 6pm and no alternative choice was offered. ➤ I have had to put holidays in at work to attend meetings. ➤ Not aware of any alternative dates and times to support working parents or child care restrictions. ➤ They have not thought about the implications of the suggested year of closure. ➤ Not aware of any alternative dates and times to support working parents or child care restrictions. ➤ All meetings offered have been unreachable for myself. ➤ I have been unable to attend due to poor timing. ➤ Because some of our children have bed times between the times they are held. ➤ No options given on times. ➤ I think there should have been an afternoon or morning meeting for working families. ➤ As I work it was hard to get to the meetings but there was no alternative dates or times offered. ➤ We felt in the last meetings where the options were reduced i.e. taking out option 3 were rushed. ➤ Consultation meetings were scheduled for both schools at the same time therefore it was impossible to attend both of them leaving me unaware how parents from the other school felt. ➤ They did not consider working parents, child care etc. ➤ Only evening meetings. Consideration needed for working shifts, or child care commitments ➤ I feel it was rushed through without any thought of what would entail combining both schools. ➤ Could not make meetings due to work and family commitments. ➤ I could not attend the meetings due to pre organised commitments. ➤ The meetings were held at a time where if you had no child care you couldn't attend. ➤ A lot of people could not make the dates and times of these meetings. ➤ No choice of times of meetings. (closed shop by council) ➤ Insufficient time to digest and collate information. ➤ Should have been more time. ➤ Should have had an AM & PM meeting. 			

5	Do you feel that the Local Authority made good efforts to reach those who could not or did not attend consultation meetings?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
No. responded YES = 2 3.8%		No. responded NO = 50 96.2%	
		No. responded 0%	
If you answered NO could you explain further:			
COMMENTS RECEIVED =			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It was obvious that there was no effort made to ensure a true reflection was obtained. ➤ GLASS has made efforts where the LA failed miserably. No effort made by LA to consult hard to reach. No understanding or appreciation by the LA of the type of area / community. Why bother have a Policy – it's just words. ➤ No efforts. All they provided were response forms aimed at people attending the meeting. It was GLASS who made sure that the remaining parents and local residents got the form. They didn't follow their own guidelines on 'hard to reach' people. ➤ There was no alternative dates given and they were the same dates and times at both schools. ➤ I was unable to attend the first meeting because of work commitments. The Local Authority did not contact me to ask my views even though my son attends the school. ➤ No efforts were made to my knowledge. ➤ People who don't use the school facility weren't consulted properly. ➤ People who don't use the school weren't consulted properly. ➤ As people did not get any full information sent out or given. ➤ Information was on internet but that was all. ➤ No information was given. ➤ Not at all. ➤ When I could not attend a meeting there was no alternative options given to me. ➤ All meetings offered have been unreachable for myself. ➤ I have had no alternatives given. ➤ Because they don't inform you to tell you what happened at the meetings. ➤ No feedback given. ➤ There has been no feedback from the local authority. ➤ More than one meeting should have been offered. ➤ I couldn't attend 1 meeting and no-one informed me on what the meeting was about. ➤ Am not aware of any efforts to do so. ➤ My husband didn't go to the 1st meeting and received no feedback or minutes on what was discussed. ➤ No they left it up to the school to give feedback and no form of paperwork was handed out other than the response forms. ➤ Efforts only made by GLASS – parents fighting against closure. ➤ They made no effort whatsoever as far as I was able to see. ➤ Only evening meetings. Consideration needed for working shifts, or child care commitments ➤ Many of my friends and neighbours who live around the school area knew nothing of possible closure. ➤ Very little feedback or consultation. ➤ People who could not attend the meetings were not given any feedback. ➤ There was no feedback to people who couldn't attend meetings especially if they don't have internet to read the minutes. ➤ Each parent should have been contacted and a response requested. ➤ No effort whatsoever!! ➤ <u>School</u> kept people informed not the Local Authority. ➤ The only information came from school. ➤ The LA did not make enough effort to reach people. They should have sent letters, minutes out to <u>ALL</u> parents / carers. 			

7

Do you feel that sufficient importance and focus was given to the education of your child / children in the exercise?

Yes No

Don't know

No. responded YES = 0
0%

No. responded NO = 49
94.2%

No. responded
5.8%

If you answered NO could you explain further:

COMMENTS RECEIVED =

- Nowhere in the report do you see mention of the children's needs in the exercise. It asserts that education will be improved but cannot support it with evidence. The children of Gillas Lane have been given a raw deal to solve problems elsewhere.
- Not once in the whole exercise was there any reference to our children's education, this wasn't taken into account.
- Education is not listed as a synopsis point!
- Education, Education, Education – as I recall – Labour Party promises leading up to election Sunderland LA again 'going it alone' they think they know best and ignore this important issue to meet their own ends. They failed even to give it lip service, how inconceivable and remiss of them. Have they not heard of EVERY CHILD MATTERS, PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST and that the welfare of children is PARAMOUNT.
- Feel they treat the child as only a number not an individual.
- The disruption of moving – possibly into temporary accommodation, is detrimental, with larger class numbers, education will suffer and standards would not be upheld.
- We have yet to be told of anything that will "benefit" our children.
- Absolutely not. It felt more like a number crunching exercise being done because of the Government directive on surplus school places.
- We feel this is very harsh for the Nursery children.
- We feel they haven't thought about the Nursery.
- Felt council is not interested in the best education for our children – just saving money.
- As they are going into bigger classes and they will not get all the support they need.
- The children were not taken into consideration at all.
- No, children did not get a chance to say their views.
- I do not think they have considered education, they are thinking of the cost.
- Education may suffer if changing schools unsettle the children.
- Local Authority feedback and decisions are never cascaded back to the public!
- If this school is closed their education will be affected.
- Because I don't think I feel as if they aren't thinking about the children, they are thinking about money.
- The children were not considered at all.
- Money rather than child's education.
- Children receive excellent education already at Gillas Lane so if this was of importance then it wouldn't (maybe) closing.
- I feel that they have not really considered children at all.
- Education was not considered or mentioned during meetings and overheads.
- I feel that the main focus of the authority seems to be to save money above everything else.
- This decision was in no way focussed on the education of my children. Option 3 would have been the decision if this was the case.
- It certainly wasn't, the whole thing is basically just a money saving exercise to benefit Sunderland City Council and not our children's future.
- I don't think any importance was given to children.
- Children did not seem the important issue, only numbers.
- Only Y3 in 2011 would be impacted on the closure, will have an outstanding impact on ALL the children from nursery throughout.
- Gillas Lane is a family school, several generations of families have been educated at school, staff are stable and know well all children & families in school, this would be lost if closure goes ahead.
- Children's personal details not considered at all.

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ The importance of education and the children's own needs seems to have been overlooked.➤ The only focus was to wrap up the consultation exercise as quick as they could picking the option that was based on cost not education.➤ It seems that EDUCATION did not come into this at all. If it did then this decision would not have been put forward.➤ Children don't count.➤ Pounds only not children.➤ How can a larger school with bigger classes be better?➤ I feel that the children have been an afterthought I do not believe that the children's education would be improved by the move. |
|--|--|

8	Do you feel that your child / children have been given opportunity by the Local Authority to 'have their say' at any time in the exercise?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
	No. responded YES = 0 0%	No. responded NO = 50 96.2%	No. responded 3.8%
	If you answered NO could you explain further:		
	COMMENTS RECEIVED =		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The children have not been involved. ➤ At no point has my son been asked by the Local Authority what he wants. ➤ LA failed yet again. HAVE YOUR SAY is the signature of EVERY CHILD MATTERS. Should have been done sensitively and honestly – children’s contributions should not be underestimated! ➤ <u>But</u> only when parents and teachers “pushed” for their views to be heard. ➤ There was nowhere the children could voice their opinions. ➤ The children have NOT been heard. ➤ Children’s opinions have not been taken. ➤ Us as parents and our kids could not voice our opinions. ➤ No opportunity at all. ➤ As they are not allowed to the meetings. ➤ Only when it was too late. ➤ Definitely NOT. My child would not like to be moved schools. ➤ I have not heard that children have been consulted. ➤ I don’t think the children have had a say. ➤ Never really been involved in how they would feel about moving school. ➤ Not at all. ➤ The Local Authority have never given my child any chance to have her say. ➤ The children have had no opportunity to speak. ➤ Have the council been to the school and spoke to the children? ➤ Because they aint looking at whats gonna happen to the children in the future. ➤ Nobody has spoken to the children. ➤ Nobody has spoke to the children. ➤ Children haven’t really been asked how they’d feel about going to another school. ➤ I don’t think my child fully understands what is going on, let alone been given any opportunity or info from LA to have his say. ➤ I feel our children haven’t even been considered. ➤ No evidence of this as if they had the school would not be looking at option1. ➤ No-one from Local Authority has been to see good / excellent work of school. ➤ Not at all. ➤ The children have only recently been given the opportunity to put their own views forward. ➤ Unless a child was asked by parents how they feel, they would be oblivious to the whole thing. ➤ Pupils were only brought into this after the recommendations was put to cabinet. ➤ As above – children don’t count. ➤ No opportunity given to any. ➤ Children should have their say. Many have been really upset by the closure. ➤ The children have been bypassed in the whole thing. 		

9	Do you feel that your questions were answered at consultation meetings?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
No. responded YES = 1 2%		No. responded NO = 49 96%
Not answered = 1		No. responded 2%
<p>If you answered NO could you explain further: COMMENTS RECEIVED =</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Could not give straight answers. ➤ Any awkward questions were responded with 'fill in a response form' ➤ If this wasn't so serious it would have been laughable – Officers were a joke and must have been embarrassed. The Team did not support one another and mainly left Val Thompson out to dry. They were all ill equipped with adequate skills, knowledge and information to answer questions. Their back up was 'put it on a response form' even though the design of the form didn't ask for contact details. Questions are still in the ether!!!! ➤ There were many questions that officers could not answer particularly at the final consultation meeting. Their answer was "put it on a response form" ➤ None of the original questions raised at the first meeting have been suitably answered. i.e traffic, class sizes, kitchens, nursery – none were answered. ➤ Issues / questions could not be answered at the meetings as none had thought of them occurring. ➤ Any questions to do with keeping Gillas Lane open would not be discussed at the meeting and I was told to use a response form. ➤ Could not answer the simplest of questions with reasonable answers. ➤ Definitely not. ➤ There was nobody there to answer the questions just cannon fodder. ➤ Definitely not. ➤ Couldn't give straight answers – didn't know answers. ➤ Because a lot of the questions was not answered as the answers were not known. ➤ Kept being told to put questions on a response form. ➤ Didn't listen to us. ➤ We were told to put our questions on a response form. ➤ Everything we asked we were told to write it on the comment form. ➤ Couldn't attend. ➤ No questions were answered. ➤ Because they just kept on making excuses. ➤ Not at all. ➤ No questions were answered. ➤ Couldn't attend the meeting. ➤ There's no nursery. ➤ We were told to put our questions on a "consultation response form" to anything we asked. We asked the questions that they didn't want to answer. ➤ They definitely weren't, we were just kept being told it wasn't their decision to make and any concerns needed to be put on a response form. ➤ Were just told to put to 'Cabinet' ➤ Kept telling us to put questions in writing to cabinet which we had already done at first consultation meeting. ➤ Just told to put it in writing. ➤ No one could answer questions put by parents etc. ➤ Responses kept coming back from Val "only option 1" & "put it on a response form" and at second consultation meeting 2 no options available" ➤ Our answers were – "Put it on a response form!" ➤ There was no one who could answer the questions. ➤ No satisfactory answers were given, or questions just were not answered. ➤ Questions were evaded, or answered unsatisfactorily. ➤ All our questions were brushed over. Any questions that were asked got the response of 'send it to the cabinet' 		

11	Do you feel that Gillas Lane Primary School meets the needs of your child / children?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>			
<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">No. responded YES = 51 98.1%</td> <td style="text-align: center;">No. responded NO = 1 1.9%</td> <td style="text-align: center;">No. responded 0%</td> </tr> </table>			No. responded YES = 51 98.1%	No. responded NO = 1 1.9%	No. responded 0%
No. responded YES = 51 98.1%	No. responded NO = 1 1.9%	No. responded 0%			
<p>Any further comments:</p> <p>COMMENTS RECEIVED =</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Most certainly. Family-oriented, friendly environment. Children love learning there. Excellent dedicated teachers. Good attainment records. Why is such a successful small school being closed, against the wishes of the parents / carers? ➤ I am very impressed with every aspect of the school and I feel that the needs of my child are fully met. ➤ 100% ➤ It educates my child to an excellent level – this is the most important factor. ➤ Gillas Lane School meets the needs of my children in every way, they are happy and secure. ➤ Above and beyond my children's needs, it is a first class school with very special staff running it! ➤ It meets every need of my children. ➤ Excellent family school with good Ofsted results. A school of choice. First class teaching team with effective leadership. The Team show dedication and competence yet LA put these valuable people on the scrap heap- a disgrace. ➤ My son is settled at Gillas Lane, enjoys school and is progressing well. My wife and I are happy we chose Gillas Lane. ➤ I used to go and I'm 33 years now. It's a shame to close. ➤ I have <u>3 children</u> there and <u>one</u> on the way. ➤ Definitely. ➤ My children have special needs and the teachers at Gillas Lane have time to give extra help to them. ➤ My child is settled down in a nice small class. She needs special needs so in a small class it gets looked at. ➤ In every way. ➤ The children feel safe at Gillas Lane and have an excellent special needs system. ➤ Small schools always meet needs better. ➤ My child has special needs and he is doing great here. ➤ Children are happy, secure and well educated. ➤ A happy achieving school. ➤ Children are happy and making good progress. ➤ Gillas Lane school provides a safe, stimulating and happy atmosphere for every child. ➤ The staff know every child and their capabilities. ➤ My two children are developing very well and all support required is given. ➤ Absolutely in every way! ➤ Small local school ideal. ➤ Small school with good results. ➤ Both my grandsons love Gillas Lane School and have good rapport with staff and other pupils. The classroom aspect suits them. Open plan classrooms would not. ➤ My son has made friends and knows the teachers. The closed classroom is preferable to open plan. ➤ I have a special needs child that received the <u>VERY</u> best from Gillas Lane. My other children all love Gillas Lane and feel safe and happy. 					

12

Do you feel that the proposed change will have a detrimental impact on your child / children?

Yes No

Don't know

No. responded YES = 52
100%

No. responded NO = 0
0%

No. responded
0%

If you answered YES could you explain further:

COMMENTS RECEIVED =

- Large class sizes can only lead to children losing the individual attention they currently receive.
- No continuation with teaching staff. My son is quite easily distracted. Open plan teaching would exacerbate the problem.
- Research shows that any organisational change causes a dip in performance. This will impact on children in many ways and be exacerbated by change of teachers and the cramped environment. Ofsted results are significantly better at Gillas Lane than Bernard Gilpin therefore standards will fall
- There will be a difficult transition period. Gillas Lane pupils will have few of the staff and teachers they are used to. Seen as outsiders moving in to Bernard Gilpin.
- I think continuity is important and moving to a different school with much bigger class sizes would disrupt my son's education.
- YES. It would unsettle him and the other children with all the children and bigger schools they'll not get the education they should have.
- Education levels will drop due to upheaval and many other factors.
- The children education the classes will be bigger with one teacher.
- There'd be more special needs and bullying.
- Larger classes, worse facilities – not family friendly.
- They will have to go to a much bigger school, bigger classes, worse facilities – no kitchen / nursery, temporary classrooms, not family feel.
- They wont have time for extra help. They will get bullyed and they have a main bissy road to cross.
- How are they meant to cope in a school with so many pupils when they are not used to it. They are very young and need stability.
- She wont get the attention she needs.
- Children at this age don't need 'major' change.
- The children will be disrupted.
- May unsettle children when they have never been unsettled before.
- MAJOR
- I know that it will make my day more difficult with extra travelling time plus my children will struggle with a larger classroom size.
- My children are over achieving and thriving at Gillas Lane. They are nurtured and known well by small class sizes and good teachers.
- The travelling and timing aspect will be very difficult as there are no nursery provisions.
- They are in a safe environment and Bernard Gilpin is an open planning school.
- Because they are going to be in an open plan school and increased numbers in classes if change.
- Maybe become unsettled at a new school where at Gillas Lane they settled straight away.
- I feel that changing schools would disrupt my child.
- He has been to Bernard Gilpin and didn't like it now he loves Gillas Lane.
- Child will be lost in such big class sizes and suffer emotional effects of the move.
- They will feel afraid and insecure as Gillas Lane is a small family school where the children have a close bond with the Head and all the staff.
- Larger class sizes, open plan classrooms, need I go on???
- I feel my childs education will suffer due to the excessive class size and possibly make them very unsettled.
- Our children are in a 'family unit' close knit and happy. They are going to be transferred at a very vulnerable time.
- If option 1, but if option 3 then no.

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ I feel sorry for Bernard Gilpin as they are going to have to cope with this change if staff are unhappy it will have a knock on effect to children.➤ Very detrimental to already received education!➤ It takes a long time for each child to build up confidence in the staff. They will have to start again in a new much bigger school.➤ My children will be lost in a big school. They will become a statistic. The support they currently get will be no longer and will lose a big part of their education due to being unsettled.➤ No child should go through such a change with no impact on them! Going to a larger school too is very unfair to them!➤ Each child is known – not just a number.➤ Children are not just (NUMBERS)➤ 2011 is the final junior year for my elder grandson. Move will be harmful at this stage, both educationally and emotionally, SATS will suffer.➤ Moving the children to a bigger school will set them back. They enjoy the family atmosphere. |
|---|

14	Do you feel that the Officers were consistent with the information given at consultation meetings? (e.g. Nursery provision)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>No. responded YES = 0 No. responded NO = 45 No. responded</p> <p>0% 86.5% 13.5%</p>		
<p>If you answered NO could you explain further</p> <p>COMMENTS RECEIVED =</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ MTG 1 – NEW NURSERY / MTG 2 – POSSIBLE NEW NURSERY / FOLLOW ON – DEFINITELY NO NURSERY. ➤ It was said a nursery would be built, now there won't be a nursery built. ➤ Nursery provision wrongly explained, insufficient answers to any of the asked questions. ➤ INCONSISTENT, SERIOUS ERRORS, CHANGING OF THE GOALPOSTS – obvious a combination of not enough research, lack of planning and Officers out of their depth. ➤ Nursery provision was not known at the first meeting with parents being misled into believing new provision would be made at Bernard Gilpin. Next meeting – would be dealt with through existing provision – very misleading. ➤ The information changed from one meeting to the next. ➤ They can't make their mind up about a nursery. ➤ Could not answer questions. ➤ They were not even aware that Nursery Provision would be an issue! ➤ The information on how the facilities which already exist at Gillas Lane would be developed at Bernard Gilpin were vague and unconvincing. ➤ They have not mentioned the Nursery positions. ➤ No positions mentioned. ➤ Couldn't answer questions ➤ They haven't made a decision about any nursery. ➤ They still can't answer about the nursery. ➤ Children in nursery have not been considered. ➤ Couldn't attend. ➤ Nursery discussions were avoided when questions were raised. ➤ Nursery questions were avoided. ➤ Parents were told at the initial meeting that a new nursery would be built on Bernard Gilpin site. Now no plans to build! – Why? ➤ Nursery is a huge issue for the whole community. We were led to believe a new nursery would be built. ➤ The officers already advised that they wrongly told us a new nursery would be built. How much more is factually incorrect??? Can we trust anything they've said? ➤ No they definitely by far didn't, they appeared to know very little and had very little consideration for parents feelings. ➤ As already said no questions were adequately answered. ➤ Only got to attend last meeting due to work commitments so gained conflicting information to questions, no answer given. ➤ When asked about nursery provision for children who would be in nursery when closure occurs, Houghton nursery was casually mentioned – Houghton nursery is full. ➤ First meeting said they would build nursery provision at Bernard Gilpin. Second meeting changed to no they wont and not sure where. ➤ They didn't know everything (no planning) ➤ Avoided nursery discussion. ➤ Misleading information was given at first consultation. <u>NO NURSERY PROVISION</u> has been allocated. ➤ No nursery provision has been made although promised at first consultation. ➤ Bypassed all questions about nursery. 		

15	Do you have any concerns / issues if your child / children were to move to Bernard Gilpin Primary School?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
No. responded YES = 50 96.2%		No. responded NO = 0 0%
Any further comments:		No. responded 3.8%
COMMENTS RECEIVED =		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If I said " Do you want your child to go to a school with proven lower standards, larger classes, cramped classrooms (maybe even portacabins), unfamiliar teachers, less convenient and practical and not your first choice" – WOULD YOU WANT THIS????????? ➤ Classrooms are already too small for current pupils, how will they manage if another 140 children go there. ➤ Education level / Cost to taxpayer / Future PAN Flexibility / Classroom Size. ➤ Traffic concerns at Bernard Gilpin and the Nursery. No detailed analysis of impact of proposals. Use of temporary classrooms likely during major building programme – very unsuitable for education. ➤ I have 38 years experience of working in the Public Sector, 21 of those years as a senior manager. I can honestly say I have never seen such a dismal display. Sunderland City Council should seriously look at its culture but most of all practise what it preaches i.e. real Policies – not just words on paper to tick a box. There should be a demonstration of support for its communities and voters. They should not be ignored with arrogance and disrespect. ➤ Too big, not in best interests of my child, worse facilities, not as good education. ➤ Drop in standards. ➤ My son and nephew has learning difficulties and I think this will interfere with their learning. Mess their heads up. ➤ Possible 2/3 years of disturbed education. ➤ Many ➤ My daughter has special needs so she'll not get the attention she needs if their big classes. ➤ I am not sure how Bernard Gilpin will be developed. I think the class sizes will be too big which will lower standards. ➤ Big class sizes and the open plan classes and there'll be big issues of bullying. ➤ Its going too may children not enough teachers it will be a sham. ➤ Larger class sizes, not in the best interest of my child. ➤ Bigger classes, loss of provisions, bisy roads to cross, no nursery, bullying. ➤ Yes my child needs special needs this will not be propaly looked at in a larger class. ➤ Just the disruption to their education. ➤ How does Bernard Gilpin plan to accommodate nursery children and what lunchtime provisions are there? E.g. there is no kitchen facility. ➤ The Local Authority need to give us all the information and facts regarding their intentions. ➤ Gillas Lane School and teachers are excellent and this school should not be closed. ➤ Yes I don't want my child to attend Bernard Gilpin as if I did I would have choose that school in the first place. ➤ My child has special needs and these are met by Gillas Lane. What will happen to these children? ➤ There would be more traffic on Hall Lane road and I think the children with special needs wouldn't get enough support. ➤ I won't be sending my kids there, I will be looking at home schooling. ➤ Class sizes, traffic issues, consistency of education 'ie' their reaction to moving. ➤ Our children are very happy and love every aspect of school life, we want the best for our children and feel this is at Gillas Lane. ➤ Under no circumstances do I want my child to move here as I didn't choose that school and it proves to offer no benefits whatsoever to my children other than a money saving exercise. A child's education is vitally important to the future generations and should not be quantified by money alone. Other options are clearly available yet they have been looked at very little and in my eyes not even considered – WHY??? 		

- | | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Moving to open plan system.➤ Our children will be disadvantaged moving to a new premises, not used to open plan school. Traffic problem on a very busy road.➤ No kitchen facility on site, portacabins as classrooms, lack of playing space when we are trying to tackle child obesity.➤ The disruption to both sets of children will take many years to resolve also extra pressure with so many children must affect teaching.➤ Bigger schools and classes mean that children of lesser ability get 'left behind' and don't receive the support they need from overworked staff.➤ My childrens education should be the basis for this decision but placing them in a large school, unsettling them, lack of support, will go against this.➤ I have lots of concerns.➤ Traffic on Hall Lane, size of classes, the fact that temporary accommodation will be used.➤ Larger classes, open plan, unknown teachers.➤ My children are happy and are learning well. Don't change what's not broken. |
|--|---|

OTHER COMMENTS MADE:

- The Council has not taken any parents / carers views into account in this process. This is clear from the reports and the minutes of the consultation meetings. The Council has been blinkered in its drive to option 1. In view of the uncertainty regarding regeneration and house-building in the area over the next few years then a “wait and see” policy would be better than a short-sighted solution which might cost a lot more money in the long term.
- I believe a way must be found to keep Gillas Lane Primary open. The school is an important part of the community and could be developed to preserve its future.
- There is an underlying current for the site of Gillas Lane. BE HONEST – TELL US WHAT IT IS.
- There is no way this should be allowed to happen! Gillas Lane is a lovely small school where staff know pupils individually. A school of 422 pupils is unrealistic and unfair to all these children. There are other ways of dealing with this situation that won't be detrimental to our children and their education.
- I have 38 years experience of working in the Public Sector, 21 of those years as a senior manager. I can honestly say I have never seen such a dismal display. Sunderland City Council should seriously look at its culture but most of all practise what it preaches i.e. real Policies – not just words on paper to tick a box. There should be a demonstration of support for its communities and voters. They should not be ignored with arrogance and disrespect.
- The children at this school benefit greatly from the close contact and personal knowledge of the staff at this school. This will be lost in a bigger, larger class number school.
- It's a disgrace they're closing the school. I'll also be voting Conservative to next election.
- There be a big issue Bullying. Its all a disgrace. Have the Authority got no children or grandchildren at our schools.
- I feel it is a disgrace to close Gillas Lane School.
- It is a disgrace to even consider closing Gillas Lane, it is a friendly small school and my son is in nursery and I feel he would do best in a small school where the staff know all the children, Save Gillas Lane.
- Its alright for the concil and local authoraties as they are not the people how have kids in Gillas Lane and they still have there jobs at the end of this.
- I am very concerned about my children moving schools. They are happy in the school I chose for them and they are doing very well. Its unfair on everyone and just does not make sense to anyone other than the council.
- Closing the school will cause a lot of problems, large classes will disrupt children, children with special needs and behaviour problems will not get the attention on they needs.
- Very upset about what is happening and everything that has been said has been ignored, feel the authority's has been ignorant towards parents and staff.
- As a parent and a local resident I would ask for DEFINITE FACTS from the local authority to be issued immediately. What are the plans for the land? How will Bernard Gilpin accommodate a nursery / larger class sizes? When will any changes / closures be happening?
- Why are our children not important to this council? Why has education been made a 'cost cutting' exercise?
- The Local Authority DO NOT keep residents and parents involved with any decisions or reasons – and it seems that all efforts are ignored.

- The traffic on Hall Lane at school times is horrendous and dangerous. I feel the decision has been based on money and NOT the welfare of the children.
- Just leave our school alone.
- I feel that we have been let down, and that our children's happiness and education is not a main priority. Also I resent the fact that I no longer have a choice in a local school place for my children i.e. large or small school.
- Are we looking at ££ signs or the future of our children and ensuring their needs are met to allow them the best possible opportunity to flourish.
- At the last meeting the representatives for the Children's Services, made fools of themselves. The answers to many questions were not forthcoming and questions answered were rubbish. I felt sorry for chairperson she had clearly come unprepared with knowledge to answer any questions and only one other person spoke from Children's Services, what the other came for was a puzzle.
- I do not feel that the needs of the pupils from both schools have been taken into consideration by the Local Authority before they have made any major decisions. A merger can only be detrimental to pupils, their families and the staff involved.
- I can't understand why Gillas Lane has been earmarked for closure. It is a fantastic school with excellent staff and support networks.