

Daelton
Dalton le Dale
Seaham
Co Durham
SR7 8QT

11th June 2009

Director of Children's Services
Sunderland City Council
PO Box 101
Civic Centre
Sunderland
SR2 7DN

Dear Dr Helen Pattison

Re: Closure of Gillas Lane Primary School

I am writing to express my dissatisfaction at your recommended decision to close Gillas Lane Primary School. You have failed miserably to listen and consider any views and suggestions made by parents and others throughout the process you call 'consultation'. I would ask you to seriously consider the following points I raise as objections to this decision and ensure that they are replicated in full in any final document you produce i.e. not an abridged / summarised version.

The Consultation Process:

I, along with many others, deem this process invalid and discredited due to your flawed implementation. There are many examples of this but I believe the most important factor is that you:

- Misrepresented information during the process, particularly at the October 2008 and February 2009 meetings. You therefore consulted on wrong information regarding Nursery provision. Nursery education is an extremely important and integral part to any child's education and therefore it is hardly surprising that parents want in the future at least what is provided at present. Officers were ill-prepared on this issue. There was a lack of research into nursery provision and officers displayed incompetence and a lack of unity on this subject. The consultation, in my view, is discredited.

Other factors which deemed the process invalid and/or flawed are:

- Failure to comply with your own internal policies.
- Serious errors in reports.
- Failure to involve the 'difficult to reach'
- Failure to utilise the many methods that are available to you (no real and true engagement, e.g. no survey work, no offer of focus groups and a rejection to hold 'task and finish' group.
- Failure to provide flexible dates and times of consultation meetings with no regard or support for working parents or child care restrictions.
- Failure to listen and the Inflexible attitude of officers. It is obvious that Option 1 was the preferred option of the Council from the start
- Inappropriate comments made by officers, (linked to the above), when an officer at the October 2008 meeting declared his view that the school should close
- If this wasn't so serious it would have been laughable – Officers were a joke and must have been so embarrassed, particularly at the February 2009 meeting. The Team did not support one another and left one colleague, the main speaker, to 'hang out o dry'. They were out of their depth and ill equipped with adequate skills, knowledge and information to answer questions.
- Talking down to parents and talking at parents. Officers were rude and disrespectful.

- Lack of answers to legitimate questions with officers unable to respond other than 'put it on a consultation form.' Questions are still in the ether!!!!
- The design of the consultation form did not include contact details. This clearly demonstrates that you had no intention to get back with answers and explanations.
- Failure to involve or inform the children. HAVE YOUR SAY is the signature of EVERY CHILD MATTERS. Consultation should have been done sensitively and honestly – children's contributions should not be underestimated!
- Inequality and unfairness shown to Gillas Lane as schools in a similar position have been relieved from closure due to uncertainty with demographics and housing data.
- Process was rigid, lacking flexibility and sensitivity.

Option Appraisal:

- More exploration and research should have been done. Clearly the Nursery provision is the obvious remiss. Surely, detailed information was required, yet officers failed to do so.
- Financial analysis should have been detailed for each of the options. Spreadsheets should show every detail.
- You fail to acknowledge that Gillas Lane is located in one of Sunderland's top ten areas of deprivation. Surely you should be investing in Community Development and building the area rather than dismantling it.
- Option 1 is short-sighted and reactive to a current problem. It does not plan effectively for an uncertain future
- Clearly the Council is afraid of competition as Option 2 has been conveniently ignored. At least this option would be more fair to pupils and the teaching staff.
- 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 Council but you clearly must have a hidden agenda otherwise why dismiss Option 3 which is viable and meets targets. Solutions on how to achieve this were even offered but conveniently dismissed. We were told this was not just about money but it seems it is.

Decision Making:

- It is debateable as to whether the forms were even looked at – probably just typed up by a clerical officer.
- Even formal complaints have been met with a wall of silence with refusal to accept them – with Complaints Policy not adhered to.
- I still fail to comprehend how the decision was reached and can only draw the conclusion that you are not an open and transparent Council.
- The decision is not rational and must be based on a 'Hidden Agenda' It baffles me as to how so much constructive opinion can be ruthlessly ignored by Children's Services right through to the Cabinet when there is a mountain of evidence and concern regarding this appalling decision. A nod of the head and a muttered 'agreed' at public meetings just will not do. Not one comment or question was raised but maybe these are said in 'secret meetings' (that you will deny of course). Where is the democracy?
- It appears like Mavericks who believe they can ride rough shod over everyone including Central Government Policy

Choice:

- You are taking choice away from the parents in this local community.
- Ed Balls has recently spoken of the need for more choice for parents and more than one school in a community.

Education:

- Education attainment should be a the centre of any change. Cost seems more important to you, even though the minimal amount of financial data available seems inconclusive and with glaring deficient analysis.

- OfSTED results conveniently not considered in this process even when the Council actually suggest parents consider this factor when choosing a school. There doesn't seem to be any consistency.
- Comparison with Bernard Gilpin shows significant differences with Gillas Lane performing significantly better.
- 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.
- Change issue - Research shows that any organisational change can cause a dip in performance during transition periods. 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

Statutory Guidance:

- It appears that you have also failed to comply with Statutory Guidance.
- You have not taken onto consideration the educational standards.
- You have not shown any understanding or needs of this deprived community
- You have ignored the choice issue

In conclusion, I do wonder if ever you will acknowledge your failures but also the strength of feeling and commitment of parents and others associated with Gillas Lane Primary School.

Gillas Lane is an excellent family school with good / excellent Ofsted results. It is a school of choice. There is a first class teaching team with effective leadership. The team show dedication and competence yet Sunderland City Council put these valuable people on the scrap heap - a disgrace!

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????????

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.

I sincerely hope you take note of objection forms and letters that will be coming to you. Many feel that they keep repeating the same issues as they have not been heard or acknowledged. Option 3 should be implemented. Your surplus place issue can be successfully addressed, which is what you said this exercise was about.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Coulbeck (Mrs)

**Margaret Coulbeck
Grandparent**

Report and Recommendations by
Councillors Derrick Smith and Colin Wakefield.
on School Place Planning proposed Options.
Statutory Objection to Closure.

Date of Report 12.June 2009

Submitted 16. June 2009

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1. Reasons for the Report.

This Report has been considered necessary for the following reasons.

1. The Ward Councillors and the Members of the Public that have been involved in the "consultation" process do not feel that their views have been taken in to account in the rounds of consultation leading up to the LAs recommendation to close Gillas Lane School and name Bernard Gilpin as the receiving School.
2. As Councillors we feel that a valuable opportunity has been missed by SCC. to engage and work with the public and this report seeks to regain that opportunity.
3. The Report outlines proposals as to the way forward and the signatories ask for the report to be accepted in its entirety or at least to form the basis for further consultation.
4. The rounds of consultation did not appear to fully consider the benefits to Gillas Lane pupils and teaching staff of option 2 i.e. the amalgamation of the 2 Schools.
5. The report presented to cabinet in April 2009 is based on the following data i.e.
 1. That the Birth Rate is falling.
 2. That the predicted School Admissions is based on 12 Children per 100 Houses.

This is not correct for the Coalfield Area.

This report recognises that the Local Authority has an obligation to look at schools with surplus places > 25% and that the overall Citywide % of surplus places must be no more than 10%. These issues are addressed here allowing the LA to comply with their statutory requirements.

The report intends to show that the closure of Gillas Lane School and the pupils so displaced being transferred to Bernard Gilpin School is not in the best interests of the surrounding communities, the Schools, Schoolchildren or the local authority.

Other Problems that would be created by the closure.

1. The proposals are highly unpopular with the local communities as both schools are considered to be excellent by parents and carers. Both Schools have regularly had good Ofsted Reports.
2. Gillas Lane would lose a nursery facility.
3. Gillas Lane cooks meals on the premises, whilst Bernard Gilpin has meals supplied from another school. This arrangement would have to be reviewed.
4. Limited capacity in Bernard Gilpins dining hall is such that it already requires 2 sittings.

5. Bernard Gilpin would have overcrowded class rooms.
6. Bernard Gilpin would lose a Library and Computer Room.
7. Parking on the "school run" would become more dangerous. Levels in Hall Lane, are already dangerous in a busy road and bus route, which already has traffic calming measures installed.
8. A **minimum** of £0.75M. of taxpayers money would have to be spent unnecessarily.

2. The Birth Rate.

The Report put before Cabinet bases much of its Data on a falling birth Rate.

This is not correct as since 2001 the National birth Rate has been steadily increasing. This trend is also duplicated in the Sunderland City Area. The rate from the latest Statistics is 2.33% and has been steady at this rate since 2001 see also Graph 1. (Source - Office of National Statistics).

This more realistic Figure has been used in the recalculation of the expected Annual Intake.

3. Housing Strategy

Significant development is planned from the greater Houghton Area, which will have a knock on effect to all schools in the area. For example new house building at Lambton Coke Works, Easington Lane and regeneration of Holmlands, Chilton Moor, Racecourse, Broom Hill and Eppleton.

The possible impact of Rainton Bridge South on housing and schools is yet to be understood.

The Figure of 12 Children per 100 Houses has been quoted by the LA, which is probably true for a national average, but with reference to Table 1 the figure that applies to the Coalfield Area is actually 14.49 per 100 Houses. This figure is the one used in this Report to calculate the contribution from the planned Housing Programme.

It is considered to be a more realistic figure as the method used to calculate it includes all age groups and their spatial distribution.

The Admission from the planned Housing Development is based on 3 Factors.

1. The phased planned housing in the Catchment Area this Data is based on the SHLAA.
2. That there will be no effect of this building program on the 2009/10 admissions.
3. That after that the contribution from the Housing will be phased in at 30% per year.

Note that the Building Plan is in 2 Phases, shown as green and then red on the SHLAA. See Table 3.

4. Admission Rates.

The Annual Admission Rate used in this Report is calculated from,

Annual Admission Rate = Normal Admission Rate +
+ Admission Rate increase due to rising Birth Rate +
+Admissions from planned Housing Development.

The Normal admission Rate is the normal admissions from the existing Catchment Area.

Added to the above is the anticipated extra admissions due to the increased Birth Rate which is now being seen in the School Admissions.

See Graph 3 which shows how the combined admissions for Bernard Gilpin and Gillas Lane Schools showed a steady decline up to 2001, equivalent to present Year 2, and then a similar increase from that date with a prediction of a continued increase. Graph 3 also shows the equivalent Sunderland City Birth Rate which shows the same trend.

Table 2 shows the affect of Birth Rate on normal yearly admissions.

Table 3 shows how the phased Housing Development will be affected by the Birth Rates on yearly admissions.

Table 4 shows the combined affects of the above on yearly admissions.

Note these yearly admissions are the combined admissions for both Bernard Gilpin and Gillas Lane Schools. These have initially been combined like this as the Scattergrams show that each School has effectively the same catchment area. In the final analysis the School intake is proportioned between the 2 Schools.

5. Gillas Lane revised Position

The above background Information has been used to produce Table 5 that shows combined numbers on roll, annual intake and % capacity and % surplus capacity.

The Data above is proportioned between the 2 Schools based on the allocation Ratio - Gillas Lane / Bernard Gilpin = 0,375/0.625 which is derived from the school Capacity Ratio for the Schools of 210/350.

Allocating the total admission numbers from Table 5 gives Table 6 for Bernard Gilpins projection and Table 7 showing Gillas Lane projections.

The numbers in the left hand column show Year 0 as the current year and Year 1 as the first projection year and so on.

In Table 7 Gillas Lane projections for Year 1 shows the LA figure for surplus places to be 5% high and in the subsequent years 2,3,4 the gap shows the LA figure to be 3 to 5% too high.

However in projection year 5 the difference is now that the LA figure is 12% too high. This is due to the combined effect of the birth rate and housing development starting to come through. Note that class Year 2 was the intake where the birth rate was at its lowest and that the rising trend after that will be working its way through the following years.

Also note that only in projection years 1 and 2 are the surpluses above 25% and that as the factors mentioned above take affect the surpluses fall quite quickly.

This statement is backed by the computer generated trendline for Gillas Lane shown in Graph 2. This trendline shows a steady increase back to 2002 and continues as a general trend upwards.

In projection years 1 and 2 as stated the spare capacity is >25% and Table 6D shows that if the PAN is reduced from 30 to 26 and the capacity realigned from 210 to 182 for 4 years then this allows the LA to comply with the legal obligation to manage School surpluses above 25%.

Note these reductions in PAN are less ambitious than those suggested in the LAs Report and therefore should be more easily achievable. In the case of realigning Capacity at Gillas Lane Primary moving the Nursery in to the School would be a desirable move as the present Nursery could be reused usefully as a much needed Community Centre, replacing the present one in Seaton Avenue which is damp and needs a new heating system. The vacated building could then be sold for use as a shop. The nearest shop being 700M. away.

6. Bernard Gilpin revised Position.

For projection years 1,2,3 in Table 6 the Reports projections show higher surpluses than the LAs projections. This can be seen to tie in with the trendline for Bernard Gilpin School shown in Graph 2. This downward trend will not recover until projection year 4 where the projected figure shows 2% less surplus places than the LA prediction i.e as the effect of Housing Development and Birth Rates take affect to reverse this downward trend. Projection years 5 and onwards show this continued improvement.

In projection years 1 and 2 as stated the spare capacity is >25% and Table 6C shows that if the PAN is reduced from 50 to 45 and the capacity realigned from 350 to 315 for 4 years then this allows the LA to comply with the legal obligation to manage School surpluses above 25%.

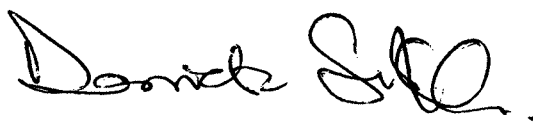
Note these reductions in PAN are less ambitious than those suggested in the LAs Report and therefore should be more easily achievable.

7. Recommendations

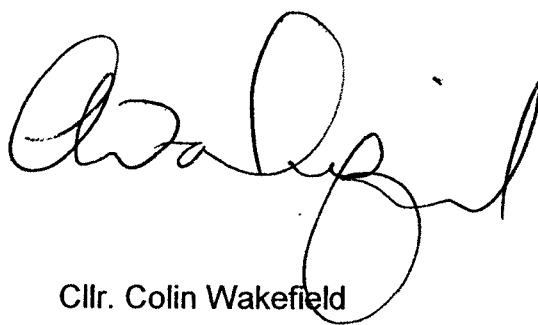
1. Withdraw the notice of closure on Gillas Lane School.
2. Reduce the PAN for both schools similar to that suggested in option 3. See Report and Tables 6C and 6D for details.
3. Reassess 2012/13.

Report dated 11 June 2009.

Submitted 15 June 2009



Cllr. Derrick Smith



Cllr. Colin Wakefield

Table 1

Coalfield Schools as at Jan.08		Calculation of Pupil Distribution
		Pupils
	Bernard Gilpin	294
	Burnside Prim.	169
	Dubmire Prim.	320
	East Rainton Prim.	97
	Gillas Lane Prim.	141
	Newbottle Prim.	354
	Shiney Row Prim.	285
	Eas.Lane Prim.	223
	Eppleton Prim.	176
	Het.Lyons Prim.	467
	Hetton Prim.	97
	Total Coalfields	2623
	Total Houses	18135
	P/100/7Yr.	14.46
	P/100/Yr.	2.07

Table 1A

Catchment Area		
Area	Houses	Pupils per Year
Coptleigh	400	8.3
Racecourse	800	16.5
Hall Lane	400	8.3
Bethany	450	9.3
Dairy Lane	350	7.2
Sunderland Street	350	7.2
others	150	3.1
Totals	2900	60

Table 2

Affect of increasing Birth Rate on yearly Admissions

Birth Rate taken as Sunderland City Average of $398 \times 100 / (6 \times 2853)$
in the Period 2001 to 2007. BR 2,33%

Year	Admission Year	Annual Intake	be shared between both Schools
0	2008/9	60	
1	2009/10	61	
2	2010/11	63	
3	2011/12	64	
4	2012/13	66	
5	2013/14	67	
6	2014/15	69	
7	2015/16	70	
8	2016/17	72	
9	2017/18	74	
10	2018/19	75	
11	2019/20	77	
12	2020/21	79	
13	2021/22	81	
14	2022/23	83	
15	2023/24	85	

Table 3

		Contribution to Admission Numbers from new Housing in Catchment Area			
Site Ref.	Site Name	Site Capacity	Deliverable		
			1 to 5	5 to 10	11 to 15
Copt Hill					
5	Davenport School	57	31		
11	Windsor Cres. Racecourse	83	83		
30	Cross Hse Farm He.Road	7	7		
35	Over the Hill Farm	10	10		
99	Windsor Cres. Hall Lane	123	123		
112	Broom Hill Ph. 1+2	116	116		
178	Downs Pit Lane North	80	80		
197	Epp. Prim. School North	115		115	
Houghton					
174	Houghton Colly.	113		66	47
305	High Dubmire Mulberry Way	18		18	
318	Moor burn House, Dairy Lane	15			15
372	Houghton Police Station	12			12
382	Dairy Lane Site 1	18	18		
Totals			468	199	74
Annual Children			9.69	4.12	

from 2,07/100

Table 4 combined Affects of increasing Birth Rate and housing Development on Admissions

	Year		normal Intake	plus Dev. contribution	Total Ann.intake
	0	2008/9	55	0	55
	1	2009/10	61	0	61
Dev. Start	2	2010/11	63	3	66
	3	2011/12	64	6	70
	4	2012/13	66	10	75
	5	2013/14	67	11	78
	6	2014/15	69	13	81
	7	2015/16	70	14	85
	8	2016/17	72	16	88
	9	2017/18	74	17	90
Dev. End	10	2018/19	75	17	92
	11	2019/20	77	17	95
	12	2020/21	79	18	97
	13	2021/22	81	18	99
	14	2022/23	83	19	101
	15	2023/24	85	19	104

Table 5 Total School Numbers by Year

	Year	Total	Ann. Intake	Schools Capacity %	% Surplus	LA est. Surplus %
	0	422	55	75	25	
	1	411	61	73	27	25.71
Dev. start	2	413	66	74	26	26.07
	3	427	70	76	24	24.64
	4	428	75	76	24	32.5
	5	462	78	83	18	31.43
Dev. 100%	6	492	81	88	12	
	7	534	85	95	5	
	8	578	88	103	-3	
	9	618	90	110	-10	
	10	653	92	117		

Table 6A

Bernard Gilpin School Numbers by Year

	Year	Total	Ann. Intake	Schools Capacity %	% Surplus	LA est. Surplus %
0	2008/9	288	36	82	18	
1	2009/10	257	38	73	27	21
Dev. start 2	2010/11	258	41	74	26	21
3	2011/12	267	44	76	24	20
4	2012/13	268	47	76	24	20
5	2013/14	289	49	83	18	25
6	2014/15	308	51	88	12	
7	2015/16	334	53	95	5	
8	2016/17	361	55	103	-3	
9	2017/18	386	56	110	-10	
10	2018/19	408	58	117	-17	
Dev.End 11						

Table 6B

Gillas Lane School Numbers by Year

	Year	Total	Ann. Intake	Schools Capacity %	% Surplus	LA est. Surplus %
0	2008/9	134	19	64	36	
1	2009/10	154	23	73	27	33
Dev. start 2	2010/11	155	25	74	26	29
3	2011/12	160	26	76	24	29
4	2012/13	161	28	76	24	29
5	2013/14	173	29	83	18	30
Dev. 100% 6	2014/15	185	31	88	12	
7	2015/16	200	32	95	5	
8	2016/17	217	33	103	-3	
9	2017/18	232	34	110	-10	
10	2018/19	245	35	117	-17	

Table 6C

Bernard Gilpin School Numbers by Year. Revised PAN

PAN changed from 50 to 45, realign Capacity to give new Capacity of 315 (from 350) for 4 Years only.

	Year	Total	Ann. Intake	Schools Capacity %	% Surplus	LA est. Surplus %
	0 2008/9	288	36	82	18	
	1 2009/10	257	38	82	18	21
Dev. start	2 2010/11	258	41	82	18	21
	3 2011/12	267	44	85	15	20
GL close	4 2012/13	268	47	85	15	20
	5 2013/14	289	49	92	8	25
	6 2014/15	308	51	98	2	
	7 2015/16	334	53	106	-6	
	8 2016/17	361	55	115	-15	
	9 2017/18	386	56	123	-23	
	10 2018/19	408	58	130	-30	
Dev.End	11					

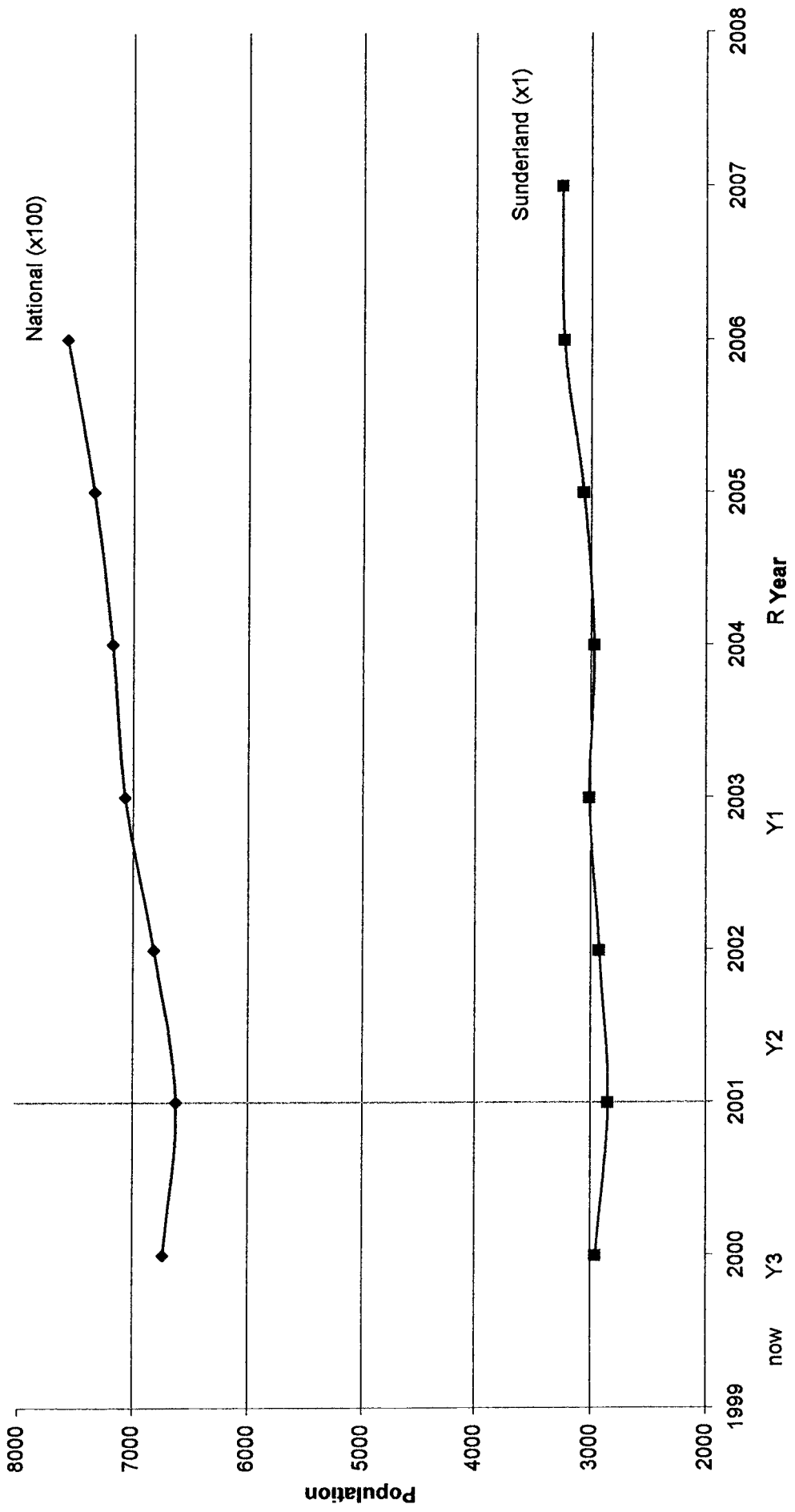
Table 6D

Gillas Lane School Numbers by Year. Revised PAN

PAN changed from 30 to 26, realign Capacity to give new Capacity of 182 (from 210) for 4 Years only.

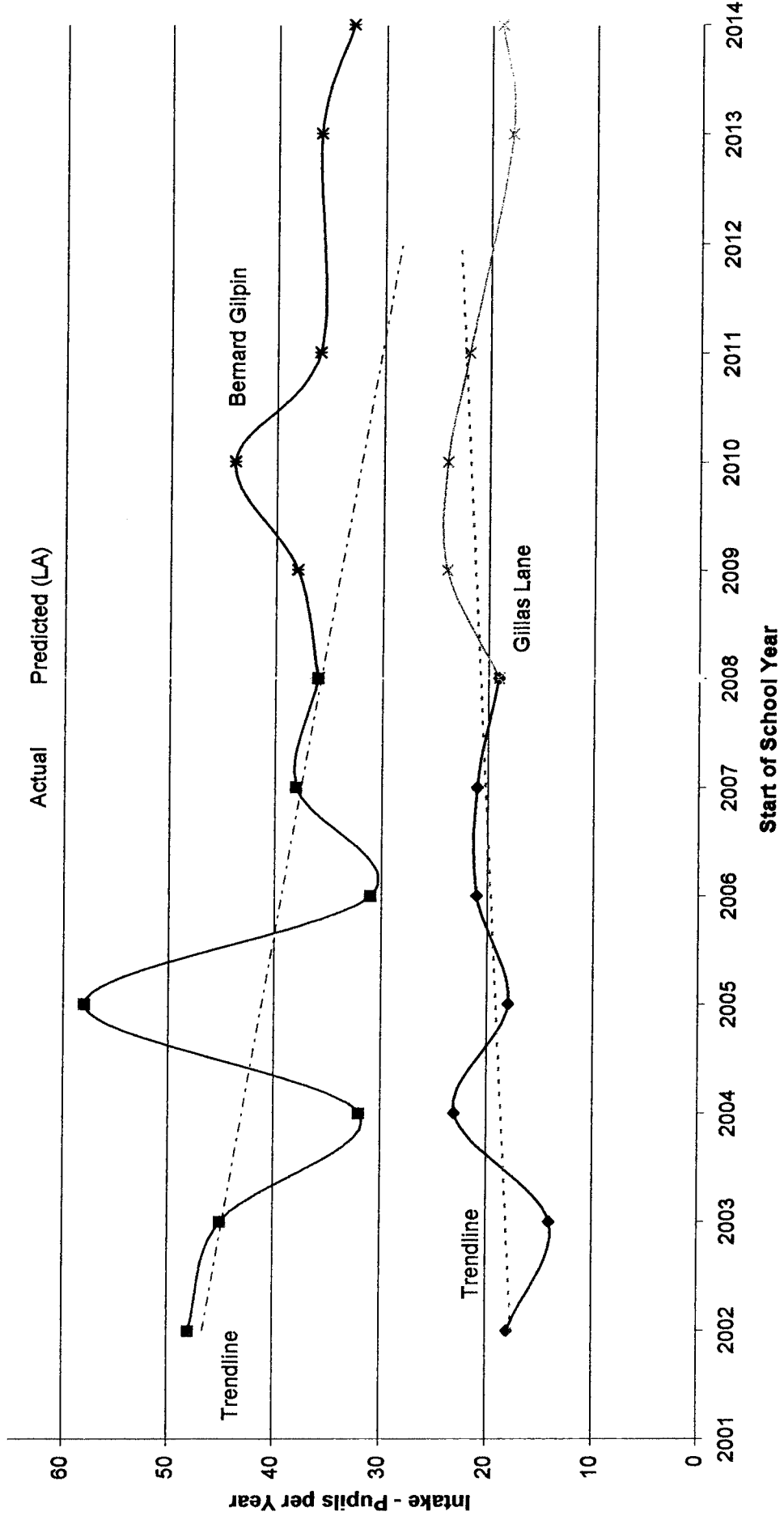
	Year	Total	Ann. Intake	Schools Capacity %	% Surplus	LA est. Surplus %
	0 2008/9	134	19	64	36	
realign C.	1 2009/10	154	23	85	15	33
Dev. start	2 2010/11	155	25	85	15	29
	3 2011/12	160	26	88	12	29
GL close	4 2012/13	161	28	88	12	29
	5 2013/14	173	29	95	5	30
Dev. 100%	6 2014/15	185	30	102	-2	
	7 2015/16	200	32	110	-10	
	8 2016/17	217	33	119	-19	
	9 2017/18	232	34	127	-27	
	10 2018/19	245	35	135	-35	

**Births
National and Local**
Graph 1



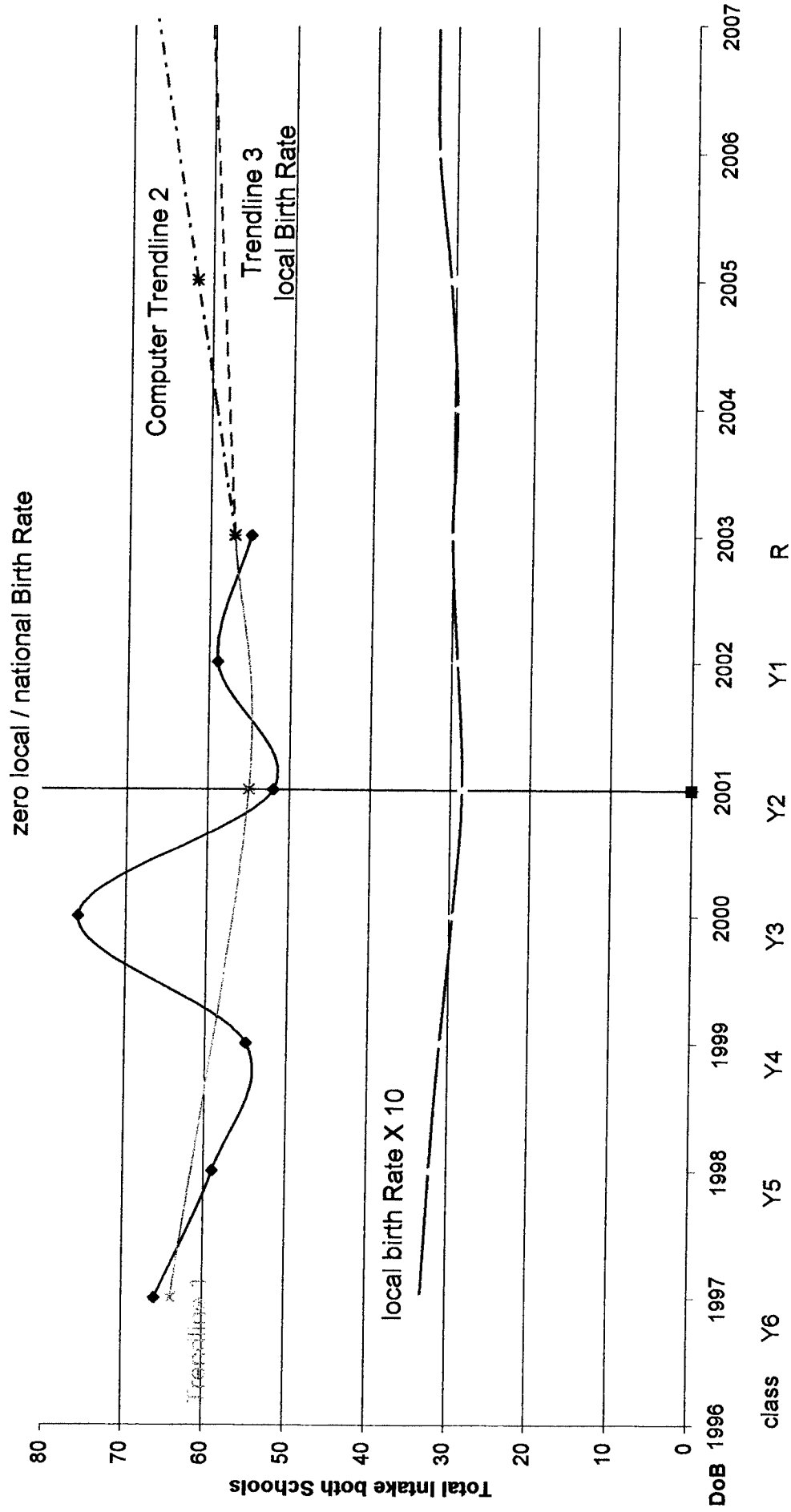
**Yearly Admissions - actual and predicted
Bernard Gilpin and Gillas Lane combined.**

Graph 2



**Annual Intake
total both Schools
2002/3 to 2008/9**

Graph 3



Director of Children`s Services

Notice to Discontinue Gillas Lane Primary School

Dr Paterson,

I wish to object to the closure notice of Gillas Lane Primary School.

I wish to speak at the School Organisational Committee .I am a governor of both schools concerned and a ward councillor.I believe the decision to close the school is premature. I am appreciate the closure date has been extended till 2012, three years from now. New houses should be built to replace the demolished homes that has had a big effect on both school rolls, that in its self will not replace all of the places at both schools and accommodation is realigned to suit the school roll at both primary schools.

I believe it would be extremely difficult to extend the school a second time should the above happen after amalgamation. I have also expressed concerns previously about the school extension as proposed.

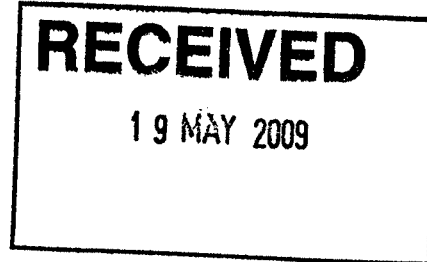
Councillor Bob Heron



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17 May 2009

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Sunderland City Council
PO Box 101
Civic Centre
Sunderland
SR2 7DN



Objection to the Proposal to Discontinue Gillas Lane Primary School

Dear Dr Patterson,

First of all, may I say that I object to this proposal wholeheartedly. I am the grandparent of an existing pupil and a potential pupil.

This is my second letter in support of Gillas Lane Primary school but the council doesn't seem to have listened so far maybe because they haven't seen my first letter.

I checked back to the report on the first consultation stage and discovered that my first letter dated 24 October 2008 was mentioned in the statistical analysis. It was the only letter. However, it was not reproduced for the report and no parts of it were included in the responses appendix. This contrasts with the council's treatment of letters in the final consultation stage where letters were reproduced in full as part of the appendix on responses.

This seems to typify the lackadaisical attitude of officers at that time. Errors and omissions abounded in the reports and the option appraisals. Even a progress report to Cabinet in December 2009 had the wrong consultation attendance numbers for the Gillas Lane and Bernard Gilpin events in October 2008. It reported that the Gillas Lane meeting was attended by significantly fewer people than actually attended. Also it inflated the numbers attending the Bernard Gilpin event significantly. I can find no evidence in the minutes of the meeting on 3 December 2008 that these errors were corrected. Reading the report, one could be forgiven for thinking that the parents and carers of Gillas Lane Primary school did not care about the fate of the school when nothing could be further from the truth.

So the first letter was not seen. Neither were parts of it included in the consultation results. So a copy of it is included in this letter so that you are able to see the original contents without any censorship. It reads:

"Consultation Response - School Space Planning - Gillas Lane School

Dear Sir/ Madam

I attended the public meeting for parents and carers of children at Gillas Lane Primary School on Monday night, 20th October 2008. I must say that I was encouraged by the turn out of parents who were concerned about the option of possible closure of the school. I understand the reason why the review has taken place and the issue of surplus places. However, the process seemed to omit some very important factors which I hope can be included following the consultation exercise. The children's needs should be paramount in this review and yet this seemed to be lacking from the officer presentation. It appeared to be a fairly cold numbers exercise.

The overwhelming feeling of the meeting was that closure and/or amalgamation with Bernard Gilpin were not options for the parents and carers of children currently at Gillas Lane. Regardless of the obvious practical difficulties of travel, parking, safety and general neighbourhood disruption and the possible detrimental impact on attendance, the main reasons were spelled out during the meeting.

Gillas Lane is important to the community. It provides a good education for all of its children as shown through your own attainment figures and testimonials at the meeting even in an area of significant deprivation. Gillas Lane achieved 90% on Average English and Maths L4+ in 2007 yet was ranked 38 in the top half of schools ranked by deprivation and some 23 places above Bernard Gilpin who only achieved 82% for the same period. Surely this counts as success in anyone's language.

Dare I say it, that parents from Gillas Lane believe that the education and teaching is significantly better than that provided by Bernard Gilpin at the moment. Why would you want to close a school that is patently providing a very good standard of education for its children? The Head Teacher and all the other teachers are respected by the community and do an excellent job. So, why even contemplate tinkering with or even getting rid of a school that is obviously working well as evidenced by your own statistics?

Gillas Lane is a small school granted but there are smaller schools in the Sunderland area. But small in this case is beautiful. Gillas Lane should be nurtured rather than coldly advised that two of the three options presented at the meeting involved closing it down sending parents in to a panic. Yes the subject is emotive as the officers acknowledged but the feelings of the community do need to play a significant part in any decision on the future of primary education in this area.

One of the officers tried to say that the standard of education might be affected in a negative way if the third option was approved leading to possible mixed year groups. I am glad that the Head Teacher confirmed that

this could be managed within school to avoid any further misconceptions for worried parents at the meeting. Mixed year groups have advantages in developing children to their full potential at a pace that matches their ability. It is clear that the school's philosophy and values respect children as individuals to enable them to flourish.

Gillas Lane has developed its enviable reputation over many years during troubled times in the area. The previous Head Teacher spoke eloquently at the meeting about the school being a quiet haven for the children away from the difficulties of life on the estates. There is a respect there in the community for the school and all that it represents. Parents speak highly of it and teachers speak highly of parents. This mutual respect is something that should be nurtured because it is the basis of a true education partnership. What is to be gained from breaking this partnership? The major risk is that any closure or amalgamation will reduce the standard and quality of education for children affected certainly in the short term and maybe in the longer term with a difficult transition phase and the new school trying to establish itself with the enlarged community it serves.

I listened to the presentation with interest but to me the problem seems a simple one to deal with for Gillas Lane. The school has to reduce its number of surplus places to below 10% to reach the standards required by government. My understanding from the documents provided is that the calculation of surplus places is defined by assessing the area of teaching space and dividing it by the actual number of children and comparing it against the government standard. Basically, the school is too big for the number of children it teaches.

This seems to be a classic architectural and resources problem. If you start with the premise that Gillas Lane should be kept open for excellent educational reasons then all you have to do is address the space problem. A clever space utilisation review including review of storage and furnishings would hopefully retain important educational facilities (library, music room etc.) within the allowable teaching space guidelines. The LEA should work with the School to remodel it. For instance, one option might be to bring the nursery provision into the main building and then offer the vacant building for other community uses. This would reduce running costs and help meet the government standards. Money for grand capital schemes appears to be plentiful in education at the moment so it should not be a difficult exercise to invest a little in Gillas Lane as a "going concern". We should be investing in our successes not dismantling them.

If Gillas Lane was providing a poor service I might have a different view particularly if a higher standard of education was going to result from any closure or amalgamation. But there are no guarantees of that here and, quite frankly, any closure or amalgamation will have a detrimental effect on the children at Gillas Lane.

Whilst I understand there is a need to reduce the PAN number the teaching staff appear well equipped to deal with this. The projections of school rolls over the next 5 years show that Gillas Lane will maintain a stable intake where there will be falling rolls at Bernard Gilpin. I cannot help but think that Bernard Gilpin has the greater problem and the suspicious side of me thinks that Bernard Gilpin's problems are being solved at the expense of Gillas Lane.

But Bernard Gilpin is a unique school and a similar approach could be adopted to resolving its surplus space issues without detriment to Gillas Lane.

I will finish by reiterating that options 1 and 2 are clearly non runners for the people of Gillas Lane as evidenced by the response at the consultation meeting. The LEA should work with Gillas Lane school and community to maintain and develop its excellent service on that site within government targets and guidelines. But the key message of this letter is that success should be rewarded not punished.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Chair of Governors of Gillas Lane and I hope that the consultation exercise takes in to account these important points."

Having reviewed my original letter, I believe it is still relevant today. There is a suggestion of how Option 3 can be achieved but this was not researched by the council and discussed with the parents and carers. It was dismissed without proper consideration, discussion or explanation.

Having now been through the horrendous consultation exercise where the parents' voice has been ignored and been bemused by the way the decision was made, my attitude towards the council has hardened significantly. Many people complained about the consultation exercise and four people decided to put formal complaints to the council through the council's published system. Sunderland City Council's reaction was to dismiss them out of hand and treat them as "negative responses to consultation". Granted they were published in an appendix in the final report on school place planning to Cabinet but the concerns were never addressed. The matter is now with the Local Government Ombudsman.

But this has been typical of Sunderland City Council's patronising attitude towards the people of Gillas Lane. It smacks of "We know best - we're the professionals" but it lacks consideration of the most important people in this exercise - the pupils and the parents. Had GLASS and the Head Teacher not made efforts to give the pupils a voice in this exercise they would have been anonymous. Surely the council should have followed the council's own guidelines on "hard to reach" people.

Why is Sunderland City Council at such odds with recent central government education policy promoting parental choice and "an education system shaped by parents"?

We can all see why closing down Gillas Lane Primary school is good for the officers. It gives them less people to "disappoint", fewer people getting angry and solves all of their other problems in the area at a stroke. But it is not good for the pupils who are affected by this proposal. In Option 1 the Gillas Lane pupils lose out in every way possible.

Why were educational factors omitted from the option appraisal process? Why have parents' views been singularly ignored in this exercise as have

those of the pupils, carers, residents and school governors? This cannot be right.

It is not as if the views of the Gillas Lane community were not clear! Just read the minutes of the consultation meetings and the appendices to the reports to Cabinet. Let me just state some facts:

- Several petitions were presented to keep Gillas Lane Primary school open, the latest including 1,602 signatures giving a vote of no confidence to the consultation, option appraisal and decision making processes and support for Option 3
- 216 written responses to the final stage of consultation with the overwhelming majority supporting the school to stay open. It is important that these comments are documented in this statutory closure process so I am attaching the summary responses from the final report to this letter. Hopefully, they will be read this time and the Schools Organisation Committee will take heed of the views expressed.

The issue we have to address, we are told by the council, is that of surplus places at Gillas Lane. The statutory guidance on school closure states:

“Surplus Places

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”.

Under option 1 - 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”. The Head Teacher put forward proposals to deal with surplus places in the last two years yet the Local Authority took no action. There is no guarantee that standards will be raised by this action, in fact the opposite will happen during the short term.

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 at Gillas Lane as shown by the council’s own figures during the initial consultation and has the support of the vast majority of parents/ carers.

Even though Gillas Lane Primary has a high percentage of surplus places currently, standards are high as evidenced in the recent good Ofsted report and, we are assured by the Head Teacher, can remain high after the removal of surplus places. During the school place planning exercise there were 4 other primary schools with higher percentages of surplus places. Two of them, Grange Park (39%) and Seaburn Dene (51%) had either proposals for remodelling and / or reducing the Published Admission Number (PAN) rather than closure. Perversely, officers commented that Grange Park would have been closed if they had followed the option appraisal results properly. So why is there such a difference in treatment of schools? Why can the option appraisal results be put aside by officers on a whim? I'm sure officers will say but the situation in that cluster is very different, the future there is uncertain. I could say the same thing about the Houghton Cluster with the massive regeneration plans and activity in the Hetton and Houghton areas and the uncertainty about population projections and house building activity over the next 5 - 10 years. Let's wait and see what happens over the next few years. But isn't that what they are doing in the Monkwearmouth cluster where Grange Park is situated? This is inconsistent in the extreme and suggests that Gillas Lane Primary is being targeted for closure for less transparent reasons.

Also no social factors have been taken into account in the option appraisals. Given that Gillas Lane Primary 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.

Gillas Lane can meet its reduction of surplus places target and has a stable intake projection over the next five years. Gillas Lane can sort its own problems out. What appears to be happening is that Gillas Lane is being sacrificed to solve the more difficult problems at Bernard Gilpin and now, we hear, at Houghton Nursery.

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?

The fiasco over the nursery provision shows how ill-prepared officers were for the consultation meetings.

There was a disagreement between officers at the October 2008 consultation meeting. They misled parents and carers at the first consultation meeting by saying that new nursery provision would be provided at Bernard Gilpin. This was consultation on misinformation and discredits the whole consultation process.

At the February 2009 meeting they had to apologise and say that there would be no new provision and that children from Gillas Lane Nursery would have to use existing provision in the Houghton le Spring area without being specific.

Now we are told that the nursery provision will be provided by Houghton nursery.

This illustrates ineptitude of the highest order and parents could be forgiven for thinking that the council does not really care about the nursery provision issue because the main objective is to close Gillas Lane Primary at all costs and the nursery provision can be sorted later.

It now appears that the Houghton nursery is significantly under capacity (approximately 50 spare places) and has its own "surplus places" problem. Gillas Lane to the rescue again!

It is interesting that Option 2 was quickly discarded in favour of Option 1. There was no real explanation as to why this had happened. I believe that because this amalgamation option would involve the element of competition, Sunderland City Council is not open to exploring it even if it benefited the pupils. If Gillas Lane had to close (although I still believe this does not need to happen) then the better of the two remaining options is definitely Option 2 for the pupils and staff of Gillas Lane. 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. I am sure that most parents at Gillas Lane would prefer the lesser of these two evils if the school had to close.

Before finishing I feel I must comment on the way the final decision is to be made. We are told that SOC (Schools Organisation Committee) will make the final decision on whether to close Gillas Lane school or not. However, SOC is merely a sub group of the council's Cabinet - the same Cabinet that agreed the final report in such a resounding manner. How can this be fair or objective? Surely, there is a conflict of interests involved here. Is there an appeal mechanism? Apparently not! Gillas Lane Primary school is a maintained school and does not have the automatic right to appeal against the SOC decision like other categories of school. I do know GLASS has referred these issues to the Department of Children, Schools and Families and the Schools Commissioner.

There are many other issues I could bang on about but I am sure others will be picking them up during this consultation period. This school

should not be closed. It is unfair and cruel. There are other alternatives that can achieve the council's aims of removal of surplus places and still retain Gillas Lane Primary school.

I hope this letter is not consigned to the darker regions of bureaucratic process as my previous letter was.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Coulbeck". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized.

David Coulbeck
Grandparent of a Year 1 pupil.

**SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE
STAGE 4 CONSULTATION RESULTS (Feb – Mar 2009)
Gillas Lane Primary School**

RESPONSES RECEIVED

A total of 216 responses were received for this school.

Q1 Are you responding to this consultation as a:-

	Response form	On-line response	Email	Letter
Parent/carer	41 (1 form had no comments)	6		1
Headteacher	1			
Governor	4			
School Staff	4	1		
Resident	61 (3 forms had no comments)			
Pupil	64			2 (X14 copy of letters sent to Echo)
Other	22 (1 form had no comments)			9

Petitions

A petition containing 1,602 signatures was received. The petition stated:

We, the undersigned, have NO CONFIDENCE in the consultation, option appraisal and decision making processes that led to the decision to close Gillas Lane Primary School through the school place planning exercise carried out by Children's Services.

Specifically, we would highlight the following:

- lack of obvious attention to the educational and emotional impact on pupils in the options appraisals
- Factual errors in minutes and reports to Cabinet
- Lack of comprehensive information on financial implications and alternative options in the options appraisal
- Lack of answers to relevant questions at consultation meetings
- Confusion regarding the alternatives for future nursery provision
- Lack of transparency and consistency in the decision making process
- Processes conflicting with several existing Sunderland City Council corporate strategies and policies and a lack of understanding by officers on their impact on the processes
- Lack of proper consideration of parents, carers and pupils views and suggestions

We therefore, request that this decision is NOT implemented, and that more research and consultation is carried out with a view to implementing Option 3 for both Gillas Lane and Bernard Gilpin schools

Q2 What are your views/comments on the proposal for this school?

Comments from parents

- Gillas Lane offers such a lot of things which a larger school cannot provide. The pastoral care of the pupils is second to none and offers some children the only stability they know. Nursery provision is paramount and the building of a new one when we have an excellent facility seems wasteful. Moving to a school which does not have a kitchen would only put pressure on to ship more meals in or are you going to build a kitchen as well.
- Why does the city council not just reduce the PAN?
- I chose Gillas Lane because of the closed classrooms and homely atmosphere. My son is at nursery here and has bonded with his friends and teachers. Having to leave this environment for an open plan school with larger classes will be detrimental.
- I think it would be best for the children to close Gillas Lane and put all the children in Bernard Gilpin for the following reasons:-
 - Gillas Lane is very old and in need of lots of repairs
 - Bernard Gilpin is a more modern building which will be better for the children to learn in

- There is not a lot of distance between the two schools so travel for the children is not really a problem
- The nursery at Gillas Lane is only open in the mornings. This is a waste of money. There is another nursery close by that has had lots of work done to it making it a safe place for the children. Why have two schools nearly side by side and both not full. Option 1 is best and will be more sensible to maintain Bernard Gilpin rather than pour money into Gillas Lane which is an old outdated school and should be closed.
- It is a disgrace and absolutely no surprise that the council want to close Gillas Lane. It is a lovely school and I cannot imagine that cramming 140 children into Bernard Gilpin will do anything to enhance my son's education. There will be too many children and I can only see a poor result for all children concerned, there is not even a kitchen, which Gillas Lane has. I feel our children will be sold down the river by a council which does not give a damn about our Childrens education. If I had known there was a possibility of closure (which was only officially released in the weeks after I had to apply for a school place) I would have made very different choices. I hope the Cabinet is proud of themselves for making the worst possible decision for the children of Houghton-le-Spring. The council has also removed any element of choice as I purposely chose Gillas Lane and not Bernard Gilpin due to the size and caring nature of Gillas Lane, also because of the attached nursery unit so my son could attend hopefully the same school during his primary education. I also feel that the council has merely gone through the motions by having these meetings and is only interested in saving money and at the same time seriously disadvantaging my son's education.
- I feel that this option is not beneficial to the children from either school. I have 3 children who attend Gillas Lane and they are very happy and settled. I fail to see how moving them to a larger school which is further away from home and without the teachers they have grown to trust, how will this benefit them at all?
- I'm not at all happy that the school is closing as I have 2 of my children waiting to start Gillas Lane. It is not fair as Gillas Lane is a friendly family unit. I think it should stay as it is. This will disrupt all children involved if anyone cares about these children they will leave the school alone and let it stay put.
- I think this is all very unfair on the children. My 4 year old is very confused and wakes up some mornings asking if she is going to Gillas Lane or Bernard Gilpin today? It's wrong!. She loved the nursery and has settled well into reception. She should be enjoying her start to school and not worrying about whether or not she is going to have to move! She has started wetting the bed – doctor says its nothing physical so it must be something worrying her. The only thing worrying her is changing schools. It concerns me that she is made to feel this way at such a young age and at such an early stage in her education! I hope you agree that this is all wrong and very unfair!
- My daughter is in her second year at Gillas Lane and looks forward to going to school. She has told me that she doesn't want to go to school anymore if she can't go to Gillas Lane. She has come a long way since she started here. The teachers spend time with her when she needs help, she doesn't have to wait for ages until the teacher has finished with another child. All this closing down of schools is wrong it seem to me its all about saving money. But how can you save money when you have to build more schools or add on to school to take children out of schools that you have closed down? I don't want my kids to go to another school to do work that they have done already as Bernard Gilpin are two years behind Gillas Lane. That's the trouble with the council, all they think about is money, and not about everyone's feelings and who they upset. This is all wrong – Keep Gillas Lane open.
- I find the proposal to close Gillas Lane unfair and unjustified. I feel that the options have not been researched enough and option 3 was discarded before a thorough report had been carried out. At the consultation meeting I felt questions were avoided and parents were fobbed off. There were many officers there but only one or two of them actually responded to the many questions that were asked. I am deeply concerned that we have nobody willing to answer our questions properly and with definite answers. The fact that the nursery provision has not been thought through properly yet but decisions have been made despite this, is extremely worrying to me. I don't think you are taking our Childrens education seriously, if you were you'd be helping us make option 3 work. I asked at the consultation meeting what the benefits would be if our school closed and my children had to go to Bernard Gilpin? The only answer Val Thompson came up with was that once they were at Bernard Gilpin they would finish their primary education there!! This answer was poor. I would like to see option 3 reconsidered and thought through with a more positive attitude, it can and will work. Please acknowledge my response (*email address provided - acknowledged 25/2/09*).
- Gillas Lane or Bernard Gilpin? Gillas Lane should be closed as there is no provision for disabled children. I think the council are meant to provide access for the disabled in all council buildings? Not the case at Gillas Lane school. Why have 2 schools close to each other and both half empty? Bernard Gilpin should be the school having money spent on it. The building is more modern, disabled access is better. Nursery and kitchens, is there a need for a nursery to be built on the Gilpin site when there are 2 nurseries around the corner. Kitchens could easily be built on, there is enough room. Gillas Lane is a tired old school needing a lot of cash injecting into it. Even then would it be up to standard and I don't think disabled access can be provided as its on different levels. Option 1 is the best solution.
- I believe that: The consultation process has been seriously flawed; The option appraisal process has been strewn with factual errors and not taken account of important educational factors; The decision making process is inconsistent and not transparent; and the handling of the process by the officers

has been ham-fisted, confusing and, in one case, inappropriate. I believe that the whole process is discredited and that any recommendations and decisions made as a result of it cannot stand the test of scrutiny and inspection. Gillas Lane Primary School should not be closed. The important and relevant views of parents and carers have been have been ignored and not given the attention they deserve.

- This option cannot be the best proposal for the children of either school, I have 3 children at Gillas Lane and they are all very settled and happy. Moving them to a larger school which is further away from their home and without the teachers that they have grown to trust has got to be detrimental to their education and certainly not beneficial.
- Is there any point in viewing or commenting on what is being proposed? I've been to both meetings with the councillor and yourselves and yes a lot of valid points were mentioned on both sides. I sat quietly listening to everyone's concerns that parents and the councillors had said, and the reaction from yourselves was enough. People are fighting to keep this school open, are they doing so in vain? I believe so. Your department is going through the motions, we are intelligent people and know that your department is going to close this school. I thought that our prime minister Gordon Brown said that every school had to have a full working kitchen and aren't all children the future. If so give the parents the right to choose between a large school and a smaller school.
- My views are to keep Gillas Lane open. Has anyone thought of the effects on the children i.e. mental and physical also emotional. Please somebody needs to take this into account.
- I sincerely hope that all the hard work and dedication the teachers, parents and parent/governors have shown in demonstrating their upset towards the planned closure of this school, has the desired affect of overturning this decision.
- These schools should not be combined. We have had children at both schools and now have a granddaughter there. Please don't take either away – they serve the community so well.
- In my opinion it would be better for all concerned if Gillas Lane was merged with Bernard Gilpin as it would mean the facilities would be better as Gillas Lane is an old school, and only has 1 class per year and not as modern as Bernard Gilpin.
- Gillas Lane is a good school. All the children are cared for and safe I would like you to reconsider and keep Gillas Lane School open. My children attend this school and are very happy. They don't want to move to another school. Save Gillas Lane Primary.
- If a thorough and fair review has been carried out and a decision has been taken to rationalise primary school provision with a view to provide more efficient, quality education for the children, at no detriment to their health, wellbeing or future success, then I support the decision to merge schools.
- I think this is a load of xxx, you have made the decision to close the school already. When new houses are built where are all the children going to go, Bernard Gilpin again! You are just trying to cut costs and not giving our children the education they deserve.
- I personally feel that the whole consultation process has been a total waste of time and money. Under no circumstances have parents feelings and comments been taken into consideration. The whole plan had already been decided beforehand and basically we stood no chance of keeping our valued school open although if you looked at the school alone it is ran considerably well, has a lot to offer both staff and pupils and is an asset to our local community. At first we were given three options to consider and I thought the first two were viable if looked at properly. I only thought and was lead to believe that option three was a last resort. This was not the case , the officers concerned just made us all think that. How can such a decision be made to close a school through these officers reports when they can't comment, give false and incorrect answers, only response given is "fill in the response forms". I'm sure you'll agree if you spoke to many parents there is a lot of ill feeling, utter disgrace and unhappy children. Our parent rights have been taken away and we are now been told what school to send our children to, sorry this is not acceptable. Also the year they propose is totally unacceptable as it's the largest no. of children. I really feel this needs to be looked at properly and decide on a more reasonable and appropriate year.
- I am very saddened to think of Gillas Lane closing and my child having to go to a different school. My children have really enjoyed attending this school and I have felt my children are safe, happy and well-educated here. I find all the teachers to be friendly and helpful and have nothing but praise for the school. I would love it if it could stay open and my youngest child continue their education there. (x2)
- I am a very angry and very concerned parent. I have two daughters that currently attend Gillas Lane Primary School. My eldest daughter will be in year 6 if the closure goes ahead in 2011. I attended the consultation meeting and by your figures this year will have 76 children. I was given no explanation as to how this year group could be split into classes (surely two classes of 38 children is unreasonable), it was also suggested that the children could be housed in a pre-fab, as a tax payer I don't think it is too much to expect my child to be educated within the main building. This is only one of many concerns I have. I am worried what effect the educational and emotional upheaval will have on my daughters SAT results. I am also aware that Bernard Gilpin school will be over-populated. As an expectant mother I am left wondering what extra nursery provision there will be. At the first meeting we were told there was to be a new nursery built at Bernard Gilpin site, then, at the second meeting we were told there was not going to be a nursery built. Will the closure go ahead without sufficient nursery provision in the area? How as a parent am I supposed to have confidence in Sunderland Council making the correct decision with regard to school place planning when the officers sent to discuss the plans don't seem to know what is happening themselves? The only

answer given to any of the questions asked at the last consultation meeting was "put it on your response form". When will these questions be answered?

- As a parent of two children, one who has left Gillas Lane but attended from nursery to year 6 and one who is now in year 6, I feel very strongly about the possible closure of such an important school. This school has a lot to offer the children who will attend in the future and those attending now. Children at Gillas Lane are educated in smaller class sizes, which for many who need extra support, gives them an invaluable start to their education which would probably be not as consistent if the two schools were to merge. At the other end of the scale the high fliers are also supported and encouraged to go that much further. The children are educated in a safe, caring family environment and each pupil and parent are known by name by all staff which makes both feel as if they count! I am sure if it were not all down to purely finance this issue would never have seen light of day. When will council realise children's welfare, education and future should not purely be down to saving money!
- I think it is very important to keep Gillas Lane School open as my child has developed extremely well since starting this school and I think it is vital that all children should have the kind of one on one time with their teachers and school teaching assistants which they get in Gillas Lane. I feel that if the school closed my children would not benefit going to a bigger school as this would disrupt their routine, confidence and I do not feel my children would the proper time with their teacher as there would be too many children in one class and one teaching assistant between 2 classes. I think you should also consider the children in the nursery as they would find moving very uncomfortable and could cause the child not to want to go to nursery at all. It is also important to consider the new houses that are going to be built which would be guaranteed to have more than 12 children living in them.
- At the moment we have two children attending Gillas Lane. Another two of our children have previously attended Gillas Lane and we have our youngest child's name down to start nursery. From 1996 our children, for the majority of the time have happily attended the nursery and the primary school. The future looks bleak for not just our children, but many other parent's children, as they will be uprooted from a school where they are settled to merge with another school, full of strangers, teachers and children!!! I think the school should stay exactly as it is. We as parents like to think it is a well run school, organised and has a friendly parent to teacher atmosphere, otherwise our children would not have attended Gillas Lane. I would love to think that my opinion will make a difference, but sadly I fear a negative outcome, even though there is a lot of hard work being done by not only teachers, but parents and relatives of children who attend this well balanced school.
- LEAVE OUR SCHOOL OPEN – LISTEN FOR ONCE TO THE PEOPLE. Having attended both meetings it seems pretty obvious the decision had already been made with only pound signs taken into account and no thought to the teachers or the pupils. Questions asked were never answered with satisfaction. Issues were avoided continually. I am not convinced these letters will even be read. Gillas Lane is a family school, the centre of the community where children feel safe and secure. I am speaking as a teacher who worked in the school, knew every child well enough to take them on three external visits (London and Paris). As one of the committee tried to point out she taught in a large school and knew every child by name, quite easy, but she would never be able to know what made each of those children "tick". I feel Sunderland LEA are making decisions to suit themselves without a care for our children. It is such a pity Houghton-le-Spring was taken out of Durham Authority. As for forecasting the number of children in the future, this was ridiculed and rightly so. Bernard Gilpin is not big enough to facilitate all pupils – no nursery, no kitchen, open plan and prefabs are not satisfactory.
- I am writing as an angry father of two children attending Gillas Lane school. I am very concerned about the future of my children if the recommendation to close goes ahead. Have the councillors making the decision even considered the children in all of this? I attended the meeting and came out of it very angry that saving money means more to these people than our children do. This is obvious as when asked what positive benefits my children would get from all of this there was no answer!! This was the case for most questions asked. In fact the only answers I seem to remember being given to anything was "I don't have the answer to that but you can write it on a response form". There was a panel of other officers that sat and said absolutely nothing leaving Val Thompson to respond alone! (x3) This to me says that they knew what we as parents were saying all made sense and they had nothing to say that would justify their actions! We are all aware that a new development is planned for the estate opposite the school and although they say that they have taken this into account I fail to see how it is possible. How can anyone believe that there is expected only to be 12 children move into that area that could possibly choose our school? Would it not be better to leave our school as it is and wait to see if what they say is correct? After the houses are built and the families move in it will then be possible to have an actual number of children and not just a guess. The area that the houses are being built on is classed as a deprived area which are renowned for having larger families. There I think you may find that the number of children living there is more than even expected! I live on an estate of less than 100 houses, on an area that is not classed as deprived and we certainly have more than 12 children on our estate already, most of which attend Gillas Lane and babies whose parents wanted them to go there. What do they intend to do if this is the case? Bernard Gilpin will be full with no spaces left and children having to travel further with even more angry parents! The reason the parents of the children attending our school chose it is because it is such a small friendly school with smaller class sizes, allowing the children to have the attention they deserve from teachers who know them as individuals. The small groups

benefit the children who need the extra support (my own child being one of them) and it is worrying to think that our children will suffer through no fault of their own. I thought "EVERY CHILD MATTERED"!! What about the children who have only known a small school environment of 130 children who are being forced into a huge school of 422 children? The whole situation is going to be extremely detrimental to them and you know that is true!! I ask you please to forget the fact that you can use our school in this way to solve your problems and think more about the children. Leave their school open!

- I was unable to attend the consultation meeting but this doesn't mean I'm not concerned about the outcome of our school and the education of my 3 children. I live closer to Bernard Gilpin school but I chose to send my children to Gillas Lane because it is a small friendly school. I feel my choice as a parent has now been taken away from me. I know there were three options for our school, so I can't understand why it has to close. My children like their school and their teachers. I don't want them unsettled at all by the change.
- Disruptive learning in open classrooms – what is the research to prove children still achieve academically as if they were in closed classrooms. Increase in birth rate is factual; in an upper working class environment between 3 houses of professional workforce we have 7 children. I think the statistics of 1 child per 12 household is hard to believe! To extend Bernard Gilpin would mean reduced space for physical activity outside – we are trying to reduce obesity and encourage children to play outside when we are in a society of computer games etc. Therefore Gillas Lane has ample space for this so KEEP GILLAS LANE OPEN!
- How can this be the best option? Class sizes will double and our children will become sheep and not individuals. Your own numbers don't leave much to play with for families coming and going in our area which happens a lot. Fill up Bernard Gilpin at all costs seems to be the plan. One school for this whole side of Houghton. HA! Timing is going to be imperative, if this is to go ahead, 2011 is a joke, that class is the largest and to put them in temporary accommodation (supposed to be a long term solution) is ludicrous. Results will dip. Bernard Gilpin and the government are going to be impressed! Nursery – made a right mess of that, we need one, you need to deal with it. Small people are an asset not to be messed with. They are our future and need to be cared for not forgotten. Small is best – large is depressed. Keep Gillas Lane!!
- My children are thriving at this school, disruption is not good for them. A bigger school is not what I chose for my children so why should it be forced on us. Bernard Gilpin is a good school but very different to Gillas Lane. I want choice – Keep Gillas Lane open.
- I chose this school for a number of reasons:- it had a nursery which meant my children would already be familiar with the school and teaching before starting reception class.; it has excellent Ofsted reviews. Great reports and reviews; smaller school which obviously can only be of benefit to any child; its closer to my home; People I know had nothing but praise for the school and its staff. I am very concerned and angry at the proposal to close this school. I am fully aware that, although obviously not the favoured option among councillors, there are other ways of keeping our school open. Closing our school is the easier way for these people to reach their goal of reducing surplus places. (This response continued with a six page letter which reflected points already made by other parents in relation to the question of potential benefits of moving to Bernard Gilpin, staff knowing children and parents well, benefiting from working in small groups, querying predicted number of children from proposed housing development, large year group and suggestion of pre-fab accommodation, officers not responding fully to questions at consultation meeting, don't take parental choice away).
- I suggest that the decision to close the school has been made only on a financial basis. This leaves me somewhat confused as to how this decision coincides with the council "Every Child Matters" policy.? As a taxpayer, might I suggest a better financial saving would be made if the two schools were left as they are and then the council's officers would not have to be paid overtime to come to a meeting with none of the answers to any of the valid questions asked. Also in a council report I read recently it stated that Sunderland City Council aims to increase parental choice. Surely closing this school to create one large school is taking away parental choice completely given that there will be no small schools within walking distance to this area. As I am writing this response form I am wondering why I am bothering as none of the concerns or questions which arose from the first consultation meeting have been answered yet. It seems the financial decision has been made and the worry of how the children will react to the upheaval is left to the parents, teachers and school governors.
- Have you really thought about all the consequences of this closure, like where will the nursery children go in 2011. Your own numbers don't add up – teaching a class of 30+ children will be a nightmare. The government even says smaller is better, choice for parents! How does your proposals fit with government policy. So it will cost more to keep both schools functioning cost wasn't the issue. Both schools are happy with the way things are – leave us alone. I and others don't see temporary classes as a permanent solution and will probably look elsewhere. If you are determined to close our lovely, successful little school you had better make sure everything is sorted and ready before moving any of our children. I know my child for one will not handle this very well and everything must be done to minimise upheaval. What will happen with uniforms?
- Gillas Lane School is a credit to the community. It would be criminal if the school closed.
- I think Gillas Lane should stay open as it will result in over crowded class rooms at Bernard Gilpin, less quality time for one to one for pupils with the teacher,. It also be a factor for bullying. Then what if in September BG has taken all the children in they are allowed, where does the remaining

children go. I think all local children should go to a local school, then would it not also be more expensive having to renovate BG to accommodate these extra children, Hall Lane or Racecourse Estate is a big area and all concerned would benefit from both schools been left as they are OPEN.

- As a parent of a child at this school I am deeply saddened by what is going to happen. I attended this school 30 years ago and it has been a lovely school and never had any problems. I would not be happy to let my child go to Bernard Gilpin as they are proposing. Gillas Lane teachers are first class and know each child individually and know all their backgrounds. If there is a problem it is easily sorted out. The school make their own dinners in the school kitchens where as Bernard Gilpin has theirs brought in. Please save this school.
- I think you should leave the schools the way they are:- Gillas Lane is a nice little school and it would be a shame for it to close; the pupils get the help they need to achieve better; there is a nursery school so it saves time; the staff are happy and polite, they give you a nice warm welcome. So if Gillas Lane closes then we wont get what we want best for the children! So please leave everything the way it is for the children. Its all about the children and their welfare that's what matters more than anything else!
- I am concerned that the officer's report to Cabinet is misleading and misses out information critical to the decision making process. For example:-
 - BG classrooms are smaller than if they were built today, on this basis surely its PAN should be reduced accordingly
 - Previous actions to reduce PAN at BG included converting classrooms into a library & ICT suite. These will be lost if the schools were merged.
 - Alternative uses do not mention Gillas Lane's need for a sick room and parent community room.
 - Cross cluster issues do not mention that BGs main road access has had speed humps installed. If the schools were to merge traffic would be increased. No mention is also made of the 111 homes planned by Gentoo.
 - Class sizes fails to mention that some year groups cannot fit into BG even after spending £750k. Portacabins may be required
 - Competition states 1 & 2 achieve the same end result, but if both schools closed and a true merge took place then all pupils would see some familiar faces and joint ownership of the school would be more likely.
 - Cost states a saving of £150k a year is to be made, but the plan runs for 5 years, therefore the saving are cancelled out by the £750k cost of implication. After the 5 years no data is available nor any school numbers flexibility. If numbers have gone up at this point then a new school will cost £5.75m.

All of the above points are within the officers notes or minutes of the meetings but do not deem mentioning to put a balanced argument over to the board. I believe if the board were aware of the above points along with many others – then option 3 would be chosen rather than option1.

- My belief is that the process has started with much confusion for the children. Stages of transition will continue indefinitely only to the detriment of the children.
 - As stated, confusion to children now, some upset, unhappy & unsettled
 - Teachers losing jobs will need to seek permanent, safe employment. Who can blame them with mortgages etc to pay. Their careers need protection.
 - The actual change of school, probably very traumatic for some children and parents
 - Settling in for pupils for both schools and adapting to new environment, new teachers and new pupils
 - Well known fact that the performance of the receiving school will dip before any improvement made.
 - Where is the educational dimension to this? Gillas Lane is a successful school and deserves investment. It appears to be about your Cost Improvement Programme. Evident by the fact that Gillas Lane can resolve its PAN issue but there is no recognition that this can be achieved. What a coincidence that by closing Gillas Lane, your problem is solved – you meet your surplus capacity target for the city – you upset one set of parents and pupils – how easy is that!
 - Even Ed Balls has recently advocated more than one school in a locality to provide choice. Clearly this is being ignored and doesn't seem important to the council. Not all parents have transport therefore BG would be the only school for their children. Their choice is taken away.
 - Nursery provision – what a shambles! The goal posts change at each consultation. Get your act together and work as a team. Surely the process is discredited as parents etc were consulted thinking that a new nursery would be provided at Bernard Gilpin. Alternatives were also poorly researched. In my opinion the process is VOID. Nursery is integrated within the school making the transition easier for nursery children when starting school. Surely this makes sense. On a practical level – how do parents with children at nursery and primary school be in two places at one time.
 - Consultation – officers failed to engage the “hard to reach”. No flexibility on date and timing of meetings. Pupils have not “had their say”, however the school is supporting children to write letters to you. Lack of consistent and accurate information. Talked down by officers, at least two instances at 23rd Feb meeting where parents were belittled. Not true engagement and inclusion. Can I remind officers that they have a corporate policy on consultation.

- It appears that Sunderland City Council's corporate policies and strategies have not been complied with.
 - Community Consultation Strategy – “ensure that the results of consultation are fed into decision making processes and used to inform decisions” – no evidence of this.
 - Primary Strategy for Change ... increased flexibility to respond to parents choice, expanding popular successful schools... - the opposite – taking choice away.
 - Community Cohesion Strategy – “the support of young people in tackling deprivation” – as Gillas Lane is top third areas of deprivation you should be investing, developing and engaging the community. You want to take this resource away.
 - Community Empowerment Action Plan – “the giving of confidence, skills and power to communities to shape and influence what public bodies do for them or with and reach out to communities.”
 - Corporate Equality Scheme – you say you are committed to promoting equality and provide flexible services to meet the needs of local people – not really
 - Every Child Matters – Clearly this has been the basis on which you developed your Children and Young People's Plan. Gillas Lane pupils are “safe” and “happy” and “proud” to be at their school – so why take this away?
 - Quality Assessment Framework – Level A. For you to achieve excellence requires you to be flexible, responsive, able to adapt the service to best meet clients needs and demonstrates the achievement of shared outcomes as a result of effective partnership working. Standard 4 – to take full account of views, preferences and aspirations. I do not believe you adhere.
- School Place Planning for the Future – the future of who, certainly not the children. When I attended school in the 70's I was in a class of 30 pupils or more, we were constantly told that these classes were too big. Now my son is in a class of 25 which we are told is too small and two schools have to merge. Can you see the irony or not. We are also told that the area when regenerated will only produce an extra 12 children per 100 households. This statistic has been proven to be false within the coalfield areas. You propose that some kind of building programme will be undertaken at BG. Is this within the current school building programme (3 years behind and £10m over budget countrywide) or is this an after thought after you realised that BG didn't have a nursery. This brings in the word planning. Your representatives at the meeting indicated that BG could lose their library and computer room in the short term. Great idea of how not to equip a school (future planning).
- I strongly believe that there is room for both smaller schools in our area. The closure of Gillas Lane would be emotionally upsetting for my kids.
- My son is in year 3. This year group will be the worst affected if this move take place in 2011, as this will be his final junior year. I feel this move will seriously affect his SATS as the upheaval of leaving one “closed” school situation and group to a larger class in possibly temporary accommodation will be detrimental.
- My views as a childminder who works mostly from Gillas Lane is that this lovely, warm and supportive school should not close. I believe the views of parents have not been considered at all. In the first set of consultation meetings many questions were asked and none were answered (class sizes, kitchens, staffing jobs, traffic etc) In this last meeting none of these were answered sufficiently. A worrying fact that I, a self-employed mother of 2, now has to contend with is that the closure of this school threatens my livelihood. I currently care for children whose parents have said would take the children from the area, will the council pay my bills when I lose work. Also I receive the majority of my business through nursery collections at the school. The proposal however is placing children in a setting with wrap around care. Please think of the wider effects that this school has within the community.
 Because of national statistics and figures, you suggest disrupting the education of my children and the children in my care. In the consultation meetings our questions have not been answered, how can the council make an informed decision if you do not have the facts there. My daughter is in year 3, and you propose moving her, not only in a crucial stage in education but placing her in an oversized year group. How can the idea be justified, surely to even suggest this would at least make me think the children had been considered in this process, perhaps not. As a parent my choice was for my 2 children to receive education in a small school where they could develop self confidence because staff have the time to nurture each child. If my children are thrust into huge classes/year groups where are staff going to find the time to give each individual child what they need. Final words – Leave our school alone.

Comments from Headteacher

- I am extremely saddened and disappointed that the proposal being put forward for Gillas Lane is option 1: that being to close Gillas Lane Primary school.
 In coming to this decision I feel that the LA has not given enough thought to the emotional and educational impact the closure of the school would have for the children and on the community.

Having only one large school is not always best in educational terms. Children would be going from a school of 136 in main school to one of 422. The knowledge staff have of the needs of its children and parents and the care and support they can be given in a small school could not be replicated as well in a large school. Furthermore, parents choice of schooling for their children would be taken away and this is against government policies.

I also feel that from the outset not enough consideration was given to the future nursery provision for our children as Gillas Lane has a nursery and Bernard Gilpin do not. The number of nursery children we have were never taken into account, nor were costings nor implications for overall nursery provision in the area. At this stage of the consultation parents are still unclear of what would happen to nursery provision and where nursery children would go. Nursery units and nursery schools have their own merits and distinctive features and parents at Gillas Lane have made a conscious decision that they want their child to go to a nursery unit attached to a school as they feel this is beneficial to their child. Under the proposal put forward again, it is not clear if parents would have this choice.

I also think that Option 3 was not given enough consideration and even at this late stage would urge the LA to reconsider this option; that being, to reduce the schools PAN and remodel our existing space. Whilst we do feel this is a challenge this could, as previously said, be an exciting opportunity. Remodelling the existing space could provide spare capacity and room. At present the LA is looking at locality based working for its services and there may be an opportunity to have LA services within our school. The LA needs to at least give this consideration. Spare capacity could also be used to enrich the curriculum for our pupils e.g. provide ICT suite, nurture room etc, or to provide a community room for our parents.

The support from the community to keep Gillas Lane open has been overwhelming. While understanding the need to reduce surplus places I would urge the LA, before making a final decision to look carefully at all responses and to reconsider whether Option 3 is at all possible.

Comments from Residents

- I don't think the school should close, I worked there for years and the children loved it. (x2)
- Will be sorry to see such a good school under threat of closure.
- As a registered childminder I will lose children and also if I will be taking children to nursery I could have to travel as far as Hetton and I don't drive. This will be a major problem. I also have a daughter who works at the school and she will have to leave her job which she loves.
- A small school like Gillas Lane is one in a million – it should be saved not shut down.
- As well as the educational and emotional changes involved in the closure and not forgetting disruption, job losses etc, I would like to bring to your attention the safety factor. Both of my children went to Bernard Gilpin school and in all of those years there was never a school traffic warden appointed to cover Hall Lane. If Gillas Lane primary was to close the extra volume of pupils will result in traffic chaos on the surrounding roads which in my opinion will result in another child being killed along this road, especially without a warden. BG has severe car parking problems as it is without the added burden of even more cars. Some parents have been known to park dangerously within the car park or on the main road so imagine the danger extra cars would contribute to this. Another factor involved is the start of new housing development about to be built opposite Bernard Gilpin. This will result in heavy works traffic too! Before you decide on the closure of this school – ask yourselves this –
 - Is a school traffic warden going to be appointed to Hall Lane?
 - Can you assure the parents that their children will be safe?
 - Are you going to provide extra car parking at BG?
 - Have you monitored the volume of traffic that enters BG at present at peak times? Have you predicted what the impact would be with added traffic?
 - Have you thought about the new housing development and the amount of wagons and work vehicles that will be using this road?

The safety of our children is paramount and I strongly believe the closure of Gillas Lane Primary School will severely compromise safety as well as all other factors involved both emotionally and educationally.

- Why is education going backwards? In other areas where schools have been closed, suddenly there is not enough places. Statistics are all very well, but in the real world it doesn't compute. In this area the nearest school is not big enough, it never will be. There is no kitchen. I thought healthy eating in schools was the in thing. As for 12 children per 100 houses, why don't you come and physically count the houses with children especially the little ones who are coming up to nursery age. By the way where will they go? I am so disappointed that the policy of small classrooms is going to be a thing of the past. Education which means teaching is taking back seat and the slower child will be left further behind, just like when I was at school 48 to a class. I would ask you to rethink and think of the children.
- In my opinion Option 1 is the best solution. Gillas Lane school has stood here since the 1960's and is now looking shabby. To me it has very little done to the building and only now are the management of the school starting to carry out works. This is a bit stupid wasting money on a building which should be closed and make way for new developments in the area. All of the children could then be moved to Bernard Gilpin which is a more modern building and I would say a better learning environment than Gillas Lane.
- I believe the closure of this wonderful small school would be of no benefit to anyone other than the local education figures. Without looking at the educational and emotional effects on the children, as

Im sure you haven't. What will happen with the empty building? A large building standing dormant will surely encourage anti-social behaviour in an area where the elderly live safely and comfortably at the moment. If the building is demolished the area will be left yet again open to youths and unruly behaviour. If you look at the open land on Queensway you will find anytime teens and young adults drinking, smoking and gathering together. This behaviour is intimidating enough without supplying them with areas closer to their homes where they can gather. (x5) Looking at the reports you are basing your decision on, I can see no facts on what the future holds for the area, yet council are expected to make a decision.

- It will be detrimental to close Gillas Lane school. Parents will have further to go. This is a close community. Does this mean the nursery will close as well? That will be a big miss.(x2)
- The council houses adjoining Hall Lane that have been demolished will no doubt eventually have replacement properties with young families and young children. There will be a greater need for school education, therefore it is essential that schools are retained to offer sufficient places for education when this occurs. To disrupt children's education in mid-stream is also detrimental to their well being. I would like to see Gillas Lane remain open.
- All our grandchildren have attended this school and all have had a satisfactory education to start their life. We hope that the response to our plea is that the school will remain open for the long future ahead.
- Gillas Lane has given 100% to the education of children in their catchment area – including our 2 who are now in their 30's! To close this school will cause heartache to the children in the "crucial ages", when they should be in a stable environment and not transferring mid-stream to a new school which will have added responsibilities i.e. larger classes, more parking etc.
- I gather that this school is in danger of closing. The school would be a great loss to local children but we as residents look on it as one of the good points of our neighbourhood. It's a joy to see the children and their parents and I must add that we have never had a bit of bother concerning behaviour or traffic. It is not an old school as we can remember it being built plus it has an excellent playing field. It would be a sin to close it.
- I would like to see this school stay open because we have a child coming up school age and it would be better for her to go to Gillas Lane than anywhere else.
- Ideally for the sake of our community and children's welfare, SCC would keep our small schools open, to provide a caring personal setting for our children. When class sizes fall below 15 for 4 years running, we could consider closing. Even then consideration should be made into new estates or an ageing population which could be replaced by young families. What I cannot understand is why both Gillas Lane and Eppleton are to be closed. This leaves no choice but Bernard Gilpin. If this happens I shall have to move from the area before my toddlers reach school age. I would rather move than send my children to Bernard Gilpin. I have visited the school and found that the children have a lack of respect and have not bonded as a peer group. I believe this stems from school care and guidance and reflects a failure of the school. Soon to get worse when Gillas Lane children attend the school, as Hall Lane estate children need care and attention to raise their academic standards and improve their prospects in life. Raise care standards at BG before considering closure of such a lovely school where community, care and standards are high.
- Gillas Lane is a nice little school. BG has no kitchen facilities or nursery. Over the last few years the council have knocked down a lot of houses with many more earmarked to be pulled down. What will happen when the council rebuild will BG be able to accommodate as I understand it cannot yet take all the children from GL. Without the nursery where do our pre-school children learn to play and ease into school life. BG may have room to expand but with open classrooms there's no "privacy" Expanding costs money – HANDS OFF GILLAS LANE.
- My daughter attended this school several years ago, she is now an adult with a young daughter of her own. This school helped my daughter and she was a very happy child and was very happy at this school. I therefore feel it will be a shame if the school closes as it is part of the community.
- I feel the school is needed as it has served the local community so well and should continue to do so.(x3)
- As a resident living close to the school, I feel it would be a tragedy if it were to close down. The school is the centre of this community. Most of the people living here have gone through the school and they are all a credit to the staff who work there. If the school were to close, the heart would go out of the community.
- BG would need to be adapted i.e. not big enough, no kitchen etc. This money would be better spent keeping Gillas Lane open.
- As a local resident I feel that Gillas Lane provides an example of a school concerned with the overall development of the children for whom it cares. As well as academic development the staff at the school show concern for the emotional and social development and support children on those aspects. I write with some degree of professional judgement as I am a retired Deputy Headteacher from within the authority, and I have had some practical experience at working at Gillas Lane in the time since my retirement. Should the decision be made to close Gillas Lane it will only be to the detriment of the children in this community.
- Children's welfare should be top priority not money. I think it will be best for the children to stay at Gillas Lane.
- Why are you proposing to close Gillas Lane School? Children as young as these, should be near their homes if possible for the sake of safety. What harm is it doing where it is? The children are in

walking distance for parents to meet them. I also feel children are happier in a smaller school, there is more contact with teachers and other staff. The closure is not a good idea for either parents or children.

- I live next to the school and if this school is closed down and houses built on the land (from good authority) where will the children from these houses be educated? It seems to me that money is the issue here (from whom to whom). Myself and my wife would like to object most strongly on this.
- The community would suffer from the loss of such a good and local school, who's teachers and staff made such a nice impact upon our daughter. She was well prepared for her next stage of education which I personally doubt she would have been given elsewhere.
- Absolutely a ridiculous idea. I believe small schools are more friendly and personal. What about the journey the poor children will have to put up with to go to another school, not to mention the stress and upheaval for them and parents. Who said big is better? Stick to the small schools. This is the children's future we are talking about. How would closing the school improve a child's education?
- As a qualified teacher, (and I have had 5 children of my own, some of whom attended Gillas Lane school) I know that smaller classes deliver better education to our kids – a matter of ratio – each child receiving more one-to-one attention. The Government are always vowing to provide higher quality education – this is the solution. It works! Look at the private sector. It is past time for rhetoric DO IT! Another proof is smaller rural schools – where they have been allowed to survive – better quality service. Big is anything but beautiful. If we keep provision as it is – payback will be reaped in a short time in the form of improved performance and good quality learning. It is time they put our money where their mouth is!
- When we first moved to Houghton our children were forced to move from the now demolished Houghton Junior School due to bullying. Our last child attended Gillas Lane which provided a wonderful foundation as now she is a very bright young lady. We are very grateful to the staff of Gillas Lane and believe it should remain open as a proven provider of quality education and a choice in local schools must be provided in case of problems.
- I feel that the proposals to close local schools is driven by finance and not the well being or requirements of the children in the area. There have been some outstanding results in terms of Childrens education, which should be the main driver, from our local smaller schools. Closure of any of these would put education standards at a very high risk.
- Having two schools in the area is a good thing as this way parents have a choice and the children get to have smaller schools with smaller classes. That can only benefit them surely! I give my full support to saving this school and I only hope the people making the final decision listen to what is said about this wonderful school and use another solution to solve their problems. There are ways of achieving their goal without upsetting so many children as after all they have to be the most important people to think about!!
- I am a concerned member of the community and a future parent. I have been told that there will be no nursery built at the BG site. This is causing some concern as I am unable to drive further afield.
- Keep it open!(x4)
- My children enjoyed being at this school. The staff were always very nice and the children all seemed happy. It would be a sad day if this school was to be closed.
- Listen to the people and keep this school open – money should not be the decider but the children's needs and that of the community who live and breathe round it.
- My concern for the proposed closure is the nursery provision at Bernard Gilpin. Places are not available there at present. Where will the nursery children go? And how can the proposed school be able to take in the extra children. Prefab units are like taking a step backwards instead of thinking of the needs of the children.
- This is an excellent primary school with very high standards. The children get the best attention from staff. The school has a beautiful nursery attached to it and is in a prime spot. The move will disrupt children from both schools and leave a beautiful building standing empty ready for vandals to move in. Staff will be made redundant and BG will be overcrowded. The number of children dwindled when the houses were pulled but these are to be rebuilt bringing more children into the area. There are babies and young children living in the Croft Lea and Warden Grove estates – these children will be wanting to go to Gillas Lane. Both schools should remain as they are. Gillas Lane is a school worth saving.
- I think it would benefit the residents of Houghton to keep Gillas Lane Primary. Surely it would be better to have 2 smaller schools than one large one. Children would have the benefit of being taught in smaller numbers in the class room and would have more attention spent on them. Save the school for the children and the future of their education and so on.
- Good schools should always be supported – not closed. Government targets are not conducive to successful primary education. Children are our future, small schools give better education. Children are our future. Small schools give better education. What are the Government thinking about closing this school!
- Good school has served us well in the past. As we now have no children of school age, but support others around us who do (x2)
- I am a retired primary school teacher and have experienced a similar situation. Personally I don't think the children are fully considered. The authority in my opinion has decided and that is that. All down to economics. Having taught for thirty five years, in a small school then amalgamated, small is best. The bigger the school the bigger the problems. It is so important that primary children have a

safe and comfortable environment. There are more issues which I am sure will have been brought up at meetings.

- I am in favour of keeping Gillas Lane open. I think that moving pupils to BG will mean quite an increase in class sizes also in the number of cars travelling along and parking on Hall Lane. I believe teachers need fewer pupils per class rather than more to maintain control and concentration levels and there is already a movement and parking problem with traffic entering and leaving the Gilpin school.
- I live in Houghton and have two small children, both of whom I intended to send to Gillas Lane. I was very disappointed to hear of the council's plans. Gillas Lane and Bernard Gilpin are my only two choices and after looking into both we decided that Gillas Lane was the better of the two – better Ofsted, better results and is a lovely respectable small school which was recommended by a lot of people in the area who can't speak highly enough of its superb staff! I don't drive so can't travel so that leaves me with no choice other than to put them in a huge school with over 400 children in it. This is ridiculous. How can anyone believe this to be a good idea?? How can this benefit any child at all?? I believe this to be an easy option for councillors. I wanted my children to attend Gillas Lane nursery and follow through to the school which is a great idea! I worry for my children's early years education. Please leave Gillas Lane open!!!!
- I think you should re-open the Glebe. It never did me any harm, Bernard Gilpin is xxx and I love Gillas Lane. I went there as well. I'm a good boy now. I am 45.
- I am strongly opposed to the closure of this school. Its an excellent asset for our children and I believe its closure would be detrimental to my children's education.
- I am shocked that this is even an option. This school is a part of the community on the Racecourse estate and has been for a great number of years. I am a member of the Board of Directors at the local Community Access Point and as such am very active within the community and have always found the school a vital partnership in the work we do and we will be devastated to lose it for the children on the estate. It is my opinion that the powers that be should have a very serious re-think about this regarding the provision of education in the Coalfields area. I feel that the opinions of the entire community should be upheld in this course of action and not even time has been given for residents to fight this proposed closure.
- Too many schools are being closed for no reason at all.
- Rumours abound as to why a school so vital to the local community is scheduled for closure. The most talked about is that the land on which it stands is required in order to build houses – fact or fiction. Has anyone of intelligence and ability to cope with information put thought into this matter. I think not. A complete enigma.

Comments from Governors

- If you close Gillas Lane you will make life very hard for lots of people i.e. staff will lose their jobs, children will suffer disruption and feel unsettled, parents & carers will have much further to walk, staff at Bernard Gilpin will feel very stressed. I know you've heard this all before but Gillas Lane is a great school providing excellent educational standards. Surely this should be taken into account! The nursery provision has not been looked at properly, surely a decision can't be made when all options have not been investigated thoroughly. Bernard Gilpin already has trouble with traffic at school times, parents at BG already call it dangerous. If Gillas Lane did close the traffic at Bernard Gilpin would increase significantly! Parents will have no choice as to where they want their children to attend school. Closing Gillas Lane takes away parental choice and this is not acceptable!
- Money would be wasted improving facilities at Bernard Gilpin to cope with extra children. That money would be better spent keeping Gillas Lane open. Closing Gillas Lane and various others will take away parents right to freely choose which school to send their children to as this will fill all empty places, with the movement of children from schools closed. Bernard Gilpin has no nursery when Government say nursery education is so important. What alarms me is the huge number of meals that will have to be transported to school as Bernard Gilpin has no kitchen. This cannot be safe or healthy to keep such meals warm for so long. Open plan school classrooms are very disruptive and with the increase of number of children noise level must be unacceptable.
- I am a parent governor at Gillas Lane School. During my term as governor and my time here as a parent, I have found this school to be extremely well managed by our headteacher and her team. As a parent governor I also have the extra benefits of knowing all the parents who have nothing but praise for our school and its staff. I believe the decision to close this school has not been thought through in any great detail. EVERYONE involved in this decision and EVERYONE if affects knows that there were other options which did not result in the closure of a superb, happy, family school. The nursery situation was definitely not given the thought it needed and even now the future of nurseries in our area is not known. We know we can adapt our school and put in place any change needed to keep our school open. I have every faith in our headteacher and our team of governors and I know that any changes made would be done professionally. The dedicated staff would in turn ensure minimal upset or confusion to children. Any changes to a child's life could be confusing for them but far better to leave them in their safe, secure, stable school environment with their own teachers that they know, respect and TRUST!! Again I feel this needs further thought and discussion and I feel strongly that the children themselves need to be given more consideration as after all "EVERY CHILD MATTERS"!!!

- Feel very strongly that this is not a consultation, we have no alternatives to consult on. The school is a good school as agreed by Ofsted. The local community feel strongly, look at the website and media feedback. The entire process is a disgrace.
 - Gillas Lane was given a "good" rating by Ofsted – Bernard Gilpin wasn't
 - No kitchen facilities at Bernard Gilpin
 - No nursery and we were lied to/misled at the first meeting
 - Class size of 76 is unacceptable
 - Ed Balls school minister said as recently as last week that parents should have a choice
 - How are the children's interests best served.

Comments from others

- As a childminder I have been in contact with the school for 12 years now. The children that have attended the school have had great opportunities. The school has a warm and friendly welcoming atmosphere. It would be a shame for this school to close, as would any school in Houghton.
- Oppose the decision to close.
- Why even consider for closure? I believe it is time the Local Authorities got their act together and tell us the real reason the school is earmarked for closure. It certainly has nothing whatsoever to do with the welfare of the children's education – that's for sure.
 - It doesn't take a genius to work out why the numbers have decreased. Sunderland Council has demolished more properties on the nearby Racecourse Estate – and failed to rebuild, that obviously the school pupil numbers have gone down. Should this be at the expense of our local school education system? Not really!
 - I believe it is the financial problems of Sunderland Council that has created this situation and nothing more.
 - "The school has good capacity to build further on its current success" – "Achievement is Good" – "Excellent" – " Outstanding" – "Gillas Lane is a good school – you are right to feel proud of it" – "Leadership and Management are good" – "The impressive rapport between pupils and staff is at the heart of school life and underpins its success" – extracts from Ofsted report Nov 08. Does this sound like a candidate for closure?
 - Now why not come clean and tell all concerned that it's solely to do with money and without consequence to the children's education – the parents – or indeed the excellence of the Headteacher, her staff and indeed all who have wholeheartedly contributed to the success of Gillas Lane primary.
 - I have no disrespect whatsoever to BG school, but the intended closure of Gillas Lane is the main issue and could prove to be detrimental rather than beneficial to these settled, happy children who are comfortable in the excellent environment in which they are continually proving to thrive.
 - Come on think again – does this school really need to close? In my opinion a totally unfair, unjust proposal and in need of further review before the final decision is reached.
- I agree that closing Gillas Lane school would upset the children who would have to be transferred to a new school with new teachers and children they do not know. The children will get more attention in a smaller class number rather than overcrowding classrooms. Also parents who have to walk to school may have a much longer journey, which is difficult for the younger/nursery children after a day at school.
- I am strongly against closure of Gillas Lane school and nursery. It is a lovely school – well structured, has its own kitchen and plenty of play area. I was a dinner nanny there for 12 years until my retirement and will be so sad to see it close.
- I think it is really terrible if they close the school, whatever happened to the children's education being very important. I don't think they have even been thought of in this matter. This closure needs to be looked into.
- There is room for 2 schools in the area. BG and GL are very different. GL is a small school which has a great family feel, every teacher knows each child's name and background which is a definite positive for the children and parents. BG is also a good school but on a larger scale. I disagree on changing either of them! Keep them both open.
- If they build on Hall Lane Estate, where will the children go?
- I oppose the closure of Gillas Lane school. It has recently been announced that 100 new home development will be built in the area of the Racecourse estate. This being the case then the school should remain open to care for the needs of present and future pupils from the new housing being proposed. It seems nonsensical to close a well performing school when all the data shows that local schools and facilities are of a great benefit to the development of children. Closure of this school would mean children moving school and being integrated to larger class sizes which is not to the best development of children. Please review and reverse your decision.
- So the council plan to make great changes in the education system. NO – they plan to make great financial changes to the detriment of the schools and the pupils involved. What advantages come with the closure of a small, closely knit, good performance school and merging it with one whose performance rating is lower and whose building is totally inadequate. This only serves to enlarge classes thus making it more difficult for teaching staff. I will also mean that more pupils will be "left behind" as they struggle to keep up with those who are more capable. It is obvious from attending the meeting that those involved in making the decision to close Gillas Lane School do not have any contact with the school, its staff, pupils and their families and, quite frankly, give the impression that

they don't care. Surely if financial cuts are necessary there must be other ways of doing it. Please think again.

- I feel closing the school will be detrimental to the education of the children. To move the children, especially those in Foundation, I believe would be extremely upsetting for them. The children are accustomed to small class sizes and benefit from a low pupil to teacher ratio. Their education will surely suffer if the school is to close and the children join a bigger class.
- Small schools are proven to benefit children at primary level. The more such schools available, the better are the chances of establishing literacy and numeracy skills early in the schooling of all children not just those who live in "good" areas.
- I oppose the closure of the school particularly in light of future demographic trends which will result in an increase in the number of nursery and primary school children requiring school places. The proposals of transferring Gillas Lane primary and nursery school children to BG will result in huge class sizes. This will mean that class sizes will exceed the government's recommendations for class sizes. Both local and national labour parties state education is a high priority. The closure of Gillas Lane School does not meet their pledges. Also how will these proposals meet the guarantee of providing nursery school places for all 3 year olds and above. I intend to write to my MP. I find this whole situation a disgrace.
- Following my attendance at a school closure consultation meeting at Gillas Lane Primary on 23 Feb, I am compelled once again to express my growing concerns regarding the future education of the Gillas Lane children, who I feel are not being considered by the council in this matter. After the council representatives were introduced I was astounded by the apparent lack of participation of all but one of these officers, in accounting for the decision to close the school, by not answering or querying any of the questions posed by the parents. I feel that their silence was due to the fact they do not really believe that the option they are promoting, which is to close the school, is the most constructive option for the children. Surely SCC officers cannot really believe, or expect us to believe, that merging pupils to form a larger school with overcrowded classrooms, will be of any benefit to the children and their education what so ever. This is an easy option to alleviate a strain on their current financial educational budget and not a long term beneficial educational option. Much was made of the fact that many homes had been demolished, leaving Gillas Lane school short numbered but future development projections and foreseeable community expansion was skimmed over with unrealistic national statistics quoted for this geographical area. It was also assessed, that due to the unrealistic timescale, it will inevitably include forcing some children into temporary accommodation while they enlarge the BG site or build another school to cater for the inevitable overcrowding.

Apart from taking children away from their friends and from a school where they receive excellent tuition, the outstanding teaching of our children with additional needs at the school was highlighted by many parents throughout the meeting and indeed throughout the whole consultation period, but I have yet to hear or see any consideration or mention of this topic in the council report. In my opinion, this appears to be lack of consideration for this cohort of children leading to the obvious prevention of them reaching their full educational potential. Education departments claim to be "reducing inequalities and promoting equal opportunities for children", but at no time during the consultation period do they seem to have considered how the proposals would affect children with additional needs and mild disabilities.

It also came across that there is now no other option than closure and that there is no more time to explore other avenues, apart from closure.

By closing this school, the council will be taking the heart out of Gillas Lane community where the destruction of this community has been going on quietly for many years and will continue until pretty soon there will be nothing left. How much does the LA actually Houghton-le-Spring as being part of Sunderland? It is much easier to make desperate financial changes to the far reaches of the city, where public outcry is dampened by distance and many of the final decision makers have never even been to, and probably never will.

I feel a reconsideration of other options for this wonderful school is paramount to the future educational welfare of the current and future children living within the Gillas Lane community and a just and appropriate outcome for the combined efforts of the teaching staff and parents alike.

- The school is at the centre of an already decimated community and I feel that closing it would only add to the erosion. I have read the Ofsted reports for both schools involved, and feel that the better of the two is the one chosen to close. Have the "powers that be" considered the children in their plans? Children need stability to mature and grow both physically and intellectually. Uprooting them means that they have to take precious time to resettle. It is a fact that children respond better to smaller classes which enables the teachers to spend more time with each child. It is obvious that the plans are based on finance and not what is best for the children, their families and the community. It is obvious from the comments posted on the website that even the staff oppose the merger. These children are our future and should be given the best opportunities possible. I feel that the proposed merger is not the way to ensure this.
- I consider closing this primary school a mistake, as the education the children receive appears to be of the highest standard. My niece and nephew have gained a lot from the smaller class size of the school rather than having a larger class size meaning they are getting more attention towards educational needs. So children's education has to suffer for financial savings and cutbacks. Also I can't understand how you can justify closing this primary school regarding financial savings considering the smaller classroom sizes are meeting with children's educational needs and if the

school was to close the other options would result in having larger class room sizes. So you would be closing a school with good Ofsted inspection reports, low class room numbers at the heart of a close knit community for financial gain!

- I am a concerned Grandparent. My main concern is that my eldest granddaughter will be moved to Bernard Gilpin in her final year of primary school. I am also aware that this year group will be over capacity by 16 pupils. Surely the council officers are not suggesting that this as well as the upheaval and unfamiliarity would benefit these children especially in their final SAT year. At Gillas Lane she is a member of various before and after school clubs. I am proud that she is so keen to take part in these activities which means she is often at school from 8.00am. and encourages her to lead a much healthier lifestyle. Would BG be able to offer children these activities? What benefit is there to move children from a good performance school to one where some children will be housed in pre-fab classrooms and there will be no nursery provision. I understand there is a new housing estate intended for the area, wouldn't it be better for both schools to delay the decision until development is complete and the actual increased number of children is known. The expected 12 children per 100 family homes is unrealistic in a deprived area, as deprived estates are renowned for larger families.(x2)
- Committee members got children or grandchildren or any kind of related children attending so these decisions affect who just a minority? Kitchen, nursery, class size, regeneration – would appreciate reply on above points as your representatives could not supply answers.
- I am appalled at the prospect of Gillas Lane closing. I worked there for 30 years and have first hand knowledge of the level of commitment of all members of staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to all pupils. Each child was given the utmost support and knowledge to obtain their full potential – academically, socially and morally. The nursery unit is second to none and in the position it is in caters for some of the more vulnerable young children in this area.
- It would be a shame to see the children attend another school.

Comments from staff

- This decision does not take into account the needs of the children. Filling B.G school now does not take into account the re development of the area. Where will future children go? the children at both schools will find it difficult to adjust to a school of over 400 when they are only used to smaller numbers. This includes time on the yard and dinner times. Smaller numbers are surely better. Other schools in Sunderland with more surplus places have had their pan reduced. We should have that option as well.
- Closing Gillas Lane is the worst thing for our community that the council can do. Keep Gillas Lane open, reduce the PAN, wait until the area is rebuilt and people are returning to this area to raise a family then see that we do need 2 primary schools in the area. Trying to teach 30 pupils in a class when some have special needs and social and behaviour problems is surely going to reduce the outcome of children's education and surely this should be a priority. Gillas Lane has just had a fantastic Ofsted report does this not count for anything!!!
- This proposal should not go ahead. It has no advantages for the pupils and staff of either school. Closing Gillas Lane will mean the loss of a good school, children having to move to larger classes and parents having further to take their children to school, as well as the inevitable job losses. BG will need remodelling of site, larger class sizes which will lead to possible management problems for staff not only in class but also supervision at lunchtime. Nursery provision will also be massively affected if closure goes ahead. The wider community would also be affected by increasing traffic levels to the BG site. The only consideration that has been made is one of finance. No-one seems to have taken the views of staff or parents on the consultation into consideration. The children are our priority – it's a pity the council do not feel the same.
- I have been a member of staff for 10 years, and in this time I have seen standards of education and achievement rise year on year, as a result of the hard work and dedication of the team – this includes EVERY member of staff and the children. The children are rewarding and well-behaved, mainly due to the fact that they feel they are part of a family, with family values and high expectations. We know each child and their needs, and so are able to tailor their learning individually. The staff are a close-knit team, and work tirelessly to improve practice, standards and the learning experience for all children. As music co-ordinator I am constantly complimented on the behaviour, dedication and standards of our young musicians and I know that our aesthetic education is excellent. We believe EVERY CHILD MATTERS – does our school place planning team agree?
- As a former pupil, a parent and currently a member of teaching staff, I am appalled at the decision to close Gillas Lane school. The school has for many years been a focal point in the community and a "haven" for many of our children. We live in an environment of high unemployment and deprivation and yet Gillas Lane manages to provide the children in this area with a warm, loving and stimulating environment. Anyone who had attended our Evening of Arts & Culture would have been amazed at the talent shown by our children, the number of proud parents and friends who attended and the fact that former pupils were so eager to support the school with this event. This typified what this small, community school is all about – a place where children achieve well and where their achievements are celebrated. Please consider the impact this decision will have on children whose lives are enriched by this school.

- I feel that all the options have not been looked at properly. This school is a lovely, friendly extension of the family. We have a nursery on site and a kitchen where meals are cooked on site. It would be a great shame to the community if it were to close.
- Money appeared to be the main issue. It didn't look as if anyone had thought of the children's welfare. Initially a nursery was going to be built on BG site, next meeting a nursery might be built, changing goal posts all the time.

Comments from Pupils

- X 20 response forms consisted of drawings/posters to save Gillas Lane.
- X 24 response forms had letters written on them asking the council not to close the school.
- I like my school very much.
- I don't want to go to BG because – people live far away, in a small school you get more help, this is a kind school, my sister might get scared, they don't have a nursery, they don't have a kitchen.
- Gillas Lane is amazing. It is small and cosy. The activities are interesting and fun. I am part of the school council and we help make decisions. We decided about red nose day. We raised two hundred pounds considering we are such a small school, I think we did a good job. I don't want my brothers and sister to be taught in a hut. The teachers always help and comfort us. Teachers give us challenges and the support we need and when we need it. You can talk to the lunchtime staff.
- I like my school because the dinners are scrumptious.(x2)
- I do not want to go to another school because I do not want to leave the teachers and we have grown up in this school. I love this school because the dinners are fresh and fantastic. I do not want to go in a big class. (x4)
- I like this school because I will miss the teachers if we go to a different school and I can walk to school from my home.(x5)
- I like this school because I will miss my teacher and all the teachers. The teachers look after us and keep us safe.
- I don't want to leave this school because I like the teachers and I don't want to leave.
- I like the dinner ladies at dinner time.(x2)

Fourteen pupils also sent copies of letters they had written to the Sunderland Echo expressing their opposition to the proposal

Reception and Year 1 pupils wrote the following letters saying what they like best about their school.

The things we like best about our school

By Reception

We like going down on the bottom yard to play foo ball.

We like playing in the water at our Nursery.

We like going in the sand outdoors at Nursery

We love our teachers.

We like playing with our friends outside.

We love to bake cakes in our kitchen.

We love our hot school dinners.

We like to walk to school with our friends.

Jessica

Maria

Sally

HO

BUFA

David

Clayton

Michael

Sam

Malcolm

AMY

ALEX

LEVI

Dylan

CRIG

Dani

Emily

We are the children of Year 1 at Gillas Lane Primary School we are 5 and 6 years old.

We know our school is special and these are the things we like about it.

We like our literacy and numeracy lessons and all of the hard work we do.

We like being outside because we have very big school grounds.

We like our classrooms because there is lots of room to move around and we have space to do our Art, Design and Technology lessons.

We like our school dinners because they are healthy.

We have lovely teachers and every teacher knows our name.

We have lots of friends who go to our school and we can play with them outside of school.

Lots of the children in Year 1 live next to Gillas Lane School and we can walk to school and walk home again.

We have a lovely library in our school and lots of computers to help us.

Most of us have been in Gillas Lane School since we were in nursery and we love it.

JESSIE
Jude
Leah

ELLIE
Mackenzie

OLLY
ELLEN
ELISE
ANTHONY

Rebecca

BEKHA
Aisha

chantelle

Abbi

THOMAS

JAMIE

Henry

EMMA

BRADLEY

Daniel

Other letters received

FROM COUNCILLOR ROBERT HERON

Gillas Lane Primary and Bernard Gilpin Primary

I would like to express my congratulations to all three educational establishments for the high standard of education and the first class pastoral care.

The catchment area for both schools has in recent years seen about 250 houses demolished and these are to be rebuilt in the coming years. This has had an effect in the number of pupils in the area for both schools. The closure of Gillas Lane would have an effect on nursery provision at Houghton Children's Centre. The numbers of pre-school children at the centre are already at capacity. There is no scope for expansion and the entrance is simply a nightmare with the Children's Centre and the private nursery dropping children off at the same time.

Bernard Gilpin School was built 15 years ago and was built as an inclusion school. There would be extensive alterations to be made to the school. It has no kitchen facilities and the dining hall is too small for the extra number of children who will require lunchtime. Several extra classrooms and storage rooms would also be required. The internal works to the present classrooms would also be required as well as other concerns for the internal and external arrangements.

It should also be taken into consideration new schools have computer room and libraries built into them both schools have used surplus capacity for this purpose. Other uses for spare capacity could include Youth Centre or community facility.

I would also like to thank all of the parents and also everyone who has contributed to the process including the excellent web page.

Gillas Lane Primary

I am writing to you in my capacity of Chair of GLASS (Gillas Lane Action to Support School), an action group devoted to overturning the proposal to close Gillas Lane Primary School.

As you are no doubt aware, 4 individual formal complaints from parents and carers have been submitted to the Council through the Council's published system for dealing with complaints. These relate to the school place planning exercise carried out by Children's Services, in particular the consultation process, the option appraisal process and the decision making process. The fourth complaint relates to the conduct of officers at the consultation meetings in October 2008 and February 2009.

We are aware that Cabinet, at a recent meeting, has already chosen Option 1 (Closure of Gillas Lane) from the option appraisal process to implement. I am seeking confirmation from you that any decision will not be implemented until these complaints have been fully investigated and resolved. As a local authority that has recently retained its 4 stars, we anticipate that these matters will be dealt with fairly and impartially.

We believe that the whole process has been badly flawed and not in compliance with many of the Council's own corporate strategies, policies and procedures. The needs and wishes of the pupils, parents and carers of Gillas Lane pupils have not been considered. These serious concerns and some of the arguments for keeping Gillas Lane Primary School open are described on the website www.savegillaslaneschool.info. Please look at the site for more information.

I look forward to your response.

Gillas Lane Primary

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 has left me, and many others, feeling that the option appraisals had been poorly prepared and selective in their use of information. This has led to the wrong decision being made and will affect my children.

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.

Gillas Lane Primary

I, like many other parents and carers 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 has 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.

Gillas Lane Primary

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 showing 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.

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 the 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.

Gillas Lane Primary

With reference to the above, I would like to express my support for Gillas Lane Primary School in its fight to remain open and also express my gratitude for the many benefits my family has enjoyed by being a part of this excellent school. I now have two Grandchildren who currently attend the school and my family have been a part of Gillas Lane School for many years.

My Grandson, who has a moderate learning and physical disability, is only progressing well due to the high quality of care and tuition he is presently receiving from attending a small well managed and resourced school, where every child receives their entitlement of tuition based at a level that caters for their own individual needs. It is not so very long ago that children with minor learning or physical disabilities, would have had to attend a 'Special School' that catered for children with much greater disabilities. It has since been proven that this cohort of children should not be segregated from their non-disabled peers. The result of a closure of Gillas Lane Primary School will result in taking my Grandson and other children with similar problems, out of an environment that is known to them, one which they feel safe and one in which they can learn and compete with their peers. Moving to a new environment with new teachers, larger classrooms and a different schedule and curriculum could destroy much of the excellent work already carried out and have a marked consequence in their learning for years to come.

The teachers at Gillas Lane School care about their students, the administrative staff are very hands on and involved and many of the parents, including my daughter, who is also a school governor, work incessantly at the school or for the school to make it the truly warm, friendly and professional learning environment that it is.

I have been involved in the educational system for many years and know that this is one of those places that works and gets results. I know that the children from the Gillas Lane area benefit greatly from the high dedication of the staff with additional and enthusiastic assistance by parents who choose to give of their time to keep the school on the right track.

Parents and indeed the children themselves should be allowed to have a voice with the right to be supported fully by any hierarchical system in what they believe is right for the future welfare of the children in their community.

My concerns also focus on the need to look ahead and have regard to projections of future demand for school places. I would ask you to exercise care when doing so, given that this can never be an exact science. Firstly, population projections for a given community or area can fluctuate quite significantly from year to year. Although there may not always be agreement as to the demographic figures, it is very important to look clearly at the population projections relevant to considerations of any school closure proposal.

Also, I feel that the way in which financial considerations and implications are calculated and set out needs to be more absolutely clear to all parties concerned. There may also be real and contentious implications for the local community served by the school, which should be the focus of many of the consultation responses. It is important that proper consideration to all such relevant matters prior to reaching their final decisions is given in full, although the welfare and educational interests of all of the pupils has to be the key consideration.

I hope the answers resulting from the consultation process, in which the points and issues raised are answered, are accessible and offered in full, having been taken seriously and explored fully. In any process where transparency and accountability count for so much it is essential that everyone who has participated in the process get some sort of response or reply beyond just the announcement of a final decision.

Let me conclude by asking you to fully reconsider all aspects of this issue and fully explore all options presented before making any final decisions regarding the Gillas Lane school closure. I hope the decision makers keep in mind that the pupils of Gillas Lane Primary, however young, are every bit as much as staff and parents, key stakeholders in any potential changes to school provision. I suggest that we put them at the forefront of our thinking when considering any alterations to the pattern of educational provision in this community.

The keeping open of Gillas Lane Primary school should be predominant and not the opposite.

Gillas Lane Primary

I refer to the above matter and write to express my grave concerns regarding the same. The school, as it stands at present, is the heart of the community in the area it is situated. A closure would have a dire effect upon the whole community, which, in my view, is being slowly eroded by beurocratic decisions made outside of the area by people who appear to have no real and genuine community interest in the area or in the children.

The proposed closure has been and remains vehemently opposed by a great number of the community including, but not exclusively, parents and families of the children, who will lose a much loved and valuable asset to the educational establishment in the local area. This was evident by the overwhelming show of interest at the recent meeting held at the school on Monday 23rd February 2009. During the said meeting a lot of extremely relevant points were raised, including one particular pertinent question "*Please give us one positive for the children currently attending the school*". This was met with silence! Neither myself, any of the other local people or indeed the panel present at the meeting can see any clear positive advantage for the children of the school through the mists of "financial savings and cut backs".

I respectfully submit that the most important reasons for the school remaining open are being overlooked by policy and decision makers. It is my contention that the level of education both to children who manage their educational needs and to those who require extra assistance will drastically reduce as a result of a number of factors, most of all larger class numbers (resulting in more pupils per teacher), open plan building layout etc. etc. At present, the class numbers are easily and well managed by the teaching staff at the school with the children receiving the assistance and level of teaching they require regardless of their learning ability. A move to Bernard Gilpin would clearly jeopardise this educational management and therefore reduce the level of education attained by the attending children. Primary schools are an important stepping stone, not only within the educational sphere but also to prepare the children for later life. An efficient and effective primary school education goes a long way in shaping the individual child, who will hopefully mature into an upstanding and law abiding member of society.

In the current climate, I feel that it is hugely important to INVEST in education, not to cut back. I would argue that a great deal of the sociological problems faced within the community, especially relating to anti social behaviour involving young people stem from a lack of support, interest or engagement at an educational level. The school is achieving extremely well and routinely produces good results. One only needs to consider the very recent (19th/20th November 2008) Ofsted inspection reports prepared pursuant to section 5 of the Education Act 2005 regarding the two schools (link to Gillas Lane Ofsted report document) (link to Bernard Gilpin Ofsted report document).

Within the preambles and introductions it is clearly stated:-

(Gillas Lane Primary School)

“The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are above average”.

Surely this alone must have a far reaching effect on the potential catastrophic decision of merging a school of this nature with a school [Bernard Gilpin] described as follows:

“The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly speech and/or communication problems, is above average for the size of the school”.

Merging two schools with above average levels of children with learning difficulties will, I respectfully submit, dilute the levels of attention and specific teaching they receive at present as the pupils could fade into the larger class sizes and important learning difficulties could be missed or overlooked. The table below at appendix 1 shows the grades attained by each school following their respective inspections, these inspections being carried out recently, within a short time frame of each other and more importantly within the consultation period for closure.

The report [re Gillas Lane] shows that this school attained a **Grade 2 (GOOD)** in overall effectiveness whereas Bernard Gilpin attained a **Grade 3 (SATISFACTORY)**, this clearly being a lower grade to Gillas Lane. Why close an overall more effective school over a less effective school? This cannot be in consideration of the best interests of the children, which one would argue remains paramount, and in fact a duty to not only the Local Authority but to the community as a whole.

When considering and comparing the two reports it is a clear and common thread that Gillas Lane School is a better achiever with more “good” grades attained than “satisfactory”. Again, the table shown below outlines, within the guidelines of core competencies, the grades attained by each school. This is a point I have laboured slightly but one which is an extremely important factor. As a tax payer, I whole heartedly agreed that financial analysis is important and money needs to be saved wherever possible. Consideration of the table below is, in my view clear evidence of the high level of achievements of Gillas Lane Primary School. I am more than happy to pay towards the upkeep and running of a school of this nature, which shows a consistent and thorough approach to the education of its pupils.

The table clearly shows that the proposed school to close was assessed in all but one of the categories as “Good” whereas the proposed school with which it will merge attained only two “Good” grades, with the remainder being “Satisfactory”. Surely these inspections are carried out for a very valid reason and the results of the same are an important factor to be considered prior to any decisions being made. I would therefore contend that the situation as a whole has not been fully considered and that further consideration is required in relation to this aspect alone.

It is reported that a statistical analysis has been considered regarding the recent demolished Holly Avenue, Windsor Crescent etc. The statistics reported are at best unrepresentative of the actual situation. The area cannot remain undeveloped and at some stage building is to commence to provide more affordable / housing association housing. With this will inevitably come larger numbers of children than expected. To close Gillas Lane School at this stage and without a clear view or forecast as to the number of families to be housed would be commercially unsafe. As families return to the area any local feeder school will undoubtedly become overcrowded or school lists will be closed, again having an adverse effect upon the community as families need to travel farther afield for education. To close Gillas Lane Primary at this stage will be a loss of an extremely valuable resource.

In essence, I feel that the situation as a whole has not been fully considered and this was clear throughout the recent meeting. The position needs to be considered more carefully with more deliberation and consultation over the wider and more diverse catastrophic sociological effect closure of this school could have as well as the BEST INTERESTS and WELFARE of the children involved. They are now pawns in a financial strategy but valuable and respected members of a community, which is already being slowly dissolved. Their needs and requirements need to be raised within the "list" of objectives and outcomes in this particular consultation as I feel that these considerations rank some way down the list and certainly below less important considerations.

I wholly support the retention of the school and am aware that my feelings are mirrored by the majority of the local community who are passionate about and very much want what is best for the children at the school. I trust that my concerns and observations will be given due consideration within this consultation, the outcome of which will have a profound effect upon not only the pupils but also the wider community as a whole.

Appendix 1

	Gillas Lane Grade Attained	Bernard Gilpin Grade Attained
Overall effectiveness of the school	Good (2)	Satisfactory (3)
Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	Satisfactory (3)	Good (2)
Achievement and standards	Good (2)	Satisfactory (3)
Personal development and well-being	Good (2)	Good (2)
Quality of provision Teaching and learning	Good (2)	Satisfactory (3)
Curriculum and other activities	Good (2)	Satisfactory (3)
Care, guidance and support	Good (2)	Satisfactory (3)
Leadership and management	Good (2)	Satisfactory (3)

6

The Willows
54 Coptleigh
Houghton Le Spring
Tyne & Wear
DH5 8JE

Director of Childrens Services
Sunderland City Council
PO Box 101
Civic Centre
Sunderland
SR2 7DN



18th May 2009

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to object strongly to the closure of Gillas Lane Primary School. I feel extremely let down by the officers involved in School place planning and I truly feel they have not conducted the exercise fairly or thoroughly. There are so many issues I have with the process, I've listed them below;

Parental Choice

Val Thompson has told parents at Gillas Lane that many children who attend this school actually live nearer to Bernard Gilpin and vice versa. This supports our argument that parental choice is very important, we have two popular schools in the area but they are very different. Over 150 families have chosen Gillas Lane as their preferred school and if it closes you will deprive parents of choice. I am appalled that officers disrespect our choice!

Lack of Consultation

I find it laughable that it was called a consultation, many parents asked many questions yet few answers were given. We were told to put our questions on a response form, yet answers to our questions still have never been received.

Over 200 Response Forms

Already over 200 people have shown that they are against the closure of Gillas Lane. Does this mean nothing to you? You obviously feel our opinions are worthless.

Education

My children's education is obviously very important to me and in the latest OFSTED report, Gillas Lane was rated overall as a GOOD school yet Bernard Gilpin was rated as satisfactory. I do not wish to appear as if I'm comparing the schools but my main fear is that if Bernard Gilpin is satisfactory at the moment the standard will slip whilst the transition period takes place. I think this will be detrimental to both children from Gillas Lane and Bernard Gilpin and I really don't think it's fair on our childrens education. I also would like to comment on the fact that in the whole school place planning exercise Education was never mentioned, again I find this very disrespectful.

Wrong Information/ Nursery Provision

In the initial consultation in October 2008 parents were clearly advised that a new nursery would be built at Bernard Gilpin yet in the second consultaion this was retracted by Val Thompson. We asked what the plans were with regards to the nursery yet no plan was in place. How can you decide to close a school and nursery when you haven't thought it through properly! Parents were in disbelief as officers could not tell us about the nursery provision. This is a vital part of the consultation and I felt that due to the misinformation we had been given initially the whole process should have been done again once they had solid facts as to what was happening.

Scrutiny Meeting

Gillas Lane parents were in attendance at the Scrutiny meeting on the 12th March. Members of the scrutiny committee seemed to be concerned at the lack of consultation and expressed that they wished their concerns to be noted. Why has nobody from the council listened to these concerns?

Other Viable Option for Gillas Lane

We have expressed from day one that we understand surplus places are a problem but we are certain we can solve this problem by reducing the PAN at both Bernard Gilpin and Gillas Lane. Val Thompson admitted in the consultation meeting in February that not enough thought had been put into this option. I feel that officers have not done their jobs properly. Every option should have been investigated thoroughly before they were discarded and I know for a fact they were not! If you had listened to parents and carers in your consultation you would have heard that we wanted option 3 not the closure.

Increasing Birth Rate/ Housing Developments

There are many various sites around the Houghton Le Spring area which have plans for housing developments yet they have not been looked into properly by the officers. Also it has been well publicised lately about the significant increase in births from 2002. If Gillas Lane is closed and Bernard Gilpin is almost full what is the back up plan if you need more school places in the foreseeable future? Build a new school?

If you could acknowledge my objections I would be very grateful.

Yours sincerely



Janine Johnson
Parent



Mr. Steven Johnson
The Willows
54 Coptleigh
Houghton-le-Spring
Tyne and Wear
DH5 8JE

15th June 2009

Director of Children's Services
PO Box 101
Sunderland City Council
Civic Centre
Sunderland
SR2 7DN

Dear Sir or Madam,

I have a son who is a year 1 pupil at Gillas Lane Primary School with another daughter who will start at the nursery in September 2009. I am alarmed to hear that the local authority plans to close the school that I have chosen for my children especially as I have no faith in the process that has led to this decision.

I write this letter not only as a parent but also as a director of a company based in Sunderland. I have used my business background when reviewing the officer's reports and have to say that in my opinion the whole process has been poorly executed at best and unprofessional and shoddy at worst.

I have a number of objections to the proposed closure of Gillas Lane Primary School. Whilst I have many more concerns I will outline what I believe to be the most pertinent in the following pages:

1 - Lack of Balance within the Executive Summary

The executive summary sheet issued to the cabinet on which to base their decision was one sided and did not give a balanced view of the situation. The summary was not a summary but a conclusion instructing the cabinet which proposal to select. There were no details given that would be seen as negative towards option 1 the officer's recommended choice.

Whilst the detailed information was included in the full report this amounted to some 2 inches of documentation. It would be unreasonable to expect the majority of cabinet members to read the full report and even if they did it would be mostly meaningless without someone to interpret it for them.

I have detailed some examples of important information relating to synopsis points below that was not brought to the cabinet's attention. The list is by no means exhaustive.

Buildings – The officers only mention repair costs. But there are other building issues; the classroom dimensions for Bernard Gilpin are smaller than if it was a new school built today – so 30 children in a classroom is a squeeze.

Previous actions – The officers fail to mention that the library and ICT suite at Bernard Gilpin that was developed when previous capacity was removed will be lost to form class rooms when the schools merge

Alternative use for surplus – The officers say 'no evidence'. Yet their own appendices mention Gillas lane's need for a sick room and parent/community room, Gillas lane would like a separate ICT suite, separate library or a cookery classroom.

Further more Gillas Lane nursery is a separate building which could be easily converted for alternative use (local councillors have proposed a community centre) and the nursery could be brought within the main school.

Bernard Gilpin requires a kitchen – why not build it within the existing building. As the existing Bernard Gilpin classrooms are small, why not enlarge some of them or create a space for drama classes or the like which are currently difficult to teach in the cramped classrooms.

Cross cluster issues – The councillors say there are none.

However in other areas of Sunderland they discuss traffic, various comments are noted of existing congestion around Bernard Gilpin, with another 134 children attending, the number of cars is going to increase, and yet only a few years ago speed humps were introduced on the main access route for safety reasons.

There was a development for 111 homes already planned by Gentoo, but officers say this will only increase the pupil numbers by 12, this seems very low. With the amount of development land in the area caused by the recent demolition's surely some future flexibility needs to be retained in case of further building works. Since the writing of the officer's report these figures have already been updated to over 200 houses with a possibility of a further 100.

Class sizes – officers note that concerns were expressed. They fail to point out that, even after cramming 30 children into an undersized classroom and spending £750,000.00 (half as much again as any other school in the area) some year groups still don't fit, a possible solution to this problem proposed by the officers was to house some children in Portacabins.

Competition – Officers say that option 1 & 2 achieve the same end result. If a valid argument for closing Gillas lane was made, then the resulting combined school under option 2 would have a mixture of Gillas lane and Bernard Gilpin teachers, all the new pupils would see some familiar faces and joint ownership of the school would be more likely. This statement shows how the officers clearly do not consider the impact of children when making their recommendations.

2 - Lack of Detailed Costing of proposals

As a business man I was horrified to find out that the proposals were considered and decisions made without first carrying out a detailed cost analysis of each of the options 1 to 3. There have only ever been 2 figures discussed. The saving due to closure of Gillas Lane would be £150,000.00 per annum. The cost to carry out the modifications to Bernard Gilpin would £750,000.00

We have been told that the officer's plan covers 5 years – that's all the data they have and therefore that's as long as they can plan for – Gillas Lane's closure saves £150,000.00 a year, Bernard Gilpin's conversion costs £750,000.00 a net saving of zero over those 5 years.

However this massive cost does not include redundancy payment to all the Gillas Lane teachers, or the demolition of the existing school and security of the obsolete site. The site is unlikely to sell easily as there is a lot of development land in the area and the playing fields are protected so it will not be a particularly viable development.

If the projections are incorrect and Gillas Lane School has been closed then all future school place flexibility has been removed from the local area so if the pupil numbers do increase it's going to cost £5.75 million for a new school.

Recently we have been provided with the officers costing following a request under the freedom of information act. I had expected to see a spread sheet detailing every cost involved as a line item for each option. The actual information was incomplete, inaccurate and full of statements such as 'I estimate this could be, all things considered, up to £500k'.

The cost for option 1 has glaring omissions such as demolition costs, Redundancy costs, ongoing site management costs this oversight obviously makes this look a more viable option.

The cost for moving the nursery into the main building has obviously been 'worked up' in order to make this look less viable; for some reason a classroom that currently holds 4 to 5 year olds would require a complete refurbishment of all internal finishes (walls,

floors, ceilings, door and windows) in order to house 3 to 4 year olds. Not only this but for some reason the cost of carrying out this work to 2 classrooms has been included.

A cost of £20,000.00 for demolition of the nursery and £30,000.00 for asbestos removal was included to remove the 1 room nursery, even though it was proposed to 'sell off' this asset as a community centre. If it is going to cost £50,000.00 to remove 1 free standing classroom then to demolish the whole school for option 1 would involve 7 classrooms, a school hall, a kitchen and offices, scaling this figure up even by a factor of 5 is another £250,000.00 making the Bernard Gilpin development now cost over a million pounds.

To then add further strength to their case they suggest that moving the nursery into the school may make them consider a major refurbishment of the entire school which may cost 'in their opinion' up to £500,000.00, a little strange as their previous document states that there are £100,000.00 worth of outstanding repairs required to bring Gillas Lane up to scratch.

3 – No Consideration of Education levels

Again I was shocked when told that the officers don't consider education levels. We are told that money is not the driving force; if education standards are not considered either I am somewhat at a loss as to why the process is being carried out.

Surely education of our children, who are the future of our region, is the most important item. When asked at the consultation meeting 'to give 1 educational benefit for a Gillas Lane pupil when moving to Bernard Gilpin' the reply was – 'they will finish their education'.

Gillas Lane is high on the councils ranking list for deprivation and yet it is in the top 10% of schools. In its latest Ofsted report it received an overall rating of 2 – Good, with an outstanding mark for how the children enjoyed their schooling.

Bernard Gilpin received an overall rating of 3 – satisfactory, with some concerns raised about staff absenteeism levels.

The governments Statutory Guidance states that the removal of surplus places should always support the core agenda of raising standards

4 – Lack of Answers to Questions during Consultation

The entire consultation process has been ineffective from start to finish and has appeared to be a tick box exercise with parents and other interested parties treated with contempt.

Whilst there were many faults with the entire process I would like to highlight this one in particular.

Anything but the most obvious question has been fielded with the 'put it on a response form' however the response forms or letters were not acknowledged individually to answer the questions. Therefore no answers have been given to any questions that could not be answered during the meeting.

Needless to say due to this any searching question has now become lost in a 2 inch thick appendix attached to the rear of the report. Even if the cabinet members did read the question, due to the fact that there are no answers attached the point is effectively lost anyway.

Conclusion

I would suggest that the current decision to close Gillas Lane School be immediately overturned and would urge the local authority to work with the local community and all stakeholders to formulate a plan to implement option 3.

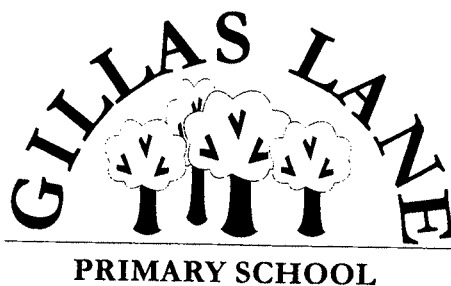
I believe everyone associated with Gillas Lane understands that the PAN must be reduced and are more than happy to work with the local authority to achieve a more sensible end result.

Surely Gillas Lane should be held up as a shining example of all that's good in Sunderland's schools and not closed due to an unfair and badly thought through recommendation.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Johnson', written in a cursive style.

Mr. Steven Johnson



PRIMARY SCHOOL

Seaton Avenue, Houghton, DH5 8EH. Telephone (0191) 553 6517. Fax 0191 553 6518
Head Teacher: Mrs T. Hambleton

10th June 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Objection to closure of Gillas Lane Primary School

All governors from Gillas Lane primary school are absolutely against the proposed closure. The school has recently been given a good OFSTED inspection report and comments were made in the document regarding the outstanding relationship between staff and pupils. Gillas Lane is a wonderful small school where all pupils feel safe and happy. The care the children receive is first class! Many parents have chosen Gillas Lane because it is a smaller school and they know their children will get the support and attention they need and deserve. Closing Gillas Lane will deprive parents of 'choice'.

Overall governors were very dissatisfied with the consultation process due to the lack of consulting which took place. Many questions were put to officers yet few answers were given and this caused frustration and anger amongst staff, governors and parents.

During the consultation process there was no attempt by officers to contact hard to reach parents, pupils or local residents to find out their thoughts on the closure. It was parent governors who distributed consultation forms to the local area as officers only brought these forms to the meetings at the school.

Reducing the PAN at Gillas Lane is the only option we wish to consider and governors from the school would be more than happy to work closely with the officers to achieve this. We believe that the nursery unit could be brought into the main building and the nursery building could be transformed and used as a community centre.

Reducing surplus places in the school is possible! We strongly believe that the school can reduce it's PAN yet still be very effective. The head teacher and the teaching staff are confident that they can manage the school with the PAN reduced and governors have every faith that they will be successful.

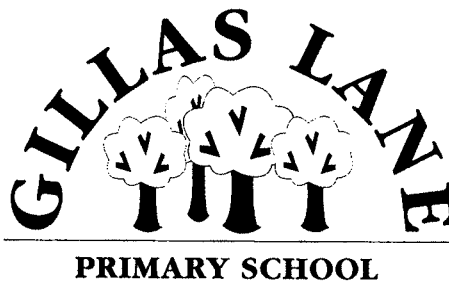
We would be very grateful if you could send an acknowledgement to this letter of objection.

Yours faithfully

Albert Anderson
Chair of Governors



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



9

Seaton Avenue, Houghton, DH5 8EH

Telephone: (0191) 553 6517 Fax: (0191) 553 6518 Email: gillas.lane.primary@schools.sunderland.gov.uk
Head Teacher: Mrs T. Hambleton

15th June 2009

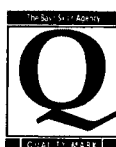
Dear Sir/Madam

As Head teacher of Gillas Lane Primary School I am strongly against the closure of Gillas Lane Primary School and would like to again reiterate my objections to the closure as follows.

Gillas Lane Primary is a good school with nursery provision which serves its community well. Parents choose our school because of the good quality of provision, standards and outstanding levels of support and care it gives to all of its pupils. Standards in our school are good and the fact that we have falling roles has not been detrimental to the standards nor to the quality of provision we give to our pupils. Bigger schools are not always best and indeed it has been reported by Ofsted that in National curriculum tests a higher proportion of pupils achieve level 2 and level 4. We provide outstanding levels of support and care for our children and these were commented upon by Ofsted. Well being, care and support are, I know, the entitlement of all children and an important part of Every Child Matters; the principles of which I know the LA seeks to adhere to. I do feel, however, that they are particularly important to the children of Gillas Lane which is a school that serves an area of high deprivation and a significant proportion of our children have emotional and behavioural difficulties and many present barriers to learning which we work hard to overcome. The outstanding levels of care and support we give our children and the way we address their well being is primarily as a result of the size of the school and the fact that we know every individual child's and family's needs so well. The high level of knowledge we have and the levels of support and care we provide would be much harder to replicate in a larger school.

Gillas Lane has a nursery attached to the school and this is also an important reason why parents choose our school. The benefits of having nursery children on site can not be underestimated (e.g. transition for nursery pupils are known by school staff and transition to Reception is eased because of this, resources are shared, all staff are aware of starting points of children and know the expectations as they move through school).

In making Bernard Gilpin School the receiving school for Gillas lane' children I think that our pupils are not being treated fairly. If the closure goes ahead

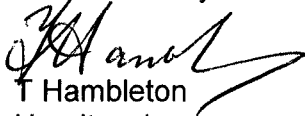


INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Gillas Lane pupils would be received into Bernard Gilpin School making it a school of approximately 420 children. Whilst we are told that Bernard Gilpin School was built as a two form entry school and has the capacity to take our children we equally know that the rooms are extremely small, classes will be packed to capacity and other vital rooms such as may have to be put out of action to accommodate extra children. Using an existing school(with minor adjustments) to hold what was two schools could also not replicate the facilities and resources of two separate schools. The joining of the two schools in such a way means that both schools are being treated unfairly and differently than all other schools in the city. Gillas Lane is not even being amalgamated with Bernard Gilpin, which would have been a better option than a straight forward closure. Had this option been chosen then there would have been a new identity for the school, which would have been better for all of Gillas Lane pupils and also would have seen some parity of care and fairness for staff in both schools. Where other closures are to take place in the future, we are told that 'state of the art' schools will be built. In accommodating our pupils and Bernard Gilpin pupils in such a way I also would question the educational benefits there would be, not only for our pupils but also those at Bernard Gilpin.

At this late stage I would still like the LA to consider option 3 as a viable option for our school. At present we have spare capacity and I would ask the LA to look at how, with some adjustments, an Early Years Unit could be formed and spare capacity could be used for the benefit of the community and/or for the benefit of LA services.

Yours faithfully


T Hambleton
Headteacher