Cyngor Cymuned Cilybebyll
Cilybebyll Community Council

Minutes of the Special Meeting of Council held Remotely via *Zoom*, on Monday 23 November 2020 at 7:15 pm

Presiding Councillor S Williams

Present Councillors S Atkins, A Melen, D Jones, C Jones, Y James, I Jones

Apologies Councillors R Lewis, M Spooner, L Rees, E Hastings, A Threlfall, D Atkins

92 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Y James, A Melen and C Jones declarations an interest due to being Governors of Alltwen Primary School. RESOLVED.

93 PROPOSAL FOR NEW ENGLISH-MEDIUM PRIMARY SCHOOL IN PONTARDAWE TO REPLACE ALLTWEN, GODRE'R GRAIG AND LLANGIWG PRIMARY SCHOOLS

a. Alltwen Community Centre:

Cllr Y James gave an overview of the meeting the school governors had with Paul Hinder, NPTCBC. She explained that he is completing an impact assessment. Information he will need from the Community Council includes a timetable for Alltwen Community Centre. This is needed to ascertain if after school clubs, baby/nursey groups etc could be held in the Community Centre in place of the school as it is the only space large enough to accommodate the children. The school have already given Paul a list of current activities.

Cllr Y James went on to explain that any activities to be run in the Alltwen Community Centre in place of the school would mean that upgrades/changes would need to be made to the set-up of the Community Centre as it would have to be set up for 0-11 age groups. Toilets would need upgrading and rooms would need to be set aside for the school use only. This would not be a great option as it could deter other groups from being able to use the centre as there would be less general space to hire out. The cost of the changes needed would also be a concern.

Cllr S Atkins stated that the loss of after school clubs from school buildings would not be good as people would be less likely to use an after school club if they had to leave the school and travel to the Community Centre. She also highlighted the importance of early intervention and early-years education which could be negatively affected under these circumstances.

It was stated that 'Hoots' previously held some events at St Johns but there was a low take up as they had to travel to St Johns from the school. Currently, as the group runs from the school itself, there is a large take up thus showing that clubs don't always work outside of school.

Cllr S Atkins stated that many of the after-school club volunteers are often parents or grandparents of the school children. She felt that this wouldn't work as effectively in a 'super-school'.

Clerk will set up meeting with Paul Hinder and Cllrs A Melen and Y James for the middle of December to discuss further. RESOLVED noted.

b. Impact on Welsh Language:
Cllr Y James stated that the impact on the Welsh language had been discussed in the governors meeting with Paul Hinder. It was stated that lots of parents of children in Trebannws School only send their children there due to convenience (not because it is a Welsh-medium school). Concerns were raised as to whether seeing a shiny new school in Pontardawe would tempt these parents into moving their children from Trebannws to the new school, thus moving their child/ren from a Welsh-medium school to an English-medium school.

Chair stated that there could be a wider impact which could include Ysgolion Cymraeg Pontardawe and Gwaun Cae Gurwen as parents may feel that the facilities at the proposed new school would be better. It was stated that NPTCBC are required to encourage Welsh Language education in line with Welsh Government guidelines.

It was stated that 25% of current staff across the 3 schools are Welsh speakers, but there has not been any statement as to whether or not all of these staff will have jobs in the proposed new school. Members would like clarification on this.

c. Impact on Rhos Primary School:
Concerns were raised as to the effect of a new school in Pontardawe on Rhos Primary School. Members were concerned as to the possibility of parents from Rhos wanting to send their children to a new school, with better facilities in Pontardawe. This could potentially affect numbers in Rhos Primary School. Members believed that the staff of Rhos Primary School should be consulted on this matter.

Cllr C Jones stated that if new houses are to be built in Rhos, then Rhos Primary will reach capacity quickly. Residents from Rhos would have no option but to send their children to the new 'super-school' if Alltwen Primary was closed, which would mean that the 'super-school' would then need to become even bigger to accommodate the extra children.

d. Travel, traffic and infrastructure:
Members had grave concerns as to the amount of new traffic that would be caused by a new 600+ pupil Primary School next to Cwmtawe Community School. It was stated that the traffic leading all the way from the school to the roundabouts (in Pontardawe, Alltwen and on the bypass A4067) is currently gridlocked every morning and afternoon due to Cwmtawe Community School and the re-location of Godre'r Graig Primary. Members felt that adding more pupils will create an even larger traffic problem and be dangerous for children walking

to school. It was mentioned that a child had been knocked down by a motorist recently in this area.

Members had concerns with regards to young children walking down to Pontardawe from Alltwen to school every day – they felt that the current walkways were not safe or sufficient.
It was also stated that there is no statutory transport service available for nursery children, so it would be very difficult for children from Llangiwg and Godre'r Graig to walk to school.

e. Suitability of proposed site:
Members had concerns with regards to the suitability of the proposed site due to the fact that it is contaminated land. It was also stated that part of the land is not owned by NPTCBC, but a trust. This would mean that NPTCBC would have to take over the land from the trust.

Another issue mentioned by Cllr Y James was that the council do not know the size of plot needed as plans are yet to be designed.

f. Impact on Villages:
The potential impact on the 3 villages in question concerned Members. It was stated that Alltwen could become a domicile village for Pontardawe and could lose its identity as a village in its own right. It could also have an impact on the community feel of the village and its relations with Rhos, Gellinudd, Cilybebyll and Fforest Goch as Alltwen could be seen as an extension of Pontardawe. Cllr A Melen felt that Alltwen and Rhos could feel 'divorced' because of this. It was stated that schools play an important part in village life and help to create a community feel.

It was also stated that the loss of a school in Alltwen could affect businesses within Alltwen such as Alltwen Stores as many parents pop into the shop before or after picking up (or dropping off) their children from school. If the shop was lost due to this proposed project, then this would have an even greater impact on the village and community of Alltwen.

g. New facilities:
A few Members stated that new, up-to-date, modern school facilities for local children could be good but the Chair, Cllrs I Jones and D Jones felt that the addition of a new swimming pool was merely a 'sweetener'. Cllr Y James stated that due to the contaminated land in question, the building of a swimming pool on the proposed site would be a difficult task due to the depth required.

Cllr E Hastings stated in her apology for absence email that she sees the benefits of the proposed plans, as the new facilities would be great for the local children.

h. Other options:
Chair stated that of the 6 options, there were no reasons given as to why the other options were not preferable. She would like clarification on this.

Cllr C Jones stated that Alltwen Primary School is the largest of the 3 schools within this plan. He stated that he had spoken to the head-teacher of the school and that he had stated that the provision for children with additional learning needs was not sufficient in the proposed new school. He said that 16 places were insufficient for the needs of Alltwen Primary School, let alone another two schools in addition. 25-30 places would be required at minimum. Cllr C Jones suggested keeping Alltwen School the way it is currently but that an additional building be built within the grounds to house a unit specifically designed for children with additional learning needs. Chair stated that she had heard that there would be no room within the grounds for a new building, but Cllr C Jones disagreed with this. Cllr A Melen stated that there had been plans for a new community canteen building on the site in the past but the project never materialised.

i. Cost & Size of Proposed New School:

Cllr I Jones highlighted the need for a balance between old and new. He felt that the figures stated in order to get the three current schools up to scratch were not large sums of money compared to the building of a new school. He agreed that a new facility could be added to Alltwen School and that the cost of doing this would be lower than the proposed new school.

Cllr D Jones and Chair had concerns regarding the size of the proposed new school, stating that 600+ children in a 'super-school' may not receive the same nurturing as children in a smaller village school. Cllr D Jones felt that a large primary school could feel impersonal whereas this can work for comprehensive schools as the children there are older. He showed concern for the children's welfare and wellbeing in a large school. Young children could be intimidated by the size of the 'super' primary school and the number of children there. Chair stated that it can be intimidating to move to a large school at 11 years old, let alone at 4 years old.

j. General Comments:

Cllr D Jones stated that he felt that NPTCBC may have used the closure of Godre'r Graig School to push ahead with this project thus affecting 3 primary schools. He stated that the issue with the quarry tip in Godre'r Graig should be further investigated. If the tip is a danger, then the houses and residents would also be at risk. He felt that NPTCBC should be taking action on this to protect residents, as a relatively small investment could rectify this issue and thus re-instate the school. This would mean that there would be no need for a new 'super-school'.

Cllr I Jones stated that post-covid times could mean that large schools would be harder to manage during a pandemic and thus, small schools would be preferable. He stated that in France, they are creating smaller centres outside big cities in order to cater for more home-working and education needs in case of a pandemic. This shows the need for more localised facilities in order to build resilience into communities. A large school would therefore go against this thinking.

It was stated that Alltwen Primary School is involved with many aspects and events within the community including the Community Garden, Remembrance Sunday, Christmas events etc. The loss of the school would mean that these children could miss out on these opportunities.

It was stated that with regards to the proposed swimming pool, that no more allocation would be given to the pupils than is currently given to the 3 separate primary schools, therefore the pool would be of no more benefit to the pupils than the Pontardawe Swimming Pool currently. The point was made that schools are for education, not for swimming. It was also stated that due to the contaminated land, the swimming pool section of the project could be scrapped.

It was stated that there will be a significant investment in IT in the proposed new school. Cllr A Melen asked the question why this couldn't instead be invested into the 3 primary schools to bring them up to date.

It was stated that there was nothing mentioned in the consultation document to state what would happen to the 'old' schools if the new one was built. Members would like clarification on this.

Chair suggested that there should have been 3 separate consultations for this project – one for each school involved.

Cllr A Melen stated that the timing of this consultation is questionable as due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns, no public meetings have been able to take place which is disadvantageous as it is difficult to gauge public feeling on this. She stated that lots of people are also pre-occupied with Christmas and feels that the people affected haven't had a proper voice on this matter.

Cllr Y James stated that this was an initial consultation for comments and that the official consultation would be carried out in April 2021. Therefore, comments from parents, residents and council would again have to be submitted in April 2021.

The meeting ended at 8:20pm.

Signed Dated 01 December 2020