



Please ask for : Peter Burrell
Tel : 01604-237417
Our Ref :
Your Ref :
Date : 30/08/2006

Mr Brian Cooper
Chair Parklands Residents' Association
33 Stowe Walk
Northampton
NN3 6EE

Dear Mr Cooper

**Consultation on Sale of School Playing Fields at Northampton School for Girls
East Site (formerly Parklands Middle School)**

Thank you for the letter, which your previous chair, Mr Ken Dowsett, sent to Lynn Hodgkiss on 16th March on behalf of the residents of the Parklands community regarding the proposed sale of the Northampton School for Girls (NSG) East site (formerly Parklands Middle School).

I acknowledge that there has been some delay in replying but it was necessary so that the response could be as comprehensive as possible.

With reference to the reasons for objection outlined in the conclusion of your letter, I would like to respond as follows:

'The consultation undertaken by Northamptonshire County Council in respect of the disposal of NSG East has not satisfied the guidance contained in DfE-1017-2004: The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for Academies'

Paragraphs 64 and 85 of the guidance contained in DfE-1017-2004: The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for Academies states that the Secretary of State expects the applicant (the County Council) to consult and take into account the views of the following:

- The headteacher, governing body, teachers and parents of pupils attending the school where the disposal or change of use is to take place

A letter was sent by Northampton Schools for Girls on behalf of Northamptonshire County Council to parents of all pupils attending the school inviting comments on the proposed disposal. A separate letter was also sent seeking the views of the headteacher, teachers and governing body of Northampton School for Girls.

Children & Young People's Service,
PO Box 216, John Dryden House,
8 - 10 The Lakes, Bedford Road,
Northampton NN4 7DD
w.
t. 01604 - 237417
f. 01604 - 237532
e. pburrell@northamptonshire.gov.uk



- The headteacher and governing body of other schools in the local area that do not have access to at least the minimum amount of team game playing field set out in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 where the proposed disposal would result in the loss of land capable of being used at least a small sports pitch

A letter was sent to all local schools, even if the school had more than the minimum amount of team game playing field, seeking the views of the headteacher and the governing body. Local schools are defined as all primary schools within ½ mile radius of the proposed disposal site and all secondary schools and special schools within 1 mile radius of the proposed disposal site. The local schools consulted were as follows:

- Parklands Primary School
- Thomas Becket Catholic School
- Kingsthorpe Community College
- Raeburn School
- Kings Meadow School

The County Council has also offered to meet with the headteacher and governing body of schools who have raised concerns or requested further information on the Northampton Schools Reorganisation and the proposed disposal of land at the NSG East (former Parklands Middle School) site.

- The headteacher and governing body of other schools that share a campus or common border with the proposed disposal

There are no other schools which share a campus or common border with the proposed disposal site.

- Any group or organisation with permission to use the playing field

There is no group or organisation with permission to currently use the playing field.

(The County Council has also commented on the reason for objection regarding community use of the NSG East (former Parklands Middle School) site later in this response.)

- The local community generally

Northamptonshire County Council printed a public notice in both the Northampton Mercury and the Northampton Chronicle and Echo on 15th December 2005 inviting comments from the general public. The deadline for consultation was 17th March 2006 which accords with the DfES recommended consultation period of 10 term-time weeks. Newspaper notices are referred to in paragraph 85 of the guidance contained in DfE-1017-2004: The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for Academies as an accepted form of consultation with the local community.

As you will remember NCC managers, together with the cabinet member for the Children and Young People's Service attended a meeting with your organisation on 28/02/06.

- Any minor authority in whose area the playing fields are situated.

It is noted that Parklands does not have a Parish Council. Northamptonshire County Council has, however, consulted with Northampton Borough Council specifically about the proposed disposal of the NSG East (former Parklands Middle School) site.

It is therefore considered that the consultation undertaken by Northamptonshire County Council in respect of the disposal of land at the NSG East (former Parklands Middle School) site does satisfy all the guidance contained in DfE-1017-2004: The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for Academies.

‘The sale appears to be motivated by financial necessity rather than the needs of the children and the residents of Northampton’

The key objective of the Northampton Schools Reorganisation has always been to raise the educational standards of pupils in Northampton by achieving a step-change in performance and removing the barriers inherent in the previous three-tier system to curriculum continuity and accountability. Other objectives include:

- to increase participation rates post-16
- to enhance the recruitment and retention of staff
- to remove surplus places
- to provide school places near to where people live
- to improve the condition and suitability of school buildings

It was the view of the Council that the reorganisation of the school system in Northampton to a two-tier system would remove the problems linked with the three-tier system as follows:

- Discontinuity between the school structure and the national curriculum key stage organisation which hindered curriculum continuity and accountability.
- Transfer of pupils between schools twice during their statutory years. There was evidence that this can impede progress
- Requirement for pupils to move school not long before the Key Stage 3 tests, with some pupils finding this transfer to upper school, with a strong focus on selecting GCSE options soon after arrival, daunting.

Other factors also supported the change. In particular, the number of Local Education Authorities supporting three-tier education systems was reducing year on year. Half the Councils operating a three-tier system over the last 10 years had moved to a two-tier system and there was no counter trend. Additionally, most of Northamptonshire was already two-tier and there was significant parental preference in favour of a two-tier system.

Choice and diversity have been important considerations in the final school-by-school proposals with parents being able to express a preference for schools of different sizes, church schools as well as single-sex secondary education. Each of the secondary schools will be developing a distinctive ethos and character within the DfES Specialist Schools Strategy. In the primary phase, schools will provide all-through

primary education from Reception to Year 6 to maximise continuity and will have 1, 1.5 or 2 forms of entry (annual intakes of 30, 45 or 60 children) according to demand for places from the local community. Each secondary school will cater for the 11-18 age range, offering a sixth form at each school within co-ordinated curriculum arrangements across the town.

In addition to the impact on the educational standards, the Northampton Schools Reorganisation has enabled the Council to remove surplus places in Northampton. The Reorganisation has also enabled the Council to provide schools near to where pupils live responding to the demographic changes in the town over the last 10 years.

As part of the Northampton School Reorganisation the County Council has committed £200 million to a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme which includes 41 schools and will provide for five new (or almost new) secondary schools and six new primary schools, with significant remodelling in a further 19 schools.

It has always been the Council's intention that the building schemes linked with the Northampton Schools Reorganisation would be funded from a variety of sources, including capital receipts from the sale of surplus sites and buildings. The remaining funding required for the PFI scheme will be provided from PFI credits, conventional DfES borrowing approval, council revenue funding and developer contributions.

Given the scale of the building works linked with the Northampton Schools Reorganisation, capital receipts are an essential element for its successful delivery. Initial discussions on the Schools Reorganisation with officials from the DfES emphasised this expectation. The use of capital receipts as an important contributor to affordability was part of the County Council's outline business case for the PFI scheme which the DfES approved.

The re-organisation took place only after a very extensive period of consultation. This took part in 3 stages, over a period of 2 years and was conducted in 3 separate stages; Stage one 'Consultation on the principle of a change from a 3-tier to a 2-tier system of education, Stage two 'Consultation of the School by School proposals, Stage three 'Consultation on the proposals amended as a result of the Stage 2 consultations. Stage one consisted of the distribution of 40,000 booklets and 4 public meetings across the town, Stage 2 consisted of the distribution of 15,000 booklets and 28,000 leaflets 44 meetings with staff and governors and 25 public meetings, Stage three consisted of the distribution of a further 30,000 leaflets and 14 further meetings. In addition to reports on the meetings we received a total of over 1,200 letters, emails response forms and petitions. The final agreement to the proposals was accepted unanimously by the County Council on 19th February 2002 and later on unanimously by the Schools' Organisation Committee. At this stage the need for the use of 'capital receipts' in order to fund the whole proposals was acknowledged.

'Parklands Primary School, which is located approximately 400m from the NSG East site does not have sufficient playing fields as defined in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 to support the pupils it accommodates'

As part of the Section 77 application, site assessments of the existing areas available at each local school have been undertaken. There is currently 6,495 m² of playing fields at the Parklands Primary School site. In accordance with DfES guidance, this

area is capable of sustaining the playing of team games for at least 7 hours during each week of the school term. This area does not include the copse or the land on an incline which is considered unsuitable for the playing of team games. The proposed development of Parklands Primary School will not adversely affect the playing fields available to the school

In response to consultation, the County Council has received a letter from the headteacher and governing body of Parklands Primary School confirming that the school has no educational need for the land at the NSG East (former Parklands Middle School) site and has no objections to its disposal.

'Northampton School for Girls, which is located approximately 560m from the NSG East site does not have sufficient playing fields as defined in the Education School Premises Regulations 1999 to support the pupils it accommodates'

When the building work is completed and Northampton School for Girls is on one site, the area for playing fields on the main site will be below that required.

As part of the Northampton Schools Reorganisation, Northampton School for Girls will be provided with enhanced outdoor and indoor sports facilities including a new all-weather pitch, sports hall, gymnasium, swimming pool and a fully-equipped fitness centre. This was the most popular option when students were asked what sports facilities they would like at the new school.

The County Council has consulted with the Governors about this and the Governing Body decided that the School do not wish to retain the playing fields at the NSG East (former Parklands Middle School) site because they would be too far from the main site and too remote. Parents in particular were concerned about the vulnerability of groups of young girls and PE staff.

In response to consultation, the County Council has received a letter from the headteacher and governing body of Northampton School for Girls confirming that they do not require continued use of the playing fields and supports the proposed disposal of land at the NSG East (former Parklands Middle School) site

'Northamptonshire County Council Recommended that land at NSG East be retained by Northampton School for Girls to augment their inadequate playing facilities'

Preliminary meetings between the County Council and Northampton School for Girls discussed the options available to address the deficiency of playing fields for the School. It was suggested that part of the NSG East (former Parklands Middle School) site should be kept for use by Northampton School for Girls. However, the staff and governing body of Northampton School for Girls considered that the playing fields are located too far from the main NSG site and that PE lesson time would be spent walking between the school and the playing fields. The school also consider it unsafe for girls to have games lessons and extra-curricular activities on a site so isolated from the school.

‘Several community organisations that previously had use of the facilities at NSG East have not been consulted by Northamptonshire County Council with respect to the disposal’

Paragraph 73 of the guidance contained in DfE-1017-2004: The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for Academies states that the Secretary of State expects the applicant to detail the existing community use of the playing fields. It is the Department’s view that only authorised community use of playing fields should be taken into account. As you state in your letter there is no longer any authorised community use of the playing fields.

You mention in your correspondence that the hard games courts on the NSG East site have previously been used by Parklands Netball Club. However, as this group has disbanded it was not possible to specifically consult with the group. Parents of children in the Parklands area who tried to restart the club or its volunteers would have had the opportunity to comment if there were a parent of a pupil at Northampton School for Girls or alternatively as a member of the local community in response to the public notice in the local newspaper. I understand, having spoken to senior staff from the former Parklands Middle School that the club was actually known as FuturePrint Netball Club and was administered by a former member of staff of Parklands Middle School, who transferred the club when she changed jobs.

You also refer to Parklands Badminton Club. However, it is understood that the Badminton Club used the school’s indoor sports hall only and not the outdoor sports facilities. Section 77 applications are concerned with the disposal of outdoor sports facilities only and therefore the Badminton Club do not have to be consulted as part of this application. However, members of the club would have had the opportunity to comment as a member of local community. I have been informed that the badminton club were offered facilities at Northampton School for Girls Main site which they declined.

‘Several community organisations located nearby require the use of additional playing fields. The majority of these organisations cater for the needs of children and young people’

Any organisation or club in the local area, including the clubs listed in your letter, had the opportunity to comment as a member of the local community. However, it should be noted that the question of any future community use of the land, including the provision of a local bowling green, falls within the remit of the planning process, of which Sport England is an integral part and a statutory consultee on proposed developments on school playing fields. This is stated in Paragraph 73 of the guidance contained in DfE-1017-2004: The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for Academies. I have been informed that no approach has been made by any of the existing clubs that you have mentioned to use facilities at either of the sites occupied by Northampton School for Girls.

Your idea to utilise Parklands Middle School site as a dedicated “sports academy” is an interesting one. However, given that the schools in the area have already said that they have no interest in this site, given the high quality of both internal and external sports facilities that will be provided and, since no other local organisation has

expressed an interest in developing such provision, the County Council considers that the provision of a "sports academy" would be under utilised. Equally I am unsure where the necessary capital funding for the development would be found nor indeed the revenue funding for its on-going work. Therefore I do not see it as a viable proposition.

As part of the process your letter of objection and this reply to it will be forwarded to the Secretary of State with the application

Further to my letter to Mr Hegarty dated 25/04/06 I can confirm that as soon as an application is made to the DfES under Section 77 of the Schools and Standards Framework Act 1998, for the disposal of the Northampton School for Girls East site I will send you a copy.

A copy of this reply is being sent to all those to whom Mr Dowsett sent his original letter.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

Peter Burrell
Head of Buildings and Capital Development / Director, Northampton Town Learning Partnership