



Annex D: Stage 2 Statutory Proposal Outcome Report

Second Stage Consultation Process

1.1 The second stage consultation process, (the publication of the Statutory Proposal and commencement of the formal representation period), which proposed the closure of The Mary Towerton School commenced on 28th April 2023 and concluded on Friday 26th May 2023. In line with statutory requirements a Statutory Notice was published in the Bucks Free Press on Friday 28th April. In addition, a consultation letter was sent to the following consultees and was promoted to all those who would be directly affected as well as local residents, councillors and other schools. The consultation was also promoted via a dedicated webpage and survey on Your Voice Bucks. An email reminder was sent out to consultees on Monday 21st May 2023 to ensure that all views could be taken into consideration.

Consultees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Councillors <p>West Wycombe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marcus Angell (Con) • Darren Hayday (Ind) • Orsolya Hayday (Ind) <p>Ridgeway West</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shade Adoh (Con) • Robert Carrington (Con) • Carl Etholen (Con)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/Carers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils at the School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Staff

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local MPs: Rob Butler MP Steve Baker MP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching associations and Unions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northampton Roman Catholic Diocese and Oxford Diocesan Board of Education
Parish Councils: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stokenchurch PC Radnage PC Piddington and Wheeler PC Wycombe Town Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buckinghamshire Council Officers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Residents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Community Centre

1.2 In taking forward this proposal Buckinghamshire Council has complied with all applicable statutory requirements in accordance with section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act. The Council has complied with the DfE's published guidance (Opening and Closing Maintained Schools Statutory Guidance for Proposers and Decision Makers: January 2023).

Second Stage Consultation Outcome

1.3 The Council received 10 responses to the consultation proposal. 9 of these came in via the Your Voice consultation page and 1 came directly to the email consultation mailbox.

1.4 In summary of the 10 who responded 4 (40%) were in agreement with the proposal to close the school from 31st August 2023; 6 (60%) did not agree.

Agree/Disagree Proposal	Responses received via Your Voice	Responses received via Consultation Mailbox	Total
Agree with proposal to close	4	0	4
Disagree with proposal to close	5	1	6
	9	1	10

- 1.5 In terms of the who responded to the consultation, the split in terms of agreeing/disagreeing with the proposal can be seen in Table 1 below. Respondents were asked to state who they were responding to the consultation as. Table 2 below shows how responses were broken down by each category.

TABLE 1			
	Your voice	Mailbox	Total
Response: Agree/Disagree Proposal			
Yes (Agree with the proposal)	4	0	4
No (Disagree with the proposal)	5	1	6
Total Number of Respondents	9	1	10
Who:			
Staff Member at Mary Towerton School	1	0	1
Governor at Mary Towerton School	0	0	0
Parent at Mary Towerton School	0	0	0
Pupil at Mary Towerton School	0	0	0
Local Resident	5	0	0
MP/Clr	0	0	0
Buckinghamshire Council Employee	1	0	1
Ex parent of Mary Towerton School	0	1	1
Other LA	1	0	1
Didn't say	1	0	1
	9	1	10

TABLE 2:	
Staff/Governor	Number
Yes (Agree with the proposal)	0
No (Disagree with the proposal)	1
Parent	
Yes (Agree with the proposal)	0
No (Disagree with the proposal)	0
Ex Parent	
Yes (Agree with the proposal)	0
No (Disagree with the proposal)	1
Elected Member/MP	
Yes (Agree with the proposal)	0
No (Disagree with the proposal)	0
Local Resident	
Yes (Agree with the proposal)	1
No (Disagree with the proposal)	4
Other (BC Employee/Rep of Community Group/work at another school/other LA/Didn't say)	
Yes (Agree with the proposal)	3
No (Disagree with the proposal)	0

- 1.6 From the table above it can be noted that the overall response rate was very low and is perhaps reflective of the fact that those consulted during the formal representation period felt that they had made their comments as part of the Stage One consultation and did not therefore feel that they needed to repeat them. Of those who responded in the formal representation stage 5 were local residents of whom 4 were against the proposal and 1 was in support. No respondents identified themselves as being parents/carers of pupils currently at the school. One respondent confirmed that they were a staff member at the school and that they were against the proposal.
- 1.7 Having looked at response rates for a similar statutory proposal undertaken by Hertfordshire to close Wareside CE school in 2022 their Cabinet Report states that they received no objections to their statutory proposal. It doesn't state if they received any responses in support. The School closed on 31st August 2022.
- 1.8 In contrast when Surrey CC consulted on a proposal to close Ripley CE School in 2018 they received 256 responses to their statutory proposal of which 98% of respondents were against the proposal. Despite this significant objection to the proposal Surrey CC still proceeded with the proposal to close based on the fact that they could not find a MAT to take on the school, numbers were too low to make it viable and the quality of educational outcomes was low. The school closed on 31st August 2018.
- 1.9 It is clear therefore that other LAs have closed schools where there has been either no response during the formal representation period or a much higher response rate and objection to a closure proposal.
- 1.10 **Feedback from respondents:**
- 1.11 Of the respondents who replied to the proposal to close The Mary Towerton School and included additional comments, the main points raised were:

Main comments from those who objected to the proposal
<i>With the number of housing developments that are being approved in bucks, as well as this being the only school in Studley Green, closing a school would be a stupid idea. It would also lead to parents moving away from the area as well as those that stay having to drive distances to other schools increasing congestion and pollution.</i>
<i>I'm think it needs to stay open for local children sad to see it close when Stokenchurch are building more houses.</i>
<i>It's a lovely school all my children went there it's small but friendly and I know so many children loved it give it a chance.</i>
<i>Mary Towerton School offers additional choice for parents who want a small, nurturing school. Although there is capacity in local schools at the moment, it is not in the schools that parents are choosing. I am concerned that if the school is closed, it will reduce parental</i>

choice and cause problems in a few years or even in the near future if there is an unexpected population surge. In addition, it is a lovely school with a unique and special family feel which will be lost forever. The staff and governors have worked tirelessly to provide the best possible outcomes for all the children over many years, and it will be a great shame if the school cannot be saved.

I would like to say what a lovely nurturing school this is and has been to the local community and beyond. I oppose the closure of the school. Having read the 7 page document as to why the school is being closed down, I find it difficult to understand why any local authority would want to do so. There is not always going to be low birth years and the school and local authority need to do more to promote the school and its facilities.

What is going to happen to the building and grounds?

Council Response:

Housing: There is only small-scale housing allocated in this area within the Wycombe Local Plan (i.e. no sites of more than 100 homes) so demand is unlikely to significantly increase over the planning period to 2033. There is currently c.24% surplus capacity (c.330 surplus places) in the area which can more than accommodate the projected pupil numbers from new housing.

Parental Choice: Should the proposal to close Mary Towerton School progress, there are still several small rural schools in the area: Radnage; Ibstone; Cadmore End, West Wycombe and Frieth such that parents will continue to have the choice of selecting a small school or Stokenchurch if parents prefer a larger school.

Promotion of the School: The Local Authority has explored alternative options to closure which have included the opportunity for the school joining a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) or federating with other schools. Although joining a MAT or federation could offer benefits in terms of economies of scale, collaboration across schools, shared learning and resources etc., the Council considers it unlikely that a trust would, through its due diligence, consider the school viable into the future. Despite discussions with a number of MATs and other Schools, no MATs or Schools came forward during the consultation stage to offer support to the school.

Site: The future of the building will only be formally considered if/when the final decision is made to close the school. However, consideration will be given to the potential for the site to offer SEND provision and therefore remain within education use.

Comments from those who supported the proposal

Oxfordshire County Council does not object to this closure. It does not expect there to be a significant cross-border impact.

1.12 Feedback from elected members:

1.13 Local Councillors and MPs were consulted on the proposal and whilst no formal responses were submitted during the formal representation stage, Simon James and Gareth Drawmer met with representatives of the two local MPs (Sue Hynard attending on behalf of Steve Baker and Elliott Banks attending on behalf of Rob Butler) on 10th May. They discussed the business case proposing the closure and both confirmed that they understood the rationale for the closure.

1.14 No formal response to the during the representation stage was received from any elected representative. However, both Steve Baker and Rob Butler did respond to the first stage consultation (the response from Rob Butler MP was unfortunately emailed to an incorrect email address and therefore the response was not received during the stage one consultation period. Following the meeting on 10th May his response was forwarded to Simon James). In their responses to the first stage consultation both MPs acknowledged and understood the reason for the proposal to close the school but suggested that the Council give some consideration to the potential future use of the site for SEND provision should a decision be taken to close the school.

1.15 Alternative Proposals:

1.16 One of the key aims of the consultation on the future of the school was to encourage external parties or other schools to put forward any alternative proposals to the Local Authority that could result in the LA and the Governing Board being able to explore other avenues to support the school in remaining open. During the consultation (both stage one and two) no Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) or Schools came forward to offer support to the Mary Towerton School and no other alternative proposals were brought to the Local Authority for consideration.