

Meetings with Watlington Primary School and Icknield Community College – Thursday 14th April 2016

Two meetings took place – one with each headmaster with Rachel Gill and Peter Richardson representing the NP and firstly Matthew Attree (MA) at the Primary School and secondly Mat Hunter (MH) and Luisa Howden (Business Manager LH) at Icknield.

Primary School

Capacity /Pupil Numbers

MA reported that the Primary School has 282 pupils with a capacity of approx. 20-30 more without the need for more infrastructure. It currently has a 1.5 form entry of around 45 pupils per school year. If the school needed to go to 2 form entry, i.e 60 per year then this would increase numbers to 420 pupils and would require an additional 7 classrooms.

Other issues

Recruiting and retaining staff has been an issue as they can earn higher rates in schools in other areas, particularly if they work nearer London and get a London weighting on wages. Also most staff don't live that near to school as housing is so expensive in Watlington / South Oxfordshire.

Traffic and Parking are issues for the school with limited parking on site and many local parents driving. He said that the walking bus would be started up again to try and help this issue and also welcomed any additional footpaths /access points that the NP could help with. Buses from Icknield also caused congestion for traffic getting in and out of Primary School.

Funding was another concern as cuts at County level meant that they were on "bare bones" funding, i.e meeting statutory requirements. School are looking at ways of raising revenue including working in collaboration with other schools as the "academy" concept draws nearer. MA stated that the school were lucky to have an active PTA which raised several thousand pounds a year.

Deprivation was also an issue, particularly in conjunction with cuts to services such as public transport and Children's centres. Oxfordshire's Children's centres are planned to be reduced from 44 to 8. He showed concern over what he described as a level of "social deprivation" which is made more significant locally through the comparative inaccessibility of special needs facilities for families. If a family in Watlington has no car then access to facilities and support is extremely difficult.

He welcomed the update of the NP progress.

Icknield Community College

Capacity

MH and LH reported a higher local attendance currently than in past years and the potential increase in numbers appears to present no problem as the children of local people will take preference over other areas. Catchment areas would naturally modify with children from Watlington getting places ahead of children from further away. Currently around 20% of pupils are from Watlington. The school is not currently full as some of the older years have lower numbers but the school is filling up year on year. No additional teachers will be required as it fills up. MH expected the school to be full in the next 3-5 yrs. This will bring in increased funding as numbers increase.

The opportunity to re-locate a new school on a different site was enthusiastically discussed with the many benefits this would bring, including a highly suitable housing development site and improved access.

Providence Land have engaged with the College to lobby for their support and the 3G pitch has come out of the latest proposals. We explained that their public exhibition on Watlington was not organised or endorsed by the NP and they were keen to hear more on proposals from other developers where the future of the College was involved.

MH and LH understand that the school buses is a consideration and they appeared to find the WAT8 proposals largely beneficial.

MH stated that the College has no problems attracting and retaining teaching staff and reiterated that most staff do not like to live in the same town as they teach.

It was thought that the town (especially in respect of gym facilities) could work much more closely with the College and LH is tasked with promoting the value of their facilities in bring in extra revenue.

MH was wary in confirming a move to "Academy status" but stated that a sixth form was still a possibility and that further plans were in place for future growth. A sixth form was the most expensive type of expansion due to the small class sizes.

A follow up meeting was suggested to develop the leisure ideas and the possibilities of adult education facilities

Rachel Gill/Peter Richardson

19 April 2016