

The rationale for the relocation of Tipton St John School to Ottery St Mary.

The GOVERNORS are responsible for the Health & Safety and wellbeing of the pupils and staff at the school, for supporting the progress of the pupils and, in the current circumstances, for securing the future of the school.

The SCHOOL SITE AND BUILDINGS pose particular challenges in meeting these responsibilities:

- The school is divided on two small sites which are separated by a road which is vulnerable to floods. Floodwater entered the school buildings on the lower site in 2008 and 2012.
- The school buildings on both sites of the school are inappropriate and inefficient for their function due to their layout, their small size, the weight restriction on the top floor of the upper site, the lack of appropriate accommodation, and the deterioration of the timber modular buildings on the lower site.
- The school does not possess meeting rooms, a hall or separate spaces for staff to undertake planning, preparation and assessment.
- There are too few toilets, especially on the lower site.
- The split site and cramped facilities mean that a lot of time is wasted in supervision of children as they move around the site. Floodgates have to be erected and dismantled at every warning and regular evacuation drills are essential but time consuming.

In essence, the children and staff deserve better.

FLASH FLOODS from the Metcombe Brook and the less frequent but longer lasting flooding from the River Otter are a threat to the pupils and the buildings. During flood events a torrent of water flows along the Metcombe road, which staff and pupils must cross to leave the floodplain, and the building on the lower site often becomes an island surrounded by water.

The LONG-TERM AIM of the Governing Board has, for many years, been to RELOCATE THE SCHOOL away from the flood plain but the funding for a new build has been difficult to achieve.

An APPLICATION FOR FUNDING to rebuild the school as part of the Government's Priority Schools Building Programme (PSBP) in 2015 was unsuccessful because, despite assurances to the contrary, flooding was not included in the criteria. The Environment Agency (EA) report provided as evidence for the PSBP application indicated that there is a 'RISK TO LIFE' should the school remain on the site. The rejection of the grant funding application led some governors to consider resignation or the possible closure of the site at that time due to the collective responsibility that this placed on the Board.

However, the Board has persevered in working with supportive agencies to manage and try to mitigate the flood risk and to secure the funding needed to relocate the school.

FLOOD MANAGEMENT measures currently in place include an automatic warning gauge on the Metcombe Brook and EA flood alerts for the River Otter.

The EA classified the Brook as a 'major river' in 2016 to raise the level of oversight but in the context of other priorities for flood protection the school is classified as a 'business' so it is not prioritised as might be expected as hundreds of other properties and people are at risk elsewhere in the area.

That said, some wider mitigation measures have been put in place including road works, maintenance of drains and the EA oversight of the Metcombe Brook channel upstream from the school. However THESE MEASURES WILL NOT OFFSET THE EFFECTS OF A MAJOR FLOOD and are not a long term solution which would enable the school to remain on the present site.

Our Emergency Flood Plans are re-examined, updated and evacuation procedures are practised on a regular basis.

A REBUILD ON THE CURRENT SITE is not a viable option and cannot secure funding; the solution to the school's flood risk is to move off the floodplain.

Further funding applications and representations to relocate the school within Tipton were made to the Education Funding Agency in 2016 and our CASE WAS TAKEN TO MINISTERIAL LEVEL, but we were informed that no funding was available and were referred back to Devon County Council and the Diocese to develop a LOCAL SOLUTION. No further central Government funding streams have been made available since and none are expected in the foreseeable future. This decision effectively ENDED THE POSSIBILITY OF RELOCATING THE SCHOOL IN TIPTON.

However, the Governors must act to ensure the safety of staff and pupils and plan ahead to secure the future of the school. We cannot accept the status quo.

THE NEXT STEPS

The Governing Board have worked with Devon County Council and the Diocese to try to find a local solution that can be funded without central Government Capital Grant and which is deliverable within a foreseeable timeframe.

THE RELOCATION OF THE SCHOOL TO THORNE FARM, OTTERY enables a possible funding solution for the school. This is because Devon County Council owns the site and can realise value from the wider site development to invest in the school new build. This reinvestment would supplement contributions and grant funding from Devon County Council and the Diocese. The governors have also made further representations to the Department of Education and have secured a contribution of £750000 to support the relocation to Thorne Farm.

Please note that the project RELIES ON FUNDS RELEASED BY HOUSING DEVELOPMENT on the Thorne Farm site and the funding of the new-build school remains unviable without it.

After many years of striving to secure a move off the floodplain in Tipton, we believe that this is now a DELIVERABLE SOLUTION. Although the Thorne Farm site is outside the village, it is as close as possible to Tipton St John at the King's School end of the town.

The DEMOGRAPHICS play a key part in the decision making and securing the grant funding for the school build; of the 90 pupils in the school in 2019 only 21 came from the Tipton catchment area whilst 38 came from Ottery St Mary.

There has been a long term trend of DECLINING NUMBERS FROM THE TIPTON CATCHMENT, from 62% in 2012 to 24% in 2019, and predicted new-starter numbers from Tipton in the next three years are in low single digits. Numbers at the school have been sustained by an increasing number of pupils from out of catchment of whom the MAJORITY HAVE COME FROM OTTERY.

Local schools are full, and new school places will be required in Ottery St Mary irrespective of the future of Tipton School. THE RELOCATION OF THE SCHOOL TO OTTERY will secure the sustainability of the school and provide new school places in Ottery with a gradual growth to 1 Form Entry. Although small by today's standards, this is of a size which benefits from a level of school funding that could further enrich the curriculum on offer.

THE GOOD NEWS FOR THE SCHOOL WOULD BE that:

- The school remains; we retain TSJs leadership, teaching staff, vision, values and curriculum and embed it within the wonderful purpose-built new facilities
- The school would be sustainable and the future secured.
- We would remain the same VA church school
- As a 1 Form Entry school, each year group would form a single class, and there would be additional staff bringing their expertise and able to contribute to and benefit from our collaborative approaches to staff development.

The Governors CANNOT SEE OTHER VIABLE OPTIONS for the relocation of TSJ school in the future. If the school remains on the present site the children and staff in Tipton will still be vulnerable to flood risk, the buildings will

continue to deteriorate, the lower site will eventually become unusable, and it is inevitable that we shall retrench to a 2 class school on the upper site with little hope of a sustainable future.

The need for school places will remain and eventually a new school will open in the areas of population growth providing places for local children and accelerating the decline of small village schools.

THE EFFECT ON THE COMMUNITY.

The Governing Board's responsibility is to the pupils and staff at the school but we recognise that there will be some strong feelings about the possible impact on the village, the possible consequences of a change from its rural character and the 'loss' of the school, albeit to a location only some 2 miles away.

Successive Head teachers and Governors have sought to secure a move within the village but we have exhausted every avenue for securing public funding to make it happen.

We recognise that the school would no longer be adjacent to the Church, but our strong links with the church community will be retained irrespective of the proximity, with the church remaining an integral part of the school in its new home.

The school has been grateful for the use of the village hall but it is a reflection of the inadequacies of the premises at the school, and the c£4500 spent annually for this purpose comes from a 'tight' school budget and would be targeted at the children if the school had appropriate buildings.

We shall WORK WITH PARENTS to identify/share what it is that makes Tipton special to each one of us and work to embed and sustain those aspects in the new buildings.

The school has continued to PERFORM AT A HIGH LEVEL. Despite the challenges the school was designated as Good by Ofsted in 2017, Outstanding in the Church school (SIAMS) inspection in 2018 and was in the top 1% of schools nationally at Key Stage 2 (KS2) in 2018.

In 2019 the school was awarded the Science Gold Mark, the Platinum Sports Mark (the first to be awarded in Devon) and all KS1 and 2 data was above National level with half of the children at greater depth for Maths at KS2. The staff and school leadership will continue to make the best possible outcomes for pupils a priority.

CONCLUSION

The Governors have responsibility for the health and safety of the staff and pupils at the school and after many years of working to move the school away from the floodplain we now have a deliverable solution in sight.

The Governors and school leadership SUPPORT the proposed relocation of the school to the Thorne Farm site in Ottery as it is the only viable solution to secure the safety of the pupils and staff into the future and the long-term sustainability of the school. We ask for your active support in SECURING THE FUTURE of the school on its proposed new site.

NB. There will be a drop in EXHIBITION and CONSULTATION about the Thorne Farm proposal between 12 noon and 7pm at OSM Football Club on 28th October. We hope that as many parents and members of the Tipton community as possible will attend that session to find out more about the proposal and to complete the consultation form.