

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

A MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNING BOARD

This document and the accompanying responses to the Questions raised at the meeting of parents and residents on June 23rd are intended to explain why the move to Ottery St Mary is under consideration and to update you on the current situation

OUR CURRENT POSITION

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 situation, for securing the future of the school.

The LONG-TERM AIM of the Governing Board has always been to RELOCATE THE SCHOOL IN TIPTON away from the flood plain. A possible site has been identified in the village but the funding to build on it has not been secured.

Our APPLICATION FOR FUNDING from the Priority School Build programme in 2015 was unsuccessful because, despite assurances to the contrary, flood risk was not included in the criteria.

As the school is flood prone to the extent that The Environment Agency report provided as evidence for the PSB application indicated that there is a 'RISK TO LIFE' on the site, some Governors considered resignation or the possible closure of the site at that time due to the collective responsibility that this placed on the Board.

A REBUILD ON THE CURRENT SITE is not a viable option. The planning application to rebuild would be opposed by the EA and there is no funding to rebuild on the site. The only certain solution to the School's flood risk is to move off the floodplain.

The SCHOOL SITE AND BUILDINGS pose particular challenges.

- The site is small and split into two areas separated by a road which is liable to flood.
- The buildings on both sites of the school are inappropriate for the functioning of the school due to their layout, the small size of the buildings and rooms, a weight restriction on the top floor of the upper site, lack of appropriate accommodation, and the deterioration of the 'temporary' buildings on the lower site which have been in place since the 1970's. We struggle to meet statutory requirements for disability and also educational requirements. One limiting factor in the last Ofsted inspection was the lack of free flow for the EYFS.
- The split site and cramped facilities mean that a lot of time is wasted in supervision of children moving around the site, there are no meeting rooms or hall and no separate spaces for staff to undertake Planning, Preparation and Assessment.
- There are too few toilets, especially on the lower site.

In essence, the children and staff deserve better.

It is a matter of observation, our photographic records and a Hydrological report that the FLASH FLOODS from the Metcombe Brook and the less frequent but longer lasting flooding from the Otter are a threat to the pupils and the buildings.

Water entered the buildings in 2008 and 2012 and during flood events a torrent of water flows along the Metcombe road, which staff and pupils must cross to leave the floodplain, and the buildings on the lower site become an island surrounded by water.

Under its procedures the Environment Agency classifies the school as a 'business' so it is not prioritised as might be expected. There are few other buildings at risk around the school. In the context of other priorities for flood protection, hundreds of properties and people are at risk elsewhere.

FLOOD MANAGEMENT measures are likely to include an automatic warning system on the brook but mitigation will be small scale.

Following the completion of the Hydrological report and a visit from a representative of the Education Funding Agency the case was again made in November to the DfE for funding to relocate the school in Tipton.

Our CASE WAS TAKEN TO THE TOP, to Ministerial level, but we have recently been informed that there is no funding available and referred back to Devon County Council and the Diocese to seek a LOCAL SOLUTION.

No further funding streams will be available from central Government for the foreseeable future and this decision effectively ENDS THE POSSIBILITY OF RELOCATING THE SCHOOL IN TIPTON with the support of public funding.

THE NEXT STEPS

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.

For the first time, after many years of striving for a solution to our need to move off the floodplain in Tipton, we believe that a DELIVERABLE SOLUTION is available with the support of the Exeter Diocese and Devon County Council if the school is moved to Ottery St Mary, although the final make-up of the funding package has yet to be confirmed.

IF TIPTON SCHOOL MOVED TO OTTERY it would double in size and become a 210 school, small by today's standards, although on a site that could allow further expansion if the long-term need should arise.

The school would be able to accommodate the Tipton year groups of about 15, which are currently combined as two year groups in a class, together with the anticipated 15 pupils in each year group expected from the new developments in Ottery.

Local schools are full, and so new school places will be required in Ottery St Mary. There is Development money available to help support the construction of a new school in Ottery but this is not transferable to pay for a rebuild in Tipton.

The DEMOGRAPHICS play a key part in the decision making:

Of the 96 Primary pupils expected to be at the school from September there will be as many children who live in the Ottery catchment as the Tipton catchment, 34 pupils from each.

Predicted new starter numbers from Tipton in the next three years are 3, 2 and 2.

On current expectations there will be approximately 105 primary pupils from the new housing developments in Ottery.

We may therefore, simplistically, anticipate that roughly 2/3rds of the pupils in the new school would eventually come from the Ottery catchment.

If the school relocates to Ottery the site will be as close as possible to Tipton St John at the King's end of the town. A feasibility study of sites for a new school is currently being undertaken by DCC, although not specifically on our behalf.

As the school would be approximately 2.2 miles from the present site in Tipton there would be some transport provision by DCC.

THE GOOD NEWS FOR THE SCHOOL WOULD BE that:

- The school would be sustainable and the future secured.
- We would still be a VA church school and provide what we offer to twice the number of pupils.
- We would move the school en masse, taking our teaching staff, vision, values, and curriculum to the new build.
- The school would have the space and layout, inside and out, appropriate to a modern school.
- Each year group would form a class and there would therefore be additional staff bringing their expertise and able to benefit from and contribute to our collaborative approaches to staff development.

This 'one remaining possibility' for us to relocate is TIME LIMITED.

There is a funding 'window' for the support which would come from the Diocese, as more funding will be allocated from 2018 to meet the needs of the expected increase in the number of academies. The funding from DCC is a response to the pressing need to prepare additional school places for children from the new developments in Ottery, whilst also supporting the necessity of relocating Tipton St John away from the floodplain.

IF THE OPTION IS NOT TAKEN to relocate TSJ School there will still need to be a school in Ottery but it would not be a Church school and its possible catchment is undetermined.

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 we shall retrench to a 2 class school on the upper site. The schools in Devon currently being closed as unsustainable are the 2 class schools.

THE EFFECT ON THE COMMUNITY.

The Governing Board does not have a responsibility to assess the impact of the relocation of the school on the community but we recognise that there are some strong feelings about the 'loss' of the school, the possible consequences of a change from its rural character and the possible impact on the Village.

It would be sad to move the school outside the village. Governors are volunteers who are part of and work on behalf of the community and we feel our inability to relocate the school in Tipton keenly. Successive Head teachers and Governors have sought to secure a move within the village but we have exhausted every avenue for public funding.

We are grateful for the use of the village hall, although the c.£4000 spent annually for this purpose comes from a 'tight' school budget and would not occur if the school had appropriate buildings.

The school would no longer be adjacent to the Church but the Church can go to the school and the school would want to go to the Church to sustain our link.

We will work with parents to identify what makes Tipton special to us and strive in partnership to implant these characteristics if the school moves to new buildings.

MAKING THE DECISION

The Governing Board would need to decide that it wishes to take forward the proposal to relocate to Ottery.

There would then be a DCC PUBLIC CONSULTATION lasting 6 months.

The final decision would be taken by the full Cabinet of Devon County Council

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 within Tipton that prospect is no longer open to us.

A move to Ottery is not the outcome for which we have worked but it is a solution which would provide sustainability and secure the long term future of the school.

There will be a third MEETING about the future of Tipton School in the Village Hall at 6pm on TUESDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER TO WHICH PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY are invited, particularly if you were unable to join us for the meetings on June 28th and 29th.

If the proposal is taken forward to Public Consultation by DCC there will be a public meeting as part of the process, but if you wish to comment or have further questions to ask at this stage please send them to the Chair of Governors at chair@tipton-stjohn.devon.sch.uk and, where possible, these will be addressed at the meeting on the 6th.