



Summary of Community Forum on School Places

On the evening of Tuesday 29th November, a Community Forum on School Places was held at West Horsley Village Hall. The meeting was well attended given the rival, if ephemeral, attraction of England v Wales. A 'Question Time' format was employed with our Parish Council Chairman, Cllr Elaine Best, directing proceedings with her usual skill. Questions had been submitted in advance.

We were fortunate to have on our panel two experts in the forecasting of pupil numbers from Surrey County Council, along with three leading executives representing our local schools. The panellists were as follows:

- Jane Edwards, Assistant Director for Education, Surrey County Council (SCC)
- Mike Singleton, Service Manager for Place Planning, SCC
- Sir Andrew Carter, CEO, South Farnham Educational Trust (SFET)¹
- Fiona O'Neill, Executive Head Teacher, The Raleigh School
- Phillip Wheatley, Executive Principal, The Howard Partnership Trust (THPT)²

The SCC representatives were firmly of the view that analysis of the numbers of pupils and school places shows there is no need for the expansion of local schools. They explained that our local schools are part of a Planning Area and need was calculated according to the area. Therefore, it may be that the Raleigh is oversubscribed, which with 128 pupils on the waiting list it undoubtedly is, but if there are vacancies in the schools within the Planning Area then no expansion of school numbers is required.

They also explained that if you expand a school on a permanent basis, rather than to deal with a one-year bulge, you have to appoint teachers and build accommodation, and if in subsequent years the numbers fall, then those teachers have to be made redundant and buildings fall into disuse.

Phillip Wheatley also told us that if the Howard of Effingham School rebuilding plan goes ahead as planned, then he believes that there will be no shortage of places in either primary or secondary education.

The Raleigh representatives did not challenge the figures regarding the Planning Area but were very concerned about the inability of the current Raleigh School premises to cope with the large numbers of children who want to attend the school but cannot currently do so.

Sir Andrew told the meeting of a way the Trust would like to expand the Raleigh School. A site at Weston Lea, owned by SCC but leased by SFET, could provide a suitable space to build an infant school. The existing Raleigh School site would in turn to become a junior school which could cope with increased numbers. The Forum was also told that another site offered some years ago was still available.

¹ SFET is a Multi-Academy Trust consisting of seven schools, including The Raleigh School.

² THPT is a Multi-Academy Trust consisting of four secondary, six primary, and three special schools, including Howard of Effingham, St Lawrence Primary, and Eastwick Schools.

There appeared to be a very strong feeling in the hall that we have an excellent primary school which is greatly oversubscribed and there is an expectation amongst those who live in the village that their children should be able to go there. There was also disappointment and a feeling of unfairness that monies which had been levied under S106³ on the developers of the new houses in our village were being used for education projects in other areas of the county, some of them at considerable distance.

Those who attended appeared to find it a very informative evening, but questions remain, amongst those being:

- Are the calculations Surrey are making, which are based on an established formula, relevant to an area which is developing so quickly and at such a huge rate?
- Will the SFET/Raleigh's ambitions be realisable?

The Parish Council believe that these and other questions that remain after the Forum, need further investigation and a working party involving both East and West Parish Councils should be established to take this task forward. We will of course keep you updated as to future developments.

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³ S106 agreements are a mechanism which make a development proposal acceptable in planning terms, that would not otherwise be acceptable. They are focused on site specific mitigation of the impact of development. Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)