

School Organisation Consultation in North Yarmouth

Information leaflet for parents of children at Alderman Swindell and North Denes Primary Schools.

Norfolk County Council has agreed to invest £7m in education in North Yarmouth and has been exploring how to make best use of that money for children now and in the future. We recently ran a consultation on a proposal that all primary school children in the North Yarmouth area, go to one primary school, on the North Denes School site.

At the end of the six week consultation period which ran from 12th June to 21st July 2017, Matt Dunkley, Interim Executive Director of Children's Services at Norfolk County Council considered all the views before making the decision to move ahead to the next stage – a Public Notice to close Alderman Swindell and extend the age range at North Denes Primary School from 2 – 11 years.

We are aware that during the consultation, several issues were raised. This leaflet sets out responses to these issues.

Issues raised from the consultation responses

Why can't the Council invest in both sites?

Both schools are in old buildings, which are not equipped for a modern curriculum. Extending the schools will not address the issues with the current buildings. A new school would give children 21st century facilities and would be more cost effective. Additionally, we know that schools with two-form entry generally achieve better results for children. They have a greater pool of teaching experience, find it easier to recruit and are more sustainable.

Why close Alderman Swindell, which is a good, popular school?

Alderman Swindell has been judged as "requiring improvement" in both of its most recent Ofsted inspections. We are supporting both schools to further improve but believe that a state-of-the-school will support our ambition to ensure that children locally receive the very best education.

Will closing the school limit choice for parents?

There are two other primary schools within a 10 minute walk of the area, so parents will continue to have a choice.

Will North Denes have space to cope with the growing population in the town?

We are proposing a 420-place primary school but with room to expand. We believe this, coupled with other developments in the town, will mean there are sufficient places in the future.

Parents and residents are worried about the impact of extra traffic

Alderman Swindell and North Denes are half a mile apart, so we do not anticipate a significant increase in traffic as a result of the change proposed. However, we will be looking at transport and access as part of any proposals for a new building. When further exploring the options for specialist provision at Alderman Swindell, we will again consider traffic and access issues.

What will happen to the staff at Alderman Swindell?

If the proposal goes ahead, North Denes would be expanding and would therefore need more staff. Any vacancies would be held for first consideration for those staff affected by the closure of Alderman Swindell. There is the possibility that some staff will face redundancy and we understand the anxiety that they might be feeling. We will be offering support to all staff affected and will try to avoid redundancies wherever possible.

Do smaller schools perform better?

No, there is little difference in the current performance of one form entry and two form entry schools. However, we know that larger schools find it easier to attract strong leaders and teachers and are more sustainable.

Parents are concerned that class sizes will be too big. How big will they be?

If we go ahead, the new school will have 60 in a year group, not per class. There will be two classes in each year group, with a maximum of 30 children in each class.

Parents are concerned that children will be learning in a building site.

The proposed new school will be within the grounds of North Denes Primary School. Building works will be self-contained and children will continue to learn within the existing school building until the new school is ready.

Consultation Process

A decision was made back on 14 August 2017, why has it taken so long to tell people?

We wanted to be able to tell everyone at the same time and could not do this until the school holidays had finished and children had returned to school.

More people said they were against the proposal than supported it. Why are you still moving ahead?

This was not a vote on the future of either of the schools but a consultation seeking views. We recognise the strong feelings from both those in support and those against the proposal. However, our priority is to do what is best for the future of education in the town. A final decision is yet to be made.

What was the purpose of the consultation and was a decision already made?

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The consultation was to seek people's views on our proposals and to help the Director of Children's Services make a decision on whether to proceed to the next stage. No, a decision had not been made ahead of the consultation taking place. We have considered all of the responses so far before reaching a decision to progress to the next stage which is to issue a Public Notice. We appreciate that there are strong feelings, particularly from parents and staff at Alderman Swindell School, however we have to look at what is best for all of the children in North Yarmouth both now and in the future.

Next steps

What happens next?

We have to make a decision within two months of the end of the Public Notice period. If we do not make a decision in this time, it is passed to the Schools Adjudicator. If the proposal goes ahead there will then be a transition plan involving representatives from both schools to ensure the smooth transfer of pupils to North Denes Primary School, including support pupils, staff and parents.

What happens to the Alderman Swindell school site?

If following the end of the Public Notice period, the decision is taken to close Alderman Swindell Primary School, then the County Council will need to consider the future of the site. Views were sought and offered during the consultation period on the possible re-use for children with education needs, not able to be met in mainstream schools. The Public Notice does not include any proposal for the future of the Alderman Swindell site. The future of the site will be considered in line with County Council policy, but only if the County Council proceeds to closure of the school. Any proposed future educational use of the site will be subject to separate local consultation and its own business case, based on the benefit to learners and the costs to the County Council.

How does my child apply for a place at North Denes Primary School?

If the proposal goes ahead, all parents of children at Alderman Swindell Primary School will be invited to express their preference. There will be sufficient places at North Denes Primary School, to ensure that everyone has a place at a local school on 1st September 2018.