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Summary of responses to the statutory consultation

Total

Support	3
Objections	537

Objections to the proposal to close Northview Primary School and expand Westrop Primary School by up to 105 places (0.5 forms of entry) categorised by school catchment area.

Northview	Eastrop/Southfield	Westrop	Out of Swindon	North Swindon Area	No address given
160	138	77	43	14	11

Drove	Swindon Academy	Beechcroft	Covingham	Grange	Rodbourne	Peatmoor	Even Swindon	Gorse Hill	Lethbridge	Moredon	Blunsdon
7	6	6	6	6	6	5	4	4	4	4	4

Brookfield	Colebrook	Millbrook	Ferndale	Greenmeadow	Haydon Wick	Lainesmead	Nythe	Shaw
3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2

[illegible]

A Summary of the key issues raised by objectors

Please note the themes and issues below were raised on the response form, emails and letters attached later in this section. There have been emails and letters involving the local MP and this correspondence and the individual responses are attached later in this section and not captured in the table below.

NB Attention is drawn to the responses raised in the pre-statutory consultation, as set out in Appendix 10 of the report to Cabinet in October 2009, set out in Section 7 of the Statement of Case, as a number of the objections raised are similar to those raised in the statutory consultation.

See also Annex to this Section – the Key Issues identified in the reports to Cabinet in May and October 2009.

Issues	LA response
It's a good school	All schools in Highworth are good schools. The proposal is not a response to school standards, as some school reorganisations are. The proposal is to deal with the number of surplus places that exist in Highworth and are forecast to increase.
Concerns about children crossing the A361 Lechlade Road and the distance involved from children to walk Concerns about extra traffic and a lack of parking at Westrop and the doctors surgery Placing a crossing on Lechlade Road will create a rat run up to Brewery Street	Conclusions from the Halcrow study are that the closure of Northview school would not create a significant change in traffic flows in the town. Officers will continue to work with all schools in Highworth to encourage pupils and staff to travel by non-car modes wherever possible, and to car-share if there is no alternative. The Halcrow study concluded that there would not be a significant change in traffic flows and queues on the A361. Closing Northview School could increase the pedestrian flow across the A361 near Crane Furlong by less than 60 people/hour. The modelling work shows that the crossing would create vehicle platooning; however, this would disperse by the time the traffic reached the Cricklade Road/High Street signal controlled junction, and therefore does not effect its operation.

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There will be too many children in the classrooms at Westrop and mixed classes. Westrop will not be able to cope with the increases.	It is considered that Westrop will be able to cope with the increase in pupil numbers whilst keeping class sizes at a reasonable level. Additional accommodation will be provided for the displaced Northview pupils. The infant class size (classes where the majority of pupils are aged 5, 6, and 7) is limited by law to 30 children. Classes with older children will be in classes of a reasonable size. It is anticipated that with the reducing number of children within Highworth that Westrop would revert to 1 FE in the near future. Many schools successfully operate with mixed year groups.
Concerns about disrupting children in Years 5 and 6 from Westrop having to attend a different school or any split site arrangement	There are advantages and disadvantages to the option of retaining Northview Primary School as a split site as reported to Cabinet at the October meeting. The Cabinet Panel will consider the implications along with the comments received during the statutory consultation before making a final decision.
Bad management has caused the problems for Northview and the school should be supported to turn the situation around	The proposal is not as a response to school standards or management. The proposal is to deal with the number of surplus places that exist in Highworth and in Northview in particular and are forecast to increase over the coming years.
The proposal will restrict parents right to chose	Admissions to schools are governed by Schools Admissions Code. The code is legally binding. The law does not guarantee a place for a child at the school of choice – it says that you have the right to express a preference and that the preference must be met if possible. The LA's admissions guide can be found at www.swindon.gov.uk . If it is decided to close Northview Primary School, there remain other Primary schools in Highworth – Westrop Primary, Eastrop Infants and Southfield Juniors.
It will put too much pressure on the other schools	The Primary school population within Highworth is reducing and is forecast to continue in the future. Currently there are 4 Forms of Entry (FE) available for Reception-aged children in Highworth with each FE being 30. There are currently 3.1FE filled and this

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	<p>is forecast to drop to 2.8FE by Sept 2013. In overall terms, this proposal would still mean that there were 3.5FE available in Highworth, well above forecast requirements in overall terms. As school funding is determined by the number of pupils on roll this process will reduce the pressure on other schools Highworth by removing the uncertainty surrounding the number of children that will start each year.</p>
<p>There will be development in Highworth and then Northview will need to be re-opened in 10 years time.</p>	<p>In the longer-term, there are a number of possible housing developments in the Highworth area that could generate additional primary-aged pupils. Based on the standard formula that is used to estimate primary pupil numbers, it is forecast that – in total – these could amount to approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ form of entry ($\frac{1}{3}$ FE). However, this does assume that all of these possible developments will materialise. At this stage, these potential developments are flagged up in the Swindon Strategic Housing Availability Assessment (SSHAA) but are not definite allocations and do not have planning permission. Further details on this are set out in the May and October 2009 Cabinet reports.</p>
<p>Concerns about the economic benefit in closing one school and expanding another. No evidence that the proposal will save any money</p>	<p>Value for money can be demonstrated, particularly in a context of scarce resources – excessive surplus places do not represent good value for money.</p> <p>The Audit Commission recommends surplus places to be in the region of 6-8% in overall terms, in order to allow a level of flexibility in terms of admissions and parents achieving first preferences for schools, where this is possible. Swindon is within this range in relation to secondary places and just above it for primary places. The Local Authority's School Organisation Plan and Primary Capital Strategy set out the approach to addressing "excessive" levels of surplus school places.</p> <p>The Financial & Value for Money Assessment is in Section 4 of the Statement of Case, as reported to October 2009 Cabinet.</p>

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Issues	LA response
Northview building is in much better condition than Westrop	In relation to condition issues with Northview Primary School and Westrop Primary School, both have outstanding priority works. Condition surveys of all schools in Swindon are undertaken by the Local Authority, the last of these undertaken in 2005 showed that both Northview and Westrop schools were of a similar condition. Further information on this is shown under Section 4 of the Statement of Case , as reported to October 2009 Cabinet.
Why have the Council ignored the pre-statutory results when 99% of Highworth residents were against the proposal?	The Cabinet and Cabinet Panel have to make a decision based on the guidance issued by the Department for Children Schools and Families. The guidance is in Section 9 of the Statement of Case . The Cabinet have to consider the key factors of which one is the views of interested parties. The Cabinet Panel will need to consider all the responses received, together with a range of the information before arriving at a final decision. The Panel will also need to consider carefully that Northview (and Westrop) is a “rural” school and the implications of this, as set out in the DCSF Guidance.

Key Issues as reported to the May 2009 and October 2009 Meeting of Cabinet

School Places Strategy

The Local Authority's School Places Strategy, as set out in the School Organisation Plan, requires "excessive" surplus school places to be addressed. The purpose of this Strategy is to ensure that:

- schools do not have excessive levels of surplus capacity, which can create problems with school organisation and financial viability;
- value for money can be demonstrated, particularly in a context of scarce resources – excessive surplus places do not represent good value for money.

The Audit Commission recommends surplus places to be in the region of 6-8% in overall terms, in order to allow a level of flexibility in terms of admissions and parents achieving first preferences for schools, where this is possible. Swindon is within this range in relation to secondary places and just above it for primary places. The Local Authority's School Organisation Plan and Primary Capital Strategy set out the approach to addressing "excessive" levels of surplus school places.

However, it does need to be borne in mind that Swindon is a growth area and that some level of surplus capacity is, therefore, essential to absorb children coming from new housing developments. At an individual school level, the benchmark for considering action to remove surplus capacity is 25%, although future trends in forecast pupil numbers will also be taken into account.

Potential Future Housing Developments

In the longer-term, there are a number of possible housing developments in the Highworth area that could generate additional primary-aged pupils. Based on the standard formula that is used to estimate primary pupil numbers, it is forecast that – in total – these could amount to approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ form of entry ($\frac{1}{3}$ FE). However, this does assume that all of these possible developments will materialise. At this stage, these potential developments are flagged up in the Swindon Strategic Housing Availability Assessment (SSHAA) but are not definite allocations and do not have planning permission.

Forecast pupil numbers shown in **section 1 of the statement of case** indicate that by September 2013 there will be a need for only 2.8 FE, compared to the 4FE currently available (excluding St Andrews Primary School).

Rural Schools

All the primary schools in Highworth are designated as “rural” schools by the DCSF. The DCSF classifies schools as “urban” or “rural” depending on whether the majority of the population falls inside a settlement of population of 10,000 or more. The Education & Inspections Act 2006 requires that a Local Authority or Governing Body, when considering proposing the closure of a rural primary school, *must* consider the following matters as part of formulating their proposals:

- The likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community;
- The availability and likely cost to the Local Authority of transport to other schools;
- Any increase in the use of motor vehicles that is likely to result from the discontinuance of the school and the likely effects of any such increase;
- Any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school.

In addition, the Decision Makers’ Guidance states:

“In considering statutory proposals to close a rural school, the Decision Maker should have regard to the need to preserve access to a local school for rural communities. There is, therefore, a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school should never close but the case for closure should be strong and the proposals clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.”

Cabinet will therefore wish to consider the above issues as part of this process, in particular:

- the impact on the local community of any proposal;
- that there is not expected to be any additional transport costs that arise;
- the effect on the use of cars (see section below on Travel and Transport Implications);
- that there are alternative schools available in the Highworth area.

Statutory Processes

If a “new” school is being legally established, then this will be subject to statutory competition arrangements. The Local Authority is required to run a competition process to invite bids. These will determine who eventually runs the school.

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It may be possible, depending on the circumstances, to obtain an exemption from the DCSF. This has been achieved in relation to the amalgamation of Infant and Junior schools. It may also be the case that the final decision on this is determined by the Schools Adjudicator rather than Cabinet.

However, if a school is being “extended”, then it is not necessary to follow the competition arrangements, as it is not regarded as a “new” school. This would apply to the proposal that is being put forward in this report.

In order to extend a school or close a school, a statutory process has to be followed, details of which are set out later in this report under the heading “Legal /Human Rights implications”.

Travel & Traffic Implications

Attached as Annex 1 is the report of the Council’s School Travel Adviser on the travel and traffic implications of this proposal. Cabinet is asked to examine carefully these implications, particularly as they relate to the proposal being put forward and to the paragraph above on Rural Schools. Any reorganisation proposal has the potential to increase vehicle traffic, particularly if families need to travel a greater distance to an alternative school.

Annex 1 sets out the key travel and traffic implications, in particular, those associated with crossing the A361. Actions may be taken, however, to mitigate some of these effects. For example, this could include improved pedestrian or cycling facilities, high profile campaigns within schools to promote sustainable travel, informal or formal car-sharing networks, walking buses, etc.

Highworth - School Places – Travel & Traffic Implications - Travel Plan Status

Westrop (2005 and updated 2008), Southfield (2006) and Eastrop (2007) all have approved travel plans. Northview began to develop a plan last year, but the member of staff involved has moved on. Warneford have not engaged with the travel plan process.

Current modes of travel

Mode of travel data is supplied to the January School Census by all schools with travel plans, and some others. Since this data is linked to pupil postcodes we can produce plot maps showing the pattern of pupil locations and modes of travel.

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School Census – Mode of Travel to School

School		Walk	Cycle	Car share	Car/Van	Public Bus	School Bus	Bus unknown	Taxi	<u>Total</u>
Eastrop	2008	108(71.5%)		9 (6%)	30 (19.9%)		4 (2.6%)			151
	2009	72 (67.9%)		3 (2.8%)	29 (27.4%)		2 (1.9%)			106
Northview	2008	78 (51.7%)		43 (28.5%)	30 (19.9%)					151
	2009	55 (50.5%)			53 (48.6%)				1 (0.9%)	109
Southfield	2008	131 (57.2%)		12 (5.2%)	74 (32.3%)	1 (0.4%)	2 (0.9%)	9 (3.9%)		229
	2009	131 (58%)		10 (4.4%)	76 (33.6%)	1 (0.4%)	7 (3.1%)	1 (0.4%)		226
Westrop	2008	168 (88.9%)			21 (11.1%)					189
	2009	140 (89.2%)			17 (10.8%)					157

Current travel issues

Police have recently received a number of complaints from local residents in the roads behind Southfield and Eastrop schools concerning inconsiderate parking by parents. The roads are very narrow and quickly become congested at morning and afternoon peaks. There are also issues with parents stopping on Shrivenham Road near the front of Southfield to drop off children, although the majority of these are Warneford pupils. Parents for all three schools are encouraged to park in the Brewery Street or Co-op car parks and walk the short distance to school.

All primary/junior schools are offered cycle training for Year 6 children. Westrop have a secure cycle shelter that was funded from the LTP budget in 2004. Despite this, currently very few children ever cycle to school in Highworth, and none are recorded on the census as cycling regularly. This is primarily because there is a lack of safe cycling routes suitable for primary-aged children, particularly through the central parts of the town, although quieter roads in the Westrop and Northview areas could be used by some.

Westrop and Southfield and to some extent Northview, have fairly restricted on-site parking for staff and visitors, although there is a small public car park behind the shops at Westrop.

Implications of school reorganisation.

At present around half the current Northview pupils walk to school and the remainder travel by car. For families living in the area around Northview school both Westrop and Southfield/Eastrop are roughly within the 800m walking threshold. It has been shown nationally that primary-aged pupils living beyond this distance from school are more likely to travel by car.

However, the Lechlade Road (A361) is a significant barrier for pedestrians or cyclists to Westrop School. The road has limited crossing facilities – a light-

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controlled pedestrian crossing at the town centre end, and two pedestrian refuges further north. (January 2009 survey data shows traffic flows of approximately 11,000 vehicles per day, with average speed 29.36mph (85 percentile 34.25mph). There have been six reported injury accidents on this stretch of road in the two years to the end of 2008, although only one involved a pedestrian.)

Travel to Eastrop or Southfield on foot would mean negotiating the central area of the town, and in particular crossing Brewery Street, which has already been raised by the local schools as a safety concern. There are plans to improve crossing facilities here under Section 106 funding.

It is likely that many former Northview families will choose to drive to school, rather than walk if they have the choice, given the physical barriers and greater distances involved. This could lead to significant congestion issues at Westrop or Eastrop/Southfield given the already restricted parking facilities and the planned development of the Children's Centre at Westrop.

Measures will need to be put in place to encourage families to walk or cycle. It may be possible to improve the crossing facilities on Lechlade Road, if this is considered appropriate and funding is identified. As with the Salt Way/Shaw Ridge transfer, suitable safe walking and cycling routes could be identified and mapped, with information provided to Northview families as early as possible. Through work with the whole school community, the Westrop School Travel Plan should be reviewed and updated to reflect the changes to the school population and travel patterns.