

LCC Guiseley Schools Consultation – Report on Options

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The mix of the large-scale housing development in Aireborough, particularly Guiseley, and a rising birthrate, has led to a crisis of infant and junior school places available in the area. After consultations in 2013 on two school options, both of which were rejected, Leeds held an OBA workshop for interested parties in October 2013 to try and find ways to solve the problem. The following proposals were then put out to consultation in Spring 2014, with a closing date for responses of 18th April 2014.

Abbreviations:

GINS – Guiseley Infants and Nursery School

St O – St Oswalds, Guiseley

2FE – 2 Form Entry 1FE – 1 Form Entry

Primary – from 4 – 11 years of age

Infants – from 4 – 6 years of age

Junior – from 7 – 11 years of age

LCC – Leeds City Council

Summary of Current Options

LCC Current 2014 proposal:

1. Leaves GINS alone; convert St O to 2FE primary; build new Junior School at Fieldhead. Creates 60 additional places per year.

LCC Previous 2013 proposal:

2. Convert both GINS and St O to 2FE primaries. Creates 30 additional places per year.

Other possible solutions:

3. Leave GINS and St O as they are; build a new 2FE primary at Fieldhead. Creates 60 additional places per year.
4. Convert St O to a 2FE Primary, GINS to a 1FE primary and build a new 1FE or 2FE primary at Fieldhead. Creates either 30 or 60 places.
5. Extend Tranmere / Queensway and/or Yeadon Westfield. Creates additional 15 place per year per extension.

Key Considerations

Number of places required – A key issue as there are risks to both under provision, which fails to provide for long term community needs; and over provision which risks further increase to housing development and may mask need elsewhere in Aireborough.

Having looked at the figures for birth data, cohort increase (ie. Numbers of children moving to the area) and expected housing development I believe the figures clearly show that 30 places would be insufficient for Guiseley, even in the short term. In 2014, 15 and 16 we know that the places

required for children living closest to either GINS or Tranmere will be 150-170 places per year. New housing already under construction and with planning permission creates the need for an additional 15 places per year in Guiseley. This gives a total of 165-185 places required, where there are currently 135, a difference of 30-50. This does not allow for future development where planning has not yet been granted, although based on LCC's target for Aireborough this could lead to the need for around another 20 places per year in Guiseley.

LCC says that a new 2FE primary (3) could be built in such a way as to have flexibility in number of places offered? (i.e. Capacity to increase if needed, and decrease otherwise). If so this would appear to be the best option. 45 places could be provided in the short/medium term; with capacity to rise to 60 when needed.

St Oswald's faith status – The conversion of St O to a through primary would mean the school setting its own admissions criteria; which could include faith. This could lead to filling places from outside Guiseley, which could have repercussions on overall school places in Guiseley/High Royds, which is already tight. Furthermore, as two primaries in close proximity, GINS and St O would be competing for pupils, GINS might be at a disadvantage due to admissions policy, indoor facilities and outdoor space. Over time this could possibly create a two tier school system to the detriment of community and social cohesion in Guiseley.

Cost / Benefit analysis – The most economical option would appear to be a new 2FE primary at Fieldhead (3). This only involves construction/alteration to one site, and creates up to 60 places. Other options either fail to provide sufficient places, or involve construction and/or alteration to multiple sites.

School places within walking distance for the whole community – This is a key requirement for many parents and carers. All children should have a school within walking distance. The best solution to provide places at a variety of locations in Guiseley, would be a new primary school at Fieldhead (3) for 60 places; or expansion at a variety of existing schools (5) for 30.

Options (1) and (2) mean that school places for ages 4-7 are all located either at Tranmere or at GINS/St O. Furthermore under option (1) the infants and proposed new juniors would be too far apart to allow most parents with siblings in both Infants and Juniors to walk to both schools for drop off and pick up. It is estimated that it would take around 30 minutes (allowing for the pace of infant age children) to walk between the schools. This means that for parents living at one site or the other a one hour walk twice a day. For any families living (say) 15 minutes away from one of the schools this would be a 1.5 hour walk twice a day. Families with a third sibling in nursery would be making this trip 3 times a day. The impact this would have on working parents would be horrendous and the majority would end up driving, especially in poor weather. Even families who live within walking distance of one site, would struggle to walk to both.

Traffic / Highways – GINS, St O and Fieldhead are all in very difficult locations in terms of traffic already. Any increase to pupil numbers at all sites will require careful planning. A plan is in place to manage the changes at Fieldhead. Traffic calming should really be in place outside GINS and St O already. Option (1) would create significant additional traffic between GINS and Fieldhead as the distance between infants and juniors would be too great to walk (see above). Options (2) would create significant additional traffic around GINS and St O. Option (3) would hopefully spread out the traffic as some children who are currently driven to GINS/St O would be able to walk to the new primary. Tranmere too has highways issues due to the conservation status of the area as a garden village, these were cited in 2013 as a main reason for not expanding the school.

Transition arrangements – I understand that ‘option 1’ of the new proposal has now been dropped. This would have been horrendous for parents such as myself who would have ended up with siblings in different junior schools at the opposite ends of town. Of the two the second option is preferable, as it allows siblings to remain together, although still puts parents in the difficult position of having to choose between siblings and friends. A new primary at the Fieldhead site (3) would remove the need for any transition arrangements, which would be welcomed by most parents.

Conclusions

LCC Current 2014 proposal:

1. Leaves GINS alone; convert St O to 2FE primary; build new Junior School at Fieldhead. Creates 60 additional places per year. *This is a similar but poorer version of (3) below. When compared to (3) it is a) more expensive, b) does not provide primary places at a variety of locations in Guiseley to promote walking to school, c) has an infants and juniors at too great a distance from each other to be practical, d) creates an independent school where children may come from outside the area and d) exacerbates traffic problems.*

LCC Previous 2013 proposal:

2. Convert both GINS and St O to 2FE primaries. Creates 30 additional places per year. *This was the original proposal, and all objections raised at the time would still apply. These include (but are not limited to): a) traffic / highways issues, b) GINS site being too small for expansion on this scale, c) the establishment of an independent school, c) concerns that it does not create sufficient spaces for future needs, d) lack of sufficient primary places within walking distance for North and West Guiseley.*

Other solutions:

3. Leave GINS and St O as they are; build a new 1.5 - 2FE primary at Fieldhead. Creates 45-60 additional places per year. *This would appear to be the best solution. It is a) simpler as it only requires the construction of a new school, and not additional expansion of existing schools, b) school places are geographical spaced around Guiseley, c) it should lead to reduced traffic over the town as a whole, d) it provides capacity for future needs, and e) there is no need for complex transition arrangements or disruption to current pupils. A 1 or 1.5FE school could be built, with the potential to expand in the future.*
4. Convert St O to a 2FE Primary, GINS to a 1FE primary and build a new 1FE or 2FE primary at Fieldhead. Creates either 30 or 60 places. *This would appear to be non-cost effective when compared to (3) as in addition to a new school significant alterations are also required to the two existing schools. GINS head teacher has also indicated that she does not believe a 1FE primary to be financially sustainable.*
5. Extend Tranmere / Queensway and/or Yeadon Westfield. Creates additional 15 place per year per extension. *Has this option been sufficiently considered? At the OBA workshop there was considerable momentum from all parties to reconsider the options for expansion at these sites. If a new primary school is not to be constructed then this should be revisited.*

Comments on the Consultation Process

Yet again, there are a number of people who are extremely unhappy with the consultation process.

Those attending the OBA workshop were pleased to hear the Council accept that the previous 2013 consultation had been mismanaged, and that they would learn from this and seek a more collaborative approach in the future. Leaving the OBA many felt very positive that a wide range of views had been sought in an open and collaborative manner and had raised expectations for the future.

Unfortunately those expectations have not been met by the 2014 consultation:

- Several ideas raised at the OBA have not been (or do not appear to have been) addressed. For example, the view that there was scope for expansion at Tranmere, Yeadon Westfield and Queensway which had not been fully explored.
- The specific proposal currently in place was not discussed at the OBA. Given that one of the stated aims of the OBA was to seek broad community agreement before any further proposals were made, in order to save time and resources, this is a significant failing.
- During the last consultation complaints were made that local residents had not been made aware of the plans; yet again local residents have not been notified.
- During the last consultation people requested that more information about alternatives be provided so that they could give a reasoned and informed view. This also has not happened.
- It is felt that the current 2014 proposal document has misrepresented the discussion at the OBA. Participants were not provided with any data about the need for places other than that which had been made publically available during the consultation process. Nor did they spend time reviewing that data. The discussion began from the assumption that the places were required, and primarily focussed on how they could be provided. The current 2014 proposal document suggests that additional data was provided and analysed by those present.
- It is also felt that the current proposal document has misrepresented posts on the LCC schools forum website regarding Green Meadows. The comments did not seem to say '*no, not under any circumstances*', as stated by the current proposal document; rather, they said '*should not be considered unless the current students are protected*'; a very different position, which recognises the vulnerability of the students, and requires a higher level of consideration as to the impact of any changes.

On a positive note, the running of the two drop in sessions (at GINS and Aireborough Leisure Centre) should be praised, as being better run than under the previous consultation. More information was available, more LCC representatives present and those present responded more openly to questions. The use of the online forum is also a welcome step; although how wide an audience it reached, or how useful it was for LCC is not clear.