

CABINET– 18 JULY 2017

REPORT ON A CONSULTATION INTO THE FUTURE OF CHILTERN EDGE SCHOOL

Report by Director of Children's Services

Introduction

1. Chiltern Edge School is an 11 -16 school located in the village of Sonning Common in close proximity to the Caversham area of Reading. It has capacity for around 1,000 pupils but currently has only c.500 on roll. Of these, around 150 live in Oxfordshire with nearly all the rest coming from Caversham. The school has been operating with in-year deficit budgets for a number of years and has accumulated a debt of in excess of £¹/₂ million. A consultant head teacher was employed by the County Council to work with the school's leadership to produce an in-year balanced budget and a plan to repay the debt.
2. When the school was inspected by Ofsted in September 2012 it was judged to be good overall. As a good school the amount of support provided by the County Council would be expected to be very limited with the national presumption being that it would assume responsibility for its own continuous improvement. The Council provided annual 'position statements' setting out how the school was performing in comparison with other schools, both locally and nationally. The position statements for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years highlighted declining performance against a range of measures but the school's leadership appears not to have taken remedial action in response to this. In early 2017 the Council deployed an experienced National Leader of Education to work with the school. This coincided with the Ofsted inspection in March 2017.
3. The report of the March 2017 inspection was published in April with the key findings being that the school was inadequate overall and inadequate in terms of the effectiveness of leadership and management, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and in terms of outcomes for pupils. The only judgement which was not of inadequacy was in respect of the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils which were requiring improvement. Consequently Chiltern Edge School has been placed in Special Measures. The full report can be found on the Ofsted web site: <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/123245>

4. The Education and Adoption Act 2016 places a duty on the Secretary of State for Education to make an academy order and convert a maintained school to sponsored academy status. To this end, an Academy Order was published on 3 May 2017. The Regional Schools Commissioner is responsible for finding a suitable academy sponsor. The Council is working with the Regional Schools Commissioner regarding this.
5. Both nationally and locally the process of finding a suitable academy sponsor in circumstances where a school appears to be financially unviable and has a large number of significant underperformance issues to address has proven very difficult. In consequence of this there was considered to be a significant risk that a strong sponsor might not be identified in a timely manner to begin the process of rapidly addressing the school's weaknesses. The Department for Education also requires local authorities to consider the option of closure in circumstances where schools are failing (see Annex 1).

The purpose of the consultation

6. Given both the severity of concerns raised by Ofsted, and those set out in paragraph 5, the council decided to open an informal consultation on the school's future. Views were sought on the potential impact of a decision to close the school and whether other solutions could be found to ensure good quality education in this part of Oxfordshire. Throughout this process, the council's number one priority has remained to ensure good educational opportunities are available to local families. Cabinet members have also publicly stated their desire to find a solution that would both enable the school to stay open and deliver the improvements demanded by Ofsted.
7. The Chiltern Edge consultation was initially set to run from the 27th April to the 16th June with the responses to be reported to the June Cabinet meeting. However, in order to ensure that all contributions to the consultation would be reflected in the written report, the consultation period was extended to the 30th June (9 weeks including the half-term holiday) and consideration by Cabinet deferred until its July meeting.
8. A decision is now sought whether to proceed with publishing a statutory notice and proposal to close Chiltern Edge School. If such a decision is made, in order to avoid the school holidays the soonest a notice would be published would be 5 September, with representations then running until 3 October. This would allow a final decision whether to close the school to be taken by Cabinet on 17 October, so that parents applying for places for 2018 would know the decision before the applications deadline of 30 October 2017.

Developments since the launch of the consultation

9. The County Council's application to the Regional School Commissioner for the governing body of Chiltern Edge School to be replaced by an Interim Executive Board (IEB) was approved and the IEB is now providing the school with strategic direction. It is chaired by an experienced former head teacher and has Finance and Human Resources expertise.

10. An interim head teacher with a proven track record of school improvement was appointed and she took up post on the 5th June. She has begun to implement a range of actions and strategies aimed at addressing the numerous weaknesses identified by Ofsted and to deliver an in-year balanced budget.
11. Following the County Council elections on 4th May a new Cabinet member for Education was appointed. She has met with the interim head teacher, the chair of the IEB, representatives of the 'Save Our Edge' campaign, the Sonning Common Parish Council and members and officers from Reading Borough Council.
12. She has also attended a public meeting where she was able to provide an update on developments since the start of the consultation. Of particular significance was that she was able to report that a potential sponsor had been identified and that initial discussions had been held with the Maiden Erlegh Trust, a Multi-Academy Trust based in Wokingham.

Results of the Stage 1 Consultation

13. The Stage 1 consultation included an online survey; three meetings for parents with children either at the school or due to start at the school in September 2017; and other meetings with interested parties, including other nearby schools and Reading Borough Council. Information was also collated from a number of data sources.
14. The online consultation received 1118 responses. 19% of these respondents identified themselves as parents of children at Chiltern Edge School; 6% as parents of children allocated places at Chiltern Edge School for September 2017; 24% as parents of children at primary school, two thirds of whom identified themselves as living in the designated area for Chiltern Edge School (some of these categories will overlap). There were 60 respondents identifying themselves as pupils at Chiltern Edge School, although from their detailed responses, it was apparent that some of these were actually past pupils, and it is not clear how many current pupils responded.
15. In addition, 92 responses were received by post and/or email – some of these responses were duplicates of those received online.
16. The information gathered through the consultation is detailed in Annex 3. In summary, the very large majority of responses opposed the closure of Chiltern Edge School. The affection and pride felt by those associated with the school was apparent from the detailed responses, as was local anger and concern that the school might be closed. A large number of responses disagreed with the Ofsted judgement, and said that it did not reflect their experience of the school.
17. Many respondents argued that there are not sufficient school places in the area already, and that this situation would worsen given that pupil numbers have grown in local primary schools, and there is housing planned in the local area. Data collated during the consultation identified that sufficient additional

school places could be created, through some capital investment, to accommodate Oxfordshire children who would be displaced by any closure, including allowing for housing growth in Oxfordshire, but the majority of children at Chiltern Edge School live in Reading. On the final day of the consultation (30 June) Reading Borough Council submitted their consultation response (attached as Annex 7), which stated that closure would cause “insurmountable problems with placing children in other schools in Reading”.

18. Most responses said that the school should be given more time and support to improve and stay open. Several respondents commented on the positive impact the new interim headteacher and Interim Executive Board were already having, and thought that with strong leadership, the school could quickly improve. Many responses said the school needed more funding, and suggestions were made as to how the school could improve.
19. There was a strong view that the closure of Chiltern Edge School would have a negative impact on the local community, including a large number of community users of the school’s accommodation.
20. If Chiltern Edge School were closed, the consultation identified that the schools which would be mostly affected by the consequent displacement would be Highdown, Gillotts and Langtree, with the choice between these schools largely determined by proximity and ease of travel. Parents considered it important that pupils would be only transferred to a good or better school.
21. As the site accommodates Bishopswood Special School, particular attention would need to be given to the future of this provision, as well as to pupils with Special Educational Needs currently taught at Chiltern Edge School.
22. While the large majority of responses opposed closure of Chiltern Edge, concerns were also raised about whether it is viable to continue to maintain the number of small secondary schools currently in southern Oxfordshire. Gillotts School and Langtree School both urged that the county council work with the other interested parties to address how best the quality of education in south-east Oxfordshire can be secured, in terms of number of places and their location, so as to ensure the future viability of schools.

Financial and Staff Implications

23. At this stage, a decision is sought as to whether to publish a statutory notice. The financial and staffing implications are therefore related to the work which would be necessary to develop the detailed proposal and the costs and time required to conduct the representation period. The costs of the statutory process which would be undertaken are planned for and met within the normal CYP&F budget provision. There are no significant financial implications at this stage.

Equalities Implications

24. If a statutory notice to close Chiltern Edge School is published, it would be accompanied by a Service and Community Impact Assessment, which would assess the impact of the proposal on any relevant community, but with particular emphasis on groups that share the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership). The assessment would also consider potential impact on individuals and communities (such as carers, rural communities and areas of deprivation), staff, other council services, other providers of services and other /partner organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

25. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
- (a) not proceed at this time with the publication of a statutory notice proposing the closure of Chiltern Edge School;**
 - (b) commission, ideally from Ofsted, an external review of the progress made by October 2017 towards addressing the weaknesses identified by Ofsted and the construction of an in-year balanced budget;**
 - (c) consider a further report on the progress identified by the external review at its November meeting.**

LUCY BUTLER

Director of Children's Services

Background papers:

- Annex 1: The decision-making process for closing a maintained school
- Annex 2: Factors for consideration when deciding to close a maintained school
- Annex 3: Information collected through the Stage 1 Consultation
- Annex 4: Gillotts School Response to Chiltern Edge Closure Consultation (received 6 June 2017)
- Annex 5: Langtree School Governors' response to the consultation on the future of Chiltern Edge School (received 21 June 2017)
- Annex 6: Consultation submission from Matt Rodda MP (Reading East) (received 29 June)
- Annex 7: Reading Borough Council's response to the consultation (received 30 June 2017)

Contact Officer: Roy Leach, Strategic Lead, Education Sufficiency & Access

July 2017

Annex 1: The decision-making process for closing a maintained school

The DfE’s statutory guidance on “Opening and closing local-authority-maintained schools closing maintained schools” (April 2016) specifies that where a maintained school is failing and there is no viable sponsored academy solution, the local authority can consider closure.

All decisions related to school closures are taken locally following a statutory process to allow those directly affected by the proposals to feed in their comments. All decisions on proposals to close a school must be made in accordance with the factors outlined in the guidance for decision-makers.

The DfE’s statutory guidance on “Opening and closing local authority maintained schools” (April 2016) sets out the required process, and is supported by the associated “Statutory guidance for decision-makers deciding prescribed alteration and establishment and discontinuance proposals” (April 2016). The relevant legislative basis for this guidance is Part 2 and Schedule 2 of the *Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006* as amended by the *Education Act (EA) 2011* and *The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013*.

The statutory process for closing a maintained school has five stages:

Stage 1	Consultation	No prescribed timescale.	Informal / pre consultation. Recommended to last a minimum of 6 weeks. School holidays should be taken into consideration and avoided where possible. Likely to be no longer than 12 months.
Stage 2	Publication		Publication of the statutory notice and proposal. The information which would need to be provided in such a proposal is shown in Annex 2.
Stage 3	Representation	4 weeks from date of publication.	Formal consultation. As prescribed in the Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools Regulations and cannot be shortened or lengthened.
Stage 4	Decision	LA should decide a proposal within 2 months of the end of the representation period, otherwise it will fall to the Schools Adjudicator.	Where permitted, appeals must be made within 4 weeks of notification of the decision.

Stage 5	Implementation	No prescribed timescale.	However the date must be as specified in the published notice, subject to any modifications agreed by the decision-maker.
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The consultation covered by this report is the Stage 1 consultation. If Cabinet were to decide to proceed to Stage 2, a statutory closure proposal would be written for publication and statutory representations. As set out in Schedule 2 to the Establishment and Discontinuance Regulations the information below **must** be included in a proposal to close a school:

Contact details

The name and contact address of the local authority or governing body publishing the proposals and the name, address and category of the school it is proposed that should be discontinued.

Implementation

The date on which it is proposed to close the school or, where it is proposed that the closure be implemented in stages, the dates of and information about each stage.

Reason for closure

A statement explaining the reason why closure of the school is considered necessary.

Pupil numbers and admissions

The numbers (distinguishing between compulsory and non-compulsory school age pupils), age range, sex, and special educational needs of pupils (distinguishing between boarding and day pupils) for whom provision is currently made at the school.

Displaced pupils

A statement and supporting evidence about the need for school places in the area including whether there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils.

Details of the schools or further education colleges at which pupils at the school to be discontinued will be offered places, including—

- a) any interim arrangements;
- b) the provision that is to be made for those pupils who receive educational provision recognised by the local authority as reserved for children with special educational needs; and
- c) in the case of special schools, the alternative provision made by local authorities other than the local authority which maintain the school.

Details of any other measures proposed to be taken to increase the number of school or further education college places available in consequence of the proposed discontinuance.

Impact on the community

A statement and supporting evidence about the impact on the community of the closure of the school and any measures proposed to mitigate any adverse impact.

Rural schools

Where proposals relate to a rural school designated as such by an order made for the purposes of section 15, a statement that the local authority or the governing body (as the case may be) considered section 15(4).

Special educational needs provision

Where existing provision that is recognised by the local authority as reserved for pupils with special educational needs is being discontinued, a statement as to how the local authority or the governing body (as the case may be) believe the proposals are likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of the educational provision for these children.

Travel

Details of length and journeys to alternative provision.

The proposed arrangements for travel of displaced pupils to other schools including how the proposed arrangements will mitigate against increased car use

Annex 2: Factors for consideration when deciding to close a maintained school

There are no prescribed factors for consideration in making the decision whether to publish a statutory notice. However, should such a notice be published, then the subsequent decision whether to close would need to be informed by a number of factors which are set out in Annex 2. The consultation aimed to gather information relevant to these factors, and the key messages resulting from the consultation are detailed in Annex 3.

Closure proposals & sufficiency of school capacity

The decision-maker should be satisfied that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils in the area, taking into account the overall quality of provision, the likely supply and future demand for places. The decision-maker should consider the popularity with parents of the schools in which spare capacity exists and evidence of parents' aspirations for those schools.

Consideration of consultation and representation period

The decision-maker will need to be satisfied that the appropriate fair and open local consultation and/or representation period has been carried out and that the proposer has given full consideration to all the responses received.

Education standards and diversity of provision

Decision-makers should consider the quality and diversity of schools in the relevant area and whether the proposal will meet or affect the needs of parents; raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps.

A school-led system with every school an academy

The 2016 White Paper *Education Excellence Everywhere*, sets out the department's aim that by the end of 2020, all schools will be academies or in the process of becoming academies. The decision-maker should, therefore, take into account the extent to which the proposal is consistent with this policy. (N.B. The White Paper has not been translated into the primary legislation required to give effect to this aim.)

School size

Decision-makers should not make blanket assumptions that schools should be of a certain size to be good schools, although the viability and cost-effectiveness of a proposal is an important factor for consideration. The decision-maker should also consider the impact on the LA's budget of the need to provide additional funding to a small school to compensate for its size.

Equal opportunity issues

The decision-maker must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) of LAs/governing bodies, which requires them to have 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination;
- advance equality of opportunity; and
- foster good relations.

The decision-maker should consider whether there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that arise from the changes being proposed.

Community cohesion

Schools have a key part to play in providing opportunities for young people from different backgrounds to learn with, from and about each other; by encouraging, through their teaching, an understanding of, and respect for, other cultures, faiths and communities. When considering a proposal, the decision-maker must consider its impact on community cohesion.

Travel and accessibility

Decision-makers should satisfy themselves that accessibility planning has been properly taken into account and the proposed changes should not adversely impact on disadvantaged groups. The decision-maker should bear in mind that a proposal should not unreasonably extend journey times or increase transport costs, or result in too many children being prevented from travelling sustainably due to unsuitable walking or cycling routes. A proposal should also be considered on the basis of how it will support and contribute to the LA's duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school.

Funding

The decision-maker should be satisfied that any land, premises or necessary funding required to implement the proposal will be available and that all relevant local parties (e.g. trustees or religious authority) have given their agreement. A proposal **cannot** be approved conditionally upon funding being made available.

Schools causing concern

In determining proposals decision-makers must ensure that the guidance on schools causing concern (Intervening in falling, underperforming and coasting schools) has been followed where necessary.

Community Services

Some schools may be a focal point for family and community activity, providing extended services for a range of users, and its closure may have wider social consequences. The effect on families and the community should be considered when considering proposals about the closure of such schools. Where the school is providing access to extended services, provision should be made for the pupils and their families to access similar services through their new schools or other means.

Presumption against closing rural schools

There is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and a proposal must be clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.

As there is a presumption against closing rural schools, as Chiltern Edge is classified, any eventual decision to close would need to particularly consider:

- the likely effect of the closure of the school on the local community;
- educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools;
- the availability, and likely cost to the LA, of transport to other schools;
- any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the closure of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase; and
- any alternatives to the closure of the school.

Any proposal to close a rural school should provide evidence to show that the following have been carefully considered:

- alternatives to closure including the potential for federation with another local school or conversion to academy status and joining a multi-academy trust or umbrella trust to increase the school's viability;
- the scope for an extended school to provide local community services; and facilities e.g. child care facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access etc.;
- the transport implications; and
- the overall and long term impact on local people and the community of closure of the village school and of the loss of the building as a community facility.

Other factors for consideration: Related proposals

Any proposal that is 'related' to another proposal must be considered together. A proposal should be regarded as 'related' if its implementation (or non-implementation) would prevent or undermine the effective implementation of another proposal. Decisions for 'related' proposals should be compatible.

Where a proposal is 'related' to another proposal to be decided by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) the decision-maker should defer taking a decision until the RSC has taken a decision on the proposal, or where appropriate, grant a conditional approval for the proposal.

If Chiltern Edge School were to close, there would need to be expansion of one or more other local schools. As the neighbouring schools are academies, such expansion would need to be approved by the Regional Schools Commissioner.

According to DfE Departmental Advice issued March 2016, "Making significant changes to an open academy", academies rated 'good' or 'outstanding' at their last inspection, proposing to physically expand their school premises, may follow the fast track approval process, unless the proposal results in an increase of over: 50% in the school's capacity; and/or increases pupil numbers to 2,000 pupils or more. The schools likely to be affected would all qualify for fast track approval to expand under current circumstances.

If a proposal to close Chiltern Edge School is published, the decision on that proposal should not be made until RSC approval has been granted for any resulting expansion of another school, or should be made conditional upon such approval.

Annex 3: Information collected through the Stage 1 Consultation

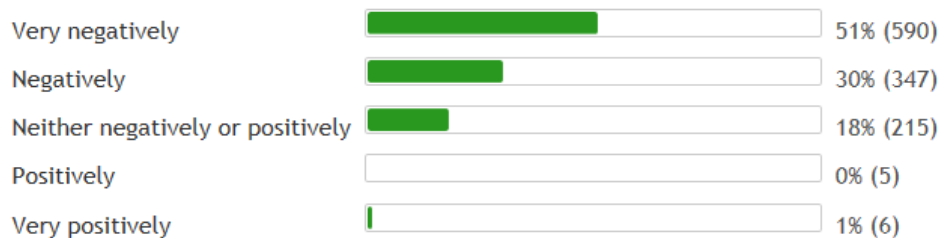
1. The online consultation received 1118 responses. 19% of these respondents identified themselves as parents of children at Chiltern Edge School; 6% as parents of children allocated places at Chiltern Edge School for September 2017; 24% as parents of children at primary school, two thirds of whom identified themselves as living in the designated area for Chiltern Edge School (some of these categories will overlap). There were 60 respondents identifying themselves as pupils at Chiltern Edge Primary School, although from their detailed responses, it was apparent that some of these were actually past pupils, and it is not clear how many current pupils responded.
2. In addition, 92 responses were received by post and/or email – some of these responses were duplicates of those received online.
3. The consultation period also included three meetings conducted by Oxfordshire County Council and Reading Borough Council officers for parents with children either at the school or due to start at the school in September 2017, and other meetings with interested parties, including other nearby schools and Reading Borough Council.
4. The responses to the consultation are summarised under the following headings. (Where statistics/graphs are provided, these refer to the online responses only.)

Should the county council propose closure of Chiltern Edge School?

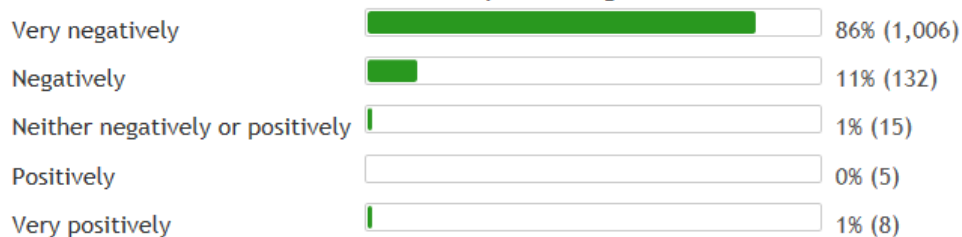
5. Nearly all responses to the consultation opposed closure, including those from Reading Borough Council, Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre, The Henley College, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, and Matt Rodda MP (Reading East) wrote to oppose closure. Sonning Common Parish Council, at its meeting of 15 May 2017, approved the motion “The Parish Council wishes to see Chiltern Edge School successfully brought out of special measures and retained in situ to continue with its important educational and community role in the village. To this end the Parish Council will work with elected representatives, officers, appropriate bodies and school supporters to do everything possible to keep the school in being.”
6. The very large majority of responses identified that the closure of Chiltern Edge School would affect their family, the community, and the quality of local education in the area, negatively or very negatively, and thought that closure should not be considered.

Table 1: What impact would closure of Chiltern Edge School have?

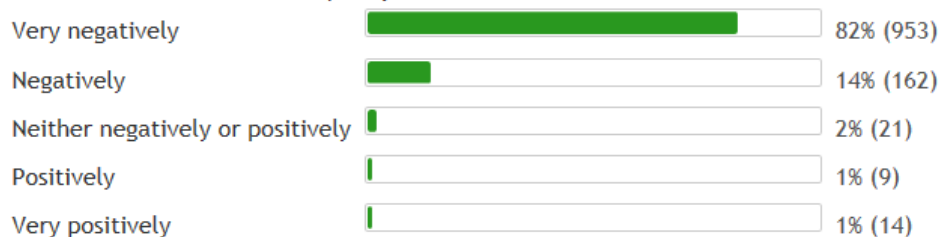
Detailed breakdown for 'You and your family, personally?'



Detailed breakdown for 'The local community of Sonning Common?'



Detailed breakdown for 'The quality of education in this area?'



7. The affection and pride felt by those associated with the school was apparent from the detailed responses, as was local anger and concern that the school might be closed.
8. A large number of responses disagreed with the Ofsted judgement, and said that it did not reflect their experience of the school. Many respondents praised the school's staff, and argued that many subjects are already achieving good results, although there was some criticism for core subjects. Closure was considered an extreme over-reaction.
9. Some commented that Oxfordshire County Council had not previously given the school sufficient support, and that lessons should be learned about intervening in schools more quickly, and more closely monitoring school performance. Several responses queried the motivation behind closing the school, and in particular whether closure was proposed in order to sell off the site for a capital receipt, and to build more houses.
10. Many respondents argued that there are not sufficient school places in the area already, and that this situation would worsen given that pupil numbers have grown in local primary schools, and there is housing planned in the local area. The need for school places in the area is considered in more detail below.

11. The negative impact on the local community of closing the school was described by several respondents, including the number of community users of the school site and buildings, and how closing the school would reduce the attractiveness of Sonning Common as a place for families to live, and affect local businesses. Being able to walk to school is good for developing pupils' confidence and independence, and their interaction with the local community.
12. Only a few respondents agreed with proposing closure of the school. Some reported negative experiences, including poor behaviour, and thought the school would take too long to turn round.
13. Parents of primary children were asked whether they would choose Chiltern Edge as a preferred school.

Preference for CES	Designated area	All respondents
First	91 [53%]	108 [45%]
Second	49 [28%]	80 [33%]
Third	22 [13%]	34 [14%]
Not a preference	11 [6%]	18 [8%]

The parents who said Chiltern Edge would not be a preference did so mostly due to concerns over standards at the school or distance from home; there were also concerns about the condition of the buildings; lack of support from the council; and the lack of a sixth form.

Alternatives to closure

14. As a rural school, particular attention needs to be given to alternatives to closure, including the potential for federation with another local school or conversion to academy status and joining a multi-academy trust or umbrella trust to increase the school's viability.
15. Most responses said that the school should be given more time and support to improve and stay open. Highdown School was quoted as an example of a school which turned itself around after a poor Ofsted report. Several respondents commented on the positive impact the new interim headteacher and Interim Executive Board were already having, and thought that with strong leadership, the school could quickly improve.
16. Many responses said the school needed more funding, including the funding that would be needed to expand other schools and pay for transport if Chiltern Edge closed, which could instead be spent on improving Chiltern Edge. A few respondents suggested that parents could be asked for donations, but far more thought that there should be more government (local or national) funding for the school.
17. While some respondents rejected the academy option, more accepted that if the school were to stay open, it would need to become a sponsored academy.

It was suggested that the county council should write off the school's budget deficit to encourage a sponsor to take on the school. A few respondents said that the school should become a grammar school, but others said it should not be a grammar school, with no clear balance of views.

18. Suggestions for how the school needs to improve include:

- Improving recruitment and retention of high quality staff at all levels, and ending the dependence on supply staff.
- Considering the nature of education it provides, for example specialising, or providing alternatives to GCSEs to include all range of needs.
- Improving the behaviour of pupils, through stricter discipline.
- Reconsidering the length of the school day to ensure supported homework facilities.
- Closer supervision of the school's performance.
- Better communication with parents.
- Increasing specialist support for SEN/EBD children.
- Focusing on core subjects (English, Maths and Science).
- Changing the classroom set up and looking at how pupils migrate through the school.
- Develop management skills at all levels.
- More professional development for staff.

19. It was suggested that the school could get more support from other local schools and The Henley College, which could be through a school-to-school support network, or through formally federating or joining a multi-academy trust, or even merging.

20. There was support for the existing plan of the school to develop a small portion of its site to generate capital funding to invest in the school, including in providing community facilities which could bring in revenue income. It was thought that building subsidised housing for teachers on some of this land could improve recruitment and retention of staff. Another suggestion was that revenue could be raised through having an on-site shop where pupils could get work experience.

21. Some respondents wanted new accommodation to be built for Chiltern Edge School, or for a new school to be built on the site to replace Chiltern Edge School. Reading families in particular commented that the area needed another secondary school due to a shortage of places north of the river. Other suggestions included relocating Sonning Common Primary School into the Chiltern Edge School to create an all-through school; creating a sixth form – perhaps shared with other schools; restoring adult education to create a lifelong learning centre; increasing the use of the site at weekends and school holidays; making Chiltern Edge an annex of another school; relocating Gillotts

School to the Chiltern Edge site, as Gillotts' accommodation is in poorer condition.

If closure is proposed, what should be taken into account in planning the school's closure?

22. Those factors marked * require particular attention for a rural school.

a. Sufficiency of school capacity

Many consultation responses questioned how Chiltern Edge School could be closed when there are insufficient places at other secondary schools in the area to take the displaced pupils.

Chiltern Edge School currently has a capacity of 934 places, admitting up to 180 pupils per year. As of March 2017 it had 507 pupils on roll, so was just over half-full. Of the pupils on roll at Chiltern Edge School in March 2017, only 159 live in Oxfordshire, with most of the rest living in the Caversham area of Reading.

Data collated during the consultation confirmed that there are currently insufficient places at other secondary schools in the area to take the displaced pupils. Langtree School and Gillotts School identified potential to create "bulge" classes to take additional pupils, but did not consider they could accommodate all the pupils currently at Chiltern Edge School. It would be necessary for Reading Schools to accommodate most or all of the Reading pupils.

On 30 June 2017 the county council received Reading Borough Council's consultation response, Annex 7, which stated that closure of Chiltern Edge School would result in Reading pupils having to travel to schools more than three miles distant from where current Reading-resident Chiltern Edge pupils live, and that over 70 per cent of the places currently available are in schools requiring special measures, with 85 per cent in schools that are either requiring improvement or special measures.

In the longer term, pupil planning data indicates that expansion of other schools would be needed to replace the capacity lost at Chiltern Edge School.

Many consultation responses, including that from The Heights Primary School in Caversham, commented that existing bulge classes in local primary schools and planned local housing growth require more, not fewer, secondary school places in this area.

Pupil numbers in the Sonning Common partnership primary schools do not indicate likely growth in demand for places at Chiltern Edge School, and demonstrate how the school is dependent on pupils from outside its immediate area, i.e. Reading, to sustain its numbers:

Current year group	R	1	2	3	4	5	6
Year of secondary transfer	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Numbers currently on roll in partnership primary schools	93	103	106	90	106	100	100

Data from the last five years' admissions rounds shows that, on average, 65% of pupils at Chiltern Edge's three partner primary schools (Sonning Common Primary School, Kidmore End Primary School and Peppard Primary School) transfer to Chiltern Edge School. Based on this level of transfer, the partnership schools would be expected to contribute around 60-70 pupils per year to Chiltern Edge's intakes, with the balance being drawn from Reading schools.

In the Woodcote (Langtree) partnership primary schools there is some evidence of growth in demand for places, and in particular a bulge in the cohort due to transfer on 2019, but it is not clear that there will be sustained growth. There is no sustained pattern of growth in the Henley primary schools.

Current Local Plan indications are that housing growth in the Sonning Common area could potentially generate pupils equivalent to around half a form of entry; in the Langtree area there is a similar scale of planned housing growth; in Henley planned housing growth might eventually generate approximately one additional form of entry's equivalent of pupils. Reading Borough Council is consulting on its draft Local Plan, which includes 700 homes in north Reading, broadly equivalent to somewhat less than one form of entry in pupil generation. In each case, much of the impact of housing growth will not affect secondary school numbers for several years.

b. Displaced pupils

Any closure notice would need to specify where pupils displaced by the closure would be offered places, and measures proposed to increase the number of school places in consequence of the proposed closure.

Two other schools are within 3 miles of Sonning Common as the crow flies, although they are more than three miles by transport routes:

Secondary Schools within 3 miles	Distance in miles from Sonning Common	Ofsted rating
Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre (Emmer Green, Reading)	3.5	Good (May 2015)
Gillotts School (Henley)	4.6	Good (April 2016)

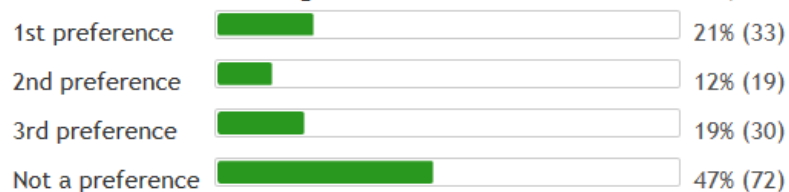
There are a further five secondary schools within 5-8 miles (by travel routes) of Sonning Common:

Other Secondary Schools within 5 miles	Distance in miles from Sonning Common	Ofsted rating
Langtree School (Woodcote, Oxon)	5.0	Good (June 2013)
Kendrick (Girls Grammar) School (Tilehurst, Reading)	5.7	Predecessor (non-school): Outstanding (October 2008) Not inspected since converting to an academy
Reading (Boys Grammar) School	6.3	Outstanding (May 2010)
The WREN School (Reading) Free School, opened Sept 2015	6.4	Not yet inspected
Prospect School (Reading)	7.4	Requires Improvement with "Good" features (Sept 2016)

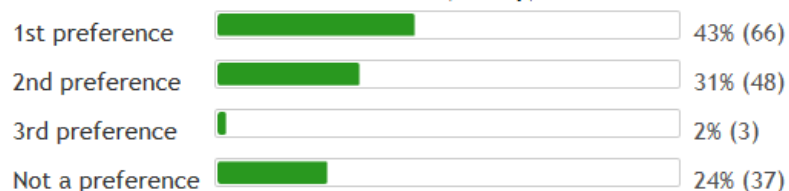
Other than Highdown, the Reading schools are south of the river, which has significant implications for travel times.

Respondents identifying themselves as parents of **Chiltern Edge Year 7-9 pupils** (children in Years 10 and 11 will have left the school before any potential closure) were asked what their preferred schools would be should Chiltern Edge School close:

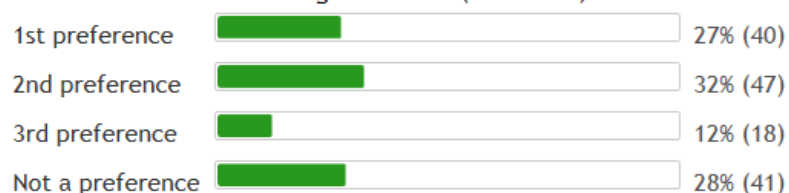
Detailed breakdown for 'Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre (Emmer Green, Reading)'



Detailed breakdown for 'Gillotts School (Henley)'



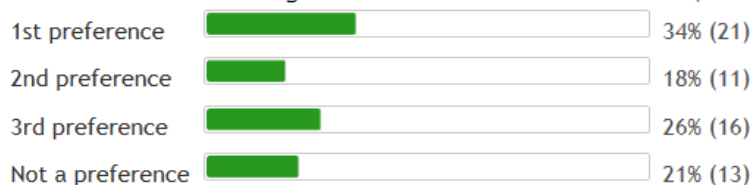
Detailed breakdown for 'Langtree School (Woodcote)'



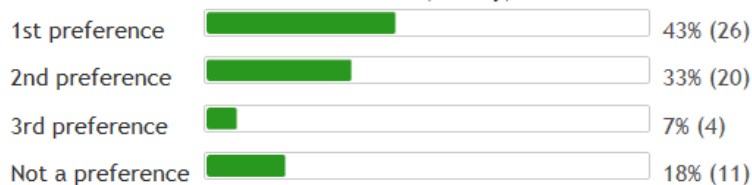
The UTC Reading was also identified as a preferred school by some parents.

Respondents identifying themselves as parents of **Year 6 pupils** allocated places for September 2017 were asked what their preferred schools would be should Chiltern Edge School close:

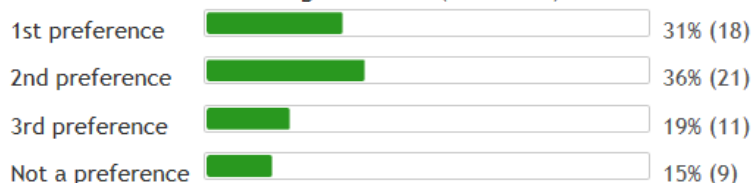
Detailed breakdown for 'Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre (Emmer Green, Reading)'



Detailed breakdown for 'Gillotts School (Henley)'

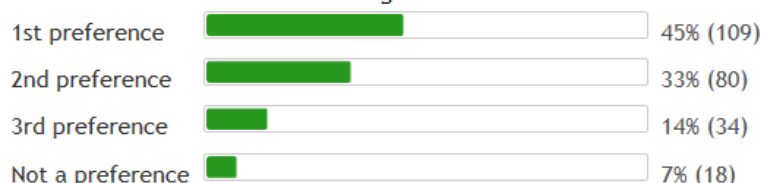


Detailed breakdown for 'Langtree School (Woodcote)'

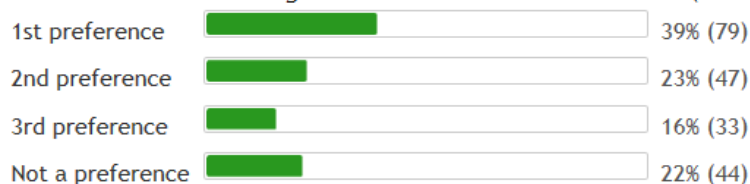


The 287 respondents identifying themselves as parents of **primary school Reception – Year 5 pupils** were asked what their preferred schools would be for secondary transfer:

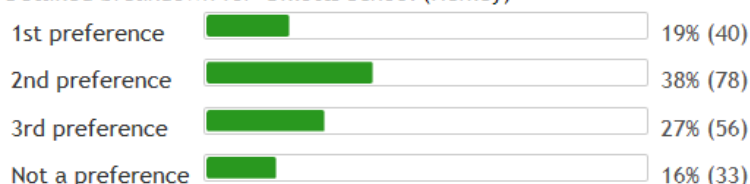
Detailed breakdown for 'Chiltern Edge School'



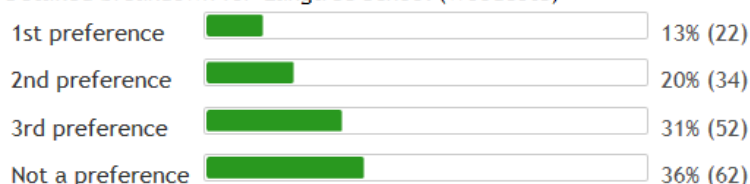
Detailed breakdown for 'Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre (Emmer Green, Reading)'



Detailed breakdown for 'Gillotts School (Henley)'



Detailed breakdown for 'Langtree School (Woodcote)'



Kendrick School, Reading School and Wallingford School were also identified as preferences by a few parents, as were independent schools.

Should Chiltern Edge School close, the schools which would be mostly affected by the consequent displacement would clearly be Highdown, Gillotts and Langtree, with the choice between these schools largely determined by proximity and ease of travel.

Respondents considered it important that pupils are given a place at a nearby good school of their choice; that siblings were not separated; that friendship groups should be maintained. There was concern that the allocation of places to other schools should be fair, and not on a “first come” basis.

Catchment areas of surrounding schools would need to be adjusted, but there was a concern that Sonning Common could end up on the edge of other schools' catchments, and always at a disadvantage in the admission process.

The governors of Gillotts School responded that Gillotts School had some vacancies to take transferring pupils, and could create “bulge” classes if

immediate financial support is provided to increase staffing. In the longer term, their site offers potential to expand the school with appropriate capital investment. They raised concerns that despite the school's high standards, Gillotts is not full and has experienced five successive intakes below the school's admission number. The school's partner primary schools are also not full. It is their view that there is an oversupply of school places in south-east which should be addressed by considering how best the quality of education in south-east Oxfordshire can be secured, in terms of number of places and their location. Their full response is shown in Annex 4.

The governors of Langtree School raised particular concerns about pupils at Chiltern Edge about to embark on their GCSE courses at KS4. Consequently, the Headteacher at Langtree School will continue to work in partnership with the interim Headteacher at Chiltern Edge, the Local Authority, the strategic school improvement lead and the Head of the IEB in order to provide whatever help and support it is possible for Langtree to offer during this period of uncertainty. At the time of writing their response to the consultation, Langtree School had only two available places in Year 9. Once these places are taken, the school will be full given its current accommodation and organisation. Like Gillotts, Langtree also raised concerns about the long-standing issue of oversupply of school places in south east Oxfordshire. Their full response is shown in Annex 5.

Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre responded that they are "aware that there are many Reading families who have children at Chiltern Edge School. There is not capacity in Highdown for all of these children. Transport time to other Reading schools would be prohibitive. Therefore Highdown believes that Chiltern Edge should be supported to improve and remain open to provide education for children of Reading and South Oxfordshire."

Consultation responses emphasised the importance of additional places being available in Reading for Reading pupils. It was argued that, if Reading pupils could not be accommodated at Highdown, they would be the worst affected by any closure of Chiltern Edge due to the travel difficulties of reaching other schools from the Caversham area.

The consultation responses emphasised the negative impact that having to transfer midway through secondary education would have on children. There was particular concern about children already studying for their GCSE courses (Chiltern Edge starts teaching some GCSE subjects in Year 9).

There was also broader concern that children starting a new school may be vulnerable to isolation, and would need mentoring and other support to support their emotional and mental well-being, as well as their academic progress. Practical issues were raised, including the need for free transport; financial support where families needed to buy new uniforms; and transition days for transferring pupils.

There were mixed views on the speed of closure, with some respondents thinking that a gradual closure would reduce the difficulties of school transfer, and others thinking that it should be as quick and smooth as possible.

As well as displaced pupils, concerns were also raised about staff at Chiltern Edge School, with requests that they would be supported through redeployment, retraining and mentoring.

c. Special educational needs provision

The closure of Chiltern Edge School would not classify as closure of provision for pupils with special educational needs, but as the site accommodated Bishopswood Special School, particular attention would need to be given to the future of this provision, as well as to pupils with SEND currently taught at Chiltern Edge School

Parents of children at Bishopswood School were asked where they would like to see Bishopswood's secondary provision delivered if Chiltern Edge School were to close. Respondents explained that proximity to the primary provision is important, as children are transferred between the two sites. Co-location with a mainstream school is preferred. and Gillott's and Langtree were suggested as alternatives.

Many parents commented on the benefits of a small school for children at Chiltern Edge School with special educational needs, and also raised concerns about children with SEND needing to travel further to other schools if Chiltern Edge School closed.

d. Education standards and diversity of provision*

The schools which would be expected to accommodate displaced pupils should Chiltern Edge School are all rated "Good" by Ofsted.

e. School size

Many respondents made the case that Chiltern Edge School is particularly valued because of its small size, which provides diversity and choice for families who do not want large schools. However, it was also noted that Chiltern Edge School is only currently small because it is not attracting sufficient applicants; its accommodation would enable it to be as big, or bigger than, other local schools which are considered "large".

As school budgets are closely linked to pupil numbers, the school's low numbers have resulted in a long-standing budget deficit which would indicate that it has not been able to maintain the quality of education within its budget. A minority view from the consultation was that, rather than have three schools so close together all struggling for money, it would be better to have two better funded schools.

Some parents of children attending other schools expressed concern that, if Chiltern Edge were to close, their children's schools would become overcrowded or too large, and that standards would suffer at those schools.

f. Equal opportunity issues

Many parents of children with special educational needs responded very positively about the care and attention their children received at Chiltern Edge School, often commenting that this was, at least in part, due to its small size. Parents of children with SEND were also particularly concerned about how their children would be affected if they had to change school, as they would find it difficult to settle into a new, probably larger, school, and may struggle with transport to a more distant school.

g. Community cohesion, community services and impact on rural communities*

Many respondents made the case that the school is a vital part of the local community. Having a secondary school makes the village more attractive to families moving in, and generates local employment.

The school's accommodation hosts a large number of community users, including:

Hirer including number of members	Use	Nights per week
CE Horticultural Society x100	Horticultural shows	Main show in September
CE Orchestra x34	Orchestra	Weekly booking (Tues)
Chiltern Badminton Club x15		Weekly booking (Thurs)
JG Dance x150		Whole site every Saturday Dance studio every Monday
Men's football x12	Local 5 – a – side club	Weekly booking (Thurs)
Ox Adult Learning x12	Upholstery Classes	Weekly booking (Tues)
Reading Ultimate x20	Frisbee	Has been weekly, on hold
Rock Choir x50		Occasional concerts
Rotherfield Football Club x50	Various age groups of youth football	Bookings on Wed and Thurs evenings
Primary school cross country x271	5 meets a year	Monthly October to March.
Scottish Dancing x100		Occasional large group dances
SC Youth Club x70 on roll	Open to young people aged 10 – 16	Twice a week
South Chiltern Choral Society x102 on roll	Choral singing	Weekly rehearsals on Monday, with staged concerts during the year

Women's Frisbee x15	Frisbee	Weekly booking (Wed)
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Some of these users come from a wider area, including Caversham, but respondents to the consultation considered it would be difficult to find alternative venues, and that the county council should take responsibility for doing so.

Loss or displacement of these activities would have a negative impact on the local community. One respondent described the crucial role of the Youth Club in an area subject to rural isolation, explaining that the police recognise that the facility reduces anti-social behaviour in the village, and that the Youth Club is particularly valuable to looked-after children placed at the Children's Home & foster carers in the village.

The school is also used by local primary schools for events including music and sports. The secondary school's pupils also take the role of "water helpers" for after-school swimming school at Sonning Common Primary School, which they would not be able to do if they had to travel further to school.

Any proposal to close the school would need to give careful attention to mitigating the potential impact on the community, and in particular whether community facilities could be retained/enhanced.

h. Travel and accessibility*

If Chiltern Edge School were to close, displaced pupils would need to travel to other schools in Oxfordshire or Reading. Statutory guidance requires that a proposal should not unreasonably extend journey times or increase transport costs, or result in too many children being prevented from travelling sustainably due to unsuitable walking or cycling routes, and that changes should not adversely impact on disadvantaged groups. Respondents, including Reading Borough Council, raised concerns over the amount of travel time pupils would require, particularly if having to travel into Reading, and on how this would increase traffic in the area. It was considered that free direct bus transport should be provided for all affected pupils. Any transport arrangements put in place would need to support pupils' attendance at before/after school clubs. The specific travel needs of children with special educational needs would need particular attention.

i. Funding

Any decision to close a school would require certainty that the necessary funding required to implement the proposal will be available and that all relevant local parties (e.g. trustees or religious authority) have given their agreement. A proposal cannot be approved conditionally upon funding being made available. The consultation identified three strands of funding concerns:

- Schools receiving displaced schools would require additional accommodation, so significant capital investment would be necessary. If part of the current Chiltern Edge School site were to be sold for

redevelopment, the disposal receipt could be reinvested in other schools' accommodation, but this would be subject to the necessary approvals for disposal of schools sites and planning permission. Some consultation responses opposed the building of houses on the Chiltern Edge School site.

- Additional staffing would also be required at receiving schools: although in the longer term this would be funded from increased revenue as a result of higher pupil numbers, schools raised concerns about the time lag between receiving additional pupils and benefitting from higher budgets.
- Oxfordshire County Council and Reading Borough Council would incur additional school travel costs. For Oxfordshire, these have been estimated at £100,000 per year.

Annex 4: Gillotts School Response to Chiltern Edge Closure Consultation

Capacity - as Gillotts is not full, we will clearly be able to take some Chiltern Edge students either through parental choice or when the school closes.

Published Admissions Number - we are working with OCC's Pupil Place Planning team to establish if, in the longer term, Gillotts' PAN may need to be increased, should Chiltern Edge close. We currently have 76 Reading pupils in the school. Were Reading to educate all its students going forward, it would appear likely that the current PAN, or a small increase, would be adequate, especially as some Chiltern Edge students live closer to Langtree than Gillotts. The size of our site means we could accommodate increased pupil numbers, though we may need some capital investment to support.

Managing bulges as Chiltern Edge closes - we anticipate we would need to breach our PAN in some year groups to manage the closure process. This will put pressure on the school as the curriculum and staffing would have to be restructured. However with notice and working in partnership with OCC, we would expect to be able to support.

Funding - a major challenge in managing the closure is the fact that funding is on lagged pupil numbers. Given the current very difficult financial situation for schools, we will be seeking OCC's support to ensure that any pupils who are admitted over the school's published admissions number will be funded immediately.

Appeals - we will be seeking OCC's support in funding exceptional numbers of appeals, should these come to pass.

Long term security of the quality of education at Gillotts - despite the School's high standards, we are not full and have experienced five successive intakes of fewer than our PAN. Our partner primary schools are also not full. The oversupply of school places in south-east Oxfordshire has been an issue for many years and was last formally considered in 2006, though it was not tackled at that time. We welcome this consultation as an opportunity to consider how best the quality of education in south-east Oxfordshire can be secured, in terms of number of places and their location.

Annex 5: Langtree School Governors' response to the consultation on the future of Chiltern Edge School

Governors at Langtree School recognise the close partnership between Langtree and Chiltern Edge which has been a strong feature of our learning community in south east Oxfordshire for many years. In this regard, the governors at Langtree School are very aware of the level of concern which will be felt by all those connected with Chiltern Edge at such an uncertain time.

In particular, governors at Langtree School would like to express their concern for the immediate future of the pupils at Chiltern Edge, especially those who are about to embark on their GCSE courses at KS4. Consequently, the Headteacher at Langtree School will continue to work in partnership with the interim Headteacher at Chiltern Edge, the Local Authority, the strategic school improvement lead and the Head of the IEB in order to provide whatever help and support it is possible for Langtree to offer during this period of uncertainty. Governors at Langtree are fully supportive of this strategy and it is our hope that our close partnership links continue throughout this difficult period.

At the time of writing this response to the consultation, Langtree School has only two available places in Year 9. Once these places are taken, our school will be full. In order to protect the educational provision for students currently studying at Langtree, governors are clear that there will be no increase to this admission number during the period of the consultation.

Clearly, a proposal to close any school in the heart of any community will always be a serious and contentious one. The governors at Langtree school, along with the Headteacher, urge all stakeholders in the local community to submit a response to the current consultation, in order to ensure that the decision makers are fully aware of the views and feelings of all those who could be affected by potential closure.

If the outcome of the consultation is for Chiltern Edge to remain open, governors at Langtree will continue to work with elected representatives and officers at Oxfordshire County Council to address the long-standing issue of oversupply of school places in south east Oxfordshire, in order to ensure that Langtree is a viable school for its local community well into the future.

Annex 6: Consultation submission from Matt Rodda MP (Reading East)

I would like to raise the following points, after considering the future of Chiltern Edge and speaking to local parents, teachers and colleagues from Oxfordshire County Council and Reading Borough Council.

Basic Need

There is clear evidence of growing basic need in the north Reading area, which has been demonstrated by the lack of school places at local primaries. Given this context I am concerned that a valuable local school could be lost if Oxfordshire proceeded with a formal consultation which led to closure of Chiltern Edge.

As a result, I believe it is important to keep the school open. In addition the need for school places in the area is linked to a series of other points.

Parental choice

Parents in the north Reading area currently have a choice of two schools offering different and complementary provision. I believe it is important to maintain this element of choice, in particular with regard to areas where Chiltern Edge has a particularly high reputation, such as special needs provision.

Benefits of maintaining a local Community School

Chiltern Edge plays a valuable role as a community school, both for north Reading and the community in south Oxfordshire.

Raising standards

Chiltern Edge recently received a critical Ofsted report, however, the school has also been given much higher gradings in previous Ofsted reports. It currently has a new head who has turned round another school and is showing strong leadership and is supported by an IEB. I believe this process of school improvement should be supported by giving the school time to improve.

Value for Money

If Chiltern Edge was closed at a time of rising basic need Oxfordshire and Reading might have to build other schools or expand existing schools to provide suitable places. They would have to do so at a time when building costs and land values have risen. Maintaining an existing school would appear to offer far better value for money as a result.

Matt Rodda, MP for Reading East, 29th June, 2017

Annex 6: Consultation submission from Reading Borough Council