

Ickleford Parish Council – education presentation to EiP – 27 February 2018

Residents of Ickleford feel overwhelmed by the scale of the proposed changes to our village as detailed in the NHDC Local Plan. However, in comments made to members of the Parish Council, it is apparent that one proposal is causing more anger and dismay to more residents than any other single recommendation in the Plan; the proposed relocation of Ickleford Primary School from its current position at the heart of our village to a part of site IC3. The opposition to this proposal is supported by a survey conducted in Ickleford in the past two weeks. After explaining NHDC's reasons for doubling the size of the school and relocating it to their preferred site, and noting the opposition of Ickleford Parish Council to this proposal, the letter to residents asked a simple question:

Should Ickleford Primary School remain in its current location?

Considering that the consultation period straddled the school half-term holiday, we were pleased with the response rate of **36%**. Of those who replied, **98%** wanted the school to remain where it is.

Along with St Katharine's Church, the Village Hall and Ickleford Stores, Ickleford Primary School forms the heart of the village. This is the case not just in a physical sense but more broadly, and this fact is reflected in the level of anxiety that NHDC's proposal for relocating the school has caused. This is felt not just among current pupils and their parents, but also former pupils and parents and many residents who have no direct link with the school.

The school is located off the Village Green, and has been an integral part of the community since it was built in 1848. The main school building and the flint boundary wall are Grade 2 listed. The school has been extended over the years to accommodate the gradually-expanding population of Ickleford, and now also includes seven classrooms, a hall, dining room, library, music room, special needs room and IT suite. Outside there are attractive grounds providing ample playing fields for competitive and non-competitive sports, and also a small wildlife area.

Historically, Ickleford Primary School was a Church of England school, and it still retains a Voluntary Controlled status. More important are the direct links between church and school, with a regular procession of children from one to the other for various activities

associated with the RE curriculum and religious festivities and celebrations. The school and church are about 100m apart, separated by the Village Green, with this proximity optimising these interactions, even in inclement weather.

The school is also opposite Ickleford Village Hall, making it easy for children to move seamlessly from their formal education to post-school activities in the Village Hall.

The presence of the nearby (150m away) Ickleford Stores – our only such shop – provides basic retail opportunities for children, parents and staff at either end of the school day; and this helps ensure the financial viability of this important village asset.

The attractive and expansive Village Green provides a perfect and safe location for parents, carers and children to socialise. Thus, the Green comes to life at 8:30 every term-time morning, and from 3:00 in the afternoon, with groups of people of all ages congregating to chat at either end of the school day. A good definition of ‘community’ is a body of people with something in common, and this gathering clearly provides a vital community function in Ickleford. It is unlikely that this focal point could be provided in an alternative school location.

I am sure much of this will seem trivial to more sophisticated urban dwellers, but these interactions are part of what makes village life so special, and Ickleford such a popular place to live. And changes which affect the bonds which are clearly so important to residents should only be made if they are absolutely necessary, and after careful consideration.

It is our assertion that the proposed relocation of Ickleford Primary School is neither necessary nor has the recommendation been given much consideration.

I think it would be helpful, Sir, for you to orientate yourself with the proposed location of the Education Zone as given in the Hearing statement Vincent & Gorbings on behalf of HCC Education. Their recommendation is to position a new 2FE school at the eastern part of IC3, adjacent to the Ickleford Sports and Recreation Club. IC3 itself is a site which is split by Bridleway 15 which runs east to west, and this bridleway would form the southern boundary of the Education Zone. The approximate distance from the school’s current location at the heart of the village to the entrance to the Education Zone is 400m, running almost exclusively along Chambers Lane.

We have a number of concerns about the school relocation proposal, and I would like to start with the heritage impact. This could have been addressed in the Heritage Assessment for Ickleford (NHE5), but IC3 is not mentioned at all in this document. While IC3 itself might have a limited heritage contribution, the proposed relocation of the school forms a key part of NHDC's plans for this site. There are significant heritage impacts of the school relocation, and these have clearly not been considered in NHE5 – a serious omission. Essentially, Ickleford Primary School is a key component of the village Conservation Area, comprising 21 listed heritage assets. It is our firm opinion that the school relocation runs the risk of weakening this historical core.

We have serious concerns about pedestrian and road safety associated with the proposed access to the Education Zone from Chambers Lane. This cannot have been suggested by anyone with local knowledge. Chambers Lane is a narrow road where two-way traffic is impossible in parts and challenging in all other places. Moreover, the narrowest section has no pavement footpath for pedestrians. Under HCC's recommendation 420 pupils and their parents plus about 50 members of school staff will access the new school twice a day. It is, frankly, beyond belief that Chambers Lane is the authorities' preferred route.

To compound this significant, genuine safety concern, the HCC Education Hearing submission acknowledges that there will be insufficient demand for a 2FE school for pupils living in Ickleford. These 'spare capacity' pupil places will be filled from children outside of the village, and they will almost certainly be driven to school. It is impossible to say exactly what proportion of the pupils of the new 2FE school will come by car, but is undoubtedly the case that the absolute numbers arriving and departing in vehicles will be greater than currently with the 1FE school. It is inconceivable that a large tract of valuable land in the Education Zone will be set aside to provide parking for 200 vehicles (a reasonable estimate; 50 staff needing 'full' parking spaces, and 150 vehicles associated with pupils – about 1/3 of the total pupil population). Moreover, it would be inappropriate to 'cannibalise' the Education Zone for car parking purposes as this would lead to much-reduced school playing fields for the children. So, the inevitable will happen; complete gridlock and utter chaos will ensue every school-term morning and afternoon for local residents and members of the school community as cars are abandoned in the narrow residential streets adjacent to the Education Zone. Try as we might, we can see no possible way to mitigate for this scenario.

This is nobody's definition of 'sustainable' development. For this to have been proposed as a serious option simply beggars belief.

The other component of our concern focusses on whether the Local Plan has accurately assessed whether there is a need for an expanded primary school in Ickleford. To begin, it is worth clarifying an ambiguous point in the Proposed Submission Local Plan document (LP1), Ickleford section, which states 'Ickleford Primary is a 1FE school and regularly fills most of its available places from the local area' (13.160, p170). The ambiguity is in the phrase 'local area'. Figures kindly provided to us by the school show, in October 2017, the following pupil numbers and their home settlements:

Ickleford	99
Hitchin	75
Letchworth	9
Holwell	17
Pirton	2
Lt Wymondley	1
Bedfordshire	8

Clearly, if 'local area' is defined as 'Ickleford', the statement is incorrect; fewer than half of the children attending Ickleford Primary School are resident in Ickleford. This is not something to which we object – the school could not have thrived without additional pupils from outside the village – but it goes to the heart of the case, presented in the Local Plan by HCC as the education authority, for relocating our school. Holwell, our neighbouring village, does not have its own primary school, and children from there tend to apply either to Pirton or Ickleford. But Hitchin, Letchworth, Pirton, Wymondley, Luton, Arlesey and Stondon – settlements where 95 Ickleford Primary School pupils currently live – clearly do have their own primary school provision.

The Ickleford Parish Council Appendix IPC13 lays out our calculations which suggest that a 1FE school in Ickleford in its present location will be able to accommodate pupils arising from the new developments in Ickleford, even taking the worst-case scenario (for the village) of all four Local Plan sites and both windfall developments. As this information has

been provided in our Appendix IPC13 it is not appropriate to mention it again in detail, although for the Inspector's and NHDC's benefit this is replicated at the end of the hard copy of my presentation which we have distributed today. However, there are a few key points and additional pieces of information which have come to light during the EiP process worth highlighting.

There is disagreement, noted in the Local Plan documentation, on the most accurate method for calculating the need for new school places. In the IDP (TI1, 6.76, p70) it shows that HCC's calculations are based on a pupil yield of 1FE per 500 dwellings. However, the same document suggests this to be a generous estimate compared with other shire counties, including our neighbouring authorities of Essex and Cambridgeshire (Table 6.7, p70). Consequently, NHDC seem to prefer a pupil yield of 1FE per 850 dwellings. Clearly, moving to this lower pupil yield reduces further any justification for expanding and relocating Ickleford Primary School.

We have a 'real life' example which might be informative in this debate. Ickleford has 844 dwellings, and these generate 99 pupils at Ickleford Primary School, which is equivalent to less than 0.5FE. Adding a further 419 homes (all four Local Plan sites plus both windfalls) would, on a pro rata basis, generate a further 0.25FE, therefore less than 0.75FE in total. There are two important caveats to this calculation:

1. Some children of primary school age in Ickleford attend other schools – mainly Our Lady Roman Catholic School in Hitchin, and local independent schools – or are schooled at home. We estimate that this to be 5 pupils per year group, and therefore 35 across the seven years of primary school provision¹. Therefore, the 'real' pupil yield for all Ickleford children currently is 0.64FE – i.e. $(99+35)/210$. Adding, pro rata, those from the 419 new dwellings would still generate a total of less than 1FE from the expanded Ickleford. However, there is no reason to expect that the ratio of children from Ickleford who attend Ickleford Primary School will be different in the new developments compared with the present-day situation; i.e. a similar proportion will be schooled at home or attend alternative educational establishments. And this real calculation (of 0.64FE) is still much lower than the HCC estimate, which would be 1.7FE for the 844 homes currently in Ickleford.

2. There is evidence that new housing developments attract a greater proportion of young families, eliciting a higher proportion of primary school-age children, and therefore a higher pupil yield. However, the demographics of the proposed new developments would have to be radically different from the current situation in Ickleford for this to generate so many additional primary school-age children that they could not be accommodated in a 1FE school. We do not believe that the demographics will be that different in the new developments compared with the village as it currently stands:

- The NHDC target is for 50% of homes arising from the Local Plan to be 1-2 bedroom, and 50% to be 3 or more bedrooms
- The current housing split in Ickleford is approximately 20% 1-2 bedroom and 80% 3+ bedroom

Of course, we know that the calculations we have performed to indicate that a 1FE school is adequate for an expanded population in Ickleford cannot be taken in isolation. The near-half of pupils at our school who come from outside of the village will still need primary education. By far, the greatest number of these are from Hitchin. The Local Plan makes provision for expansion of primary education in Hitchin:

A new 2FE primary school at HT1 (Highover Farm), of which only 1.4FE is required for the new development, and therefore there will be 0.6FE spare capacity for children from elsewhere in Hitchin.

The updated IDP (ED73) notes the possibility (6.47, p81-84) of expansion of 6 schools in Hitchin with the provision of an additional 5FE in the town.

Clearly, there is ample capacity in Hitchin to accommodate children who, in future years, would otherwise have come to a 1FE Ickleford Primary School, along with those from new developments in Hitchin itself.

In conclusion, we think this proves conclusively that our local primary school does not need to expand, and therefore does not need to be relocated. Ickleford Primary School can and should remain at the historical and social core of the village. Section 12 of the NPPF mandates, where possible, the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. We believe that we have shown this to be eminently possible in this instance.

NPPF (para 158) requires Local Plans to be created via a sound evidence base. We believe that we have shown that there is no evidence base which proves that a 2FE primary school is needed in Ickleford.

Para 32 of the NPPF requires Plans to consider whether safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people. We have shown that this cannot be achieved for the Education Zone of IC3, and that the Local Plan has not even considered this in its proposals.

Therefore, we respectfully request that mention of the expansion and relocation of Ickleford Primary School be removed from the Local Plan to make it sound.

¹Calculations for Ickleford primary-age children

- Ickleford Primary School has 211 pupils on its roll of whom only 99 are from Ickleford (October 2017)
- This equates to an average of 14 pupils per year group (Reception to Y6) being from Ickleford
- Census and Electoral Roll figures indicate 337 under 18s in Ickleford, equating to 19 per year.
- Of these, therefore, an average of 5 primary age children receive their education at home or at other establishments (e.g. Catholic Primary School, independent sector).

Appendix IPC13

1. Ickleford Primary School has 211 pupils on its roll of whom only 99 are from Ickleford (October 2017)
2. The Local Plan proposals plus windfalls would add 419 new dwellings in Ickleford. Using NHDC's preferred method of calculating pupil yield (25 per hundred dwellings – IDP 6.77, p70), these new homes would add 105 children to the school roll – the new total being within the school capacity.

3. The Hertfordshire primary schools' admissions criteria give high priority to children for whom a particular school is their nearest – this will be the case for children living in the village with respect to Ickleford Primary School.
4. Therefore, over time, children of the new developments in Ickleford will attain places at our school in preference to children from further afield.
5. Due to the cumulative numbers of new dwellings in the NHDC Local Plan as a whole, new school provision (primary and secondary) will be required in North Herts; this might be better placed elsewhere in the District. This is acknowledged within the Local Plan:

13.139: 'The cumulative demand arising from the remaining sites within Hitchin will create further demand for additional school places.'

13.140: 'Land at Bearton Green ... could be used to facilitate expansion of other existing primary schools by providing detached playing fields.'

Although these statements refer to Hitchin, it is appropriate to consider Ickleford Primary School within this context as 75 of our pupils live in Hitchin (October 2017).

6. Hertfordshire Education Authority should look at the best sites for expansion via a review once new housing numbers and locations throughout North Herts are known, as proposed in 13.141 of the Local Plan: 'Hertfordshire County Council will need to undertake further work to understand the dynamics of school place allocations within Hitchin and to identify the most appropriate location(s) to make any additional primary school provision.'
7. Even if Ickleford is chosen as a site for additional primary school provision after this review, the options for expanding on the site have not been fully explored. The western borders of the school are adjacent to fields onto which it could be extended. Such an approach has been considered for Codicote (6.54 of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan): 'Additional land to be sought to enable expansion of the current primary school'. Additionally, there are small areas of land at Ickleford Primary School which are currently unused, and these could be deployed to accommodate expansion.
8. Retaining the school in its current location will ensure the historical and social bonds of the village are unbroken, and the school remains core to the heart of Ickleford.