



NG/ECK

Dear Parent,

NEW COWBRIDGE SCHOOL

The recent decision of the Council to progress with the rebuilding of Cowbridge Comprehensive School has received extensive coverage in the local press. However, following discussions with Mrs. Evans, the Headteacher, it is clear that there remain a number of aspects which require further clarification. These are as follows:-

Current Position

The Vale of Glamorgan Council has agreed to progress a School Investment Strategy. The Strategy provides for rebuilding of three Secondary Schools in Cowbridge, St. Cyres and Llantwit Major and a significant programme of refurbishment of Primary Schools.

Secondary School Priorities

Following an objective and independent evaluation of options which included assessment based on conditions, maintenance requirements, planning issues and educational requirements, Cowbridge School has been identified as the Secondary School priority for rebuilding. Cowbridge School will be followed by St. Cyres School in Penarth and Llantwit Major Comprehensive School.

Assembly Government Support

The Welsh Assembly Government has supported the Council strategy and there have been a series of meetings with relevant Ministers at which funding issues and options were explored. A Private Finance Initiative [PFI] model would not be supported by the Assembly. The Assembly Government have provided an additional £9m to each Local Authority in Wales to improve schools.

Funding

The estimated costs of the School Investment Strategy within the Vale of Glamorgan is £68m. The strategy will be funded by a combination of borrowing, grant and release of capital assets.

Building Programme

Our Independent Advisers confirmed that in terms of minimising building costs, it would be more cost effective to build all three schools at the same time. However, this approach would require significant additional borrowing as it would preclude the possibility of phased release of land. The financial burden arising from the additional borrowing required for this option, cannot be met from the Council's revenue budgets. For this reason, a phased approach with Cowbridge as first priority has been agreed.

Land

The Council has initiated Compulsory Purchase Orders to obtain the land necessary for additional playing field space at the new school in Cowbridge. The progress of these orders and the development of playing fields will not delay the building of the new school.

Procurement

Public sector procurement regulations require the Council to seek open tenders for the various phases of the work. Timescales are prescribed and the advertisements must be placed within relevant European Journals.

The contract for technical advice on the project was won by MACE, an organisation with extensive experience of school building in England. The design tenders have been placed, informed by consultations within the school. A decision on the design team will be taken by September 2007. Following design submissions, a final school proposal will be presented to Council for approval, enabling a further procurement process for the construction phase. We expect the new school to be built and ready for occupation by 2010.

Type of School

The new school at Cowbridge will be built to enable external community use and with the objective of supporting curriculum developments in Wales, particularly in offering vocational qualifications options for pupils aged 14-19. Throughout the process, funding will be constrained and some development options will not be affordable. We are committed however, to establish a school which is fully fit for purpose and which will provide pupils and staff with an excellent environment conducive to the delivery of high quality education.

Maintenance

In addition to progressing the new build, the Council will work with all three schools to develop, agree and implement a maintenance programme to enable the existing schools to function effectively. Quite clearly, difficult decisions will need to be taken on investments necessary to extend the use of buildings at Cowbridge, St.Cyres and Llantwit Major. The schools will continue to be consulted over these arrangements.

Involvement of Schools

The Council has worked with and been appreciative of the support of Schools and Governing Bodies over recent years. Schools and Governors have been consulted over the development proposals and the Council will continue to work with partners to deliver this ambitious project.

How Can Parents/Governors Help

As the project progresses, the Schools will need to offer specific advice to pupils and parents on arrangements and maintain normal school activities. These will be communicated to parents and pupils directly by the School and your support in implementing such arrangements would be appreciated.

Please continue to attend parents' evenings and support your PTA to ensure that you are aware of developments.

I hope that this is a helpful update. If you need any further information, please liaise with the School directly. I will ensure parents receive further information as the new school developments proceed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Gibbs', written in a cursive style.

**COUNCILLOR NIGEL GIBBS
CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING**