

Consultation Feedback Form

Proposed Expansion of Wheelock Primary School, Crewe Road, Sandbach

You are invited to comment on Cheshire East Council's proposal to expand Wheelock Primary School from a 210 place, 1 form of entry primary school to a 315 place, 1.5 form of entry primary school for completion in 2013.

Before completing this form, please refer to the consultation document, which provides the rationale for this proposal.

Please tick the relevant boxes to indicate your views and any comments you may wish to make.

Do you support the proposal to expand Wheelock Primary School?	Please tick (✓)		
	Yes	No	No View
	☐	☒	☐

Comments (if any)

I am not in support of the proposed expansion of Wheelock for a number of reasons which I've listed below.

I am aware of a general response being returned by Chairs of Governors from Sandbach and Haslington Primary Schools, but this response is purely from a school perspective and the possible impact upon St. John's CE Primary School.

Point 1: The Consultation Process

The first point that I would like to raise is with regards to the consultation process, which to me seems to be taking place very quickly, at short notice, with very little regard to the short term impact upon local schools and seems completely flawed and a waste of time as decisions appear to have already been made. I am aware that there have been discussions, feasibility studies and what appears to be well thought out forward planning between the local authority and Wheelock Governors and Headteacher - before the summer break. Even the local authority officers present at recent meetings, Barbara Dale and Rob Hyde, apologised - recognising that the consultation process has been done in completely the wrong way. I feel that this was a tokenistic gesture though as even parents of Wheelock pupils are fully aware of what's going to be happening, not what is being proposed, which strongly suggests to me that decisions have already been made and that it is a done deal! This consultation process is just lip service I feel to tick the boxes. At no point have I nor any other headteachers or governors of local primary schools (as far as I'm aware), been informed or asked our opinions on the Wheelock development prior to the consultation process as we know it now - especially in light of the potential impact upon our schools. My worry for my school is quite simple, should the capacity of Wheelock increase from a PAN of 30 to 45, then I may not fill my own PAN of 25 for September 2013 and potentially could lose children in other year groups to Wheelock, especially if their siblings start in reception next year. Long term, I agree that building developments within our schools will need to take place - but in the short term, the impact of developing Wheelock without full consideration of the potential impacts upon its neighbouring schools could be catastrophic.

Point 2: In year movement of Pupils (year 1 to Year 6) wanting to transfer school

As far as I understand it, if the PAN at Wheelock changes from 30 to 45, then that applies to

every year group - not just the Reception intake for 2013. The school (if 4 classrooms are built) will have the capacity to accommodate up to 45 pupils per year group. However, they won't have the budget or staffing structure to do that. Put simply, if 45 spaces are available per year group, then they can be filled if applications are made. The school will then have to make in year adaptations with how they work- which I know will potentially have a massive effect upon the outstanding provision they currently provide.

If parents wanted to move within the school year and applied for places in year 1 to year 6, the school would have to put forward a very strong case indeed to an appeals panel should they decide that they do not want to admit over 30 due to staffing and class structures and the potential impact upon current pupils. However, if your PAN is 45, then you have to admit 45, irrespective of what current provision and structures a school has in place. A school will have to change how it works in order to accommodate the PAN. I know how this scenario could play out and it's harsh impacts as I have experienced it first hand recently.

This will have a detrimental effect in many ways, not just for my school but for Wheelock as well - especially in light of it being recognised as an outstanding school. I know that I have some parents of pupils in my school who would have gone to Wheelock in the first instance if spaces had been available in the past when they chose reception places, because of location and before/after school provision. If places become available, which they will in every year group if the PAN is increased to 45, then I know that some of my parents will possibly look to move. THIS IS NOT GOOD FOR MY SCHOOL. Nor is it good for Wheelock. This will seriously impact both schools. Parents are more than satisfied with the quality and standard of education at my school and that is not a reason for them wanting to move.

Point 3: Reception Places 2013

One of the key reasons why the Local Authority feel the need to increase the PAN at Wheelock and expand the school building by adding 4 extra classrooms is because of the demand for reception places in Sandbach. The Local Authority increased both Wheelock and Offley PAN's for September 2012 due to the over subscription of places - yet I didn't have a full intake and neither did Elworth Hall. This doesn't make sense to me. The authority are proposing to expand Wheelock as it is projected that demand for reception places will outweigh supply, but yet two schools had surplus places in their reception intake for 2012 when we so called didn't have enough spaces then! The Public Consultation Document produced by Cheshire East Council for the Proposal for the Enlargement of Wheelock Primary School (September 2012) states that:

PAGE 1 - 'For 2012 admissions, the Local Authority and the school (Wheelock) agreed the admission of 45 children to accommodate local children due to an increase in demand for school places in the Sandbach area. The general shortage of places in the Sandbach area for 2012 would have resulted in parents of some children being offered schools over 4 miles away, as the next nearest schools with places available'.

& PAGE 3 'For admission in September 2012, the Local Authority received 212 (applications for the 6 Sandbach town primary schools. This exceeded the 185 reception class places available in the area'.

These statements are flawed as my school had a space (we admitted 24 in relation to our PAN of 25 but yet we could have admitted up to 30 if we had been approached by the local authority - which we never were). I also know that Elworth Hall also didn't have a full PAN and as far as I know - both schools are much less than 4 miles away from Wheelock. So if that information is wrong, it leads me to not trust the data being put out there for the 2013 reception intake. Why did the Local Authority not speak to us at St. John's if so many extra spaces were required?

If I do not get a full intake of 25 pupils, then I will have to look at my budget as to where I can make savings. If we get below 20, then I will have to make staffing cuts, either in hours or redundancies. My budget is that precariously balanced just like most other schools.

At recent consultation meetings held on the 30th October at Westfields and 9th November at Offley Primary School, I asked a simple question to Barbara Dale, to seek assurances with regards to getting a full intake of 25 pupils in our reception class for September 2013. Her

reply was that the Local Authority can not give any assurances that we will have a full intake of 25 pupils for Reception 2013 as it is parental choice. So if Wheelock fill their potential 45 places and we don't fill the 25, where is the logic in that. And if projected data is to be taken as the evidence that all school places will be filled in Sandbach and Haslington, then I have no confidence whatsoever as was proved by the admissions process for 2012 when both my school and Elworth Hall did not have full intakes despite their being 212 applications for the 6 Sandbach Primary Schools for the 185 places available.

Point 4: Current Capacity at St. John's CE Primary School.

At no point have I nor my governing body been approached by any members of the Local Authority who have been involved with the expansion of Wheelock Project. I find this strange considering the research, desktop exercises and feasibility studies which have been undertaken with the potential spend of £1.765 million. St. John's currently has a PAN of 25. We have not had full intakes for several years, for the main reason that in 2008 the school was placed in special measures. During the 18 months that the school was in a category, it lost almost a third of it's pupil numbers, falling from 163 in 2007 to 111 in September 2009. When I started here at St. John's, I had to make staffing redundancies and restructure the whole school due to the impact of pupil losses. However, the school came out of special measures in June 2009 and in June 2011 was inspected again with a good grading, with outstanding recognition in our reception class.

However, despite having a stability now in our school, we have fluctuating numbers from reception to our current year 6. Rec:24, Yr.1:18, Yr.2:26, Yr.3:17, Yr.4:14, Yr.5:13, Yr.6:23. Total pupils 135. These pupils are spread over 5 classes, which we have to change the structure of each year until we reach capacity.

Based on our current PAN of 25, we have 40 spaces across the primary phase in our school alone. That is almost 50% of the forecasted spare places as identified in the Public Consultation Document on page 3. So should there be any need to fill places from in year movement, then we can accommodate them.

However, we would like to increase our PAN to 30. The reason we have not yet done so is because we have not yet filled an intake of 25 in the three years that I've been here to date. St. John's is its own admission authority and we can increase our PAN if we choose to do so. Ideally, we would like to have a 1FE school as it makes the whole organisation, structure and management of a school much easier than having mixed year groups. If we increased our PAN to 30, that would give us an additional 35 spaces across the school, taking our potential capacity from 175 to 210. That would mean that based on current numbers, we would have potentially 75 available spaces across the primary phase from September 2013. I appreciate that in the long term, with potential housing developments across the town taking place, school building developments will have to take place. However, in the short term, for September 2013, we can admit up to 30 pupils in our reception class if requested by the Local Authority. At the recent meeting held on the 9th November at Offley Primary School, Ken White did acknowledge that St. John's CE Primary School can accommodate 7 classes, each with 30 pupils at potentially no extra costs. However, ideally we would look to either add on an extra classroom or provide extra learning space & a new staff room - but we would be open to ideas and discussions. The costs would be no where near as significant as Wheelock I feel. There are solutions available across the town in the short term (for September 2013) which if utilised, would give the long term planning for school development more opportunity to get it right.

Point 5: Current reasons why parents choose not to come to St. John's CE Primary School.

Although parents rate our school highly in terms of the quality of education we can provide, they choose not to come to St. John's for 2 key reasons.

The first reason is because we are not a through road and parents do not pass our school on their way to work, where as they do with Sandbach, Offley and Wheelock.

And secondly, St. John's does not offer before and after school provision. I have looked into this extensively and it is not economically possible for us to run such a club. The main reason is because we do not have a sufficient enough demand from our current parents to fund such wraparound care. Outside providers have been approached, but do not see it as a sound business opportunity for them due to the lack of demand. I appreciate the fact that if I invest in the service then it will attract new parents, but unfortunately with the school budget

the way it is and the future funding outlook looking extremely bleak, it would be very bad value for money and would take away Teaching Assistant roles within my school, which are more important.

In Summary:

My concerns are:

1) The potential short impact of expanding Wheelock from a PAN of 30 to 45 from Sept 2013 may result in St. John's NOT having a full intake of its PAN of 25. No assurances can be given to me.

2) The potential impact of in year movement of pupils away from St. Johns (from year 1 to year 6) to Wheelock Primary because the PAN for all year groups will be 45. I do know that I could lose several potential parents and their children due to:-

Wheelock being closer to them (they didn't get in there when they originally applied for reception places);

If younger siblings of older pupils currently at St. Johns start in Reception at Wheelock in September 2013, parents will look to move the elder siblings also;

Wheelock being able to offer before/after school childcare provision;

Wheelock being a more accessible school for parents to take their children to, especially if parents work in Crewe or Nantwich.

3) That the process has not been thought out and the long term solutions resemble more of a quick fix solution. I am not a legal expert, but I feel that errors have been made in the consultation process as otherwise apologies would not have been made by senior Local Authority officers leading the project for the 'lack of communication and consultation'.

My suggestions:

Although long term, I am in agreement with looking to develop school provision within the Sandbach locality, especially in light of the proposed building developments across the whole town including here on Sandbach Heath, I believe that a thoughtful, well planned and considered approach needs to be applied. It may turn out to be that the expansion of Wheelock is the RIGHT option, but all options and scenarios need to be considered first, which hasn't happened. I believe that a full risk assessment of the short term impact upon Wheelock's neighbouring schools has not been undertaken or considered. Spending almost £1.8 million should not be taken lightly and all thoughts, opinions and options need to be considered carefully - and that can not be achieved (in my opinion) in the remaining few months before building is scheduled to take place in the spring to ensure that building is completed for September 2013.

In the short term, St. John's can:

Increase its PAN from 25 to 30 to help accommodate any surplus applications for September 2013. This is achievable within my school at NO EXTRA COSTS.

Long term, we can also look to operate a 1FE school, with a PAN of 30, but would want to discuss with the Local Authority additional space, even though on paper we can accommodate a 1FE intake NOW at no extra costs. We could, but it would be difficult to provide a standard of education which we currently deliver now.

	Please Tick (✓)
Parent/Carer of Present Pupil(s)	☐
Governor	☐
Member of School Staff	☒
Pupil	☐
Other (please specify)	

Name:Mr Rob Whittle	Date:20/11/2012
Address:St. Johns CE Primary School, Sandbach	Signed: R D WHittle

Please return this form to:

Cheshire East Council, School Organisation and Capital Strategy, Delamere House, Delamere Street, Crewe CW1 2LL **by the closing date of 23 November 2012.**