

**BISHOP'S CASTLE, CHIRBURY & WORTHEN AND CLUN LOCAL JOINT
COMMITTEE**
MINUTES OF A SPECIAL SURGERY/LJC MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 21ST MARCH 2011
AT: THE CHURCH BARN, BISHOP'S CASTLE.

Present:

Members of the Committee

Shropshire Council Members

Mr Peter Phillips
Mrs Heather Kidd
Mr Nigel Hartin

Bishop's Castle
Chirbury & Worthen
Clun

Parish/Town Council Members

Mrs Valerie Whately
Mrs Jane Carroll
Mr Andrew Craig
Mr John Croxton
Mr Jonathan Roberts
Mr Llewellyn Morgan
Mrs Jackie Williams
Mr Keith Mansell
Mr Eddie Jones
Mr Brian Ince

Bettws-y-Crwyn Parish Council
Bishop's Castle Town Council
Chirbury with Brompton Parish Council
Clunbury Parish Council
Clungunford Parish Council
Llanfair Waterdine Parish Council
Lydbury North Parish Council
Myndtown Combined Parish Council
Newcastle on Clun Parish Council
Worthen with Shelve Parish Council

Substitute Parish/Town Members

Mr Roger Plowden

Lydbury North Parish Council

In Attendance

Mrs Lesley Thomas
Mr Mathew Mead
Mr Tim Ward
Mrs Caroline Shepherdson
Ms Sue Jones
Mrs Charlotte Barnes
Ms Claire Leggott and 2 others-Matthew & Kim Lydbury action group

Acting Clerk (Myndtown Combined Parish Council)
Community Action Officer
Clerk to Chirbury with Brompton Parish Council

1. Apologies:

Mr Trevor Hughes Bedstone and Bucknell Parish Council
Mr Colin Pendry Clun and Chapel Lawn Parish Council
(Sympathies were extended to Colin on his sudden illness)

2. Declarations of Interest:

Members were made aware of the guidance on declaring personal and prejudicial interests.
Nigel Hartin & Jonathan Roberts under Item.3 (a)

3. Grant Applications:

(a) Hopton Castle-£2500

Report: £10,000 has previously been awarded by the LJC towards the restoration project. Bad weather has delayed the project by a further 6 mths. Because of this there have been additional unexpected costs. One of the remaining elements is to complete the wooden access steps to the castle. It is recommended that a grant of **£2500** is awarded to the Preservation Trust.

Jane Carroll Proposed that the application be approved on the grounds that it will bring extra tourism, however this was disputed as being a large grant with little benefit to other LJC areas. Peter Phillips Seconded the proposal for Approval to which the Item moved to a vote: 6 were In Favour, 6 were Against. Heather Kidd used her casting vote In Favour of the application.

Decision: **Approved.** Reason: **The Castle Preservation Trust will lose the remaining Heritage Lottery Funding if the access to the castle is not completed.**

(a) Worthen Village Hall and Recreation Ground-£500

Report: Worthen are requesting grant support for a series of community events to celebrate the Royal Wedding in April. It is recommended to allocate the remaining LJC budget of **£237.23** to this project.

Mathew Mead Proposed that the application be approved. This was met with a counter proposal by Jane Carroll that the application is denied as being not sustainable and therefore benefits only the Worthen community. Keith Mansell Seconded this proposal to which the Item moved to a vote with significant numbers Not In Favour.

Decision: **Denied.** Reason: **The Worthen parish should bear the costs to prevent an influx of similar applications from other parishes.**

4. Date of Next Meeting:

Thursday 16th June 2011. Venue: TBC

Other Matters:

The special meeting had been called by Heather Kidd, Peter Phillips and Nigel Hartin to formulate a representation from the LJC to the proposed primary school closures at Lydbury North and Stiperstones, and to make comments on Shropshire Councils proposal of a School's Federation.

Peter Phillips informed the meeting that there is no formal mechanism for making responses on Shropshire Council's website; this can only be done in letter form. Following a number of meetings, the main comments for the reasons for closure were that the schools in question have too many surplus places, **and money**. Minister has issued new guidance that surplus places cannot be considered as **priority** criteria for closure. Currently there are 1000 surplus places in Shrewsbury primary schools and 200 in Albrighton, yet Shropshire Council has no issues with any of these. Each school carries a surplus of places to accommodate parental choices when either moving or deciding on the preferred school for their children. Peter urged all Parish/Town Councils and members of the public to submit a written response to the proposed closures.

(a) Lydbury North

Lydbury was last under threat of closure in 2008 during which time numbers did fall because of uncertainty, however since its reprieve it has been the fastest growing primary school with numbers up from 26 to 38. Recent Ofsted was satisfactory with many good features. If the school is closed, the figures reported for transporting 29 pupils- not the actual figure of 38 children- to Bishop's Castle are £38k-this is speculative when fuel increases are projected to rise to 12%. The actual cost of transporting 21 children to Chirbury is £60k per year. Bishops Castle Primary has not been consulted on whether they can accommodate the transported children. Bishops Castle has no plans to add extra classrooms and should become involved in the consultation to prevent future overcrowding. At present there is no capacity to accommodate extra pupils. A parent Governor for Bishop's Castle, Charlotte Barnes, commented that more work should involve the receiving schools.

Lydbury North Parish Council opted for future development during the recent LDF consultations and expects the village to 'grow'. If the school is closed this will have a knock-on effect and threaten other local services i.e. shop/pub, the village then becomes less attractive to migrating families. It was commented that all figures quoted must be authenticated before the response is made. Photographic evidence is being collected at Bishops Castle Primary to highlight the problematic traffic congestion it already experiences without the transport of Lydbury school children.

John Croxton stated that Clunbury Primary is full and cannot accommodate Lydbury school children; Clunbury Parish Council and Primary School are fully in favour of the strongest support for both Lydbury and Stiperstones schools and 'spare places should not mean closure'.

(b) Stiperstones

Brian Ince reported that the LEA only visited Stiperstones School last week after the public announcement of its threatened closure. They have declared that the school closure will have no foreseeable impact on local services. This is refuted by evidence that Stiperstones and Snailbeach have twice won 'Village of the Year' because of its school community benefitting the local community and therefore local services. Llewellyn Morgan stated that the closure of Llanfair Waterdine School took the 'heart out of the community'.

There is no mention in the report of the effect the closure will have on the Pre-School which operates within the school building, this is full bar 2 places. Stiperstones School is an historic stone building whereas Minsterley School, the nearest for transportation is prefabricated. Minsterley Parish Council has also opted for development in the LDF and expects growth of 200-300 more houses. There will be no available funding to build a larger new school for several years. Minsterley School does not provide pre-school facilities and is already oversubscribed. Heather Kidd suggested that a year group by year group comparison be made as to how the class sizes would alter with the possible addition of transported children. The possibility of 5 to 15 year olds sharing buses with no supervision is a worrying prospect as to younger children getting a 'different education they don't need'. During the recent Rural Testing Event/Parish Plan, growth for Stiperstones School, shop and pub was pivotal.

There are no running costs for new buildings included in the LEA/SC? Report or that the classroom sizes at both Stiperstones and Lydbury are larger than other local schools not facing closure. The focus is on falling numbers not increasing numbers with no regard for 'future' demand. The report believes it will be more economic to close some schools to advantage others whereas to remodel funding from small schools to larger primaries the average loss of funding will be 11%. All consultation documents include errors. The LEA must be

made to understand the impact of school closure on both villages with clear and precise detail. It was asked whether the costings of all consultations could be obtained and also if Shropshire Council's proposed costing figures/savings as part of the closure consultations were ever seriously challenged?

The Diocese has stated that if both Lydbury and Stiperstones, being Church of England Schools close, then the proceeds from any 'sales' of buildings or land will be re-invested in other Church run schools and will not benefit the LEA.

It was questioned that if numbers at The Community College drop significantly might there be the possibility of a 'through-school' for 5 to 16 year olds on site?

Jackie Williams commented that there has been no drive by David Taylor to campaign for extra funding from the Government for local schools. She proposed that the LJC write to Owen Patterson to lobby for extra funding. **Carried. Action: To cc Philip Dunne.**

Agreed: That Heather composes a letter of Representation from the LJC using the key criteria that surplus places is not a reason for closure and also to include several points as outlined above, against the proposed closures. Action: **To cc all members before submission.**

Federation Schools:

Background: Shropshire Council is proposing to form (hard) Federations whereby schools will share Governing bodies, Headmasters, Senco's and Business Managers. The date for making responses to the proposal of the formation of Federation Schools is the 5th April 2011. All Primary Schools are urged to make a response. The schools federations are proposed as follows:

Bucknell, Clunbury
Clun and Newcastle

There is a nationally recognised collaboration already at Chirbury, Lydbury, Norbury, Clun and Newcastle which the Council's proposals totally ignore.

It was felt that the LJC must support schools in the agreements they have made among their individual governing bodies. These schools should decide what is best for them and ask for an 'opt out' clause whereby if a particular school feels it is getting a raw deal, it can opt out of the federation. The 'soft' federation is a more suitable option when each school shares just one or two officers. It was felt that a 'hard' federation would have no benefit to an individual community. It was questioned why Shropshire Council has failed to publicise the value of the current collaborations. Concern was also raised about the possible threat of future closures to federation schools. **Agreed:** That Heather write with the LJC comments on the aforesaid key elements. Action: **To cc all members before submission.**

Policing:

Heather has been informed that the local Police Officer is on long term 'sick leave' and the area has also lost its part time police officer who has been moved to a more central point at Craven Arms. She has been assured that there is no risk of losing a police officer permanently. **Agreed:** That Heather will write on behalf of the LJC to request the situation of a replacement officer is rectified ASAP.

Peter Phillips told of the difficulties faced by himself, Heather and Nigel in calling this special meeting. Shropshire Council had felt it could not authorise a meeting where comments might agree to be made by the LJC on the proposed primary school closures and therefore refused to supply a clerk. However it was expecting formal minutes for the LJC funding agenda. Lesley Thomas was thanked for her attendance and minute taking. It was questioned whether Shropshire Council are acting properly in exerting influence on LJC's not to discuss schools or whatever other local issues on its agenda? It was felt that as an LJC it was only proper to make group comments affecting local issues. As an observer at Cabinet recently Jackie Williams noted that LJC grant funding is to be phased out and that LJC's were encouraged to talk about local issues. **Agreed:** That there should be Press coverage of the difficulties in calling the meeting and to protest to the Shropshire Council Chief Executive and Leader.

Meeting Closed at 8.32pm