

Minutes of a special public meeting at the Town Hall

Purpose: Perth & Kinross Council (PKC) estates review – updates related to Breadalbane Academy (BA)

Date: October 22nd 2019

Chair - Victor Clements (Head of Aberfeldy Community Council)

Breadalbane Academy Parent Council (BAPC):

Eleanor Laurie (Co-Chair)

Lyndsey Hurley (Co-Chair)

Karl Wright

Gill Steel

Andy Pointer

Politicians:

John Swinney (MSP)

Murdo Fraser (MSP)

Clr Mike Williamson

Clr John Duff (Convenor of the Lifelong Learning Committee - LLC)

Clr Xander McDade (Member of the LLC)

Clr John Roebeck (Member of the LLC)

1. Welcome from Co-Chairs.

The Chairs introduced and outlined purpose of evening; to bring together communities, associate schools to BA and local politicians to share facts and risks.

It was noted that a campaign to expand Pitlochry High School (PHS) without due and proper consultation on impact to BA had been initiated in 2018. It was Breadalbane PC that insisted on BAPC and associate school inclusion.

A report published in Summer 2019 had concluded that expansion of PHS would have a detrimental effect on both schools. Despite this, councilors of the LLC along with Clr Mike Williamson, had ignored these conclusions and passed an amendment in September 2019 to continue exploring plans to provide some S5/S6 provision at PHS.

BAPC had started a petition to raise awareness of this important local matter which was at 634 signatures. BAPC seeks to fairly represent all school communities and parents and acts to protect BA as a high performing school which serves pupils across Highland Perthshire.

2. Words by Head Boy and Girl of BA

The Head Girl (Bethan) spoke of great personal growth and achievement made possible from access to a wide and varied curriculum. She identified that BA offered freedom and support in subject choices, not currently available to every Scottish pupil. It was discussed that the value gained from access to a vast range of subjects is that most individuals can find something they are passionate about and succeed in that to a high level. The Head Boy (Finlay) stressed the importance of PHS pupils joining at S5, adding it brings new opportunities to all and that PHS pupils are very much part of BA friendship circles.

3. Victor Clements had been asked to oversee the meeting given his role of community council Chair. He welcomed all those present and gave an overview of the evening's agenda. An open Q&A session would be held at the end.

4. Presentation by Karl Wright

How did we get here?

BAPC was not consulted in the PKC estates review which started in 2016. Consultation is a statutory right. PHS had led a brilliant campaign to save their school from closure but during this process it had been proposed that PHS have an expanded senior phase (to include S5 and S6). This proposal was made public despite no educational or financial viability work having been set down. Understandably this had gained community support, but also wide political support. In December 2018 the potential impact on BA became clear and still the consulting process was not followed. Later, Senior Management Team from both schools agreed that it would be impossible to proceed without negative impact; mainly less breadth and depth of subjects on offer and at a higher cost.

In September 2018, three proposals were put to the LLC and the recommended option was to develop a Highland Perthshire Learning Partnership (HPLP) which would seek to improve collaboration between the two school without compromising the level and quality of education. This was changed through an amendment put forward by Cllr Xander McDade, proposing to continue exploring a spilt education across the two schools without 'detriment'. This amendment was passed at the LLC without public scrutiny or due debate.

BAPC had raised concerns and consistently asked PKC for a definition of detriment. BAPC highlighted that such change risked a reduction in pupil roll, loss of at least two teachers, loss of subject choice and an increase of annual operating costs at both schools. Current subject choice at BA was widely recognised as diverse and growing year-on-year and a hugely influential success factor for school and future experience of pupils. HPLP proposal could result in a much smaller offering.

BAPC call for action – all those in support to sign petition and write to councilors sharing concerns.

5. Councilors response

Victor Clements invited the councilors to respond.

Cllr. John Duff confirmed that the aim of PKC is to deliver the best possible quality and variety of education in Highland Perthshire. Both schools are recognised as performing well. Pitlochry's building had been improved and option of closure removed, rural geography requires both schools. Issues were remaining so 4th, 5th and 6th year classes had been part of wider review. Now, the option to deliver 5th and 6th in some form at both BA and PHS remained. LLC had confirmed that neither school will experience detriment. John Duff agreed that reduced subject choice would be considered detrimental. The HPLP is a collaborative approach which will increase opportunities and not cause detriment. A Steering/ Working group made up of SMT, key PKC education team members, PC Chairs, Perth city campus, to report back in January 2020. LLC seeking to achieve even better quality and increased subject choice and greater range of education.

Cllr. Mike Williamson endorsed words of John Duff. Aim for no detrimental effect. What that looks like is down to HPLP steering group.

Cllr. Xander McDade noted John's words and added: he had been very critical of the estates review process and of engagement throughout. A previous pupil of both schools, he was against detriment and seeking opportunity to expand offering at both schools. A focus of HPLP was to reduce unnecessary travel and long days. Committed that there should be no detriment and opportunity to enhance subject choice. He confirmed that pupil budget would remain control of BA even if pupils experienced some of their education elsewhere. He wants to see more subject choice delivered through technology and HPLP.

Cllr. John Roebeck spoke; admission that school estates review had been flawed but no will for detrimental changes. HPLP is the answer. Support of broad subject choice. Spoke of his concern for health and wellbeing of pupils on long bus journeys.

John Swinney - MSP Perthshire North spoke; BAPC do not trust the process by PKC. Necessity to consult should have involved BA many years ago, despite apology, trust is broken. Need to face that honestly and seek remedy. Recognised strength of BA. Fundamentally, process must not be detrimental. In addition, the process must be open, fair and transparent. This has not been built up to date. HPLP must be handled differently to Estate Review. Choice and opportunity should not be diminished but we have to make sure that every young person gets the best opportunity to access education. HPLP should address: can we strengthen and broaden opportunities through collaboration?

Murdo Fraser – MSP spoke. BA is a top performing school and important part of the wider Highland Perthshire community. This debate is not about PHS v BA. It should be about enhancing education of every pupil - this cannot be done at the expense of Breadalbane

6. Grandtully and Glen Lyon Chairs of Parent Councils

Anna Brocklehurst and Lynette Oldham spoke. In summary:

Jaded by the process having been through review of Primary schools.

Review began as a School Estates Review and has ended up at provision at secondary level. It makes no sense. Is it the right place for this discussion?

The Council's report concluded rejection of moving pupils to Pitlochry, that was then rejected and amended. Why?

Cost? How much has the process cost? Support of enhancing and improving provision.

Key issues seem to be transport and transition - the answer to that seems logically to be to fix them not discuss solutions that are damaging.

Glen Lyon is a very small school and Breadalbane offers a nurturing environment and the pupils from here already travel a long way - extending educational reach and a split provision does not solve that problem.

7. Q&A

Charlotte Fenton (BA parent); previously employed to deliver Sixth Form services in Lancashire, delivering partnership across seven schools. On paper partnership works but not in reality, it went around in circles and needs to be funded successfully. How will HPLP be funded?

Breadalbane Parent - how can you guarantee that partnership can be delivered and funded? Why have you not looked at transportation and transition first?

Logierait/Pitlochry parent - why is it so hard to work together without a divisive process? Knows firsthand the transition is difficult and that this should be addressed.

Teacher at Perth school, Aberfeldy resident - comment on using technology - it is happening with the e-school on Stornaway - technology could help.

Dunkeld parent – primary children in Dunkeld have a choice of Ba or Perth, most choose BA and leave at 8am and return at 4:30, thus have chosen longer journey to go to a fantastic school where they are very happy.

Pitlochry resident- both children at Breadalbane - both children thriving at Breadalbane and does not wish to see damaging decisions.

Gill Steel (BA estates review team and parent) on e-schools - Bruce Roberston former Director of Education completed a study on virtual learning and while there is much to benefit smaller rural schools there is much planning and investment needed. It must be seen as an addition to the core offer not a full solution, i.e. NOT replacing core offer.

In response to question on funding:

John Swinney - Scottish government funds local authorities and this is driven by pupil numbers but not specifically attached to a pupil. Local authorities decide the funding formula. £120 million goes directly to schools with financial support to deprived backgrounds, closing attainment gap and 70+ schools additionally supported. Control of those resources is managed by individual schools.

How can funding be delivered by the Council?

Xander McDabe- Council's discretion on spend. 52% of budget spent on education, more costly in a rural area. Advocates more money!

John Duff - cannot accept a proposal that is detrimental. If working group comes up with innovative approach it must be sustainable.

Alice McRae (BA Parent) - What is the goal of the Steering Group? If status quo is good, why look at improving something that is already good? What are the options being discussed? BA doesn't need improving.

John Duff - the working group will address education on one side and use of Pitlochry building on the other. There is no defined outcome other than to improve education.

Andy Pointer (estates review and BA parent) - still no definition of detriment. £2.3 million deficit to meet existing budgets. Where will the money come from? PKC is not competent. Transport is an issue. Recognise BA as the senior provision in Highland Perthshire and stop process.

Karl Wright (estates review and BA parent)- Why do we have to fight constantly or increase the costs further when what we have is good?

Karen McKay (Breadalbane librarian); has already seen that some pupils cannot take their subject choices so great concern that choices could be reduced. Beyond the big budget questions, are points to consider such as effective travel times for all pupils, Wi-Fi restrictions, teaching of research skills, discipline of pupils to self-study, doubt over how much of that responsibility should be left with pupils.

Lorraine (BA parent and owner ABC), if council wouldn't support anything detrimental - why is this ongoing after initial report? Why was conclusion of reports ignored?

John Duff - that option is not on the table there will not be a full return of fifth and sixth year pupils to PHS. The option of S5 and S6 in full at PHS is NOT an option. S\$ PHS pupils to BA is not an option. Whether or not HPLP will enhance education is what the working group will take forward.

Eleanor Laurie reported that she spoke for five minutes at LLC in March and focus was on detriment. When she asked what does it mean, a lawyer from PKC said the definition of detriment will be decided as the process unfolds! Tonight is the first time detriment has been defined. Our campaign is beyond Save Our Subject, it's so much more than that. Saying don't worry, it won't be detrimental - we are still asking what does that mean?

Neil Glover - minister and parent - What would help bring trust is if LLC could define in writing detriment.

General consensus in room that transition can be improved and focus for HPLP should be on that and on improving transport by providing some concrete proposals for these concerns. It feels there is now a focus on inclusion and fair representation of wider community thanks to BAPC.

Deborah Hannigan – PKC have made a huge amount of investment building a school with 780 capacity which currently only has a 400+ roll. Why is PKC ignoring the capacity and facilities we have? Let's build on that when nothing has changed. Let's honor the history of finance. Even with the breadth of subjects struggling to have three sciences. Why are we making it more difficult?

Background in education, parent at Breadalbane - watched ideals fail to deliver. We want to work with Pitlochry across the whole of Highland Perthshire. We want this to be sustainable for quality education BUT too much of these words dissipate. supportive of partnership and review but let's keep looking.

Jess Pepper, Dunkeld – welcomed an open and transparent process, agreed had been lack of clarity - this is the first time I have seen the amendment - impossible to find, not online. Call for more openness and clarity - how will the associate schools be informed and involved going forward? How will it work for everyone? What about detriment to pupils and not just school.

Andy Pointer spoke on behalf of the chair of Rannoch school to report there is no public transport to Aberfeldy. This is fundamentally wrong. Pupils cannot use their bus passes on public transport (for after school activities etc.).

Concluding comments:

Xander McDabe's concluding comments - understandable to be concerned. Change is concerning. Process is opaque. We have listened and we will take this feedback on board. This doesn't mean that everyone will be pleased all of the time. I have been consistent on my view. I will try to reach a solution that puts pupils first.

Glen Lyon Chair asked Xander why had received no response to emails and letters. Xander reported that the PKC server and email system was down.

Mike Williamson - agree on transition and transport focus. Childcare provision should also be mentioned. Going forward we need to work on communications. Clarify what detrimental effects mean to everyone.

Victor concluded that the majority view of the room was that BAPC and associate communities right to be anxious. No confidence in process and information being provided. Recognised that some were still unclear on the broad principle of what PKC was trying to do is.

John Swinney - to close - fundamentally this process has got off on the wrong footing and there is confusion over the proposal. A strong proposal will only come from a clear process. The lack of

engagement is a fault of PKC consultation process and has been demonstrated beyond doubt tonight. The answer is transparency, openness and evidence-based discussion. You cannot be worse off after it than before it, that is the definition of detriment.

Lyndsay Hurley closed the meeting.

Thanked all for coming, listening and engaging. Reiterated how BAPC do want to work collaboratively. Council process led to our campaign, the amendment was not communicated, and the lack of trust is very real. BAPC want to move forward positively, protect education provision and seek enhancement for Highland Perthshire education.