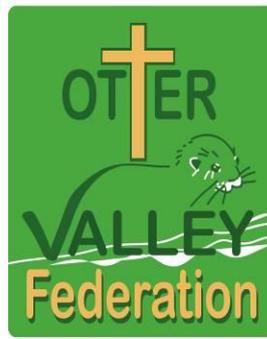


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## ***An open letter to the Tipton community from the Governing Board of the School***

### **The proposal to relocate Tipton St John School to Thorne Farm, Ottery**

Dear All,

The Governing Board (GB) of the school is writing to ask that you consider giving your support to the proposal to relocate the school to Thorne Farm in Ottery St Mary.

The Board is responsible for the safety of pupils and staff at the school and we have a shared responsibility for the premises. As you would expect, we take these responsibilities very seriously and have sought the advice and support of the relevant authorities when considering possible solutions.

Following recent questions about the improvement following works to the Metcombe Brook, we have, (through Devon County Council) again sought clarification from the Environment Agency (EA) as to the possibility of the school remaining on the site.

On November 1 2019, the Environment Agency advised: *'The key message to reinforce is that the existing school site floods to a dangerous level and the ability to provide safe refuge and/or safe access and egress is not an option. The development is at high risk of flooding and this risk will increase as a result of climate change. All efforts should be made to relocate the school to a safer location in accordance with Government planning policy'*. The Environment Agency has confirmed their position has not changed and has also identified the redevelopment of the lower school site as not possible.

Although the flood risk and the safety of pupils and staff is the primary reason for needing to relocate the school, there is also the matter of time-expired buildings, the practical difficulties of operating on a split site, and the lack of space and facilities. The current facilities fall far short of what is needed for modern educational purposes.

The GB has sought to relocate the school within the village for many years. In total, seven sites have been considered with most falling away because the surrounding road networks are unsuitable. One site did appear feasible and initial discussions suggested a possible way forward. However, our application for grant funding to relocate the site was unsuccessful and no suitable funding stream has since been made available.

Following meetings with Ministers at the Department for Education we were told that we needed to work with the local authority (Devon County Council) to find and fund a local solution for the school. We eventually managed to secure a small contribution from the government for the project at Thorne Farm.

The proposal to relocate the school to Thorne Farm provides a solution for the GB's Health and Safety responsibility and Devon County's school place planning responsibilities. The scheme also funds the financial shortfall for the school's relocation through the associated housing development as Devon County Council owns the site and is willing to release the proceeds to support the school.

The proportion of 'in catchment' pupils attending the school has decreased from 53% in 2012 to only 21% in 2019, and currently there are significantly more pupils from Ottery at the school than there are from Tipton. Future in-catchment pupil numbers are predicted to be in the low single figures from Tipton with the need for school places being in Ottery itself.

The school was founded more than 175 years ago and has grown within the Tipton community with strong links to the local church and with continuing support from parents, PTFA and volunteers. Leaving the village has never been the desire of the Governors, but there are no solutions to relocate or rebuild in the village and we cannot remain passive to the risk from flooding. Inaction is not an option for the Board as we have been told that remaining on the site puts lives at risk and that the school needs to move to a place of safety.

Please be assured, the school is relocating to a new site and is not closing. This scheme ensures the continuity of our church school with the same vision, ethos and values and the children will continue their education in new buildings with their existing staff and leadership.

The school, in its new location, will still serve the village of Tipton St John and the catchment areas will be modified accordingly and following consultation. The GB will remain as the admissions authority for the school and it will serve the whole community.

The proposed school at Thorne Farm is to be constructed for 210 pupils with a class for each year group and also a Nursery. The growth of the school from the current 89 to 210 pupils will happen gradually within the Local Learning Community. The growth will not happen overnight; it will take a number of years as more pupils joining the school will mean that we can fund another teacher.

Tipton St. John CofE Primary School maintains a high level of performance and the GB and leadership intend that the school will continue to thrive. The school leadership and staff will work with children, parents and the community to capture the 'essence' of the school and embed that in the new buildings.

The Governing Board requests your support for the proposal to relocate to the Thorne Farm site as this will ensure the sustainability of the school, albeit outside the village itself. There is no deliverable solution for the school remaining in the village and the Governors cannot ignore the risk to children and staff in their care by remaining on the current site. The reality is that there is no 'Plan B' to secure a successful future for our school on an alternative site.

The consequence for the school if the planning application is not approved is that its sustainability (as a 4 class school) into the future will disappear.

If the relocation to Thorne Farm proceeds, thereby removing the school off the floodplain and meeting pupil place demand in Ottery, the school will have a long term future continuing to serve the Tipton and Ottery communities.

Please respond to the consultation by the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019 at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/haveyoursay/consultations/proposal-for-a-primary-school-and-associated-residential-development-at-thorne-farm-ottery-st-mary/>

Yours sincerely

OVF Governing Board