

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Development of Thorne Farm Site, Ottery St Mary to enable the relocation of Tipton St John Primary School

#### Why can't the school stay in Tipton?

The complete rationale for the movement of the school from the point of view of the School's Governing Board can be found here

<http://www.tipton-stjohn.devon.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-rationale-for-the-relocation-of-Tipton-St-John-school-to-Ottery-St-Mary.pdf>

#### What efforts have been made to keep the school in Tipton?

Devon County Council, The Governing Board of the school and the Diocese of Exeter have investigated numerous sites in Tipton over the past 15 years, but a deliverable solution in the village of Tipton has not been found. A deliverable relocation scheme requires a suitable site, the ability to develop the site and adequate funding. The only deliverable scheme that has been identified over this period is the project being now proposed at Thorne Farm, Ottery.

#### Why not build new flood resilient buildings?

Please refer to the letter from the Environment Agency provided in Appendix A which addresses this question.

#### Has the recent work undertaken to the Metcombe Brook resolved the flooding issues? There have not been any flooding events in Tipton since this work was completed.

Minor works were undertaken by the Environment Agency to the Metcombe Brook in 2017 but as confirmed in the Environment Agency's letter of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2019 (see Appendix A), these works do not resolve the significant flood risk issue large order events on the Metcombe and all levels of flooding from the River Otter.

#### Who is responsible for the safety of the children?

Tipton St John School is a Voluntary Aided School for which the Governing Body is responsible for both the premises and for the Health and Safety of the children at the school. The Governing Board are the employers of the school staff and therefore they also have the Health and Safety responsibilities to their employees alongside a duty of care to visitors to the school and to parents dropping off and collecting their children.

The Governing Board have received professional advice that there is a "risk to life" if the school remains on the current site and therefore, they are duty-bound to actively resolve matters and relocate the school off the floodplain as soon as it can be practically achieved. The current proposal is considered the only deliverable solution available. If this were to fail, the Governing Board will inevitably have to strategically consider the long term future of the school given the issues raised by the Environment Agency.

#### In 2016 school was deemed a "risk of life" - Why is 2022 the earliest opportunity to relocate the school?

The Governing Body, supported by the Diocese of Exeter, Devon County Council, the Local Member of Parliament and local Councillors have been working to secure funds from Central Government to enable the relocation of the school over many years. Once it became apparent that insufficient financial support could be secured from Central Government then a locally-funded solution was the only option possible and was enabled by developing a solution which met the twin key objectives of

school safety at Tipton and outstanding pupil place planning pressures at Ottery. This complex project releases funds to build the school through the development of the wider Thorne Farm site, which is owned by Devon County Council. As such, it has taken considerable time to get to a position in which planning permission application can be submitted. The current proposal will deliver new school buildings in just over two years' time, subject to planning permission.

In the meantime, the school has in place a series of well-practiced safety procedures to manage the flood risk in the short term. Of course, such local school management procedures are not a long-term solution to the flood risk problem in light of the Environment Agency advice.

#### **Does Devon County Council own any other land near Tipton?**

Devon County Council owns farmland in the open countryside in Fluxton. However, the development of this site would be most unlikely to receive serious consideration from the local Planning authority due to its location in the open countryside. The land's location will not sensibly serve as a school site for Tipton and/or Ottery.

#### **Isn't this just a school closure?**

The proposal is that the existing Tipton St John CE VA Primary School – its pupils, staff, leadership and Governance – moves from one set of buildings in Tipton St John into another set of building in Ottery St Mary. This relocation retains the existing ethos, reputation and quality of the school but with the school then located in wonderful new building and facilities and in a safe environment.

#### **Is the current Ottery school currently completely full?**

Yes. Ottery St Mary town currently has a primary school age population of 516 children. The current primary school in the town has a maximum capacity of 420 children with 428 on roll and the school cannot expand on its current site. This under-provision of places results in a significant number of children leaving the town for their primary education and therefore there is an existing need for additional school places in the town.

#### **Is this just a new school for Ottery?**

The relocation of Tipton St John School to Ottery and for its expansion to a single form of entry (210 pupil with Nursery) enables a new safe and sustainable site for Tipton school whilst also creating additional high quality primary places for parents in Ottery St Mary. The growth of the school will take place over a number of years as the larger cohorts of children (from Tipton and from Ottery) enter the school from the youngest year groups. The catchment area of the new school will include Tipton St John and so it will be the designated school for families in Tipton.

#### **Is 210 places big enough?**

Based on the current and projected pupil numbers a 210 place primary school will be sufficient in size to serve the area. However, the school will be developed on a site which is large enough to expand to 420 places in the longer term if required. Delivery of a 420 place school from the outset would result in an over provision of school places and would require additional housing to facilitate the additional places.

#### **Why are 150 houses required in the new development?**

The development of the site with housing is needed to meet the shortfall in funding to build the school. An independent viability study has identified that 150 houses is the anticipated minimum number required to fill this shortfall and so secure the funding needed for the relocation of the school onto this site.

### **Why can't the development money come from another piece of land owned by DCC?**

The sale proceeds of this land are specifically designated for the completion of this project; any other land sales are/will be designated to deliver other projects within the capital programme.

### **Will DCC profit from this development?**

The number of houses being set at 150 followed an exercise being carried out independently by a consultant from Plymouth City Council to identify a house number which would equate to the amount of money required to finance the school. DCC is taking a level of risk in proceeding with this project in that the school construction will be commenced as soon as planning permission is obtained, and the marketing of the development land will lag behind the school construction activity. Therefore, DCC is proceeding with the risk that the development receipt may not cover the cost of the school, however DCC is prepared to proceed at risk. Should the development receipt exceed the amount of money required to fund the school East Devon District Council have indicated that they will require an overage agreement to be put in place to secure half of the excess amount to be paid to East Devon District Council. Alternatively, there is a possibility that the number of houses to be developed could be reduced to ensure that only the amount of money required to finance the school is secured.

### **Doesn't the King's need to expand?**

The King's is a highly popular school and is oversubscribed annually. The school is full and has high numbers in the sixth form. However, around 20% of children allocated a place at the school each year are from outside the school's catchment area. The King's School has a published admission number of 180 and its current feeder primary schools have published admission numbers of 150, which allows an additional 30 spaces for pupils living in the catchment area. This proposal in no way changes The King's School catchment area. Devon County Council, in its role as Education Authority, has ongoing discussions with The King's School and is content the current published admission number meets local needs. The school supports this position and sees no immediate need for expansion. However, 0.2 hectares of land is safeguarded for potential future secondary education provision if required in the longer term.

### **Isn't this proposal contrary to the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan?**

We acknowledge that the site is not allocated for housing in the adopted East Devon Local Plan or the Ottery Neighbourhood Plan. This will be a matter for East Devon District Council to consider alongside other elements of the proposal when determining the planning application.

Part of the site is allocated for education and community use in both Plans mentioned above however, investigations have indicated that this part of the site is not appropriate for the development of the primary school. This is due to the topography which results in significant and unaffordable development costs. The remainder of the site is adjacent to the 'Built-up Area Boundary' of the town and therefore will provide an adjoining physical expansion of the town.

### **How close is the Thorne Farm site to the proposed new quarry site?**

There is a proposal for a new quarry at Straitgate Farm, which is approx. 1 mile from the proposed school site. Planning permission has not currently been granted for the quarry. We do not anticipate any adverse impact on the school should the quarry proposal proceed. This issue will be considered fully through the Thorne Farm planning application.

### **What would happen to the old buildings on the Tipton School site?**

The lower site will revert to local Trustees in accordance with the relevant Trust Deed while the upper site will be sold on the open market and the proceeds of sale will contribute to the funding of the school on its new site.

### **Will there be priority for Tipton children in the new location?**

The village of Tipton St John will be included in the revised catchment area of the relocated school. The exact boundaries will need to be agreed with neighbouring schools and will be subject to separate consultation. That said, Tipton St John School on its new site, will still serve Tipton St John and therefore pupils in that designated area will have priority. In addition, as a VA School, Tipton St John Governing Body is its own admission authority and therefore has control over its own admissions policy and oversubscription criteria.

### **What happens to the next generations of Tipton children?**

The revised Tipton St John school designated area for the school (in its new location) will include Tipton St John and, as such, future generations of Tipton children will be fully provided for at the school. The future generations will have access to a new school with high quality, purpose built modern buildings with a full range of facilities. The location of the new site, away from the floodplain will ensure the safety of Tipton's children into the future.

### **What transport arrangements will put in place for current Tipton St John school students?**

#### **In Catchment**

All children living in the school's catchment and further than a walking distance of two miles are eligible for free school transport to the relocated school in Ottery St Mary.

#### **Closest school**

All children who live further than a walking distance of two miles to the school are eligible for free school transport where it is the closest available school.

#### **Not in catchment and where there is a closer school**

Children who attend the school because of parental preference are not eligible for free school transport if the school is not the catchment or closest school available.

### **What alternative solution is there should this scheme fail at the Planning stage?**

There is no deliverable alternative option that exists at present. If this were to fail, the governing body will inevitably have to strategically consider the long term future of the school in light of the issues raised by the Environment Agency.

### **What arrangements are there for the safety of returning children from the new school site in Ottery during flooding?**

The Ottery site is located away from the dangers of the flood zone. The new site will be a safe place to hold children at the school in the case of a flooding event until the parents can arrive safely to collect them (as would be the same situation if, for example, there was an accident on local roads). As there are currently more children from Ottery at the school than from Tipton itself, the travel risk will be reduced when the school moves to its new location.

### **How will Tipton St John's community be affected with the movement of the school?**

It is fully recognised that the movement of the school from the centre of the village will be a loss for the Tipton community. However, this needs to be balanced against the benefits of the solution proposed which does ensure a sustainable future for the school in the new location, for it to retain

its excellent staff and core values and to continue to serve the children and community of Tipton St John for many years to come.

### **Is there a danger that the moving of the school out of the village will lead to new families not moving into the village?**

Individual's choices for moving to a new house are predicated on a full range of considerations and the proximity of good schools is often a key consideration to many. The safety of their children and the long-term sustainability of the school in the community would be important considerations too. Relocating the school sustains an excellent school in the locality, and therefore prospective buyers will still have the attraction of moving into the catchment area of a highly reputable school, with excellent facilities.

### **Why can't Tipton apply for a Free school?**

A Free School is a new state-funded independent school operated by an Academy Trust. Applications from approved sponsors to open a Free School are invited by the Department for Education at times. The criteria/justification for opening a new school requires the poor performance of surrounding schools and in situations where there is significant and unmet need for school places. There is currently no guarantee there will be further waves of the Free School programme. Tipton is a maintained school and cannot apply to open a Free School. The Free School programme does not enable an existing maintained school to rebuild and open as a Free School with the same staff and governance, etc. The solution for Tipton St John is to support the school in serving the community on a safe site and to ensure its sustainability into the future so it can continue to serve the local community as it has since 1843. This proposal aims to retain and improve the school, not to close it. A new Free School is not the solution for Tipton St John and its school.

### **When is the full consultation?**

A pre application planning consultation for the relocated school and 150 dwellings has been held from Monday 28<sup>th</sup> October – Monday 18<sup>th</sup> November. Responses received during this consultation will inform the preparation of a planning application to be submitted in early 2020. There will then be a further opportunity to provide comments on this proposal to East Devon District Council as part of the formal planning application process.

Governors will need to undertake a separate statutory consultation on relocating the school once planning permission has been granted and funding for the delivery of the school has been secured.