

**MINUTES OF PUBLIC MEETING TO DISCUSS ADMISSIONS POLICY
OF CHELLASTON FOUNDATION SCHOOL**

HELD AT CHELLASTON COMMUNITY CENTRE, 11.9.06, 8 p.m.

Panel:

John Bowden	Chairman, CRA and chair of meeting
Simon Longley	Assistant Director of Children and Young People's Services, Derby City Council
Andrew Dawson	Chairman, Admissions Committee, Chellaston Foundation School Governing Body
Lance Dean	Previous Chairman of Admissions
Ray Ruszczyński	Head, Chellaston Foundation School

Attendees:

Mark Todd, M.P.
Councillor Mark Tittley
Councillor Phil Ingall
CRA Committee Members
238 Residents who signed the attendance register.

Apologies:

Fiona McLaughlin	Head of Chellaston Infants' School
Julie King	Head of Homefields Primary School.

Chairman's Opening Remarks:

The CRA thanked the Chellaston Community Association for the use of the hall and Chellaston Foundation School for the use of the PA equipment.

The Chairman exhibited a meeting notice (printed in colour) which had circulated at the northern end of Chellaston and said that this was not put out by the CRA and as it contained inaccuracies the CRA disassociated itself from it.

For the benefit of any residents present who had not heard of the CRA before, the Chairman outlined the aims and purposes of the association and recommended its website, www.chellaston.org.uk .

The Chairman set out the reasons for calling the meeting. Primarily, it was because an adjudication by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator meant that for the 2007 intake at Chellaston Foundation School, Chellaston would be placed at a disadvantage. The Adjudicator had decided upon a tie-break criterion based on the distance to the next nearest school which meant that children from say, Melbourne would almost certainly get in, whilst Chellaston children would be in an uncertain position. This adjudication had been brought about because of the failure of the LEA and governors to agree on a tie-break criterion – the governors had wanted one based on length of tenure based on HM Land Registry records. We now had a situation where the school admission criteria were different to any other, either in

Derby or Derbyshire. The CRA appreciates that the school is over-subscribed and needs to find ways to reduce the number of applicants. However, the CRA consider that Chellaston school should be for Chellaston children and the meeting was called to show the strength of feeling amongst residents and to give the opportunity to put questions to those involved in making these decisions.

Lance Dean

Lance Dean reviewed the history of the school and described the efforts made over the years to keep up with the ever-growing demand for places.

The point was made that no-one has a right to a place at any school and this is actually enshrined in law.

Andrew Dawson

The school has a complex formula for calculating the number of pupils it can admit, and this results in the "net capacity limit", the maximum that the school can accommodate. For Chellaston School at the moment the figure is 1600. However the school has more than this at the moment. The school did accept 280 this year but any number over 1600 has an impact on the quality of education, health and safety issues, and practical problems such as how well the canteen works.

In an effort to try and come up with an admissions policy which would limit the numbers (if necessary) the governors proposed a tie-breaker based on the length of tenure based on the records of HM Land Registry. They felt that this was the "least unfair" solution. The only problem is that not all properties are registered, particularly older ones. However, it is unlikely that long standing residents in older properties would have children wishing to attend the school, and the property would be registered when it changed hands. This proposal was rejected by the LEA and this led to the adjudication. The adjudication is binding and it is not realistic that it can be changed for 2007, as the application process has already started.

It is the intention of the governors to change the criteria for 2008 admissions and a commitment was given by Andrew Dawson that the governors would be working towards this. He added that there was a problem of long-term provision of secondary places in the area.

Simon Longley

Simon Longley stated that he largely agreed with what had been said so far. He emphasised that the LEA did not run Chellaston School, the governors made all decisions. On admissions, the government issues a Code of Practice for Admissions which the LEA polices. Although there were meetings with the governors, agreement on admission criteria could not be reached because the proposals ran counter to this Code of Practice. The LEA had no choice therefore but to bring in the Schools' Adjudicator which it is required to do. The Adjudicator makes a decision based on the Code of Practice.

Simon Longley said he was somewhat at odds with the school about the numbers which could be admitted in any year, he felt it could be higher than the school had stated. He also felt that the school should revert to the original criteria which includes a "distance from school" tie-breaker. He did not think that the governors should get caught up in "difficult" criteria. He did express his willingness to work with the school to achieve an acceptable solution. However he pointed out that a new Code of

Practice was more robust than the one presently in use and it certainly would not allow the sort of criterion that the governors were proposing.

Ray Ruszczyński

The overcrowding at the school is a major problem, as anyone can see at lesson change-over times and lunch-breaks. The school cannot physically increase in size any more without encroaching unacceptably on its playing fields. There is to be a new block for maths, but this is because the present buildings are temporary.

General Questions

Councillor Mark Tittley stated that he felt that a school in Chellaston should cater for the needs of Chellaston primarily and that he would be supportive of a selection tie-break which was based on the distance of the child to the school.

The question of formal planning was raised. Do Derby and Derbyshire councils look at the future need for educational provision? Why did educational provision not keep up with new housing developments? Simon Longley said that he met bi-monthly with Derbyshire. At the moment there was no indication of any increase in pupil numbers. He added that he felt that Chellaston could take all the children in its area in the foreseeable future.

A resident commented that the LEA appeared to be trying to drive children in to Noel Baker and Merrill College, the latter at least having spare capacity. Simon Longley said this was absolutely not true.

Jo Whitehead asked for an assurance that her son could get in next year, as this year the school had taken 280. Such an assurance cannot be given as no child has a right to a place, it will depend on numbers applying and their status.

John Evans proposed a judicial review of the Adjudicator's decision and wanted a feasibility study on the fairness of the decision. Simon Longley stated that there was virtually no chance of the decision being overturned, and it would cost a lot of money to have the review. The application process was about to start so it was also too late as the review would take some time to complete.

Dave Slack asked what the forecast of applicants was for 2007. Andrew Dawson said that the published number was 260, but the school did not know how many would apply, it was likely to be more and they expected 270-280. Technically the excess over 260 could be turned away but the school has always bent over backwards to accommodate those who comply with the selection criteria. Simon Longley re-iterated that the school could not guarantee a place to anyone but felt the school could take 280 in a year.

A resident said that it was a problem not to know whether a place had been granted until March, which caused a lot of worry.

Concern was raised that, should the Adjudicator be brought in again, he might suggest changes to the catchment area. Simon Longley said that the Adjudicator could not make such a decision if the Governors had not wanted to make such a change in the first place.

The question of how the Governors make decisions was raised. Was it by a show of hands. Andrew Dawson said it did not work that way, they had to make decisions by consensus, being mindful of all areas and groups within their area.

The lack of governors from Chellaston was raised and again Andrew Dawson defended the split of governors from Derby and South Derbyshire. He said that all governors had to make decisions based on what was best for the school, not on where they came from.

Roy Morter, a Chellaston resident, said that when he stood as a governor, he got few votes. John Bowden said that it was likely that, as a result of this meeting, there could be several nominations for a parent governor place which could split the vote at an election, and mean that a Chellaston resident would not get in. It would be better to choose a candidate that everyone was happy with and the most important thing was that parents should make sure they voted.

A question was raised about how distances were measured and it was confirmed that it was by straight line from residence to the school.

David Corner pointed out that the school's website home page made no mention of Chellaston being in the catchment area and asked for this omission to be corrected forthwith. He asked how many children had been taken from outside the catchment area in to years 12/13 (6th form). This is thought to be 15-20. Ray Ruszczynski said that it was a deliberate policy as the school had to be open to pupils from a wide area. The 6th form is self-contained and as many classes are modest in size, an extra 1 or 2 does not make any difference. Mr Corner thought that the school should be allowed more 6th form capacity. Mr Ruszczynski said that it was impossible for the facilities to expand any more and they already had 319 this year which meant that there was a more "comprehensive" (i.e. less selective) approach to the 6th form.

Closing Remarks

John Bowden said that it was good that the governors and the LEA were willing to consider and discuss the admissions policy and the CRA would be making sure that they did so in a reasonable timescale.

Meeting closed at 10.10 pm.