

ABERGAVENNY TOWN COUNCIL

FULL COUNCIL EXTRAORDINARY MEETING

WEDNESDAY 2ND MARCH 2022 7PM

COMMUNITY ROOM, TOWN HALL, ABERGAVENNY & MS TEAMS

PRESENT: Cllr T Thomas
Cllr T Davies
Cllr M Groucutt
Cllr T Konieczny
Cllr G Jones
Cllr N Tatam
Cllr M Harris
Cllr R Harris
Cllr M Hickman
Cllr MA Brocklesby
Cllr S Burch
Cllr D Simcock
Cllr P Simcock

Absent: Cllr L Van De Vyver

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: D Haswell, K Hepton, C Holland,

OFFICERS: S Rosser – Town Clerk
W Mclean – MCC Chief Officer Children and Young People
C Saunders – MCC 21st Century Schools Programme Manager
C O’Conner – MCC Head of Planning
M Hand – MCC Head of Placemaking, Housing, Highways and Flooding

Apologies: Cllr F Morgan – reasons for absence accepted and approved.

Declarations of interest:

Cllr M Groucutt – non-prejudicial as Governor of KHS
Cllr M Harris – Vice Chair of Board of Governors at Deri View Primary School
Cllr R Harris – sits on MCC Planning Committee so unable to contribute to discussions and votes on planning applications, and sits on MCC 21st Century Schools Committee.
Cllr T Davies – Sits on Governing body for KHS and on board covering transition period for KHS.
Cllr P Simcock – conflict of interest as Governor at Deri View Primary School
Cllr MA Brocklesby – Governor at Deri View Primary School
Cllr T Thomas – Governor at Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni

Cllr T Thomas welcomed all attendees to this Extraordinary Meeting called to discuss Abergavenny Town Council's response to the planning application for King Henry VIII School. Environment Committee had discussed this on 23rd February 2022, and wanted all Councillors to have the opportunity to contribute before making a formal response.

Two members of the public had requested in advance to speak for 5 minutes at the meeting. Cllr Thomas reminded all present that his was to discuss responding to the planning application, which we can make comment about, in order to respond to the Principle Authority. Cllr Thomas thanked all MCC officers present for taking time to attend the meeting.

D Haswell spoke first, explaining the scheme for planning hadn't gone through a usual process. Mr Haswell shared three images – the first had areas highlighted in black which faced north which you wouldn't expect to see in a school design. In red were the internal corridors with just 2 doors on the scheme. This was completely internal with no view of daylight at all. Second image – no area of welcome on the scheme, and the playground had disappeared. The school built at Monmouth had a 3d environment, whereas this is entirely 2d. Results in double banking of corridors. Done for efficiency but challenges there are alternative ways of doing this. 6th Form – where is it? If you were a child that had been there since 3 years old you would want some sort of separation by the time you reach 6th Form. Stated brief not met – scheme was to be welcoming and inviting. Planning app shows this is to accommodate 1320 pupils. Original scheme was for 1200. Flexibility and expansion for the school should be considered as part of the housing growth in the RDP. Image 3 showed how it could be laid out – blue area relocates classrooms and opens up corridors to allow daylight in the scheme, and classrooms then face E/W.

Second to speak was K Hepton. She explained her views as a parent of children at the schools. It had been explained to parents that here would be a linear design – you come in at 3yrs and pass through the school. It was disappointing to see a loop top fence to separate areas. Her son was about to start KHS, and describes older children at KHS as being disruptive. There is a reduced access to facilities due to separation of years, and there are concerns from both teachers and pupils. The BREAAAM rating only aims for excellent – why not outstanding or even carbon negative as we have declared a Climate Emergency. Produce power to put into the grid Flagship 6 provision. Environmentally friendly build is possible. All feeder schools are at capacity already, so are enough spaces being provided for going forward? The consultation has been very poor, links not working, uninspiring documentation and design, and teachers comments had not been enacted upon. The needs and safety of the children has been overlooked. It should be a flagship school designed and built to the highest standards. Points have been raised at every meeting attended – these are valid concerns as a parent.

Cllr Konieczny read out his update to ATC. The planning application came to Environment Committee as part of their remit, and at their monthly meetings applications are discussed and comments are then sent back as part of our remit as consultees. It is rare to discuss a development on this scale and of such importance. It was discussed at great length, and rather than just feed back from Environment Committee, it was felt the whole of ATC should be consulted. In context, Environment Committee did not offer a full response to the PAC because

there was unanimous agreement that the time available to study copious technical documents was too short, and difficulties had arisen over availability during the Festive period and the restrictions of the pandemic. The Committee agreed it was unreasonable to expect the majority of the public, or the councillors elected to represent them, to plough unaided through nearly eighty documents and drawings, some listed without explanatory titles. I was duly charged by the Environment Committee to communicate our disappointment in the time scales for consultation of this major and significant development.

ATC did not fundamentally object to this planning proposal, they offered no opinion on the educational advantages of creating a single 3-19 school.

They noted that many others have also raised the issue of the time available for consultation in the PAC responses. Abergavenny Town Council and the communities they represent would have welcomed a summary guide to this significant and important development and were dismayed that only the statutory period that is legally required was allowed for a Planning Application Consultation (PAC) for this major development. The Env Ctee agreed that this seriously undermines the purpose of a PAC and effectively excludes the engagement of the wider lay community.

The Env Ctee were unimpressed with the overall design of the school, describing it as unimaginative and uninspiring as a set of learning for the 21st Century. The three principles laid out in the DAS; that the building is to be welcoming and inviting, the building design should consider the well being of both staff and pupils and maximise the use of Natural daylighting is fundamental to the basic design of the project. Failure to address these fundamental principles and respond to the concerns expressed through the PAC leads to considerable doubt that the brief has been met.

Abergavenny Town Council noted that MCC had not consulted The Design Council for Wales for advice on the merits of the proposed design. The Committee would have appreciated more information on the internal planning & design of the building rather than the detail of the exterior. Many comments were made about the design of entrances being inadequate and unwelcoming. Comments from others who are professionally qualified and experienced architects express similar views.

The Committee commented on the 21st Century school principle of community inclusion and felt that this had not been addressed fully in the application. We welcome the Green infrastructure proposals but are concerned at the loss of sports field the committee noted the loss of a 400m running track, reduced to a 100m sprint track and long jump pit, and see this as a loss to the well being of children and adults in the community as there are no athletics facilities in Abergavenny. They were puzzled at the retention of Cricket nets in the plans with no provision of a cricket pitch.

The Committee had strong reservations concerning the plans for traffic management. We have questioned whether the traffic generation of the western car park might have been

underestimated and we note your Transport Assessment conclusions about easing the peak flow at the Pen-y-Pound/Avenue Road/Old Hereford Road junction. We cannot judge whether this will be sufficient, and we do recognise that the congestion is of short duration. We also note with disappointment that the impact of increased traffic on the Pen-y Pound/A40 junction is set aside on the basis that it is only a part of the complex succession of problems on the trunk road through the town centre. This led to a discussion on the active travel provision for the development. There is insufficient analysis of the safety for pedestrian movement within and without the proposed development and little provision to promote safe cycle routes in both the construction phase of the project and on completion.

The committee challenged the proposed Net Zero aspirations for this development and would welcome detailed proposals for de-carbonisation strategies. We regret that the development does not comply with Pasivhaus principles to address the issues of minimalisation of thermal bridges, low air leakage and the consideration of undertaking Brise Soleil studies. This is an opportunity to provide a centre for learning that is inspiring and embodies the need to respond to the climate crisis as a centre of excellence.

We urge MCC to reconsider and apply the many suggested improvements to this project before coming to a final decision to grant planning application. There are serious issues, serious failings, and this should be fit for purpose, to show a way forward to deal with the Climate Crisis.

Cllr Thomas then asked Councillors to comment.

Cllr MA Brocklesby: These plans have not met the original brief. Wellbeing of Future Generations Act – a 21st Century School should be child-centred, safe, sustainable, and none of these goals are met. As a Governor of Deri View she has received reports from parents who fear for their children going forward, and this heightened degree of anxiety will affect wellbeing.

Cllr G Jones: County Councillor Paul Pavia was invited to this meeting but sent apologies, which feels dismissive, as if MCC are not listening to peoples views. 60% of this is being covered by Welsh Government funds, it feels like MCC have taken the money and not listened to concerns.

Cllr M Groucutt: Worked with D Haswell previously, when he was Architect for Gwent. Educational requirements he understands, and he has gone through planning of a new school and persuaded Property Services to ensure they got value for money, whilst ensuring the Education Authority delivered. DH has set out concerns that I have. I want to see a new school, my own children went to KHS and it wasn't fit for purpose then. There is a rush to start the project, yet simple steps can see this plan improved. We need to give the Planning Authority a chance to think through any issues. Worked with Ofsted previously to advise Department of Education on opening of new schools, he wasn't there to advise on the design, just to say if the provision would assist in teaching children to the best of the abilities in that environment. 2 issues: process could have been better, not had detailed education assessment yet. The Design Council for Wales feedback which should support the 21st Century School initiative. He takes on

board parents points, and that of architects that have commented. We should consider these to ensure best process is followed. Covid has taught us a lot about school design, and that multi entrances are a good thing. Note the role of being welcomed in to a school whoever you are. Disappointed at the entrance provision. Use of smaller access points to allow safer access for teachers and children. Had tried to get this brought up at CYP sitting Thursday 3rd March but told it is currently a planning matter not an educational one. It is both. North facing and enclosed corridors with no light is not conducive to a pleasant learning environment. He hopes MCC will listen to residents and parents in the town. He hopes we can get a school that is worthy of the town and its children. It is a popular community and a brand new school will build on this. Hates the idea we have to accept a plan with so many flaws. Grateful to D Haswell for pointing these out.

Cllr Thomas: As chair of Children and Young People at MCC. The CYP committee had spent time in committee scrutinising the proposal for the new 3-19 school in Abergavenny in principle but not the design and planning submission. MCC has a constitution which when scrutinised saw the 3-19 provision approved. He taught at KHS himself. Estyn at WG don't have the same process as in England. Large number of children in the school are from his ward. He will be at the MCC Planning meeting when this is discussed. The hard reality is we have to decide on a response from Full Council to this huge development to last many lifetimes, and at a cost of £60million, is a huge investment in the town. We need to decide how we are going to respond.

Cllr M Harris: re-emphasise that we need a new school. Current provision was not fit for purpose generations ago. What we've got is hotch-potch. We are talking about a Secondary School, when in fact it will be a 3-19. School. Visited an outstanding example. Real issue with the design – the junior provision looks tacked on. How skilled have the planners been on junior school design. When Deri View moves down to this site, it melds into one with the Secondary School, when there still needs to be structure of infant, junior and secondary. Discussion to come later about possibility of a 'middle school'. Architecturally, north facing overshadowing, 2 entrances – guidance would have been appreciated. Entrances to go to junior and senior are opposite each other at a narrow point, causing concerns over safety and safeguarding. Plus, cycle access through what may be a forest school area. Junior School access is via fence and gates? Wellbeing will be an issue, trying to keep children in a safe and happy environment. A teachers nightmare is the single a=canteen for the whole site, how will all children access this? Concerns over walkway – crosses vehicle access. Junior school – very concerned drop off is not safe. Nursery provision to Yr 4 – over 3 levels? Up and down stairs makes it difficult to travel around. Severe concerns for the young people. Huge emphasis on the Senior School. Parents and staff feel left out. Trying to amalgamate planning and educational response – if we object to one we object to both? This is not so – agrees we need a new educational facility, but planning hasn't provided this. 3-19 school plus special needs provision again have not been fully considered. Deri View children – 50% are on free school meals, and this provision has not been considered in this plan.

Cllr S Burch: as someone who has taken part in design and planning for schools, and sent own children through Deri View and KHS, understands primary and secondary provision needs are

very different. Negotiating a double buggy through to the school, through school gates, back to the car – this scheme doesn't lend itself to the community particularly young parents and children. They are quite vulnerable. Its an amazing site but very challenging. Traffic flow – puts people at risk and the snarl-up of traffic through town. Biggest development which will have the most impact on people in the town. Civic Society submitted a detailed brief and suggested an architectural competition, which is not what we had. Parents are being asked to give Deri View over to Ysgol Y Fenni, and to move into a school which is second rate and ugly. It is forbidding, unappealing, and worse than what is already there, which is quite the achievement. MCC need to step back and think again. Do it once, and do it right. Planning drawings – please put them on the website so they can be read clearly and understood.

Cllr T Konieczny: timetable for this goes back a long way. When MCC had a failed Estyn inspection, Cllr Konieczny went to speak to Cllr Peter Fox in order to establish what the roll out of the 21st Century Schools would be after Caldicot was completed. N He put in a plea that KHS should be next, because it was in a Communities First area and struggling, and a 21st Century build would do a great deal for the town. Cllr Fox promised this for 2018. Its now 2022. Lots of water under the bridge. Its caused deep anxiety – we found ourselves in time boundaries with a set target of 19 month completion date, with contractors already appointed, yet legitimate views seem to be pushed aside as there is no time to consider any of them. Deep failure of developing the service.

Cllr P Simcock: endorses Cllrs M Harris and S Burch's comments. At Deri View, with the social situation that lots of the children come from, they strive to give them the best start in life and they need every ounce of sunlight that we can give them. Look at tipping the classrooms round as suggested in D Haswell's plans. Hereford College attracts a great deal of Abergavenny students due to its great facilities, not such a great choice for kids at KHS leading to less students staying on post 16. If we don't provide a great school with excellent facilities, this downward trend will continue. It's a poor design.

Cllr N Tatam: Agree with almost everything that has been said. Why are we at this space at such a late stage? Awful – prison entrances, energy is awful, no daylight, suspended ceilings which means building must be taller, lose thermal mass, etc. PAC responses – look at these, and the points made, even that from the Design Council for Wales had no response given to comments. Other responses received the line "its not up to us, they set the brief". Its a big thing, and a small authority can't attract specialist officers of sufficient grade to do this. They can't attract talent at any level. The pedestrianisation project was a 1 in 60 year development, and MCC trusted a local group with huge experience to advise and assist. If you've not got the talent, you need to look elsewhere. Get to experts. Why weren't the Design Council for Wales properly consulted?

Cllr Thomas: ATC are not calling in to question the integrity of the MCC officers and County Councillors, we are meant to be coming up with ATC's response. This is a professional Town Council meeting, with wide debate and lots of feedback. Open to MCC for comment, as its

about planning process for the council to comment and feedback on, as stated at the beginning of the meeting.

Cllr M Groucutt: in response to the educational matters, the Chief Exec will be in the hands of the Cabinet Member but we have the Chief Officer here.

W Mclean: this was a meeting for planning views, not the role of the Cabinet Member to comment. When moved away to Cabinet and Select Committee Structure, we have Policy and direction of travel to follow. Planning are there to look at land use and aspect. Cabinet Member to defend is not how it will work and progress. When he received the invite, it was for ATC discussion to form a view. As an Abergavenny resident, disagrees with points, and has visited other examples which work well, with feedback on middle schools and older and younger children mixing mitigating bad behaviors. Happy to engage as we did in the consultation events, PAC, and online. Lots took time to come and speak to all relevant engineers and planners. Its been a proper planning process. Doesn't expect to be told at the meeting he was a substandard officer, the new school being welcome, but working to vote against 3-19 and what it looks like. Doesn't want his legacy of tenure to be a substandard school. KHS is above Chepstow as greater need here due to Deri View needing to move, hence re-think of programme. This development needs to be right, and will work through this via the proper channels.

Cllr Thomas: expressed his unhappiness with the personal comments made by Cllr Tatam questioning the competency of MCC senior officers.

Cllr Konieczny: Compressed time scales with the kinds of representations that will come, will you plough ahead regardless? We're here to represent the community -we tried to do this honestly and properly, raising deep concerns echoing lots of similar views. Don't know why the scheme poses more questions than answers. 19 month time scale – any give will be brushed aside as it was in the PAC. Doesn't do anyone any good, or engage in citizenship as whatever view is expressed the bigger body will go over these. Will our views raised be considered and if not, there's no point.

M Hand: Distinguish the different roles of officers present. W Mclean/C Saunders: Education. M Hand/C O'Connor: Planning. C O'Connor is head of planning, and their time scales and consultation is flexible around this to take comments to MCC Planning. Timescales of Education are also taken into account. Collaboratively working but also having separate agendas. Post election, MCC Planning will consider this. Great to hear thoughts which will be absorbed and fed back. We have to take comments into account as part of the planning process.

W Mclean: Tight timescales due to Covid and two school deliveries being impacted. Costs have skyrocketed, and this has an implication, plus delay to the Welsh School move and MCC ambitions there. Programme affects more than this. Comments today on safeguarding – its No 1 on job description. The notion that MCC would design an unsafe school and that we've not managed this is challenging, when we went to Tonyrefail 3-19 school to see a good example.

Heads of both schools were on this trip. It was a fantastic and ambitious middle school. This build will be a net zero carbon school, a 1st for a 3-19 provision in Wales. This is significant. Estyn are the statutory consultee and have expressed positive views in Estyn language. Worked closely with schools – Tim Bird at Monmouth has engaged with the schools to understand the needs and aspirations. 6th Form was separate in build but KHS were adamant this was not good, they need to be seen and visible to inspire younger children. Obviously planning comments are considered. Delays are significant and have an impact. Trying to do so that council are as informed as possible. New council to be well informed and address challenges for children, to do something different.

Cllr MA Brocklesby: Point of info: Deri View found the beginning of this process fraught within the local community. It's not the design but the leadership team that should have brought everyone along, its saddening that this hasn't happened here. Learn from one another for this 21st Century School – need to get the design right and some of the suggestions are worth considering. No process isn't without difficulties, those that take on board these and communicate then get ownership from town.

W Mclean: ATC are problematic to deal with on these issues. Head at Tonyrefail made equivalent point. 1/1/23 is time frame for new SLT to carry out engagement for the school. It will be a 3-19 school, and new head will start 1/1/23 to develop and build the framework for the school as it is in Tonyrefail. Ownership, development and consultations with children and staff to make sure it is fruitful and successful.

Cllr M Groucutt: disappointing to hear ATC are considered problematic. He wanted this to be the best, and it is important to have a nursery provision. Huge arguments over privatised nursery provision over a maintained offer- latter is very important. Difficulties when councillors are both MCC and ATC. I don't think we are problematical. Educational issues were spoken about at KHS to look at best model. Impact of poverty in community – new school will encourage growth. Education links to design. We jumped ahead due to social needs of Abergavenny, and MCC told KHS that it was falling down, in a worse state than Chepstow.

W Mclean: 2017 paper showed levels of deprivation in both areas, there was uncertainty around demand in Chepstow due to the removal of tolls on the bridges and how this was going to affect the flow into and out of Bristol. Condition of buildings was the 3rd point. Across all 3 points, aspect and validity of comments (build on success of Welsh stream and Eisteddfod). Optic of Town Council voting against 3-19 provision then objecting to planning could be challenging at 2 stages of engagement this is the view.

Cllr Thomas: He had taught at KHS, and in terms of children's development the barrier from key stage 2 through to secondary and the number of feeder schools as it will not just be Deri View it will also be OLSM, Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni, Llantilio Pertholey, Cantref and Crucorney. There should be a more balanced view – look at progression in children. The hurdle from teaching styles and buildings can be quite difficult.

Cllr Burch: Thanked Mr McClean for setting out the rationale for the 3-19 school. She had concerns but am delighted to hear visits to a school of the same format have been done. This design: architectural solutions to the 3-19 challenges – don't feel this resolves these challenges having toddlers through to adults on one site. Sure we'll make submissions critical on the design, but not on the officers or their duties or the 21st Century School.

D Haswell: Issue raised by Cllr M Harris: 3 level primary school – no primary school on one level in county, but where is there another to see if this works? M Hand: planning committee: real time to sort out issues. Query number of students – is it 1200 or 1320? Designed for 1320, but 1200 is for secondary – what's the reality? Different models: architectural brief and planning issues – if committee structures have changed what's the equivalent now in MCC? Education surely is nearest – why didn't design get referred to sub committee. Could discuss PAC drawings that were not discussed at Christmas- call it in to discuss it now.

W Mclean – stated that a call in has to be done 5 working days after cabinet and that's on a decision – it gets passed to CEO to determine if sufficient evidence is there – there is a process to use for a call in.

Cllr R Harris: This is a ATC meeting, and D Haswell has no right to ask questions.

C O'Connor: Clarify points on planning: review as LPA to assess on material as per planning regulations rather than on principle. Look at Highways, Environment, etc. Working with NRW and statutory consultees. Unacceptable if there is a direct material planning issue – reason for refusal. Due to make recommendations to planning and as ATC you can make representations to planning – wanted to ensure you were clear on what we can do.

Cllr Thomas: thanked the council for a full and frank admissions and comments made. He also thanked all the professional officers for attending and giving their inputs. He suggested that the report from Cllr Konieczny and the Environment Committee be used as points raised to feed back to Cllr Konieczny to include in this in the submission over the planning proposal for the new school development

Cllr Tatam requested a vote on this.

Cllr Konieczny – propose to adopt views of Environment Committee as appropriate response to the planning application. Seconded by Cllr G Jones. Agreed by all councillors, bar one abstain from Cllr R Harris. This proposal was passed.

Meeting concluded at 9pm.