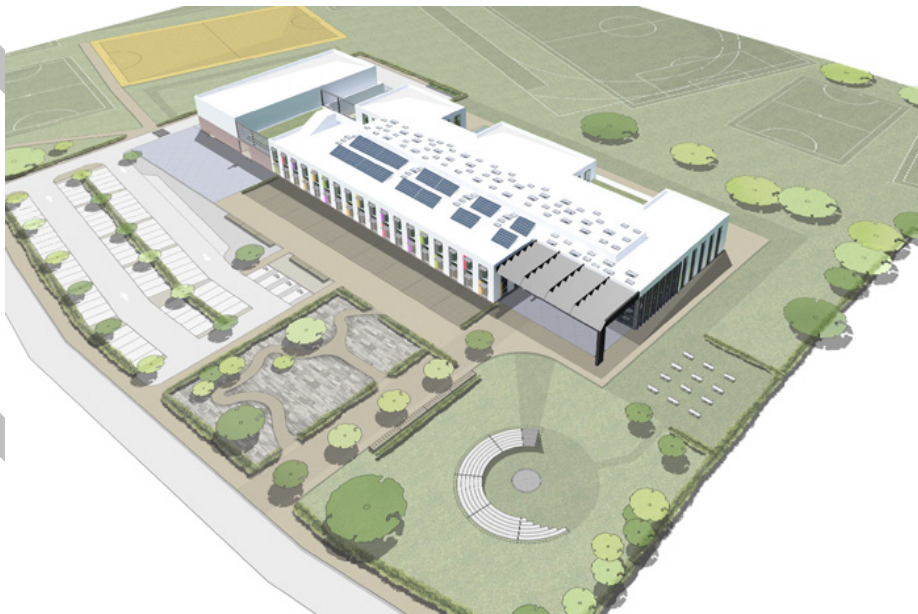
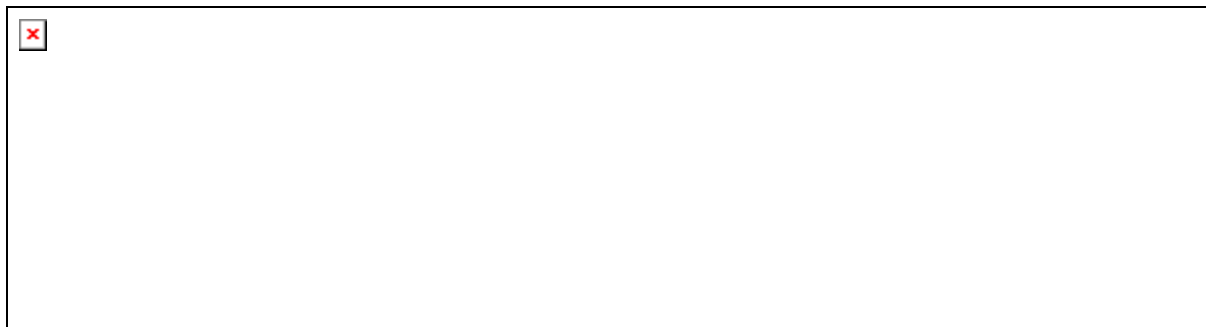


Secondary Rationalisation: Phase 1 Islwyn West

Objection Report



Directorate of Education & Lifelong Learning
April 2014



1. Introduction

1.1 Consultation on the Secondary Rationalisation: Phase 1 Islwyn West commenced on 9 December 2013 and concluded on 31 January 2014. Public consultation sessions were held as follows:

- Pontllanfraith Comprehensive 23 January 2014
- Oakdale Comprehensive 24 January 2014
- Blackwood Comprehensive 30 January 2014

Consultation also took place directly with pupils as part of the consultation process.

Caerphilly County Borough Council's Cabinet considered the consultation report and outcome of the consultation on 19 February 2014. The Cabinet determined to proceed with the proposal and published the Statutory Notice which it proceeded to do on 3 March 2014. The period of the Statutory Notice finished on 3 April 2014.

2. The Proposal

2.1 The proposal consulted on is:

- Closure of Oakdale and Pontllanfraith secondary schools
- Oakdale Plateau 3 as the preferred site for a new school in the Islwyn West region
- The proposed Oakdale Plateau 3 school to be designed with a maximum capacity of 900 pupils, plus provision for Special Needs of circa 50 pupils.

3. Objections

3.1 Summary of objections received.

There was only one response. A letter received on 16 March 2014 which was jointly signed by a present Year 11 pupil and a former pupil.

Whilst supportive of the new school in principle, the objection stated that there should be a new school on Pontllanfraith's current site rather than the Oakdale Plateau 3. It was stated that a new school could be built on the land occupied by the current playing fields and woodlands.

Concerns were expressed about the future of the existing leisure and sports facilities at Pontllanfraith and what facilities would be able to be provided on the Oakdale Plateau 3 site for the new school.

Further concerns were raised in relation to transport in terms of logistics and cost, as well as the drop-off and pick-up arrangements.

3.2 Response to Objection

A response was sent on 20 March 2014.

The response explained that a number of options were explored in terms of identifying the site for the new school. From these options Oakdale Plateau 3 was deemed the most suitable. It was explained that construction of a new school on the existing Pontllanfraith site would present technical challenges particularly in respect of using the current playing fields and woodlands.

It was also explained that both Oakdale and Pontllanfraith had significant surplus places. As at September 2013 Pontllanfraith Comprehensive had nearly 52% unused or surplus places and Oakdale around 20%. The number of surplus places at both schools was forecast to increase even further in future years. It was explained that Welsh Government requires local authorities to address surplus places which are very costly and direct resources from pupils in the classroom. The Council's Working Group determined the principle that it was best to close two undersubscribed schools and construct a new purpose built one.

Reassurance was given that Oakdale Plateau 3 would accommodate a new 900 place school plus provision for all requirements such as sports facilities. It was also explained that after the new school is open the leisure centre and pitch at Pontllanfraith will still be available to members of the public.

In terms of transport, it was explained that the design of the new school would incorporate adequate drop-off and pick-up areas, also that transport costs have been clearly identified and facilitated into the delivery and future operation of the proposal. Finally it was explained that the Council will be required to articulate arrangements for pupil transport, including safe routes to school, as part of the transport plan which is an essential part of the design of a new school.