

Record of Meeting

Proposal to Establish a New Non-Denominational Secondary School in Kirkliston and implement Catchment Changes

Public Consultation Meeting held at 6.30 pm, Tuesday 10 October 2023, Kirkliston Primary School, Edinburgh

Present: Approximately 200 members of the public

In Attendance: Tom Wood (Independent Chair), Councillor Joan Griffiths (Convener of the Education, Children and Families Committee), Lorna French (Service Director Education and Chief Education Officer), Robbie Crockatt (Strategic Asset Planning Manager), David Givan (Chief Planning Officer and Head of Building Standards), Vincent Spicer (Quality Improvement Officer, Learning Estate), and Joanna Pawlikowska (Committee Services).

1. Introduction

Tom Wood introduced the proceedings and himself as a former policeman. He indicated that this was a proposal to establish a New Non-Denominational Secondary School in Kirkliston and implement Catchment Changes and this was important to the future of Kirkliston. He was the independent chair for the meeting, ensuring that those in attendance could hear what was said and would ensure that they got answers to questions. This meeting would form part of the report which would help Councillors to make a decision. It was necessary to have a proper minute, therefore, people must speak clearly and there should be one question at a time. He introduced Councillor Griffiths, Lorna French, Robbie Crockatt, David Givan, Vincent Spicer, and the clerk. He apologised for an absence of Julie Duncan (Portfolio Planner).

The Schools (Consultation Scotland) Act 2010 requires the Council to conduct a public consultation ahead of a report on the proposals going to the City of Edinburgh Council for consideration in January 2023. The public consultation provides people with the opportunity to express their views and feed directly into the consultation process.

Officers that represented the Council gave presentations, as described below.

2. Presentation/Proposal

The event started with Robbie Crockatt (Strategic Asset Planning Manager) delivering a presentation that provided some background information on the reasons behind the Proposal to establish a New Non-Denominational Secondary School in Kirkliston and implement Catchment Changes.

Background and Context

The catchment area for Queensferry High School was presented to the Members of the Public. This catchment has four primary schools at the moment – Echline, Dalmeny, Queensferry and Kirkliston Primary Schools. Queensferry High School's capacity is 1,200 pupils. Current projections suggest a roll of 1,654 by 2031 with increasing numbers driven by new housing developments. The new Queensferry High School was designed and funded in 2016 on the basis of Kirkliston being realigned with another school. A graph showing the predicted increase in numbers of pupils attending Queensferry High School from 2022 to 2036 was presented.

Since 2016 officers have been engaging with elected members and the Kirkliston community to try and identify secondary school solutions for Kirkliston. Officers looked at a number of options. Different options were identified along with the issues preventing further exploration of those options:

- New secondary school in West Edinburgh at the International Business Gateway (IBG) site (Travel and Transport were big issues)
- Winchburgh Academy (this option divided people; West Lothian's different term dates and education approach caused concern and also the feeling that Kirkliston should have own school).
- A new secondary school at Ratho Station (Travel and Transport creates issues)
- Burnshot Road site (Greenbelt was an issue)
- A new secondary school at Ratho Station (similar Travel and Community Links issues as West Edinburgh High School proposal)
- Extend Queensferry High School (unpopular option in Kirkliston and Queensferry as school too big).

The desire for a new school in Kirkliston was identified after an informal consultation in January 2023 showed that 70% of the 240 responses from people living in Kirkliston,

agreed with the need to build a new High School in Kirkliston. The main reasons given by respondents were:

- Reducing travel time and increasing active travel.
- Improving facilities in Kirkliston.
- Long-term strategic planning.

The results of the informal consultation in January 2023 showed the need to build a new school. 22% respondents asked to extend Queensferry High School, 3% to build a new High School in West Edinburgh; 3% to build a new High School in Kirkliston or West Edinburgh, 2% asked for another solution.

The informal engagement in January 2023 also asked people where a new secondary school should be located. Very few (less than 20) responses commenting on a site were submitted.

Preferences and Suggestions after this initial engagement indicated the following sites:

- Sites in the north-east of the village around Burnshot Road
- Redevelopment of the Leisure Centre site on the west of the village

Kirkliston Leisure Centre Site was previously excluded because of its small size, its proximity to the motorway and existing residential properties. However, advice from the Council's Planning Department made it clear that other sites were likely to be undeliverable. The Leisure Centre site is the only site in Council ownership (potentially reducing costs and timescales). Commissioned architects (ADP) looked at the Leisure Centre site in detail to establish whether a school could be accommodated on the site, and concluded that it could be.

Officers conducted a further Informal Engagement in June 2023 asking people in Kirkliston if the Leisure Centre Site was a good site for a school. The Council received 186 responses.

The majority of people – 62% didn't support the Leisure Centre site. 36% agreed that this is a suitable site for a new High School and 2% respondents didn't have any preferences. 165 comments received rejected the Leisure Centre site due to transport and environment issues; the second most common reason was the loss of outdoor and sport facilities. Education, alternatives, infrastructure, and economy were also submitted as reasons by a minority of respondents.

The reasons to progress Statutory Consultation on Kirkliston Leisure Centre Site were:

- There is clear support for a new secondary school in Kirkliston.
- The Leisure Centre site is currently the only site that we can build a school on due to restrictions on all other potential sites.

- The timescales for delivery of a school on the Leisure Centre site are within our control.
- The major concerns previously expressed – transport, site size and outdoor facilities can be addressed through a detailed design process.
- If a new school in Kirkliston is not deliverable, then we will extend Queensferry High School – by far the least popular option in Kirkliston and in Queensferry.
- The proposal would work and would be very successful.

Proposal

The outline of the proposed new High School in Kirkliston was presented:

- Establish a new 600 capacity secondary school on the site of the existing Kirkliston Leisure Centre; this means that the leisure centre will be removed.
- Catchment area formed from the existing Kirkliston Primary School catchment area.
- New school's catchment area implemented from November prior to new school opening.
- Kirkliston Primary School as feeder school to the new high school.
- Catchment boundary of Queensferry High School changed to exclude catchment area of Kirkliston Primary School.
- New school built with capacity for 600 pupils extendable to 1,200 if required in the future.

The whole community would be engaged through the design and planning process. A new school would have a flexible design to accommodate expansion to 1,200 pupils at a later stage. Community access would be a core principle and would be developed with users through design process to provide sport facilities, meeting spaces etc. A new school would be designed to Passivhaus standards as this will be a green school in terms of energy use. Head Teacher would be appointed well in advance of opening in August 2028. New school would open in August 2028 with S1 pupils only and each consecutive year a new year group would be added (the same approach as Winchburgh Academy). Siblings would be guaranteed a place so siblings will not learn at different schools.

A Statutory Consultation will be open until Tuesday 31 October 2023. Then all responses will be sent to Education Scotland to produce their report outlining their views on the Council's proposals. Education Scotland's report and all other responses to the consultation will be addressed with recommendations on next steps published in an Outcome of Consultation Report which will be considered by the Council's Education, Children and Families Committee in January 2024.

The proposed site was described in detail:

- Proposed site is 1.7 Ha.
- School site sizes governed by the Schools Premises Regulations, 1967 as amended.
- Regulations separate out size of area required for school building and size of area for pitches.
- Pitches do not have to be located on the school site as this is not a statutory requirement.
- 600 pupils require site of 2.0 Ha; 1,200 requires site of 2.6 Ha (excludes pitches)
- A smaller site area can be provided for a new school with the consent of the Scottish Government.
- 13 out of 23 secondary schools in Edinburgh do not comply with 1967 site size regulations.

A comparison with other secondary school sites across the city was presented. St Thomas of Aquin's RC is 750 Pupil Capacity school and it's based on 0.69 HA; Trinity Academy which is currently 950 Pupil Capacity (1,200 when rebuilt) is based on 1.37 HA; Boroughmuir HS with 1,560 Pupil Capacity is located on 0.92 HA; Kirkliston HS with the capacity of 600 – 1,200 Pupils would be on a 1.7 HA site – larger than all these other school sites, demonstrating that even with a smaller site, this proposal could be successful.

Planning issues were discussed on different sites, and it's been highlighted that the main issue preventing development on those sites is their status as 'greenbelt'.

Greenbelt status was described as below:

- A Local Development Plan (LDP) sets out policies and proposals to manage where development should take place.
- Current LDP which set up where developments can be built was adopted in 2016.
- New LDP in progress is called City Plan 2030 and it's been consulted on ('Choices for City Plan' document) in 2020.
- City Plan 2030 was approved by Council in November 2022.
- Scottish Government Examination of City Plan 2030 began December 2022.
- Developers made representations supporting release of land around Kirkliston.
- Hearing held September 2023.
- Scottish Government report would be published early 2024.

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- CEC believe that it is highly unlikely that any changes to City Plan 2030 affecting Kirkliston in terms of Greenbelt will be required.

Kirkliston attracted 810 representations in City Plan responses– more than any other area of Edinburgh: 156 in support and 654 objections.

The changes of National Planning Framework 4 were presented:

- New National Planning Framework published by Scottish Government in February 2023 sets national planning policy.
- All authorities to produce new LDP reflecting NPF4 by May 2028
- NPF4 Policy does support essential infrastructure in the green belt but the definition of “essential infrastructure” does not include schools.
- Development of Greenspace under the next LDP appears more difficult under NPF4 as it seeks to protect land around towns and cities.

In conclusion, the development of a school on greenbelt land would be contrary to National and local planning policy. There could be potential to locate pitches on some Greenbelt sites.

Greenbelt sites could also potentially be released for development in 5 years’ time as part of the next Local Development Plan. However, Kirkliston overwhelmingly rejected this idea of development in 2020 and the new National Planning Framework makes this release less likely.

Educational Benefits – Vision and Values

Vincent Spicer (Quality Improvement Officer, Learning Estate) spoke to the educational vision and values for a new secondary school in Kirkliston. He stated that he has worked at secondary schools of various different sizes. The main concern for people might be size but this is a fantastic opportunity for the reasons highlighted below:

- At the heart of the successful introduction of a new Kirkliston Secondary will be a clear vision for the new school. The vision, values and aims will be developed with stakeholders, with children and young people, parents/carers and staff actively involved.
- Success will be driven through leadership of the school at all levels and the establishment of a positive culture and ethos.
- With a supported, creative, and ambitious approach and working in partnership with stakeholders, a smaller school community - as is proposed at Kirkliston - can thrive equally as well as a larger one.

This would be an exciting opportunity to review the curriculum, to challenge traditional structures and methods for learning and introduce innovative practice, aligned with the recommendations and outcomes of the Hayward Review.

The curriculum offered and the totality of the curriculum experience was defined by the ability of the school to meet the needs of its learners, and this isn't an ability exclusive to larger schools. Leadership and partnerships would be crucial in this respect. In addition, engagement of creative teaching and learning approaches in a new viable and sustainable school space could broaden scope for attainment and achievement.

Lorna French (Service Director Education and Chief Education Officer) said that education is changing in the city in a creative way, in primary and secondary schools. There are innovative changes coming in the next 10-20 years which will change the future of education.

Digital learning was presented as an educational benefit:

- New technologies would be fully utilised, supporting and enabling Edinburgh's 1:1 Empowered Digital Learning Strategy.
- The development of equity of opportunity through digital technology would provide even greater access to learning and courses; locally, nationally, and internationally through distance and hybrid learning activities.

Enhanced transitions into, between and beyond each stage of education would ensure continuity and progression to support pupil well-being and raising of attainment levels.

Transition activity would be planned collaboratively, with staff, learners, parents, and partners actively involved in decision making as we develop a new Kirkliston High School. This would include co-creation of the physical design of accommodation and facilities as well as the design of the Curriculum. Planning for transition would provide staff, learners, families, and the community significant opportunities for meaningful engagement with the process, developing a sense of ownership of their new learning environment.

Next Steps

The six-week statutory consultation period would come to an end at 5pm on 31st October 2023. Any comments that the Council received would have to be considered and responded to in an Outcome of Statutory Consultation Report which would be put to the Council's Education, Children and Families Committee in January 2024. Once the public consultation phase had finished, details of the representations received would be issued to Education Scotland for their consideration. Education Scotland would issue a report on their findings which would be included in the final Council report on the consultation.

Tom Wood thanked Officers for the presentation and asked for any questions or comments. He prioritised questions from parents who have children in Kirkliston Primary School who would attend a new secondary school.

3. Questions and Comments

Question 1 - I want to talk about site space and the leisure centre, as there are some complications. There is a piece of land on the west and this land was for sale, but it's been considered as 'countryside'. Why could this not be considered as the site for a school or for pitches to serve a school? Kirkliston has done its fair share of housebuilding, we've got lots of new developments, more than we need. I don't understand why the council didn't set up plans years ago rather than developing the Leisure Centre site. Where on the earth is the catchment for the new school?

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) Just to clarify, is the site to the west the one on the other side of the underpass toward Winchburgh?

Answer – Yes.

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) – Proposals for a new school and its design must work within planning policy. However, the design of a new school goes beyond the boundary of the Leisure Centre site and we would like to develop the design and the location of facilities such as sports pitches with the community. I am happy to have a look into this site. Lots of people have got problems with transport and parking and we need to explore these but this should be done as part of the design development process with the community. What we need first is, through this consultation, establish what school provision for Kirkliston should be. I will pass now to David who will say more about planning.

Comment - I was a big advocate for a new High School in Kirkliston and suggested the Leisure Centre site. But I now don't think it is feasible.

Answer (David Givan) - Planning policies are very restrictive when it comes to greenbelt, so a school building in one of those sites won't be supported by planning officers. In terms of sport provision, when considering a proposal for pitches on a greenbelt site, we need to assess the surrounding area and context of any proposal. There are lots of issues to consider like high fences and floodlights that may not be consistent with housing development. I am happy to work with Robbie to explore this site further.

City Plan 2030 is being examined by the Scottish Government. City Plan 2030 will be adopted and in place for the next 5 years. Through the Planning process for a new school people from the community will have a chance to say more. We are happy to hear from people and will work with Robbie to investigate existing sites. I am pleased to see that the viability study by the architects shows that the site can accommodate the school building and sports facilities.

Comment – A comment was made that it is disingenuous of the Council to give Trinity Academy as an example of a school on a small site as it has access to the Bangholm sports facilities.

Chair – Chair prioritised questions from parents whose children attend Kirkliston Primary School, approximately 20 members of public (affected parents) put their hands up.

Question 2 - A member of the public (who is a High School teacher) raised a concern that a small school would rely on bi-level teaching and this issue and what it means should be communicated to the public. She said that when bi-level teaching takes place, teachers must juggle different subject levels and it's not ideal for pupils' learning..

She also asked about teacher recruitment: how would a small school attract teaching staff when there is a shortage of teachers qualified in specific subjects.

Answer (Vincent Spicer) - It's a valid point, but from my experience this can actually benefit learners through providing challenge and enabling pupils to experience a level of learning that they might not otherwise experience. Bi-level classes are common across the city.

Comment – It's not an ideal option though.

Answer (Vincent Spicer) - Many schools have combined level classes. I appreciate there are challenges but having mixed ability levels in classes can actually inspire and encourage learners to achieve at a higher level, through peer support and collaboration.

Answer (Lorna French) - We need passionate, skilled teachers. When the teacher is the right person, they can achieve the best results. Bilevel teaching is standard in many schools in Edinburgh and nationally. What improves the quality is to have highly skilled teachers.

We are looking for something different, the curriculum will be different. A recent presentation from cluster Head Teachers in the Northwest of the city highlighted a new approach to connecting schools to share resources both physically and digitally. A Kirkliston High School would be part of this network. This proposal is a great opportunity for Kirkliston.

Question 3 - What support will be provided? How can you gain trust from Kirkliston? As over years you've done nothing, we've received no response over the last few years and will soon be left with a High School without enough capacity.

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) – Queensferry High School has sufficient capacity to meet demand for places and we will work with the school to ensure that continues to be the case regardless of the option progressed. This might mean that temporary accommodation is required. But how the school timetable their spaces is also an

important factor and we will be working closely with them to make sure the building and any temporary buildings work efficiently.

And about the timescale – this wasn't an easy process, but we've got an option that is deliverable. If this proposal is not accepted then we will extend Queensferry High School. Above all, we need to give people certainty, and this proposal might not be popular, but something must happen in the future.

Question 4 - 63% of us said that the new site is not suitable, and extension of the school is not suitable, is there any plan C and how long will this process take?

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) - There is no plan C, it's a choice between a new school or High school extension.

Comment - The Council clearly don't have a plan C. I don't understand why you showed all those options to us.

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) – We explored all other potential sites; some were ruled out because they flood, others because of planning restrictions.

Question 5 - There has been no real consultation - it seems like all sites identified were unsuitable with no alternative. The Leisure Centre's location beside the motorway means that there will be air quality and acoustic issues. How will the Council address these?

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) – Transport and Environmental Impact assessments will happen as part of the design development. I am not an architect but the architects from ADP who undertook the viability study can perhaps provide a more detailed answer.

Answer (Architect) – Architect assured the Member of Public that environmental process and air pollution will be considered and that different measures will be considered through the design process, such as the orientation of the building, its layout and simple things like opening windows when its necessary. The building would be constructed to Passivhaus standard and this will make the building extremely efficient from an energy perspective but also provide excellent air quality and acoustic baffling.

Comment – There are so many issues, it's a nonsense.

Comment - It's a ridiculous stage to get to. The thing with opening windows for example, is that it will create acoustic issues. We don't yet know the impact the new primary school building will have on traffic. A new secondary school will cause more issues and the impact to the residential area is crucial. This is the wrong place.

Comment - Just because you could doesn't mean you should, it's a not a suitable site.

Question 6 - How many new houses have been built and why is there no negotiation with the developers. I want to understand if someone will build something like that close to my house – what rights do I have?

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Answer (Robbie Crockatt) - This consultation won't guarantee this school will be built on this site. We will make a recommendation informed by the responses received to the consultation. This recommendation will be in the consultation outcomes report to Education, Children and Families Committee who will decide whether to approve the recommendation. However, this is the beginning of the process. A budget for the new school will also need Council approval. And Planning approval will be required.

Question 7 - A member of the public asked to pause the consultation process so that other options could be explored and consider how residents will be supported.

Comment – A member of the public commented on the site in Ratho. She didn't want to travel so far and didn't want to have new houses built in Kirkliston. She also mentioned that residents weren't aware of consultations in January, and she found out about the Leisure Centre in June, many have not received a consultation letter. The City of Edinburgh Council has been described as very unfair in processing this proposal.

Chair – What would you prefer?

Answer (Member of Public) – I would prefer Greenbelt, a small school there.

Question 8 - A member of the public raised a concern that the use of the Leisure Centre site had always been the Council's intention. The site was handed to the Council in March 1994 with a condition in the title restricting its use. However, in 2017 the Council followed a legal process to remove this condition. Also the size of the site is incorrect. It is 1.4 Ha rather than the 1.7 the consultation documents claim.

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) – This is not something I was aware of.

Question 9 – Can this be reported please?

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) - We will look into the site size question with architects. The advice we have received is that the space for the secondary school is 1.7 Ha. We will respond to this through the outcomes report.

Question 10 – Question about planning permission in principle and why an application would be refused.

Answer (David Givan) – There are two types of planning applications. Applications for planning permission in principle (PPP) can be submitted to establish whether the principle of development is acceptable. If it is, then PPP will be granted and then subsequent applications for approval of matters specified in condition (AMC) applications can be submitted to get approval for the details, like the layout, building design, etc. The other type of application is for planning permission in full where instead of that two stage process for PPP and AMC, a single application is made for which shows all the details of the buildings proposed.

When we make decisions for developments like a school, it is very likely that these will be decided by Committee rather than by officers (under delegated authority). When an application is decided by Committee, officers make a recommendation of whether to grant planning permission or not. We are required to make decisions in accordance with our development plan) unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Council's development plan is the Edinburgh Local Development Plan and National Planning Framework 4. We need to carefully consider proposals against the development plan policies. Countryside and Greenbelt are very restrictive policies within the development plan. Having these policies mean that where applications come forward that conflict with them, it is very likely that we, as officers, would make recommendations that planning permission should be refused.

Question 11 - It's been clear again this idea is not good, no plan C. It would be sensible to have sub-committees with local people who have some ideas.

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) – I am more than happy to work with a group; with the primary school's parent council or the community council; happy to explore that.

Question 12 (primary child) – it's about the Leisure Centre – what happens with that? Building a secondary school there will bring younger children next to older children and they might swear a lot and that's not what younger children should learn.

Answer (Lorna French) - We can separate and judge any groups of people. The reality is we can't keep children separate and I hope that the High School in Kirkliston will encourage good habits.

Question 13 – A member of the public asked about a pitch on the site of the Leisure Centre and the Education Scotland report. This resident stays on the road next to that proposed site and also asked about the impact on close residents, which should also be considered as well as views on accommodating children.

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) – There is an opportunity to provide a synthetic MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) on the Leisure Centre site which is usable throughout the year. The Education Scotland report will capture Education Scotland's views on the Council's proposal. It will consider the views of staff, pupils and parents as part of their assessment. The Council will respond to the Education Scotland report as part of their own Consultation Outcomes report.

Question 14 – A member of the public asked if any traffic modelling has been undertaken to assess the impact a new school and the new nursery will have on the area. Also, there are exceptions in NPF4 in specific circumstances to allow building on greenbelt land.

Answer (David Givan) - NPF4 is a very restrictive policy and schools are not one of the circumstances for which there is an exception but we will be reflecting on the comments and suggestions made here.

Question 16 - Two members of the public (parents) raised a concern about online learning, saying online learning is not that great, it's not the same. Aside from education benefits, there is an important social aspect to keeping school clubs.

Answer (Lorna French) – The way education is developing now means there are benefits to be had from digital learning, to complement and enhance the curriculum offer.

Question 17 - A Parent Council representative said that people have concerns about links with a different high school and asked if there was a way of creating a small campus linked with Queensferry High School? There are a lot of families who have more than 2 or 3 children. Could the City of Edinburgh Council guarantee enough places at a new High School if the village grows?

Answer (Lorna French) - I went to a High School with 800 pupils. What you need is to work with the community. I like the idea of an all-through campus approach, many independent schools operate with this model, and it has the potential to address the often difficult transition from primary to secondary as relationships are stronger and communication is easier.

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) – The school would be extendable to 1,200 pupils this would be sufficient to accommodate any future expansion of the village based on the release of land originally proposed in the LDP.

Question 18 – A member of the public asked about legacy, social and environmental considerations. She stated that residents of Kirkliston need a proper facility and asked what officers can do to release the pressure and make better decisions.

Answer (Robbie Crockatt) – This process has taken 7 years. We need a decision now to allow us to progress with design development and understand the opportunities this site offers. We need to discuss what opportunities there are but there is the timescale pressure. Right now this consultation gives us the opportunity to hear from a large group of people.

Question 19 – A member of the public expressed a concern that this process doesn't include people and spoke of the National Decision model as officers should consider using a decision-making model to inform their decisions.

Comment – A member of the public said that greenbelt is a big factor, with most of the land owned by developers. He expressed a concern that this would be such a small school.

Comment – Challenge the greenbelt.

Answer (Vincent Spicer) – Working in partnership is crucial and I can share one example of practise that can make small schools as successful as a larger school. I had an opportunity to work in the smallest secondary school in Edinburgh at the time, that had some excellent teachers including one who taught Mandarin. They were able

to teach at the school through a fantastic partnership with George Watson's College. With a smaller school, you are not limited by how creative you can be and we introduced Mandarin as a core component of the S1 and S2 curriculum. When it came to course choices in S3, a third of the year group chose it through a free choice process and now that school has young people studying Mandarin at Higher level. Anything is possible through creative and innovative leadership, working together in partnership with stakeholders and I'm passionate about that.

4. Conclusion

Tom Wood brought questions to a close and thanked everyone for all their contributions which were extremely valuable. He also reminded everyone that they had until 31 October 2023 to make any further contributions on the website or in writing.

Councillor Griffiths thanked everyone for coming and for their contributions.