

**Statutory proposal to close The Henry Prince CE (C)
First School, Mayfield on 31 August 2019**

Representation from Mayfield Parish Council

Mayfield Parish Council response to Henry Prince School's comments on its formal representation to the consultation on school closure (23 January - 5 March) and the Statutory Proposal to close Henry Prince CE (C) First School 20 March -16 April.

Background

Mayfield Parish Council made formal representations to Henry Prince School's consultation (23 January – 5 March). This is attached as Appendix 1

Henry Prince School's Governing Body responded to Mayfield Parish Council's representation by stating:

The Governing Board met on the 12 March and carefully considered all responses and comments received, having met previously more than once as suggested in your "A new way forward". The governors sadly could not see anything by way of these responses that could be seen as a viable way forward to halt the consultation process and ensure a viable way forward to address the current deficit and move the school forward for a sustainable future ensuring the high quality of education which is essential for The Henry Prince School and its community. Governors voted and carried the motion that Statutory Notice for the closure of The Henry Prince First School & Nursery be published.

The response from Henry Prince School to Mayfield Parish Council's representations is inadequate and appears to be a blanket refusal to seriously address any of the substantive points raised by the Parish Council. It is noted that Henry Prince School has not adequately appraised the impact of closing the school on the community of Mayfield, which is a specific requirement of National Government guidelines for closing schools. We have raised this matter with Andrew Griffiths MP to clarify whether this is a breach of the consultation procedure.

Henry Prince School having taken the decision to publish the Statutory Notice for the closure of Henry Prince School & Nursery on 12 March has now published the 'Full Proposal' for the closure of the School. Representations can be made on this Full Proposal by 16 April.

Mayfield Parish Council's response to the 'Full Proposal' Statement by Henry Prince School's Governing Body to close Henry Prince School.

REASON FOR CLOSURE PROPOSAL

Henry Prince School's Governing Body has summarised its reasons for proposing the closure of the school in the 'Full Proposal' document:

“It is with regret that the governing body has published this closure proposal but it has concluded that there is no financially viable alternative. The key issues facing the school are low pupil numbers and its finances. The school was judged “good” by Ofsted, for a second time in October 2017, however too few local parents are choosing The Henry Prince for their children. Low pupil numbers result in lower funding, which means that the school has built up a large financial deficit, cannot set a balanced budget and cannot afford to maintain a good quality of education for the pupils in its care.”

Second consultation period in 2018

The Full Proposal document then explains what has happened during 2018 for Henry Prince School to meet the agreed action with Staffordshire County Council to retain and expand the school roll to provide a sustainable future. It states:

“At the point the above actions were agreed there were 35 full time pupils on roll. The school currently have 30. The ambitious proposal agreed with county projected 49 pupils for September 2019. On admissions closing for September 2019, the expected numbers are 29 full time pupils. This leaves the school 20 pupils short resulting in a £70,000 addition to the established deficit. So, therefore, the school cannot purchase necessary resources or essential training for staff which is vital for educating pupils to high standard and with the planned increase of year groups. With reducing pupil numbers and finances, in October 2018, the governing body were again forced to consult on a proposed closure.

Paragraphs 15 to 27 of the appended consultation document explains the background to the consultation as at January 2019 and notes that it is not possible to set a balanced budget to sustain the high quality of education at The Henry Prince. Since January, during the second period of consultation, the number of pupils (excluding nursery) has fallen from 30 to 24, which means an even worse financial position. There are also an additional 5 pupils who will be leaving The Henry Prince shortly. The forecast deficit for the end of 2019/2020 is now £314,000 and is forecast to rise to £440,000 in 2021/22 and to continue to rise: this is clearly untenable. As noted, an additional ten pupils would only increase the school budget by around £35,000 per year; even with continued budget reduction by the governing body, to balance the budget for the current financial year would have required an additional £74,000.

Governors considered three written responses received during the recent consultation period, between 23 January to 5 March 2019, and the range of views expressed during consultation meetings with staff, parents and the community. After due consideration, governors could not identify anything that could be taken to the county council which would address the current deficit as well as the on-going deficit. The governing board, therefore concluded that there was no way forward other than to serve this notice.

Mayfield Parish Council response

The Full Proposal document does not adequately explain what pro-active steps have been taking by the School’s Governing Body during 2018 to understand why people in Mayfield, and elsewhere locally, are deciding not to send their children to Henry

Prince. There has been no survey of residents as far as we are aware and when asked, the Head Teacher and the Chair of Governors were unable to explain why residents are not sending their children to a community rural school with a GOOD Ofsted rating. Without an understanding of why local residents are not sending their children to Henry Prince School it is difficult to see how the Governing Body could have taken positive steps to achieve the increase in school numbers that it agreed with Staffordshire County Council when the decision was taken to save the school from closure in early 2018.

Mayfield Parish Council, working with the local community, has now undertaken a survey of all local residents to understand what it would take to ensure that local people select Henry Prince School as their first preference. Some 600 questionnaires were distributed to homes across Mayfield from 4 April 2019 with a return date of 10 April 2019. 159 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 26%.

The analysis of returned questionnaires is still taking place but core headline findings are very supportive of keeping Henry Prince school open.

Virtually all respondents stated that they wanted the school to remain open. Respondents with children, either below school age or of primary school age, stated that they would consider sending their children to Henry Prince School providing certain changes were made. These included the need for practical 'wrap around care' and nursery education provision. In addition there appears to be a 'disconnect' between the Mayfield community and the school. This probably explains why families with children are not sending their children to Henry Prince School and accounts for the School's existing funding problems. More analysis of this community 'disconnect' is currently taking place to fully understand what these issues are.

Particularly important was that over 90% of families with children aged 0-3 (of 13 families responding) said that they would consider sending their children to Henry Prince School if changes were made. This is on a survey response of 26%. If this statistic was extrapolated across the whole survey it demonstrates that there is a sustainable future supply of children from Mayfield alone that would enable Henry Prince to be able to survive and expand.

In addition there is no evidence in the Full Proposal report of what action Staffordshire County Council advised Henry Prince School during 2018 to take to reduce the on-going debt that the school faced. This is despite County Council representatives advising the public meeting on the first stage consultation on school closure in January 2019 of proposals that they made to the school to reduce the financial debt issues.

The Full Proposal document should explain what action Staffordshire County Council has taken since the school was saved from closure in early 2018 to assist Henry Prince School in both promoting itself to attract new pupils and the monitoring and mentoring of the school's Governing Body on the financial management of what has clearly been a worrying period for the school.

In addition the financial projections contained in the Full Proposal document do not appear to tally with information recently provided by the Head Teacher to the Parish

Council. We have been recently informed by the Head Teacher that the school first went into deficit in April 2017 at £17,000. This increased to £98,000 in April 2018 and is likely to be £143,000 at April 2019. Moreover the year on year deficit is actually likely to fall significantly between 2018 and 2019.

The financial projections therefore in the Full Proposal seem to be based on a 'worse case' set of assumptions about the likelihood of children attending the school which our recent survey of Mayfield appears to contradict. We recommend that Staffordshire County Council urgently review these financial projections for Henry Prince School based on the evidence we have recently received from the Head Teacher and the results of our community survey.

Impact on the community

The Full Proposal summarises the Governing Body's view on what the closure of the school will have on the local community. It states:

"The closure of The Henry Prince School will have an impact on the community as parents and children form relationships around the school and without this, the opportunity for making friends and good neighbours, who mutually support each other, will be lost. Since early 2019, the school re-started a paid weekly lunch offer for senior citizens and also themed lunches for family members to join their children. Typically around 6 senior citizens attend the lunches though numbers have varied between 2 and 12. The school holds golden worship weekly for parents and relatives to celebrate the children's achievements. The school has open days for the wider community to visit. A summer fair is held in the school grounds, where the whole village is welcome. There is an annual sports day picnic where parents join their children for a lunch after sports day. At Easter, the local clergy holds a service in school for parents and pupils. The children lead a class worship where the community is invited."

The Full Proposal concludes that if the school closes:

"The parish council will gain added importance as a focal point for village life."

Mayfield Parish Council response

In the formal representation to Henry Prince School's Governing Body consultation on school closure in January 2019 Mayfield Parish Council made it clear that the impact of any rural school closure needs to be fully addressed in any consideration for closing a school. There was no consideration of the impact on the local community during the Governing Body's first stage consultation which Mayfield Parish Council believe is an error in the consultation procedure. This is a matter that has been raised with the local MP, Andrew Griffiths.

Furthermore the Governing Body's assessment of the impact of the closure of Henry Prince School in the Full Proposal document is inadequate. It does not for example assess what the loss of the school would have on Mayfield's Local Plan designation where the existence of the school is one of the few community infrastructure elements that currently gives Mayfield the Local Plan designation of a Strategic Village with the potential for some residential and employment growth. The closure

of Henry Prince School could see Mayfield's designation in the Local Plan being reduced in any further review of the Local Plan with a consequent detrimental impact on sustainable development and future growth. This could lead to a loss of potential investment in the village and a further decline of housing and employment benefits.

The closure of Henry Prince School will result in Mayfield becoming essentially a dormitory residential community with a local shop, some small businesses and the Mill. Ashbourne will further become the principal location for necessary community services, shopping and employment making Mayfield less and less sustainable.

Given the importance of the Henry Prince School in currently making Mayfield a sustainable community we urge Staffordshire County Council to ensure that when it makes its decision on the future of Henry Prince school on 15 May it takes into account **all** matters in the Government Guidance on the closure of rural schools into account and not simply the educational financial problems that Henry Prince school currently faces.

PROVISION OF SCHOOL PLACES

The Full Proposal documents states that:

“Dove (school sic) was identified by the county council as the proposed catchment school as it would have sufficient capacity to absorb the pattern of demand for places from parents in The Henry Prince catchment area. Places are available for all children in current Reception to Year 3 classes at Dove First from September 2019.”

It also lists the closest Faith schools in Staffordshire, although interestingly not in Derbyshire which are closer, using a ‘straight line distance measurement’.

Ilam School is shown as the closest at 3.7 miles with Dove school in Rocester second at 4.5 miles.

This section of the Full Proposal report concludes that there are sufficient places at nearby schools to cater for the needs of Mayfield parents and children if Henry Prince School closes.

Mayfield Parish Council Response

The analysis in the Provision of school places section of the Full Proposal is flawed and does not recognise the economic and social cost of Mayfield parents having to make round trips of some 11 miles actual (not straight line distance measurement) to take their children to a school in Rocester, which is the recommended school of Staffordshire County Council for Mayfield children if Henry Prince School closes.

There is evidence of some parents having to change their employment hours with a consequent negative impact on income to take their children to Dove rather than locally at Henry Prince. There is also a social cost to parents with more than one child in transporting their children to Dove.

These economic, social and environmental costs of closing Henry Prince School need to be fully assessed by the County Council before they take their final decision

on whether or not to close Henry Prince School. Clearly the Full Proposal document prepared by Henry Prince School's Governing Body does not even start to address these issues and therefore is flawed in this regard.

Conclusion

The Full Proposal report is inadequate in a number of key areas, namely:

- A limited and inadequate assessment of the impact on the local community of the closure of the school despite this being a key requirement of National Government Guidance on school closures. The fact that the first consultation document made no assessment of local community impact of closing Henry Prince makes this matter even more serious. It is a fundamental flaw of the school closure consultation process.
- There is no description of what action Staffordshire County Council has taken during 2018 to support Henry Prince School to manage its budget effectively to reduce on-going debt.
- The financial forecasts of continuing, and rising financial debt for the school, contained in the report reads as a fait accompli of proposed closure rather than offering any practical way forward to increase pupil numbers and to keep the school open. The financial forecasts need to be reviewed in the context of new financial information supplied by the Head Teacher of Henry Prince School and the results of our community survey.
- Assumptions about the cost of providing transport for Mayfield pupils to travel to other schools some considerable distance from Mayfield if Henry Prince School closes are not fully defined and accounted for in the decision to close the school.

Mayfield Parish Council, representing the community it serves, asks Staffordshire County Council to invest in our community by saving Henry Prince School from closure. The decision to save the school from closure in 2018 was based on a developing a realistic business plan for the future Henry Prince School over a number of years. Yet within one year of being saved from closure the Governing Body of Henry Prince School has agreed that the school should close. This is unfair, and unreasonable, on the community of Mayfield and a more realistic timescale to invest in Henry Prince School, and consider new models of educational management, must be considered.

The fact that the Governing Body of Henry Prince School never produced a practical Business Plan for the school to expand and prosper was only made clear by the school's Governing Body in January 2019. Mayfield Parish Council offered, as part of its formal representation on the first stage consultation of school closure in January 2019, to work in partnership with the Governing Body to produce a robust business plan for the school's future. This offer has been rejected by the school's Governing Body.

The same offer is now made to Staffordshire County Council. Mayfield Parish Council, and the community of Mayfield, will work in partnership with councillors and officers to produce a realistic and robust business plan for the future of Henry Prince

School. We need to do this to save a GOOD school and a supportive and caring community.

Save our School for the future of Mayfield.

Mayfield Parish Council

Mayfield Parish Council response to the statutory consultation notice issued by Henry Prince School on its proposal to close the school.

Background

The governing body of Henry Prince CE (C) First School has approved a period of statutory consultation on a proposal to close the school on 31 August 2019. The Formal Consultation period is 23 January to 5 March 2019.

The governing body issued a consultation background paper as part of the formal consultation process which explained what the school agreed to do, with the support of Staffordshire County Council, following the 2017 campaign by local people and Mayfield Parish Council to stop the earlier proposed consultation on closing the school in 2018. This included:

- Increasing the age range to become a primary school
- Introducing wraparound early years provision
- Positive engagement with QEGS on their future admission arrangements
- Further promotion of the school: issuing press releases, reception admissions flyers, advertising Year 5 open evenings, promoting nursery places, working with local parish councillors and developing a new website.

Despite Henry Prince school making positive progress on many of the issues that it agreed to address with Staffordshire County Council, the school's governing body makes clear in their consultation paper on the proposed closure of the school that it has 'exhausted all other options available to them to secure the future of the school'.

A key factor in the governing body's decision to propose closing Henry Prince School is the inability to attract sufficient children for a Reception place in 2019, with only 5 applications for the 15 available places. This is despite evidence that there are 21 children across Mayfield who could have applied for a Reception place in September 2019. It is clear therefore that Mayfield parents are deciding not to select Henry Prince School as their preferred choice. This fact is having a continuing negative impact on the school's finances and its ability to reduce the deficit as required in the 2017/2018 agreement with Staffordshire County Council to keep the school open.

Henry Prince School therefore clearly cannot survive as a good rural community school for Mayfield without the full support of local parents and children. This is the key issue that we must tackle together to keep Henry Prince school open.

Mayfield Parish Council

The Parish Council has made it clear that it supports Henry Prince remaining open. This decision was taken during the 2017/2018 consultation on the proposed closure of the school by the governing body.

While the Parish Council has no statutory responsibility for school matters it agreed in 2018 to support the PTA in funding for laptops for the school, which unfortunately

is not now proceeding because of the decision by the governing body to consult on the closure. In addition the Parish Council has established an Education sub-group to support Henry Prince and councillors have given support to the school's marketing group as well as campaigning to keep the school open during the current round of public consultation on school closure.

In addition to supporting Henry Prince school the Parish Council has a duty to protect and enhance Mayfield as a sustainable community. This is a duty we take very seriously and keeping Henry Prince School open is a core element of what constitutes a sustainable community. Henry Prince School is at the heart of the village, educationally, socially and geographically. Its loss would leave a gaping hole in our village and mean that Mayfield essentially becomes a dormitory settlement with few other public or commercial services on the edge of a rapidly expanding Ashbourne.

Moreover one of the key tests for closing a rural school, according to Government guidelines, is to assess fully the impact that any school closure will have on its community. This test, as far as we are concerned, has not been fully assessed in the current closure consultation and we need to ensure that it is assessed before any final decision is taken by Staffordshire County Council in May 2019.

Key issues for the Parish Council to consider in keeping Henry Prince School open

There are a range of issues that parish councillors have raised with Henry Prince School and Staffordshire County councillors during this current round of consultation. We are still awaiting answers. There are also other issues, which we have only recently been informed about, which could be key factors in any future strategy and business plan to keep Henry Prince School open. These are:

- At the public meeting on 12 February representatives of the Lichfield Diocesan body indicated that there might be funding which could be invested to keep the school open. The Diocesan representatives promised to let us know what that might be. We have not been told what this figure is.
- At the public meeting on 12 February, Councillor Philip White from Staffordshire County Council agreed to speak to his counterpart in Derbyshire County Council about how Henry Prince School could assist in meeting the future significant planned increase in pupil numbers in Ashbourne arising from the current and planned new residential development of nearly 2,000 homes. We are awaiting Councillor White's response.
- At the public meeting on 12 February Councillor Philip White was asked what the net cost of closing Henry Prince School was, including the cost of providing transport for children that would need to attend schools in Denstone and Rocester if Henry Prince school closed. Furthermore he was also asked what the County's attitude would be to agreeing to the closure of the school if the net cost of closing the school was greater than keeping Henry Prince open. We need to know this cost before any decision is taken to closing Henry Prince School.

- We need to know why Mayfield parents are choosing not to send their children to Henry Prince School. Parish councillors have asked the school what the reasons are but there is no definitive explanation. There needs to be a survey of Mayfield residents on this crucial matter to establish what the reasons are and how they could be addressed in a future robust business plan for Henry Prince School to keep it open.
- We were surprised to be told on 11 February, a day before the public meeting on the proposed closure of Henry Prince School, that there was no business plan to manage the reduction of the school's financial deficit and therefore no sustainable strategy to engage in positive discussions on the federation with other schools to avoid closure. Without a robust business plan Henry Prince School appears to be in a very vulnerable situation. This is something that can be addressed if the school remains open.
- We were surprised to be told at the public meeting by a parent governor on the governing body that there appeared to have been a cost effective wraparound care offer that was not taken forward because of apparent Ofsted issues. We need to know more about this offer which could have been particularly helpful in attracting more parents to send their children to Henry Prince School. Henry Prince's own wraparound offer was more costly and did not attract sufficient parent demand to survive. The school closed the wraparound care offer in January 2019.
- What is the transport offer of sending young children to schools in Rocester and Denstone, both of which are over 3 miles away.
- Is it reasonable for Staffordshire County Council to expect Henry Prince School to have completely changed its offer for parents, and reduced the deficit sufficiently, within a year? Surely more time is required for the school to achieve this, which would give confidence to local parents that the school has a long term future and select Henry Prince for their children.

A new way forward

Mayfield Parish Council urges the Henry Prince governing body to reconsider its proposal to close Henry Prince School. We feel that the school needs more time to recover from the initial proposal to close in 2017/2018 and produce a sustainable business plan that will attract local parents to choose our rural community school over other schools elsewhere in Staffordshire and Derbyshire.

In addition, at this stage, there are still many questions for the school, the County and the Diocesan Board of Education to answer. Without these answers we do not know whether the proposal to close Henry Prince could ever be in the best interest of our community.

We ask the Henry Prince governing body to work in partnership with the County Council and Mayfield Parish Council to produce a sustainable business plan for the school to remain open. This will involve the creation of a new partnership for Mayfield comprising Henry Prince School, Mayfield Parish Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council and local businesses.