

Appendix **C**

**Consultation on the
proposed closure of
Ashton Church of England
Voluntary Aided Middle
School, High Street North,
Dunstable.**

**Monday 24 February 2014 -
Monday 7 April 2014**

1. Introduction

Councils have a duty to ensure there are enough suitable school places for children aged 5-16 (as per Section 14 of the Education Act 1996). The Council's role is to promote parental choice, diversity, high standards and fair access to education (Education and Inspections Act 2006).

To help meet these duties a Council has the power to close schools where no other viable options are available.

Possible reasons for closing a school include where:

- it is surplus to requirements (e.g. as a result of an area-wide reorganisation and/or there are sufficient places in neighbouring schools to accommodate displaced pupils)
- it is to be amalgamated/ merged with another school
- it is failing and there is no viable sponsored academy solution
- it is to acquire, lose or change religious character or
- it is being replaced by a new school.

Central Bedfordshire Council is proposing to close Ashton Church of England Voluntary Aided (CofE VA) Middle School because the current and projected pupil numbers make the school unviable.

This document explains the reasons for proposing to close the school and how you can have your say.

The Council is also currently consulting on proposals to close two other middle schools in the Dunstable area for the same reasons. You can also have your say, by responding to the separate consultations, on the proposals to close:

- Brewers Hill Middle School (Aldbanks, Dunstable) and
- Streetfield Middle School (Dunstable Road, Caddington).

Consultation documents and responses forms are available from the schools concerned and from the Councils website at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations . You can also request copies by email from admissions@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk and by calling the School Admissions helpline on T. 0300 300 8037.

2. Background

There have been lots of changes taking place in Dunstable and Houghton Regis schools over the last few years; many have taken advantage of greater powers given to them by Government to change their school, in response to parental demand. The governing bodies of maintained schools in the area, which have approached the Council for permission to consult on a change of age range, were able to provide proof of parental support at that early stage in response to their initial surveys. This support was further demonstrated during the consultation process for each proposal and was one of the factors that were considered by the Council when approving a requested change of age range.

Likewise, for academies that were required to ask the Secretary of State for Education for permission to change their age range, the level of parental support was again one of the factors that were considered when approving the proposal.

In both Dunstable and Houghton Regis there has been a shift from the three tier system of lower, middle and upper schools towards a two tier primary and secondary school model as a result of these changes.

This shift has led to many of the previous feeder schools converting to primary schools. This has led to fewer pupils applying to middle schools for the intake at Year 5. Also the four former upper schools have extended their age ranges, meaning that some pupils are leaving middle schools to start secondary school in year 7. The combination of these factors means that pupil numbers at Ashton CofE VA Middle School have fallen significantly as a result of these changes. We have now reached a point where falling pupil numbers means the Council needs to consider the future viability of the school.

The funding that schools receive comes to the Council from Central Government and is passed directly to the Council's maintained schools in accordance with our local funding formula (academies receive their funding direct from Central Government). A maintained school's funding allocation is predominantly based upon the total number of pupils they have on roll and the total number of pupils that are due to move in and out of the school during that academic year. Because of falling pupil numbers, the budget for Ashton CofE VA Middle School is due to fall by 29.8.% for 2014/15 alone and this decrease, and projected decreases going forward, places the school in a financially unviable position. With such a significantly reduced budget, the school will find it difficult to employ sufficient teachers to enable the delivery of a full curriculum.

The table below sets out the current pupil numbers at Ashton CofE VA Middle School, the projected numbers in September 2014 based on actual applications, and projected numbers for September 2015 based on assumptions regarding applications. Ashton CofE VA Middle School has a Published Admission Number of 155 which is the total number of children that the school is able to admit for each year group.

Current and Projected Pupil Numbers at Ashton CofE VA Middle School

Year Group	Current number of pupils – as at 15 January 2014	Projected number of pupils for September 2014	Projected number of pupils for September 2015
5	106	35	0
6	118	106	35
7	104	37	33
8	140	104	37
Total	468	282	105
Total number of places available at the school	620	620	620
Percentage of school places filled	The school is 75.5% full	The school would be 45.5% full	The school would be 16.9% full

The projected figures are based upon applicants' 'first preferences'. There are sufficient places within Ashton CofE VA Middle School to admit all of the children who have applied for a place, in year 5, at the school as a 'first preference'. Due to the places that are currently available within other Dunstable middle schools, children who have applied for a place within an alternative Dunstable middle school as their 'first preference' and have named Ashton CofE VA Middle School as their 'second preference' will be allocated a

place within their 'first preference' school. Second and third preferences for Ashton CofE VA Middle School will not therefore need to be considered.

As described above, low pupil numbers make the school no longer educationally or financially viable and keeping this school open would not be in the best educational interests of their pupils.

3. Our proposal

The Council is proposing to close Ashton CofE VA Middle School. The Council has considered other options (see Frequently Asked Questions on page seven) but the fall in pupil numbers, both current and projected, means that the school is not able to deliver the full curriculum and the school is unviable.

Should the proposal go forward and the closure of the school be approved, the timeframe and process would be as follows. **Please note that this timescale would need to be reviewed nearer the time depending on actual numbers at the school.**

September 2014	
Year 5	Children for the new Year 5 group are admitted.
Year 6	Parents of Year 6 children are invited to apply for transfer to a secondary school in Year 7 (to transfer in September 2015).
Year 7	Year 7 operates, but on a reduced size of year group.
Year 8	Parents of Year 8 children are invited to apply for transfer to a secondary school in Year 9 (to transfer in September 2015). This will be the last Upper transfer in Dunstable.

April 2015	
Year 7	Parents of Year 7 children are invited to consider making an application to transfer to a secondary school in Year 8 (to transfer in September 2015). This is known as an in-year application as it happens outside of the normal transfer point.

September 2015	
Year 5	No new pupils are admitted.
Year 6	Parents of Year 6 children are invited to apply for transfer to a secondary school in Year 7 (to transfer in September 2016).
Year 7	Year 7 operates, but on a reduced size of year group.
Year 8	Year 8 operates, but on a reduced size of year group.

April 2016	
Year 6	<p>Any Year 6 children whose parents haven't made an application to transfer to a secondary school will be sent an application to state a preference for a school.</p> <p>If no application is received by the end of May a place at the nearest Secondary school with places will be allocated.</p>
Year 7	<p>Parents of Year 7 children are invited to consider making an application to transfer to a secondary school in Year 8 (to transfer in September 2015).</p> <p>This is known as an in-year application as it happens outside of the normal transfer point. If no application is received by the end of May a place at the nearest Secondary school with places in Year 8 for September will be allocated.</p>
Year 8	<p>Parents of any Year 8 children remaining in the school are invited to apply for a place in Year 9 at a secondary school (to transfer in September 2016).</p> <p>If no application is received by the end of May a place at the nearest Secondary school with places in Year 9 for September will be allocated.</p>

We recognise that this proposal to close the school may be unsettling for pupils, staff, parents and carers and we are keen to hear from all those people who want to have their say on the proposals during the consultation. You will find a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) starting on page seven of this document which may help to address some immediate concerns that you have. You are also welcome to raise queries via the School Admissions helpline on T.0300 300 8037 or at the public meeting that is being held at the school on Monday 3 March (see page six for details)

4. The consultation process

The Council is required to consult with a range of people and organisations including:

- Parents and carers of the children in the school
- The school's governing body
- The school's teachers and other staff
- The governing bodies, teachers and staff of other schools that may be affected
- Parents and carers of children at other schools that may be affected e.g. at feeder schools
- The local diocese and other faith groups
- Neighbouring local authorities
- Members of Parliament

You can have your say online at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations or you can complete pages 13 and 14 of this document and return them to the FREEPOST address provided at the end of the form. As well as providing feedback on the Council's proposed closure of Ashton CofE VA Middle School, you can also submit an alternative

proposal for the school. All responses should be returned by **5.00pm Monday 7 April 2014**.

We will also hold a public meeting at Ashton CofE VA Middle School on **Monday 3 March 2014** at 7.00 pm which is open to all interested parties. We are also meeting with the staff, union representatives and governors of Ashton CofE VA Middle School.

The timetable for the consultation and decision making process is set out below. At the end of this consultation, if the Council decides to pursue closure of the school, it would then have to go through another stage of consultation (a Statutory Notice period) before any final decision could be made in August.

Consultation Timetable

Action	Timescale/Deadline
Six week consultation period begins	Monday 24 February 2014.
Staff, Governors and trade union meeting	Monday 24 February at 4.00pm at Ashton CofE VA Middle School.
Public meeting	Monday 3 March 2014 at 7.00pm at Ashton CofE VA Middle School.
End of six week consultation period	Monday 7 April 2014.
Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee meet to consider the responses received to the consultation. This meeting is open to the public **	Wednesday 7 May 2014 at 7.00pm at the Grove Theatre, Dunstable.
Council's Executive meet to consider responses to consultation and decide next course of action. This meeting is open to the public **	Tuesday 27 May 2014 at 9.30am at Priory House, Chicksands.
If decision is made to proceed with the closure, Statutory Notices will be published and a four week period for comments and/or objections will begin	Monday 9 June 2014.
End of Statutory Notice period	Monday 7 July 2014.
Final decision regarding the proposal to be made by the Council's Executive Committee. This meeting is open to the public **	Tuesday 19 August 2014 at 9.30am at Priory House, Chicksands.

** for information regarding these meetings, please see page 11.

For more information about this proposal please:

- visit the School Admissions webpage at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/admissions
- email admissions@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or
- call the School Admissions helpline on T. 0300 300 8037.

5. Frequently asked questions (FAQ's)

Q – Does this consultation mean that the Council has already decided that Ashton CofE VA Middle School will close?

A – No. The Council's Executive committee has approved the start of a consultation on the proposal to close the school, based upon the school's financial and educational viability. The final decision will not be made until 19 August 2014.

Q – Has the Council considered any alternative solutions other than the proposed closure of Ashton CofE VA Middle School?

A – Yes. We have considered converting the school to either a primary or a secondary school but we do not need any additional primary or secondary places.

Q – To give parents a real choice, could the Council keep just one of the 3 middle schools open?

A – Unfortunately, due to the total number of pupils currently in Ashton CofE VA, Brewers Hill and Streetfield Middle Schools, and the number of projected pupils moving forward, this is not a viable option.

Q – Is the Council proposing to close Ashton CofE VA Middle School because it 'requires improvement' as per the last Ofsted report (dated December 2013)?

A – No. The closure is proposed because the current and projected pupil numbers make the school unviable. The school is currently being supported through the Council's School Intervention Strategy due to its performance.

Q – What is the Council's response to the accusation that by proposing to close 3 middle schools in Dunstable you are reducing parental choice?

A – Parental choice and support was demonstrated to us within the proposals that were brought forward to the Council by the schools that wished to expand their age range. This has been further demonstrated by the number of parents who have not applied for a middle school place for September 2014 but are choosing to keep their child within a primary school. There are still middle school options available in the area:

- Barnfield Vale has expanded and is a Primary and Middle school for children aged 4-13 years and admits children in both Year R and Year 5 as these are their normal points of entry.
- Caddington Village School is for children aged 4-13 years and admits children in both Year R and Year 5 as these are their normal points of entry.
- Priory Academy is expanding from 9-13 years to 9-16 years from September 2014 and admits children in the Middle transfer round to Year 5 as their normal point of entry.

Q – How can the Council be sure that the projected figures are correct?

A – The projected number of pupils for September 2014 for Ashton CofE VA Middle School is based upon the total number of applications received by the School Admissions Team, by the national closing date of 15 January 2014, that requested a year 5 place in the school.

Q- Would there be sufficient places in Dunstable upper/secondary schools to take any potential displaced children?

A – Yes. The Council is legally obliged to provide sufficient places for all children aged 5-16 years.

Q – Following the conversion of many Dunstable lower schools to primary status, is there now a surplus of primary school places within the town?

A – Yes. There is currently a 17% surplus of places in year R (reception) to year 5 and a surplus of between 63% and 65% surplus of places in years 5 to 8 within the local area.

Q – Historically, some Dunstable parents have chosen to send their children to schools outside of the local area. Is this still the case?

A – The admissions process allows for parental preference and parents can select any school they wish their child to attend whether that is their local school or one some distance away. In previous years some parents in the Dunstable and Houghton Regis area have opted for middle and upper schools in the Leighton Buzzard or Harlington areas or have chosen to send their children to schools in Luton.

Q – Are the school staff also being consulted as part of the consultation process?

A – School staff and trade union representatives are being consulted throughout this consultation process. Should a decision be made to issue statutory notices to close the school, staff and trade unions would be further consulted. The Council and the school's Human Resources provider will work with the governing body, the staff group and trade unions to ensure all staff have access to appropriate advice and support and will ensure that the relevant policies and procedures of the Council are followed.

Q - Should a decision to close the school be made, how would the Council retain the staff that would be needed until the school closed completely?

A - Should a decision be made to close the school, the governing body of the school would consider a staffing structure that would reflect the pupil numbers and the educational and pastoral needs of pupils at the school until it's closure. The Council would work with the governing body and their Human Resources provider when considering the staffing structure.

Q- Is the Council able to place staff from the schools under consultation in other local schools that may have vacancies?

A – In accordance with education legislation, each school's governing body is responsible for appointing its own staff therefore vacant posts in other schools are unable to be ring fenced to staff in those schools under consultation. The Council has a redeployment procedure for school based staff and would support the redeployment of suitably qualified and experienced staff where possible.

Q- Why did the Council not forewarn parents of this proposal?

A – Because it is only a proposal at this stage. A decision has not been made yet. The data upon which this proposal is based was not available until after 15 January 2014, when the closing date for middle school applications had passed.

Q – My child is due to transfer into Ashton CofE VA Middle School this September from their lower / primary school – if the proposal is approved, what would this mean for my child?

A – If the proposal to close the school is approved, all children who are due to start Ashton CofE VA Middle School in September 2014 would still be able to take up their place.

By 31 October 2015 you would need to make an application for your child for a year 7 place at a Secondary school in September 2016. Ashton CofE VA Middle School would be closed by the end of the academic year in the summer of 2016.

Q – My child is currently attending Ashton CofE VA Middle School – if the proposal is approved, what would this mean for him/her?

A – If the decision is taken to close the school then the following would apply:

Child is currently in Year 5	<p>Could continue at the school and make an application in September 2014, when in Year 6, to transfer to year 7 in secondary school in September 2015.</p> <p>Or alternatively child could continue into Year 7 in September 2015 but would need to make an ‘in-year’ application in the summer of 2016 to transfer into Year 8 at an alternative school i.e. Secondary school or Priory Academy or Barnfield Vale.</p>
Child is currently in Year 6	<p>You would need to make either a late application for a Secondary school to start Year 7 in September 2014.</p> <p>Or apply ‘in-year’ for a place in Year 8 in the summer of 2015 to start in September 2015.</p>
Child is currently in Year 7	<p>Could continue at the school and make application in September 2014, when in Year 8, to transfer to Upper school as normal for September 2015.</p> <p>Or make an ‘in-year’ application for a place in a secondary school either to start in the academic year of 2014/15 as a Year 7 pupil, or at the end of Year 7 to start in Year 8 at a secondary school.</p>
Child is currently in Year 8	<p>Would transfer to Upper or secondary school in September 2014 as per usual process.</p>

Q – What happens at the end of this consultation period?

A - This consultation period will end on Monday 7 April. The responses to the consultation, plus any other alternative proposals that are submitted as part of the consultation process, will be considered at a meeting of the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 7 May. This meeting will be held at the Grove Theatre in Dunstable at 7.00 pm. As with all Council meetings, the public are welcome to attend and to speak at this meeting. For advice on how to apply to speak at a council meeting, please see the guidance on page 11.

The Council’s Executive Committee will then consider the results of the consultation plus any other viable options, along with the recommendations from the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at their meeting on Tuesday 27 May. This meeting will be held at the Council’s offices, Priory House, Chicksands at 9.30 am. The public are welcome to attend and to speak at this meeting. For advice on how to apply to speak at a council meeting, please see the guidance on page 11.

If a decision is made by the Executive to proceed with the proposal to close Ashton CofE VA Middle School, the Council would move to the next stage of the process, which is the publication of a statutory proposal and this would be published on Monday 9 June.

Q – If the Executive decide that an alternative viable option has been submitted for the future of Ashton CofE VA Middle School, what would happen then?

A - The Council would be required to carry out a consultation process for the alternative proposal, following the same procedure as this consultation.

Q – What is a statutory proposal and what would happen if it is published?

A – A statutory proposal is the second part of the process that the Council is obliged to carry out for proposed prescribed alterations to its maintained schools. A full representation (description) of the proposal would be published on Monday 9 June along with a summary of the proposal, which is referred to as a statutory notice.

Once published, all interested parties would have an opportunity to respond and make their views known to the Council regarding whether or not they support the proposal to close the school. Any comments or concerns they may have can be submitted during this period. This part of the process would last for 4 weeks and would end on Monday 7 July.

Q – When would the decision be taken to either keep the school open or close it?

A –The Council's Executive would consider all of the responses received during the statutory notice period, and would determine whether or not to close the school at their meeting on 19 August 2014. This meeting, which the public are welcome to attend, will be held at the Council's offices, Priory House, Chicksands at 9.30 am. For advice on how to apply to speak at this council meeting, please see the guidance on page 11.

Q – Could the Governing Body of Ashton CofE VA Middle School or anybody else appeal against the Executive's decision?

A -. Within four weeks of the decision being made by the Council, the following can apply to the Schools Adjudicator against the decision

- The local Church of England Diocese
- The local Roman Catholic Diocese
- The governing body of the school that is subject to the proposal
- The Trustees of a foundation, foundation special or voluntary school that is subject to the proposal

On receipt of an appeal, the Schools Adjudicator would request the Council to submit, within one week, the proposal, the responses received and the reason for the decision made. There is no right of appeal on any determination made by the Schools Adjudicator.

Q – What would happen to the building and land if the school was to close?

A – No decision has been made regarding this. The land occupied by Ashton CofE VA Middle School is owned by the Ashton Foundation and the school is a St Albans Diocese School. Should a decision be taken to close the school, the Ashton Foundation would need to consider the future use of the land.

Q – Why has the Council allowed this situation to happen within Dunstable?

A – Following Central Government's decision to allow academies (which are outside of the Council's control) to change their age ranges, in order to give maintained schools (schools which are within the Council's control) the same flexibility, Central Bedfordshire Council has allowed schools, with evidence of parental support, to bring forward their proposals to improve their schools and, through this, the outcomes for their pupils.

The changes that have subsequently occurred in schools and academies throughout Dunstable and Houghton Regis have led to the situation that we now have.

New Government regulations, which came into effect at the end of January 2014, have given more freedoms to maintained schools; they are now able to change their age range by up to two years without following a statutory process and without the Council's consent.

Q – Has the consultation that Ashton CofE VA Middle School carried out previously, regarding a change of age range, had any bearing on this consultation?

A – No. In March 2013, Ashton CofE VA Middle School launched a consultation regarding a proposal to change the age range of the school from 9-13 years of age to 4-11 years of age, and to also change the name of the school. At the end of the consultation the governing body decided not to proceed with the proposal.

Q – How does the consultation that Ashton CofE VA Middle School is currently undertaking (launched in January 2014), regarding a change of age range, affect the Council's consultation?

A – As a Voluntary Aided school, the Governing Body are able to consult on a proposed change of age range (in excess of two years) without the permission of the local Council. However, at the end of the two part consultation process, the governing body is required to submit its findings to the Council and request a determination on its proposal.

Information regarding Ashton CofE VA Middle School's Governing Body's proposal can be found on the schools website - <http://www.ashtonmiddleschool.co.uk/>

If you have any questions that have not been addressed above you are welcome to -

- raise these at the meeting to be held in school on Monday 3 March
- visit the School Admissions webpage at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/admissions
- email admissions@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or
- call the School Admissions helpline on T. 0300 300 8037.

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Attending and speaking at Council meetings

The public are welcome to attend the Council meetings at which decisions regarding the proposed closure will be discussed.

The Council's Constitution allows anyone to register to speak about an item, prior to the meeting, once the agenda has been published. Those who register to speak are allowed a maximum of three minutes to speak (unless the Chairman agrees to allow more time).

Normally no more than three people can speak on any one item, but again the Chairman can extend this number if they feel it necessary and if there is significant public interest.

We encourage groups of residents or community groups to nominate a speaker to speak on their behalf and represent the views of others so as to encourage as many different views to be represented as possible.

Speakers are normally invited to speak at the start of the meeting or, at the discretion of the Chairman, during the debate.

Agendas for meetings are published eight working days ahead of the date of meeting. You can find the agendas on the Council's website www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/committees

You are encouraged to submit a request to the Clerk to the Committee to speak at a meeting as soon as possible after the agenda has been published, although the Clerk can accept such requests up to 15 minutes before the meeting starts.

The clerk to the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee is Jonathon Partridge: you can contact Jonathon via email Jonathon.partridge@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or T. 0300 300 4634.

The clerk to the Executive is Sandra Hobbs: You can contact Sandra via email Sandra.hobbs@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or T. 0300 300 5257.

**Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services
Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford
SG17 5TQ**

Notes from staff briefing held at Ashton CofE VA Middle school on Monday 24 February 2014

Title of meeting:	Notes from staff briefing held at Ashton CofE VA Middle School	
Date/Time:	24 February 2014 at 4.00 pm	
Attendees:	<u>Central Bedfordshire Council</u> – Helen Redding, Assistant Director School Improvement Rob Parsons, Head of School Organisation, Admissions & Capital Planning David Waller, Senior Human Resource Manager Lydia Braisher, Admissions Manager Sue Barrow, Information Manager <u>HR Provider (Bedford Borough Council)</u> – Mark Johnson Lorraine McDonald	<u>Union Representatives</u> – John Monkhouse NUT Nicky Moore – NASUWT Bridget Fordham - ATL
Venue:	Ashton CofE VA Middle School, High Street North, Dunstable	

A presentation was given by the officers of Central Bedfordshire Council regarding the proposal to close Ashton CofE VA Middle School and the consultation process that is being undertaken.

The officers advised that the proposed closure of the school was based upon the

- Changing pattern of provision
- Year 5 retained in Primaries, Year 7 transfers to Secondaries
- Reducing pupil numbers in the Middle Schools
- School funding follows the child so resulting significant financial impact
- Forecast further reduction in pupil numbers will increase the financial impact

Questions were then invited.

Below is a summary of the questions and issues that were raised by the staff.

Question	Response
Regarding the projected number of year 4 pupils who are due to transfer into the school in September 2014, have the second preferences been taken into account?	Admission preferences indicate that every child who has requested a place at a Dunstable Middle School will get their first preference so second preferences will not

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	need to be considered.
The letters that have been sent out to parents of current year 6 students regarding admissions have been misleading and parents have raised their concerns with staff. If the letter had been properly written we would not be losing so many pupils. The school should have been privy to any letters that were due to be sent out to our parents.	<p>The School Admissions service has a duty to advise parents of a change to a transfer point. We therefore needed to advise parents that there will be no coordinated year 9 transfer into Manshead or Queensbury from September 2016.</p> <p>The letters invited parents to contact the Admissions helpline. Many did contact us and we were able to assist them.</p>
What are the Council's pupil numbers based upon? We have had 38 new starters since September but have lost year 6 pupils because the letter said that parents would lose places	The forecast numbers for year 5 from September 2014 are based upon the number of applications we have received for transfer. Based upon these numbers, forecasts have been made for subsequent years. It is these low numbers that have impacted upon the schools budget from September 2014.
Who is looking after staff and their welfare? Morale is currently OK but will get worse.	<p>Bedford Borough Council, under contract to the governing body, is the school's HR provider The Diocese is the employer of the staff. With the support of Central Beds Council, the Schools HR provider and the Diocese we will ensure that staff are supported and appropriate policies and procedures followed should the Council decide to move to statutory notices.</p> <p>Trade Unions and Professional Associations are included in all consultation processes and staff are encouraged to contact their trade union for advice and support.</p>
If the Council is not the school's employer, would it benefit the Council financially to close the school?	No. The Redundancy and Reorganisation Policy of the Council outlines that the Council will contribute towards the cost of redundancy compensation payments for employees in Foundation and VA schools.
The Council is scaring parents by saying that the school will close. Parents want to keep their children at Ashton but do not know what to do. It is very unsettling, having this hanging over us.	The Council is not saying that the school will close. This is a consultation and the decisions made regarding the proposed closure will consider the results of the consultation and all of the responses received.
Will the Council accept responsibility for the low	The Council's letter to parents was clear

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numbers in the school that have arisen as a result of their letters? Will the Council write to parents to apologise and clarify?	and provided contact details for further advice should it be required. The school should refer parents to the admissions helpline number should they need support.
Lower schools have previously handed out literature to their year 4 parents but middle schools have had to fight this year to be heard.	The Council offers consistent support and advice through its admissions service to all school, parents and carers.
Are the primary schools undersubscribed?	Some lower schools that have converted to primary are predicted to have lower numbers for year 5 in September 2014. This is a trend seen elsewhere in the first few years of a school's transition to a new age range but we expect numbers to rise in subsequent years as parents grow in confidence.
Could just one middle school remain open?	There is a 65% surplus of places within the area in years 5-8. There is no demographic demand for these places to be retained in the area.
What about the additional places that will be needed for the older children under the Governments 'raising the participation age'?	Not all will remain in school – young people will have a choice about how they continue in education or training post-16, which could be through college, a training provider, work, volunteering or an apprenticeship. Where new places are required to meet demand for post 16 education in schools these will be commissioned through upper and secondary schools.
What about the new provision that will be needed in Houghton Regis for the new development?	This will be provided either within or adjacent to that development, providing school places local to the new communities in north Houghton Regis, when they are required
Why has the Council decided to change to a 2 tier provision?	Academies and schools within Dunstable and Houghton Regis have brought forward their own proposals to change their age ranges. They were able to justify these proposals and show evidence of parental support to the Council who is the decision maker for Council maintained schools and to the Department for Education for academies.

<p>Did the Council consider the over supply of places when it approved the change of age ranges for the Dunstable and Houghton Regis schools?</p>	<p>The Council allowed maintained schools to bring forward proposals to change their age range in order to give those schools the same opportunities as were available to academies within the area. The supply of places was one of the factors that was considered when decisions were made by the Secretary of State (for academies) and by the Council (for maintained schools).</p>
<p>Are academies allowed to do what they like? Academies appear unaccountable and Council maintained schools are therefore at a disadvantage</p>	<p>Academies are accountable to the Secretary of State who will intervene in any that are underperforming or are significantly undersubscribed and therefore unviable.</p>

At the close of the meeting, staff were encouraged to respond to the consultation.

Notes from public meeting held at Ashton CofE VA Middle School on Monday 3 March 2014

Title of meeting:	Notes from public meeting held at Ashton CofE VA Middle School
Date/Time:	3 March 2014 at 7.00 pm
Venue:	Ashton CofE VA Middle School, High Street North, Dunstable

A presentation was given by officers of Central Bedfordshire Council regarding the proposal to close Ashton CofE VA Middle School and the consultation process that is being undertaken.

Helen Redding, Assistant Director School Improvement

Rob Parsons, Head of School Organisation, Admissions & Capital Planning

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The officers advised that the proposed closure of the school was based upon the

- Changing pattern of provision
- Year 5 retained in Primaries, Year 7 transfers to Secondaries
- Reducing pupil numbers in the Middle Schools
- School funding follows the child so resulting significant financial impact
- Forecast further reduction in pupil numbers will increase the financial impact

The officers encouraged everybody to respond to the consultation.

Questions and concerns were invited.

Below is a summary of the questions and concerns that were raised

Question	Response
If the school is to close, can parents reappraise their choices?	Yes, parents can change their preference and submit a late application
This is scaremongering and nobody has been asked to vote for either 2 tier or 3 tier across the town. Nobody has voted for this closure. The council will not listen.	Academies and schools within Dunstable and Houghton Regis have brought forward their own proposals to change their age ranges. They were able to justify these proposals and show evidence of parental support to the Council who is the decision maker for Council maintained schools and to the Department for Education for academies. This not a referendum, there is no voting process. This is a consultation and we encourage everybody to submit their responses.
Parents throughout the town were not aware of the various	All of the schools carried out consultations regarding their proposed changes. They published consultation documents

consultations that were being undertaken by the lower schools when they were looking to convert to primary. We now have a mish-mash of provision with the children stuck in the middle. All of the schools used to work together but not any longer.	and held meetings, as required by the DfE. The consultations were advertised via the local press and the Council's website. All of the schools in Dunstable and Houghton Regis were aware of the consultations.
Why has the Council not driven all of the changes? Academies are competing for our children. Feeder schools are in partnership with other schools. The mess within the town is due to the lack of partnership working between schools.	The Council is no longer able to drive system wide change and schools are now largely in control of their own destinies. The Council has not been the decision maker for the changes that have happened in academies, but the Council decided to give our maintained schools the same freedoms that were available to academies. Following recent changes to school regulations by the Department for Education, all maintained schools can now change their age range by up to 2 years without any recourse to the Council. The Council retains responsibility for ensuring the provision of school places.
Why were the parents of year 4 children not advised of this proposal before they were asked to submit their choice for year 5?	Figures from the admission process, which closed on 15 January 2014, were used to confirm the numbers of pupils that were due to move to the school in September. This then gave us the information we needed regarding the future viability of the school.
Have the children from the new development north of Houghton Regis been included in the projected numbers?	This will be provided either within or adjacent to that development, providing school places local to the new communities in north Houghton Regis, when they are required
Vandyke is being expanded – is this to accommodate Dunstable children?	No, Vandyke is an academy and is carrying out this expansion to accommodate pupils as a result of existing housing development in the Leighton Buzzard area.
You are taking away our choice. By forcing children into bigger schools, with much older children, you are forcing them to grow up too quickly.	All of the schools that have proposed an extension to their age range have had to demonstrate how they will manage the increased age range and provide the pupils with a good education. If we have any concerns about a maintained schools ability to subsequently do this, we will intervene. If we have any such concerns about an academy we can take these to the DfE's Regional Commissioner.
The Council's School Organisation Plan is out of date and does not take future generations into account	The School Organisation Plan covers a five year period and is updated each year to reflect changes in school organisation. It looks at trends and likely future demand for school places based upon census data, pre-school aged children in the area and housing development
The rational for the proposed closure is the falling numbers which is affecting the schools	The role of the School Admissions Service is to advise parents when a transfer point is removed. The co-ordinated year 9 transfer point from middle to upper will not be available

financial viability. This fall in numbers is due to the letter that was sent out by the Council. Some parents have chosen not to request a middle school place because of the uncertainty.	for current year 6 pupils after September 2015. The Council's letter to parents was clear and provided contact details for further advice should it be required.
No allowances are being made for second preferences. Priory Academy are reducing their admission number so there will be number of children who come to the school as a second preference.	Priory Academy is a middle combined secondary so has one entry point in year 5. The admission number will be 112 in 2015 but for September 2014 their admission number is 125. In their consultation document under their year group projections Priory projected that they may lose children at the end of Year 6 due to parents wanting an alternative Secondary school who may be able to offer a wider curriculum choice. They expect to have 84 children who continue from Year 6 into Year 7.
Some primaries have very lower numbers for year 5, despite the schools being confident that year 5 children would stay.	Some lower schools that have converted to primary are predicted to have lower numbers for year 5 in September 2014. This is a trend seen elsewhere in the first few years of a school's transition to a new age range but we expect numbers to rise in subsequent years as parents grow in confidence.
Are there enough school places throughout the town?	There are sufficient places across the Town in all year groups. And this will be the situation for at least the next 2 years based upon a forecast of 840 places per year group. This figure of 840 includes an allowance of 10% to allow for parental preferences.
Can the upper/secondary schools accommodate such a large increase in number of pupils?	Where schools have expanded, the Governing Bodies are legally required to provide the number of places that they have committed to provide.
If parents want a Church of England faith based school, what would be their alternative?	Ashton St Peters Lower and Manshead Upper School are both faith based provisions. All Saints Academy doesn't give priority to pupils based on faith but is sponsored by the Diocese of St. Albans. Manshead School is a voluntary aided Church of England school and gives priority to children on the basis of their parents' faith as part of their admissions criteria.
Lower school parents are not being consulted.	There has been a large amount of publicity regarding the proposals and everybody has been encouraged to respond to the consultations.
You are making my child move from a middle school to a secondary school.	There is still a mix of 2 tier and 3 tier provision in the town. Priory Academy is a Middle combined Secondary school that has an intake at Year 5 and is working in partnership with Dunstable Icknield, Watling and Studham Lower schools; there is also Barnfield Vale who currently has a Middle intake. If the decision is made to close the Middle school, options are available to transfer to alternative schools as part of the annual admissions round or in-year.

Does the Council consider the financial viability of all schools?	The Council reviews the finances of all maintained schools on an annual basis. Schools budgets for 2014/15 have recently been set and sent out to the schools. The funding follows the child therefore those schools that are affected by the loss of year 5 pupils are seeing a decrease in their budget.
The upper/secondary schools are too big. Queensbury has 1200 children. Leave the children in the middle schools where numbers are lower	Schools budgets are determined by the numbers on roll. The budget impacts on the staffing structure and other resources that can be afforded by the school and therefore their ability to deliver the full curriculum. All schools whatever their size are accountable for the progress that their children make. There are very successful large schools in Central Bedfordshire.
Will the Council force the lower schools that have not converted to primaries to close?	No. Dunstable Icknield, Watling and Studham lower schools in the area are working with Priory Academy and other lower schools will consider their options.
Has the Council factored in the Government's initiative for 'raising the participation age'?	Not all will remain in school – young people will have a choice about how they continue in education or training post-16, which could be through college, a training provider, work, volunteering or an apprenticeship. Where new places are required to meet demand for post 16 education in schools these will be commissioned through upper and secondary schools.
This school nurtures its children - they will not get this in a large upper/secondary.	All schools are judged on the full range of provision that they make which includes their pastoral support for pupils. Large upper/secondary schools have a range of ways in which they provide this pastoral support.
Can we wait until all of the changes in the Town settle down and see what happens?	The proposal is based upon the viability of the school both currently and for the foreseeable future.
Re the projected number of year 4 pupils who are due to transfer into the school in September 2016, have the second preferences been taken into account?	Admission preferences indicate that every child who has requested a place at a Dunstable Middle School will get their first preference so second preferences will not need to be considered.
Why are Councillors not at this meeting?	The Members of the Council's Executive approved the launch of the consultations on 4 February. It is the role of Council Officers to carry out the consultations and report the findings, and all of the responses received, back to the Executive. The Executive Members are the decision makers.
Is this a cost saving exercise? How much would the Council save if the school closes?	The Council would not make a saving - it would incur either an element of or all of the redundancy costs. School funding is ring-fenced for all schools and therefore all money is redistributed among all schools.
Please can we have your assurance that the decision has not already been made to close the school.	As per the decision making process covered within the presentation, no decision has yet been made. This is a consultation to seek the views of all stakeholders.

Ashton Middle's consultation on an alternative proposal ends today – how will this affect the Council's proposal?	The School's Governing Body will decide whether to proceed with their proposal. If the decision is made to proceed, they will have to follow the same process as the Council would – i.e. the second stage which is the publication of statutory notices. Ultimately the Governing Body will submit their proposal, with the results of their consultation, to the Council for determination.
If my child has been offered a place in an upper/secondary school for year 7, can I decide to leave my child at Ashton Middle?	Yes. The offer letters have gone out and parents can decide whether to take up the place in the upper/secondary school or leave their child in their middle school.
Could just one middle school remain open?	There is a 65% surplus of places within the area in years 5-8. There is no demographic demand for these places to be retained in the area.
Are other areas within Central Bedfordshire going over to 2 tier?	The rest of Central Bedfordshire currently remains as 3 tier but we have had approaches from various schools who have wanted to discuss pupil numbers. If schools want to consider changes, they would need to follow due process either as an Academy or as a maintained school as set out in the new School Organisation legislation
The school and the building are 125 years old. It would be a shame to lose all of the history of this school.	The schools building and land are the responsibility of the Ashton Foundation and the future of the site would be matter for them.
Can anyone attend the meeting at the Grove Theatre on 7 May?	Yes, anyone can attend, but you need to register if you wish to speak at the meeting. The instructions regarding how to do this are in the consultation document.
Comment from a pupil. She wants to come to the school. Her brother came here. She has not looked at another school.	You can still come here into year 5 in September. However if the decision is made to close the school you would need to transfer to another school at the end of Year 6.
Comment from union representative	Please feedback to the consultation with the enthusiasm for the school that you have shown today. It is not a losing battle. A proposed change to a school in London was overturned by the Secretary of State because the school had not consulted correctly. Tell the Council's elected members of your views by responding.

At the close of the meeting, everyone was encouraged to respond to the consultation. They were also reminded that they are welcome to attend the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the Grove Theatre on 7 May.