

# Boston Spa, Bramham, Clifford, Thorp Arch, Walton & Wetherby

## Caring & Campaigning for our Community



Clr Alan Lamb

Clr Gerald WILKINSON

### **Initial response to Leeds City Council's community engagement survey on secondary school provision in Outer North East Leeds**

Over the past few months we have been talking in great detail to the communities we are elected to represent on Leeds City Council namely; Bramham, Boston Spa, Clifford, Thorp Arch, Walton & Wetherby, collectively known as The Wetherby Ward. We have also studied in great deal the huge array of data and information that we have acquired on behalf of our constituents.

It is the view of officers of Leeds City Council that there are insufficient numbers of pupils choosing to go to the 2 secondary schools in our ward and that as such, there should only be one school moving forward which they suggest should be located in Wetherby.

Based on the hundreds of discussions we have had, we are in no doubt that it is the clear view of the majority of people in our community that both schools should be retained.

We wanted to ensure that our view was developed carefully, took account of all the available facts and information and was fully informed by the views of those we are elected to represent.

Our views are not based on responses to the survey, at the time of writing this submission, we don't have access to them. Rather, they are based on the huge amount of information we have gathered and the huge number of conversations we have had with our community. Over the past couple of months, we have taken the following steps to hear as many opinions as possible;

- Attended every Parish & Town Council in our ward to share information & listen to people's comments.
- Attended meetings of both schools governing bodies to hear first-hand the views of Governors & senior leaders of each school.
- Spoken face to face with hundreds of residents at the drop-in sessions we organised in Boston Spa & Wetherby.
- Responded to over 2000 emails and requests for information from our constituents.
- Spoken with hundreds of residents in their homes or on the phone to discuss the schools issue with them at their convenience.
- Regularly monitored social media to follow the online conversations people were having.

- Had discussions with education professionals not connected to either school or the council to try and gain a deeper understanding of the data and issues.

We have not rushed to a judgement on this issue and we feel we can demonstrate that our opinion is based on fact and evidence as well as being in line with the wishes of those we are elected to represent.

It is our firm belief that we should retain both the secondary schools that serve our communities. We believe that Boston Spa should be allowed to join The Gorse Academies Trust without further delay and that Leeds City Council should commit to making significant investment in Wetherby High School, delivering the objectives set out in the Wetherby Neighbourhood Plan. Crucially, this would leave the future of both schools in the hands of their current Governing Bodies.

While we recognise there is a level of challenge & risk in pursuing this option we believe it is in the best interests of the communities we serve;

- it is the quickest & most likely way to secure outstanding schools in our area through a continuation of improving education standards.
- it is in line with the wishes of the communities we represent and the huge array of communities that both schools serve
- Every other option available to reorganise school provision in our area is fraught with risk and is more likely to fail than not. Moving from 2 schools to one is complicated and there are many more examples of failure than success
- Both schools have been rooted in their communities for generations, it is impossible to predict the wider implications of either school closing
- There are too many unknowns to make sound closure decisions at this time. We do not yet know where a significant number of new homes will be built or when and where new schools may be built in inner east Leeds or even if parents would choose them over our existing schools.
- It is surely a better bet for the tax payer to invest in established and improving schools than gamble on shiny new schools with no track record. A nice building does not make an outstanding school.
- The uncertainty created by the current process may precipitate the failure of one or both schools. We need to give clarity to parents now that if they have chosen to send their child to Boston Spa or Wetherby in year 7 in September that they will be able to complete their education in that school.

In our view, there is nothing more important than giving children the best possible start in life. Outstanding schools are the greatest engines of social mobility that we have. We passionately believe that parents should have the absolute right to choose whichever school they think is right for their children and we want to see the greatest possible range of outstanding schools in our area.

We need to be honest with our community at this point. If the current numbers attending secondary school in our area remain as they are it will be incredibly difficult for both schools to be sustainable, offer a broad & balanced curriculum & drive up standards.

However, we are optimistic that if the right steps are taken and there is a clear, long term commitment to retain & invest in both schools that it is realistic & achievable to retain both schools. Our community wants to see 2 outstanding schools with first class community facilities attached. Doing nothing will not deliver this ambition. We believe the following steps need to be taken;

- Immediately remove uncertainty for parents by;
  - Allowing Boston Spa school to complete its request to join TGAT without further delay.
  - Leeds City Council to commit to delivering the aims set out in the Wetherby Neighbourhood Plan of a new school & community facilities located on the current Wetherby High School site.
- An urgent review of post 16 (sixth form provision) to take place. A standalone sixth form college based in our community with a strong vocational focus could serve north east Leeds & potentially north Yorkshire communities as well. Lessons from the current process must be learned and the process of this review should bring together both schools & the wider community to work together on a vibrant and exciting sixth form offer.
- Leeds City Council need to develop a stronger partnership with North Yorkshire councils on school place planning, secondary school provision and particularly post 16 provision.

While we are preparing a more detailed submission to Leeds City Council, the Regional Schools Commissioner & Lord Agnew we wanted to share our view with our community once the engagement survey was closed.

Cllr Alan Lamb

Wetherby Ward

Cllr Gerald Wilkinson

Wetherby Ward