Sean Gallagher

Project Lead

The Office of the Regional Director for the South East Region

34 Clarendon Road

Watford

WD17 1JJ

9th September 2022

Dear Sean

Councillor Hammon has asked me to reply swiftly to your letter dated 23rd August 2022 on behalf of all members of our working group being especially mindful of your reference to the 16th September date as a closure date to register an interest in opening a new school.

The working group would like to thank you for the obvious time and trouble you have taken in order to respond to our letter dated 24th May and we propose to use your chapter headings as a guide to our response whilst also taking the opportunity to share some analysis of pupil birth rates and Year 6/7 transition data that we have recently completed.

**Rationale for Decision**

The working group and a growing number of members of our community consider that the decision taken to close the school completely in July 2019 was ill-judged and we see considerable merit in seeking a pathway that will enable us all to reflect on this decision.

The consultation process you refer to was focused entirely on the matter of E-Act’s withdrawal from Burnham and no opportunity was ever taken to consult members of the community as to the future of the non-selective secondary school in Burnham.

This shortcoming has proved to be very damaging as regards the quality of the dialogue that our local community has been able to establish with officers and members of Buckinghamshire Council and clearly issues such as the reshaping of local government and the pandemic have also served as obstacles.

Burnham is indeed a unique place with a unique community facing unique opportunities and all stakeholders would benefit spending some time together sharing their thoughts and observations.

Secondary schooling provision in Burnham commenced in the 1960’s – the grammar school opening in 1960 and the secondary school in 1969. The impact of county boundary changes in 1974 posed a real issue for Burnham in that whilst both its secondary schools remained in Buckinghamshire its two largest primary schools migrated to Berkshire and ultimately Slough. What might be considered to be the FOOTPRINT of Burnham’s secondary schools was established during the 1970’s and especially its relationship with Slough was made even more apparent with the closure of the neighbouring Haymill School in Burnham Lane by Berkshire County Council as a non-selective secondary school in 1979.

This FOOTPRINT does, of course, still remains as will become apparent in later parts of this letter and can only become more significant as challenges associated with the development of The Elizabeth Line start to materialise. The working group feel strongly that the impact of this new rail service and related population growth has not been considered sufficiently in past deliberations.

**Burnham Catchment**

Much emphasis has been placed in past correspondence on the apparent preference of Burnham parents to travel westwards and send their children into Maidenhead to attend a comprehensive school. This is not a new phenomenon! Personally, I recall friends of my own children travelling to Maidenhead in the 1980’s! And no emphasis whatsoever appears to have been placed on the migration of children living to the east of Burnham in Slough who also look westwards and choose to send their children to Burnham secondary schools.

Burnham’s non-selective secondary school experienced a torrid time in the past decade due primarily to grossly inadequate leadership and management and one should be mindful that there had never been any concern expressed as to its future prior to 2010.

Any careful consideration of Buckinghamshire Council’s performance in the management of schools reveals starkly that it has difficulty in supporting its non-selective secondary school cohort. There are, of course, exceptions to this observation and again careful investigation reveals examples of very good practice. The working group consider that the future in Burnham for its two secondary schools is for both to be placed under the management of the Beeches Learning and Development Trust and this would offer significant reassurance to parents who would immediately feel far less concern for their children facing the Year Six selection challenge as there would be the potential for children to transition far more readily between the two secondary schools.

Buckinghamshire Council have to date deemed to dismiss the observation that it appears to be nonsensical to have a grammar school but no secondary school in Burnham and as a result are electing to enhance a sense of deprivation amongst the majority of families and children living in and around Burnham. The working group sense a lack of ambition and ability in The Council’s preparedness to embrace its non-selective secondary school segment and is more than content to promote the migration of non-grammar school children to other local authorities.

Furthermore, should The Council seek to fulfil its duty to provide suitable non-selective secondary school places for its children living in and around Burnham – the proposal to provide transport by coach to Bourne End Academy and The Pioneer School in Stoke Poges has within it a degree of perversity and contortion as travelling to both locations requires use of grossly inadequate highways.

**Free School Presumption and Opening New Schools centrally**

The doorway you outline in your letter for us to walk through clearly is closed! We need to seek out another path and entrance!! As we outlined above – we see ourselves in Burnham in a unique situation. We already have a school although admittedly it would warrant in the mid-term to be rebuilt as has been the case for the grammar school.

And, to date, we have yet to establish a constructive dialogue with Buckinghamshire Council who have, for example, not responded to the letter we sent to you both on May 24th.

We are hopeful that both the path and entrance we are seeking with both yourself and The Council can be developed by sharing data and we have in the past few months analysed birth data and transition data from primary schools into Burnham Grammar School. The key point from both analyses is simply to illustrate the significance of both Buckinghamshire and Slough in shaping the future vitality and well-being of Burnham.

We are mindful of national press reports and correspondence received from Buckinghamshire Council which focuses on falling birth rates which will impact at differing times on admissions into both primary and secondary schools. Attachment One is a graph that represents births in England as a whole and also for the two county wards which constitute Burnham together with one Slough ward (Haymill and Lynch Hill) which is one of several Slough wards which often see themselves as part of Burnham. For example, Burnham railway station is located in Haymill. The trends of both lines differ considerably with a current spike, for example, in local births in 2016 exceeds the peak in 2011. And using the same ONS data it is evident that the birth rate in Slough is 50% higher than that for both Buckinghamshire and Windsor and Maidenhead.

Attachment Two is a table which has been generated from the analysis of admissions data into Burnham Grammar School (BGS) for September 2022 and the previous two academic years.

Over the last three years BGS has admitted pupils from 88 schools with admissions being 150 in 2020, 179 in 2021 and 180 in 2022. However, there were only 24 primary schools that sent children in all three years and they accounted for 402 pupils in the three years which equates to 79% of BGS’s total intake.

Looking more closely at Autumn 2022 admissions and the table includes the top 21 primary feeder schools – these schools account for 133 pupils (74% of the total) – 87 pupils (65% of the total) are from the 12 Slough schools and 46 (35% of the total) are from the 9 Buckinghamshire schools.

Looking more closely at Forms of Entry of the 21 primary schools – there are 57 in total – of which Slough have 42 (65%) and Buckinghamshire 15 (35%).

Calculating the distance travelled from the 12 Slough schools and the 9 Buckinghamshire schools – the average distance from Slough schools to BGS is 2.7 miles and from Buckinghamshire schools is 3.7 miles.

By way of comparison – the distance from BGS to Bourne End Academy is 5.6 miles and to Pioneer Schools 4.3 miles.

Further lessons from this table are to note the potential significant reduction in the distance travelled by children when Burnham’s non-selective secondary school reopens and the size of the new school’s potential catchment area were both it and the grammar school to share the same strategic management team.

As you will see, we are sharing this correspondence with Councillor Martin Tett, the leader of Buckinghamshire Council, and would be delighted to be invited to discuss its contents further. We are also beginning to explore an innovative and cross-cutting repositioning of the School which could indeed open the doorway we all need to find!

Yours sincerely

Viv Nicholas

A New School for Burnham Working Group Member

CC. Cllr. Martin Tett, Cllr. Marie Hammon, Cllr Ekta Kaur Ross, Cllr Carol Linton, Louise Hayday, Nalini Milligan, Bronwen Zeun.

 

