

## APPENDIX ONE

### Submission to the LEA regarding the future of Comart (for consideration by Children Families & Schools Committee in September)

This submission - sent on behalf of the school, governors & some members of the local community - contains a proposal paper and two annexes:

**Proposal Paper:** the following paper has been compiled by Derek Swindells, Governor at CoMART, and is the result of discussions with other governors and members of staff outlining some proposals regarding the future of the school. This is in response to the resolution that the school should propose some options for consideration by the CFS committee in September.

**Annex 1** - feedback on the questionnaire that members of the Whitehawk community put together and self-completed. At a public meeting held at the Valley Social Centre on 16 July, jointly facilitated by eb4U, about 85 local people attended to express their views and ask questions of LEA representatives

**Annex 2** – a copy of the letter expressing the views of the Crew Club, a neighbourhood youth club run by local residents in Whitehawk

### PART 1 – Proposal Paper

1. **COMART** : future development opportunities for continuing the provision of secondary education on the Sheepcote site.

### 2. Background

The current debate is based on a number of issues concerning the school that were reported by the Director to the CFS committee in June 03

In the context of considering future options we feel that it is relevant to provide a commentary to the main points he made in that report;

### 3. Budget

- Many of the performance and financial problems have at their root a requirement for the school roll to reach 850 – 900 pupils in 5 years. Anything less than this is seen as a failure of the school and brings financial penalties that the school is unable to sustain.
- The reality is that demographic changes and the emergence of alternative school places outside the area have rendered the predicted numbers unrealistic.
- The objective of Option Planning, needs to recognise this reality and facilitate a managed retreat from unrealistic targets whilst mitigating the financial costs undertaken by the Authority on the basis of population projections.
- Failures to meet these optimistic estimates of growth have exacerbated the budget position. Management attempts over the last two budget cycles to bring the budget into equilibrium by redesigning workloads and the curriculum have not been fully supported, and therefore not successful.

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- As a matter of record the school 2003-04 budget is, for a variety of reasons, within £16k of being in balance. This contrasts sharply with many other schools in the area who are setting larger deficit budgets.
- Governors believe that with the support of the Authority an acceptable Management Plan for the next 2 years, as was recently discussed, can be established when actual school roll figures for September 03 are available.

#### **4. PFI**

- The unitary charge is sustainable in the early years but, by 2008, the school will need 845 students to support charges in excess of £300k and eventually in excess of £400k p.a.
- We believe that in the present circumstances the student roll requirement for an 11-16 school is unattainable.
- The school will be unable to meet the charges contractually entered into by the Authority under a different planning regime.
- The building is, therefore significantly too large, not just for CoMART but also for the 11-16 needs of Brighton and Hove.

#### **5. Performance**

- School attendance is improving and will continue with the new cohort, given clarity about the future.
- First option choices for year 7 entry have risen significantly but will be affected by the current uncertainty
- Exam results have improved
- Exclusions have consistently involved challenging students transferring to Comart from other schools
- Failure to recruit senior managers has much to do with the present uncertainty about the future and the understandable reluctance of professionals to commit to an enterprise perceived to have a limited life.
- (Summary) The building Construction works under the PFI contract have distracted pupils, staff and governors and diverted senior managers of the school from their primary function, significantly contributing to the difficulties of the school.

#### **6. East Brighton**

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- The school is presently blighted by the negative perceptions that Brighton residents have of, not only the school, but also the whole area of Whitehawk. These negative views are also widely held throughout the city, characterising Whitehawk as an area of high social deprivation with many needs and problems.
- These needs and social indicators of deprivation are precisely those that prompted the Government's eb4U regeneration initiative, designed to facilitate a programme of community self-action, development and growth.
- This 10-year programme is now showing the benefit of the first 3 years work. We argue that the school needs to be considered over the same time frame so that, in partnership with others, the problems that have many of their roots in the issues identified for the area can be tackled.

## **7. Options**

### **i) Small school providing continuing education for 500, 11 – 16 year olds**

- We believe that there is a need for a secondary school serving East Brighton. Notwithstanding the school's well documented problems and the misinformation attending many of them, the education case is as strong now as when the school was first moved from the Estate and established in a new building on the Sheepcote Valley site.

The argument for accepting that a school of this size could be viable is not hard to make:

- Charles Clarke confirms in Dfes statements that small schools can make significant contributions to the local community and be financially viable.
- A few examples of where this is happening can be found at;  
  
East Sussex - Robertsbridge 560 pupils, Causeway 436 pupils,  
Hants - Oak Farm 546 pupils, Testbourne 567 pupils, John Hunt 378 pupils, Fort Hill 474 pupils, Portsmouth - Milton Cross 440 pupils  
And many others. (Ref. Guardian education webpages)
- There are clearly many schools that could be used as a budget/curriculum model for informing the future planning of CoMART
- We do not think that Governors alone have the capacity or skills necessary to set a small school budget and design a new curriculum for presentation to the CFS committee in September. However, we do believe that it would be feasible to work with the Authority to plan a managed transition from one cost base to another and that this should be discussed by the CFS Committee.

### **Opportunities for uses of the balance of the site**

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- On completion of the PFI contract the school will have available approx. 7000 sq.metres gross of floor space (excluding the leisure centre)  
It has been designed to accommodate a future roll in the region of 900 pupils, (thus allowing approx. 8 sq. metres per pupil)
- The requirement of 500 pupils would be in the region of 4000 sq. metres, leaving 3000 sq. metres for alternative use.  
(At 'low end' commercial rents this could produce an income in the region of £300k pax)
- We believe that future planning for these floor areas should also take account of the other facilities – leisure centre, courts, pitches etc. which the school shares with others.  
Options should be focused on education and development that will bring benefit to both the wider and local communities and provide links serving to strengthen the relevance and popularity of a retained, smaller secondary school on the site.

#### **ii) Alternative - Vocational model**

- Follow up Dfes initiatives for reviewing how education in schools can contribute to the development of skills needed by employers,
- Restructure the KS4 curriculum to offer a broader based vocational model and build on the existing collaborations with City and Varndean Colleges
- Take forward, in partnership with the Learning and Skills Council, the systematic improvement of the vocational options for the 14-19 age range and work related experience for all 14-19 year olds in the area by Sept 2004.
- Develop a vocational craft base on the site, perhaps linked with sport, and in partnership with City College for post 16 provision
- Engage with the National Skills Strategy delivery plan to involve young people and adults in education and training skills

#### **iii) Alternative - Community based extended schools model**

- Build on DfES initiatives to provide a full range of community services delivered through one school per LEA by 2006.
- Identify opportunities with East Brighton Regeneration partnership, the local community and other agencies for developing a model for a community school that would extend the existing school provision by providing a rational approach to the delivery of local services by other agencies: social services, healthcare, family support and etc.
- Strengthen links with Brighton and Hove Learning Partnership.

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- Develop Brighton & Hove learning city aspirations by engaging with the community to generate a culture of learning for local people with opportunities for adult learning, access to education and training relevant to the local economy.
- This would effectively bring others to the area, enable East Brighton to confront the perceptions that others have of it and provide a needed resource for both the wider community and students of CoMART
- An audit of premises currently used by other agencies that might relocate to the Sheepcote site should provide a range of development opportunities once vacated.



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**FEEDBACK FROM QUESTIONNAIRE**

**17 responses received from members of the local community**

1) Would you like to see a secondary school stay on the COMART site?	<b>YES</b> 17	<b>NO</b> 0			
2) What type of secondary school would you like on the site? (eg. Vocational/Community etc)	<b>Vocational</b> 6	<b>Community</b> 7	<b>Community + 6<sup>th</sup> Form college</b> 2		<b>Other</b> 2 no responses
3) What other amenities would you like to see on the site, as well as a secondary school? (eg. evening classes/careers office) (many respondents cited multiple choices)	<b>Careers Office</b> 5	<b>Sixth Form</b> 6	<b>Eve. classes</b> 9	<b>Comm. amenities</b> • adult ed. classes during the day • + community healthcare	<b>Other</b> 1 no-response
4) Do you have children of secondary school age?	<b>YES</b> 14	<b>NO</b> 3	<b>IF YES, how many?</b>		
			1child 9	2 children 5	
5) Do they currently attend COMART?	<b>YES</b> 12	<b>NO</b> 4	<b>Attended but now left (1)</b>		
6) Do you have children of primary school age?	<b>YES</b> 8	<b>NO</b> 9	<b>IF YES, how many?</b>		
			1 child 7	2 children 1	
7) Would you send your children to a secondary school on the COMART site?	<b>YES</b> 16	<b>NO</b> (1 'no response')	<b>Why?</b> • can't afford bus fares to other schools • only if great improvement is made/ or sch. settled • it's local (4) • v. pleased/good school (5) [child did well, left at 16 & has gone onto further ed. (1)] • only if better run by LEA		
Do you live on the Whitehawk or Manor Farm Estate?	<b>YES</b> 14	<b>NO</b> 3			