

## **Proposal in response to the West Wight school places consultation from the Freshwater community (Draft 7, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019)**

*This proposal was developed by current and former school parents and community volunteers, together with Freshwater Parish and County Councillors. We are proposing an alternative to school closure which is future-proof, addresses known challenges, fulfils the needs of the wider community whilst creating investment and regeneration opportunities, and saves money for the public purse in the short, medium and long term. Our proposed solution comprises three parts:*

- 1) A new leadership and governance team for All Saints**
- 2) Anglican schools optimise capacity and raise educational standards**
- 3) Educational value and income from an extended schools programme**

*Please contact Freshwater parish councillor Daniel James <[daniel@64studio.com](mailto:daniel@64studio.com)> with comments and corrections.*

### **School challenges addressed by this proposal**

All Saints is a voluntary controlled school which has not yet put the systems in place to achieve a 'Good' rating by Ofsted, according to a July 2018 monitoring visit, and has suffered an exodus of pupils under its current leadership (currently 59% spare capacity at a Published Admission Number of 30). It has had three full Ofsted inspections with a 'Requires improvement' rating between 2013 and 2017, but the separately managed Early Years Centre on the school site is rated 'Outstanding'.

Brighstone is a voluntary aided school which has expanded in recent years but not attracted sufficient pupils to fill it, leaving significant spare capacity (41% at a Published Admission Number of 30). Its academic performance as measured by age related expectations for 2018 (40%) is ten percentage points below All Saints School (50%). It has had two full Ofsted reports with a 'Requires improvement' rating in 2016 and 2018 but a 'Good' in 2012, seven years ago.

Shalfleet is a voluntary controlled school which is oversubscribed (by 2% at a Published Admission Number of 24) and needs the capacity to accommodate any primary pupils moving into 24 units of new housing currently under construction on the edge of the village. Its last three full Ofsted inspection ratings were 'Good', in 2007, 2010 and 2014. It is federated with Yarmouth school.

St. Saviour's is voluntary aided and the only Catholic school in the West Wight. It has very limited spare capacity (4% at a Published Admission Number of 20), and is constrained for space by the church lawns and graveyard, also due for expansion. The direct walking route from Freshwater is long, narrow and has no pavement or lighting. Public bus routes do not serve the school site directly and there is no pavement to the bus stop at Christ Church. Conflict over parking spaces takes place between church and school users when events are held at the church. Its last three full Ofsted inspection ratings were 'Satisfactory' in 2010, 'Requires improvement' in 2013 and 'Good' in 2015.

Yarmouth is a voluntary aided school with significant spare capacity (36% at a Published Admission Number of 20, according to Ofsted and the Department for Education; Hampshire County Council disputes this, saying the Published Admission Number is 15). When the number of Yarmouth pupils fell to 51, in the year 2010, the school federated with Shalfleet to remain open. It has insufficient land and buildings to grow to the size of one-form entry (210 pupils over seven year groups) and is also on a flood plain, making development difficult. Only seven pupils at Yarmouth School live in Yarmouth itself, while more than three-quarters live in Freshwater or Totland which (excepting the sparsely populated Norton area) are a minimum of a two mile walk away. Its last three full Ofsted inspection ratings were 'Satisfactory' in 2007 and 2010, and 'Good' in 2013.

## National and local government challenges addressed by this proposal

We are informed that national government's Department for Education and county education authority Hampshire Children's Services are putting pressure on the Isle of Wight Council to further reduce the number of schools in the West Wight. While individual school rolls have fluctuated widely over recent years with the popularity of specific head teachers, and the primary school at Weston has already closed, there is no denying that the area currently has insufficient children to retain five separate schools at an efficient size of one-form entry. Parents might prefer smaller classes for their children, but mainland authorities want standard class sizes on the Island, and we are in no position to challenge this in schools with public funding. Due to a demographic dip in the number of working-age families living in the area since the credit crunch of 2008, and an unknown but potentially significant number of children being home schooled, overall pupil numbers have declined to the point that only three one-form entry schools would be required to teach all currently enrolled children (606 pupils) leaving 4% spare capacity. Therefore two schools are highly likely to close in the near future, leaving two of the five communities without any school, unless reorganisation takes place to address the surplus places.

The Isle of Wight Council is planning for a new garden village in the Wellow area and an additional 552 new houses on smaller West Wight sites over the period of the local plan (the next 15 years). While the draft local planning strategy refers to 2000 dwellings across two garden villages on the Island, central government's definition of a garden village is a minimum of 1500 dwellings, and research from the Town & Country Planning Association suggests the realistic minimum is 2000 dwellings per new village. At the average for England of 2.4 persons per dwelling, the total of new development could represent a population increase of over 6,100 in the West Wight, mostly in the area between Shalfleet, Yarmouth and Freshwater.

Hampshire Children's Services estimate that each 700 new dwellings require an extra form of entry in local schools (0.3 primary age children per dwelling). Allowing for an older demographic on the Isle of Wight and a proportion of new dwellings being second homes, with a more conservative estimate of 0.165 primary age children per dwelling, this population increase would still require two whole primary schools of one-form entry.

All West Wight schools are designated as rural by the Department for Education. The Department for Education statutory guidance on the closure of rural schools (available from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/756328/Opening\\_and\\_Closing\\_maintained\\_schools\\_Guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/756328/Opening_and_Closing_maintained_schools_Guidance.pdf)) is not referenced by version 5 of the Hampshire Children's Services consultation document, available from <https://www.iow.gov.uk/documentlibrary/view/faqs-west-wight-school-place-planning-consultation>.

This Department for Education statutory guidance states that "*Decision-makers should adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and a proposal must be clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.*"

*"When producing a proposal to close a rural primary school, the proposer must consider:*

- the likely effect of the closure of the school on the local community;*
- the proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community i.e. is the school being used by the local community;*
- educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools;*

- *the availability, and likely cost to the LA [local authority], of transport to other schools;*
- *whether the school is now surplus to requirements (e.g. because there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils, and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term);*
- *any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the closure of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase; and*
- *any alternatives to the closure of the school.”*

We acknowledge that public funds are limited, and so our proposal needs to deliver a financially sustainable outcome. Even when capital funding is available for new schools, externalised costs can still fall to the local authority (for example, officer time spent on new school projects, and travel funding for low-income families). In future-proofing educational provision in the West Wight, we need school sites in the right locations which provide a long-term solution, with existing infrastructure in place and room to grow if necessary.

### **Hampshire Children’s Services current preferred solution**

This proposal, contained within the Hampshire Children’s Services consultation document referenced above, is to close All Saints within a few months and move the children to portacabins or ‘modular buildings’ on the St. Saviour’s site by September 2019. There would be just one primary school for the Freshwater and Totland area (population at 2011 census 5,369+2,927=8,296), while Brighstone (population 1,603), Shalfleet (population 1,546) and Yarmouth (population 865) would each have a separate primary school. To the east of Brighstone, Chillerton (population 422) is not included in the West Wight school planning area consultation, and would retain its primary school.

Detailed plans for the proposed move have not been seen by St. Saviour’s governors, with just five months until the school is expected to grow by more than 64% (135 + 87 pupils). The proposal does not take into account the risk that insufficient land or capital funding will be available to upgrade the St. Saviour’s site to create a new school which is significantly better than the two existing schools combined. In that event, the proposed portacabins could be in use for many years.

St. Saviour’s is 1.2 miles away from All Saints by the direct route, in Totland. There has been no assessment of the safety or practicality of the travel route, which Freshwater parents who walk the direct route via Summers Lane know to be dangerous, due to the lack of pavements, lighting and off-street parking. Bus transport would be likely to be required on safety grounds alone, but due to St. Saviour’s being less than two miles from many homes in Freshwater, most of the cost of this transport would fall on parents.

St. Saviour’s is already close to capacity (4% spare places at its current Published Admission Number) and short on land, as it sits within church grounds. At current pupil numbers, the school would be oversubscribed for one-form entry before it opened (222 pupils), leaving no spare capacity for children living in the proposed 552 units of new housing planned for the area. A demographic bulge in Year 3 would mean an estimated 46 children in that year group for a school expanded to 30 places per year, risking the All Saints children being split among multiple schools.

There are also religious education differences between the Anglican school of All Saints and the Catholic St. Saviour’s which are not addressed in this proposal, ignoring the choice of parents to send their children to an Anglican school.

The Freshwater community rejects this proposal categorically, as evidenced by the public consultation meeting at All Saints School on the 13<sup>th</sup> March in which not one parent or local councillor supported it.

For reasons including travel costs to the local authority, the health and environmental benefits of children walking, scootering or cycling to school, and the ability of local parents to find employment compatible with childcare responsibilities, a school must be retained in the most populated settlement of the West Wight, which is Freshwater. It is not possible to state that “*there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term*”, contradicting the Department for Education closure criteria, given the house-building plans for the Freshwater area.

The All Saints site offers the best long-term solution, with plenty of land which could be used to extend the school, a nature garden and a very large playing field. This site also has excellent local facilities within easy walking distance, including a public library with a children’s wing, the West Wight Sports Centre with 25 metre and 10 metre heated indoor pools, a large sports hall with a climbing wall, a skateboard, scooter and BMX park, a multi-use games area with an all-weather surface for football or basketball, Jubilee Field for track and field events and cricket, Stroud Field with play equipment, Brookside health centre, Golden Hill Country Park and Stroud Coppice for nature walks, allotments for growing food, an arts venue at the Memorial Hall, and local businesses which host school visits. No other West Wight school site comes close in terms of facilities, which would need to be provided at any alternative location to provide an equivalent level of amenity.

## Reducing surplus primary school places

367 primary school enrolled children live in Freshwater or the smaller adjacent parish of Totland, of which 344 attend West Wight schools and 23 attend other schools. This means of the 606 enrolled children in West Wight schools, 57% live in Freshwater or Totland. These 344 children would be sufficient to fill All Saints (210 places) and St. Saviour’s (140 places) almost to capacity at current Published Admission Numbers, should Freshwater parents choose their local primary school once again. In addition, an unknown number of children are home schooled or not in any education.

Published Admission Numbers do not reflect the relatively low number of enrolled pupils living in the most rural part of the West Wight, east of the River Yar. Because the Shalfleet/Yarmouth federation of Anglican schools has attracted 261 pupils across two sites, despite serving a sparsely populated area, this has resulted in a large number of additional car journeys and time spent travelling for local families living in Freshwater and Totland. Current pupil numbers from Ofsted suggest that there are 262 spare places across the four West Wight schools or federations:

	<i>Pupils</i>	<i>PAN</i>	<i>Capacity</i>
All Saints	87	30	210
Brighstone	123	30	210
Shalfleet/Yarmouth	261	44	308
St. Saviour’s Totland	135	20	140
<b>Total</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>868</b>

The 606 currently enrolled West Wight pupils could be allocated places with an average of 21.64 pupils per year group across four schools or federations (28 classes in seven year groups), leaving some spare capacity for pupils who will live in the new housing development planned for the area. An even split would result in just over 151 pupils per school or federation. However, because 57% of enrolled pupils live in Freshwater or Totland, at least 50% of places should be allocated in these communities. For example, the following allocation of places would result in just ten spare places in the West Wight:

	<i>Pupils PAN</i>		<i>Capacity</i>
All Saints	165	24	168
Brighstone	138	20	140
Shalfleet/Yarmouth	165	24	168
St. Saviour's Totland	138	20	140
<b>Total</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>616</b>

## **Freshwater community proposed solution**

The Freshwater community acknowledges the problems that All Saints and other schools have experienced, particularly since the closure of the middle schools, and accepts that the current situation is financially and academically unsustainable. Our proposed solution does not build any new school, or require any new buildings or portacabins on current sites, and therefore does not rely on the availability of land or capital funding. Also, it does not crowd children on to smaller sites.

### **1) New leadership and governance team for All Saints**

All Saints needs guidance and better leadership to help it further improve the academic performance of local children, as measured by age related expectations. All Saints also needs management support to help it gain an Ofsted rating of at least 'Good', in order that parents have confidence in their local school and are willing to enrol their children there.

Our proposal is for All Saints to apply for federation with another organisation in order to benefit from proven management expertise. For example, the Shalfleet/Yarmouth federation has been successful in raising standards and attracting pupils, and the separate Early Years Centre on the All Saints site is rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, at grade one. Should these other organisations reject this opportunity to take over the management of All Saints, a single-school academy or 'free school' on the All Saints site would be considered as the next best alternative for Freshwater.

This part of the proposal would necessarily require new leadership and a reorganisation of the board of governors at All Saints to be in place for the start of the new academic year in September 2019. Freshwater community members would be encouraged to support and volunteer for the federation or free school, bringing their skills and additional resources to the school improvement effort.

### **2) Anglican schools optimise capacity and raise educational standards**

In association with the management teams of all Anglican schools in the West Wight, plans should be drawn up to make efficient use of spare capacity at Yarmouth, Brighstone and All Saints schools, offering a good school to parents much closer to where they live. This would address the Department for Education statutory guidance on "*the proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community*". For example, there are 91 children currently at Yarmouth School of which 69 live in Freshwater or Totland (76%), and 176 currently at Shalfleet School of which 56 live in Freshwater or Totland (32%), according to Isle of Wight Council figures, which vary slightly from the published Ofsted figures.

If parents were offered a 'Good' Ofsted rated school under new leadership on the All Saints site, that school could be the largest in the West Wight, with the majority of pupils living in the Freshwater and Totland area able to walk, scooter or cycle to school. This relates to the statutory guidance requiring consideration of "*any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the closure of the school.*" All Saints features its own traffic-free access, Longhalves, which provides an existing safe route from the largest housing estates in Freshwater at no additional cost.

This reorganisation would free the Yarmouth site for a new educational purpose, such as, for example, an early years pre-school and Key Stage 1 facility (infant school) feeding the Shalfleet site and relieving pressure on space there. Should additional housing be built in the area, this would enable both Yarmouth and Shalfleet sites to grow towards one-form entry of 30 pupils per year from their current Published Admission Number of 15 pupils per year (Hampshire Children's Services figure, 20 pupils per year according to Ofsted and the Department for Education) at Yarmouth, and 24 pupils per year at Shalfleet.

In other examples, the Yarmouth site could accommodate a specialist purpose such as a Speech and Language Therapy centre, or a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) centre, with all mainstream school places in the Shalfleet/Yarmouth area delivered on the Shalfleet site. The pupils in the West Wight with special educational needs could benefit from access to a dedicated local facility, like the one at Brading Primary School on the far side of the Island. The Isle of Wight Council is currently carrying out a Strategic SEND Review which relates to this type of provision.

This proposed reorganisation would also enable transitional capacity and flexibility during the early years of the proposed new garden village at Wellow, when there would be likely to be insufficient residents of the new village to justify the opening of a new one-form entry primary school there.

### **3) Educational value and income from an extended schools programme**

Community education during evenings, weekends and school holidays should be a strong feature of the proposed reorganisation, as one part of a West Wight regeneration strategy. Adult education provision could increase revenue for the schools, along with the hiring of facilities. Courses would be aimed at increasing skills and qualifications to enable the development of small businesses, as well as a gateway to employment with Island companies, enhancing job prospects for local people, benefiting the local economy, social cohesion and mobility.

Currently, adult education courses are mostly provided at the Westridge site on the outskirts of Ryde, on the far side of the Island, while local employers are seeking skilled workers who have to commute from other villages and towns. For example, the Rapanui factory in Freshwater has recently announced the creation of 100 new jobs, and plans to open a software development training facility in the village. It should be possible to obtain funding for community education and training which includes specific work-related skills in local demand, such as design and technology, as a feeder to longer courses at the Isle of Wight College or apprenticeships.

Freshwater's arts education has suffered since the closure of the Seahorses facility. It should be possible to obtain funding to establish a creative education centre, as part of an extended schools programme. Also, a home education centre could bring children currently home schooled on the Island into contact with mainstream education, as they prepare for secondary level and GCSEs.

## **Conclusion**

Our proposal delivers immediate and sustained revenue savings at minimal capital cost, while satisfying all of the consultation criteria:

- Geographical location – most children will be able to walk to and from a local school
- Performance – new All Saints management with a proven track record will improve results
- Pupil numbers – the most efficient arrangement will optimise the sites we already have

We trust that this proposal will be fully considered as a credible alternative to the closure of Freshwater's only school, after 304 years of education in the village.