

CALL IN NOTICE

"I hereby give notice that I wish to call-in the decision 'Determination of statutory proposals to expand Grimsdyke School' – taken by Cabinet on 15th January 2015. The reasons for the call-in are as follows:

Inadequate consultation with stakeholders prior to the decision:

The initial consultation period lasted just over a month from 16th September 2014. This included information packs being distributed to 350 properties around the school, and a meeting at the school to which parents, pupils and teachers were invited – 80 attended. Out of 57 consultation responses received, 32 (just over 56%) were against the expansion, 17 were in favour and the remaining 8 were unsure.

Following the consultation, the statutory proposals to expand the school were published on 3rd November, with representations open for 4 weeks. A total of 70 representations were received (and are detailed in Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report); 60 of which (86%) were clearly against the expansion, with only 3 responses obviously in favour and the rest unclear. The main reason for objection given in these representations was the impact the expansion will have on traffic in the nearby roads. The Council has conceded that a significant number of the representations included comments from residents angry that they had not received initial consultation information.

This view was given further weight by a resident who asked questions at the Cabinet meeting, who insisted that the Council had not consulted Derwent Avenue which is "150 yards away from the school". He also took umbrage at the portfolio holder's assertion that the Council had consulted "all houses which adjoin the route from the school to Grimsdyke road along Colburn Avenue and Hillview Road", which he said should have included Derwent Avenue – but evidently did not.

The Council has conducted a consultation exercise which, not only yielded a negative response to proceeding with the decision, but brought to the fore dissatisfaction with the standard of the consultation itself. Indeed, the aforementioned resident accused the Council of "riding roughshod over the overwhelming views of the residents", and stating "that [it] clearly did not consult with all affected parties." The vast majority of those who submitted representations are those residents who live in nearby roads, and who will be directly affected if the expansion goes ahead – they are, by every reasonable definition of the word, 'stakeholders'. These people feel very strongly that they should have been consulted, and that if they had been it seems likely the consultation response would have been even more compellingly against the proposal. It is therefore argued that the consultation was inadequate.

The absence of adequate evidence on which to base a decision:

The Council has sought to mitigate the concerns raised about the impact on traffic via means mentioned in the Cabinet report. These measures, at paragraphs 8 and 9, are lacking in detail, are largely generic and do not specifically address the sheer range of concerns raised in the representations – or the specific circumstances of Grimsdyke School. The report does state that some of the suggestions from the representations will be 'considered', but given Cabinet had an obligation to 'consider' and to give 'due regard'

to the consultation and representation responses before making this decision (and has effectively ignored them), it is unlikely this will be of satisfaction to concerned residents. Cabinet has pressed on with this decision despite almost no clear evidence being presented on how the traffic issues will be addressed, and with evidence brought to Cabinet's attention by people who know the area best largely being disregarded. The portfolio holder admitted, quite honestly, at the meeting that "we don't understand the problem". If not scrapped entirely, it would have been far more prudent for Cabinet to at least delay this decision until it did understand the problem and how best to combat it.

There is, of course, recognition that more school places in Harrow are needed, but that fact of itself is not sufficient evidence or reasoning to proceed with a decision without sufficient mitigation outlined, and to which there is so much apparent opposition. The Department for Education guidance on which the Council's own guidance (Appendix 2 of the Cabinet report) is based states: "The decision-maker should not simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view. Instead, they should give the greatest weight to responses from those stakeholders likely to be most directly affected by a proposal – especially parents of children at the affected school(s)." The people initially consulted were parents and staff at the school, as well as local residents – and they were against the expansion. Many additional local residents who were not consulted made their views known via representations, and they were also against the proposals – by an even more significant majority.

Regarding the representation responses specifically, it is telling that when the Council published statutory proposals to expand 13 other primary schools in January 2014, not a single representation on them was received; despite a couple of these proposals being received with a degree of hostility at the consultation stage – before further work was carried out. At every stage the responses received regarding Grimsdyke have been against the expansion, from the people most directly affected by the decision, and in numbers not seen before for previous expansions. Such an overwhelming response should, by any reasonable standard, be considered evidence which Cabinet should have taken into account in making its decision. It is clear from the decision to press ahead without regard to these responses, and without detailed plans to combat the traffic, that Cabinet has not properly taken into account the evidence (or lack of it) at its disposal.

Signed by
Councillor Susan Hall
Councillor Ameet Jogia
Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
Councillor Kantilal Rabadia
Councillor John Hinkley
Councillor Camilla Bath
Councillor Jean Lammiman
Councillor Marilyn Ashton