



Tain Royal Academy

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Dear Parents,

3 to 18 Campus Update from Stakeholder Meeting

We wanted to write to you to give you all the information regarding the current situation of the 3 to 18 campus in Tain. We apologise in advance for the length of this letter but as your parent council representatives we felt it was important to give you the information as we have it so far and keep you informed. It also gives you an opportunity to speak with us and give us any feedback you may like us to take back to the next stakeholder meeting which will be on 24th April. We are on the stakeholder group and our overriding objective by being on this group is to move forward in as timely a fashion as possible and with the interests of our children and teachers at heart, to attempt to get a new 3 to 18 campus built in Tain.

There is a dire need for a new campus in Tain, based on the unsatisfactory conditions of the current schools, and how these schools have deteriorated over many years to a point that they are no longer fit for purpose. The current situation in Tain is that Craighill Primary School is classed as one of the worst school buildings in the Highlands, Knockbreck Primary School is at capacity with a number of maintenance issues, TRA is in a poor condition, with limited if no disabled access and walkways, stairs and classrooms in a dilapidated state. St Duthus and the Gaelic school are also housed in temporary accommodation.

With a well catalogued backlog of maintenance work and some of Tain's existing schools in such a dire state, no new campus in Tain would be a devastating blow to our community and will continue to have a detrimental effect on teacher morale and stress levels, pupil health and well-being, which in turn will affect our children's education.

Your parent council therefore believe it is vital that we work with Highland Council and the stakeholder group to ensure we keep Tain firmly on the agenda for a new school and that we do all we can to move this forward swiftly.

As you are probably all aware a decision was taken in June 2017 by Highland Council to halt the current 3 to 18 campus project in Tain due to issues over the site that had been selected originally, (the existing TRA site). These issues involved a range of points raised by some of the community regarding the suitability of the site for a new campus. There was also a general concern in the community that they hadn't been fully communicated with and consulted over the TRA site and therefore views and opinions hadn't been taken in account. This effectively meant that the project came to a standstill.

Following on from this, Highland Council then stated that they would still carry on with the project in Tain and go back to the beginning, starting a new site selection process to try and gain consensus over where a new school could be sited.

They called a stakeholder meeting in October 2017 where representatives from the Parent Councils, Tain Community Council, and Head Teachers from the schools involved; Civic Trust representatives, Youth and Community workers and some local residents were all present.

At this meeting stakeholders were invited to suggest any sites for the new campus that had not already been in consideration and the outcome of this meeting was 4 potential sites in Tain to be taken forward for preliminary investigation including technical assessment, and consultations with civil and structural engineers, transport engineers, planners, transport planners and safer routes to school regarding the viability of each of the sites. These sites were: Kirksheaf, Burgence, TRA and Craighill.

Highland Council also explained that even though a major amount of work and money had been spent on the suitability and plans for the TRA site, going back to a full consultation on a suitable site for the new campus meant that Highland Council has a statutory duty under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 to fully reassess all aspects of each site against current conditions.

At a special parent council meeting held in February by TRA parent council the issues with our existing schools were highlighted. TRA parent council also invited Alistair Mackinnon, Chair of the Resources Committee and the budget leader to let parents know the current discussions regarding the 2018 capital budget and where Tain would feature in that. Whilst assurances were gained in that meeting regarding some monies being kept in the budget for Tain, sadly this did not happen.

In Feb/March 2018 Highland Council met to agree the capital budget for the next 5 years and in effect the outcome of that meeting was that the budget was reduced to £56.7M per annum across all capital projects (not just education) for the next 5 years. This represents roughly half what has been in previous years. The original amount of money set aside in the previous budget for a new campus in Tain had been £52M.

The Council faced with the Tain campus project effectively at a standstill, with no agreement on a site for the project, took the decision to redistribute monies previously earmarked for the Tain campus to other school build projects in Highland that were further down the line in terms of readiness. This left Tain with no money set aside for a new campus, however, there was an assurance that Tain had been identified as a priority project, alongside several other Highland schools, for funding from the next round of Scottish Government, Scottish Futures funding, which Highland Council if successful in their bid for this funding would try and match from capital funds.

In March 2018, after the budget agreements at Highland Council, another Tain 3 to 18 campus stakeholders meeting was called.

In this stakeholder meeting, Highland Council explained that moving forward, in order for the Tain 3-18 project to attract funding from the Highland Council and Scottish Government in future years, the group and wider community were encouraged to reach a settled position on a preferred location for a new Campus.

The stakeholder group then listened to presentations from Highland Council's Architect and Planning team on the four potential sites that have been looked at by Highland Council for a new campus. A presentation on preliminary site analysis collated by the Highland Council officers in consultation with civil and structural engineers, transport engineers, planners, transport planners and safer routes to school was also presented.

Having considered the presentation, and discussion on the site options, the group were asked whether they felt in a position to provide a view on those options, with the scope to express a short-list of preferred site options. The reasons for shortlisting the sites were that by doing this it meant money, resources and time spent by Highland Council would be best served focusing on the sites that were most viable to take to the next full and comprehensive stage of investigation and a public consultation. It was noted certain stakeholders had not attended this evening's meeting, and had not sent alternative representation, however the majority who were in attendance, expressed a wish to shortlist. The sites that appeared to be the most viable were the Craighill site and the existing TRA site.

The next step in the process is for the 2 sites now to be fully worked up by Highland Council to put to a public consultation in Tain as early as is practical. At this stage we will get the opportunity to decide as a community which site is better fit for purpose for a new campus. Prior to this Highland Council have to take their proposals for the potential sites to the Care, Learning and Housing Committee to approve before it goes out to a public consultation.

The next meeting of the Care, Learning and Housing Committee is at the end of May and therefore if as a community we can choose the most viable sites to take to a full review and investigation in April, then they can hit the May deadline which means a public consultation can take place on the most viable sites shortly afterwards.

As a parent council we are here to represent the views of parents and so we are very aware of the enormous responsibility you give us, we are also mindful that we have a duty to inform you and consult with you as much as we can.

The next stakeholder meeting will be held on 24th April and we would like to take parent feedback to this meeting. Therefore by sending this letter out we hope that we are doing all we can to gather your feedback and also present you with as much information as we have.

By taking 2 sites forward to a public consultation we believe that a new campus in Tain is now firmly back on the agenda and being treated as a priority. It would be great if we can reach a consensus on the sites to take to public consultation swiftly so that when we do choose a site, we can be in a position to be considered for the next round of funding later in the year.

If you would like a copy of the stakeholder meeting minutes and also the presentation from Highland Council then please email us on the contact details below and we can send these to you separately. We hope to hear from you with any feedback and will continue to keep you fully informed at each step.

Kindest regards

Wendy Hennem

TRA Parent Council Chair

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