

KBa/JMo

6th July 2021

Dear Claudine,

Thank you for your email and the attached document from the Parish Council. Hopefully the responses below will answer the questions posed.

The WPC does not feel it is qualified to comment on the educational merits of the proposal and trusts that these are valid. However, members are surprised that the Beacon will not share the secrets of their success with Uplands unless they form a formal partnership under their Academy Trust (or that other successful schools in the local education authority with Uplands are not already sharing best practice.)

Beacon Academy and Uplands Community College have had a successful working relationship for a number of years and good practice has been, and is, shared on a regular basis. The two headteachers meet regularly with other East Sussex secondary school headteachers within Area Group 1 (East Sussex secondaries are divided into three groups) where common themes are explored and good practice shared. The reason for proposing a more formal relationship with the Beacon Community College Academy Trust is so that a successful and financially sustainable future for Uplands Community College can be secured. This is in jeopardy if the school remains a single entity.

It is also the case that if the two schools are part of the same academy trust then the working relationship will be much closer and the level of collaboration will be significantly enhanced. Whilst Uplands is a good school with many strengths, Beacon Academy is in the top 2% of all schools in the country. It is to be anticipated and welcomed that Uplands will benefit from being part of the same trust as such a successful school.

Costs; the WPC understand that a key driver for the plan is the forecast additional income from increasing pupil numbers at Uplands but they would like to understand how this compares with the additional costs of joining the Academy.

The standard cost of becoming an academy and joining a multi academy trust is £25,000. This cost is met by the DfE.

Although it has been explained that the consultation has been extended from four to six weeks and the WPC has been allowed an additional two working days to respond, Councillors are concerned at the short time frame of the consultation; with some members declining to comment due to the lack of time (note that receipt of the consultation notice was after the last monthly parish council meeting). The WPC are concerned that the residents of Wadhurst have not been made aware of the consultation and the consultation period should have been longer to allow for the additional difficulty of engaging people during COVID lockdown.

The law does not specify how long a consultation should last. The original consultation period was actually 5 weeks (17th May-18th June). On request, this was extended to 23rd June and to



Monday 25th June for the Parish Council. The Governing Board is of the opinion that this period of time gave all stakeholders ample opportunity to respond if they wished to.

All staff and parents (many of whom reside in Wadhurst) were informed about the consultation period prior to its start. Letters were also emailed to businesses in the village. The letter encouraged people to respond to the consultation electronically via a central email address (consultation@uplandscs.com) or by hard copy sent to the school. Four remote meetings were also held. You will appreciate that COVID19 restrictions precluded meetings in person. However, the Principal valued the opportunity to speak to the Parish Council in person during the extension period.

The Wadhurst Parish Council is concerned about and would like to seek assurances on the following key areas on behalf of Wadhurst parishioners and businesses.

- *Uplands Sixth Form*
o that Uplands will continue to have a sixth form under the proposals

The Governing Board wishes for there to continue to be a sixth form at Uplands and this has been clearly expressed at a variety of meetings and in writing.

- *Sticky Fingers and Uplands Gym*
o The WPC are concerned that these might not be core to the educational aims of the Academy but they are very important to parishioners and the WPC would like confirmation that their future is secured under the plans. Of particular concern is how these would be funded, should they need additional investment.

The Governing Board recognises the importance of Sticky Fingers and the Uplands Gym to the local community and these two concerns will form part of the due diligence carried out by both Beacon Community College Academy Trust and Uplands Community College.

- *Organisational structure*
o As Uplands would appear to be the junior partner in the proposed partnership, the WPC would like to understand how the voices of Wadhurst parents and residents would be heard going forward. The concern being that a leadership structure based in Crowborough might not understand or hold in high priority the concerns of Wadhurst residents.

Uplands will not be the junior partner, but an equal partner. When a school joins an established multi academy trust, it is usual for the leader of that trust to become the overarching leader of the organisation. In this case, the headteacher of Beacon Academy would become Executive Headteacher over the two schools. A local governing body will be in place at Uplands, which will have representation on the Beacon Community College Academy Trust Board. This will ensure appropriate representation for Wadhurst parents and residents.

- *Traffic, congestion and parking*
o The expected increase in pupil numbers and journeys (between the Wadhurst and Crowborough sites) will increase the problems of traffic, congestion, and parking. These issues are of very great concern to Wadhurst residents and High Street businesses.

It is not anticipated that Years 7-11 will be making any journeys to Crowborough as they will continue to be educated on the Uplands site. There may be some movement between the



sites for 6th form students, but this has yet to be discussed and agreed. If this were to be the case, students would be transported via the school minibus, which would in no way increase traffic congestion.

o As previously discussed with the school, the parking allocation at Uplands falls below the ESCC guidelines. We would like to discuss this and, as we also understand that an off-road parking solution is anticipated within 12-18 months, we would like more information about this and assurances that a solution to the current and anticipated issues will form part of the proposed plans.

The issue of parking falls outside of the academy consultation. However, the Governing Board is happy to discuss the issue of parking with the Parish Council at any time.

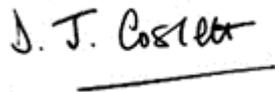
The Governing Board has had at the heart of its discussions the need to sustain a secure, successful and economically viable future for the students and staff at Uplands, whilst at the same time maintaining everything that makes the school unique.

We hope that this letter answers your questions, but please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs J. Mountford
Principal



Mrs D. Coslett
Chair of Governors

