

APPENDIX B
Summary of responses
People allied to St Laurence's Catholic Primary School

Falling rolls

- Numbers would improve if school was publicised more
- Less children are being born
- Lots of demolition in the area
- Numbers are low
- If parents had known this was coming, maybe they would have sent their children here
- Government says "have a career" so of course people have less children
- Why didn't extra children (above capacity) at Our Lady and St Edwards come here rather than building extra classrooms there?

Staff and Standards

- Provides good education
- Small school means more one to one time for children
- Teachers are great, go above and beyond the call of duty
- Fun approach to learning
- Smaller classes means greater learning
- Lots of sports, trips and activities
- School works well with children with special needs
- Is in an area of high deprivation
- Some children do not have English as their first language
- Small schools are just as capable of providing an effective education
- Small schools can deliver the National Curriculum
- Small schools have a good ethos
- Inclusive school regardless of faith
- A small school works because the staff make it work
- Class sizes would be bigger in other schools
- School represents Wirral in football and cricket
- CVA is high, good standards
- Nurturing school

- Would quality of education be as good in other schools?
- One to one teaching

Building and site

- Children's Centre satellite to St Werburghs
- Could get another two small schools on this site with a good architect
- Questions about land ownership

Pupils

- Children would miss their friends
- Hard to make new friends in new school
- Children would be upset if school closed
- Pupils go on to do well in secondary school
- My child is happy and settled here
- Concerns about additional disruption for children with special needs
- Would children get places in Catholic secondary schools if they went to non-Catholic primary schools?
- Children get the nurturing here they don't always get at home
- Children always come back to see us when they've left for secondary school

The Options

- If closed, the Diocese and Local Authority would work together to ensure places at St Werburgh's and Our Lady and St Edward's for every child whose parents want them to go there
- Best date for closure would be August 2010
- Couldn't you scale the school down by finding other uses for the rest of the building rather than close the school?
- Why isn't there an amalgamation option?
- We were supposed to amalgamate with St Werburgh's about 20 years ago and it never happened
- Would be cheaper to keep St Laurence's open rather than build places. Traffic and transport
- Our Lady and St Edward's is already full
- Is the building work at Our Lady and St Edwards to take more children from St Laurences?

Traffic and Transport

- Concern about distance to alternative schools
- Expect us to walk two miles in the rain

- People won't cross roads to get to school

Financial

- It costs a lot to educate the children, but don't they deserve it?
- This is all about money
- Council wants the land to build houses on
- Can't the Catholic Church provide funding to keep the school open?
- Will the Diocese sell the land to the Council?

The Process

- This should be about children, not about statistics
- Staff would like help from HR earlier in the process
- Decision in January 2010 doesn't give much time for staff to find alternative employment
- You've already made a decision
- Michael Clarke should be at the meeting

Other comments

- Generations have gone to this school
- Parish church already closed – where did the funding go, was it to the school or the church
- Centre of its community
- Sports days and fairs get lots of visitors

Transcript of comments made at St Laurence's Catholic Primary School 2nd July 2009

Present:

Cllr Phil Davies (Chairman)

Mark Parkinson – LA

Marie Lawrence – LA

David Armstrong – LA

Sally Gibbs – LA

Phil Edwards – Technician

John Walsh – Acting Headteacher

Sister Frances Guiney – Vice Chair of Governors

Sister Patricia Goodstadt – Representative of the Diocese of Shrewsbury

Father Phil Moor said a prayer.

Mark Parkinson gave a presentation. Questions and comments were invited from the audience.

- Governor – I've had the good fortune to have 4 children in this school, but I'd like to ask, if in the catchment area of them two Catholic schools, is there a guaranteed place for the children if anything does happen here? Will the children from here be guaranteed a place in either of them schools?

And my next question is, if they didn't manage to get into one of them schools, and went to a non-Catholic school, what would happen then to the secondary side of it, with the Catholic education, would they not get into a Catholic secondary school?

- Sister Pauline – I'm representing Shrewsbury Diocese here tonight, and you need to know that we would do everything possible to ensure there were Catholic places at Catholic primary schools to accommodate any of the youngsters from here. And, that's what we would be working with the Authority towards, and we don't think there'll be a problem there. That's not saying that we've made a decision, because we haven't, we're here to hear what you have to say but it's just answering your question, putting your mind at ease on that one. Thank you.
- Acting Head – I mean, when we watched the presentation, excellent all the statistics and everything else, but at the end of the day we're here for the children. Every single one of us is here for the children here. We look at all the different phrases there which we've had. Use money wisely, now although we have the highest, £5,500 per child we are in a highly socially deprived area and surely they deserve that kind of money, I'll come on in a minute to the kind of children that we teach in our school, you mention things like current standards etc etc, we're a small school, I'd like to put forward some points why small schools work, this school works as a small school, it works because of the staff, and the children and the parents and everybody else. If you look at all the things that we do, the extended schools, the workload is massive but the teachers and the people in this school and all the support staff,

they do it. They do it, you know, we look at all the “every child matters”, the one to one, every time you switch on the television, the radio, they talk about one to one tuition, well ok, we’ve got 10-11 children in a class, they get one to one every day and I think parents and staff are certainly concerned that when they move to other schools and go into bigger classes then what kind of support will they be given? I’m not decrying other schools, of course there are good schools which are big schools, but the children in this school have specific, we have 6 in care, we have 5 EALs, we have massive special needs, we’ve got wonderful children, they deserve everything that we give them. We give them a massive curriculum here. You don’t go anywhere without St Laurence’s being there, you go to the music festival, who’s there, St Laurences. You go to the dance festival, who’s there, St Laurences. These things don’t happen just by turning children out, they happen because we make it happen. We’ve represented Wirral twice, 75 children, the best Year 1-2 football team we represented Wirral, tomorrow we’re in Warrington representing Wirral in the cricket tournament, we’ve only got 10 boys but 8 of them will be there tomorrow and they will be doing Wirral proud. And we bought them kit, thank you to one of the parents who’s brought that kit for us, and we will be there and we’ll be doing Wirral proud. We could go on and on about all of these things that we do. All the extended schools, all the professor fluff who was in yesterday from the university, we’ve got four students in at the moment and teachers have a student, two students in one class, we have four, five work experience children in at the moment, you know, we never stop, never stop providing this massive education for our children. And what about the vulnerable groups, we have teachers who are high up on the ECAR, doing the RIPLE course, you know every member of staff here, every person in the school, works very very hard at getting all these standards, very good Ofsted, very good once again, another good set of SATS results again this year, 101.4 value added last year, the children come in, we get them out, and we give them a massive education. We are a small school, but we are a tremendous small school. And can we stay like that, maybe not, maybe you’ve got other reasons for it, but that’s the case, I think.

- Chair of Governors – I would like to endorse everything that Mr Walsh has said, and just ask you, is there any possibility that you have thought of an alternative rather than close us, a possibility of closing us, such as maybe using the other side of that building for alternative things, just as Surestart and the other special needs are used? Is there any kind of thing that you have thought about?
- Grandparent – I heartily endorse what the previous speaker said, this is a massive site, and it’s worth a great deal of money, and we know this Council would sell their own grandmother much less St Laurence’s school, and I would say that this school could be truncated, it could be moved to become a truly small school, it could in fact if a decent architect came in, accommodate three other small schools on this site, this site which I would say, the Council has got their eyes on it.

- Volunteer – I'm very grateful for the privilege of being employed here since 2002 as a support worker, and then since then as a volunteer following the failure of the budget. I'm particularly grateful to the headteacher, Mr John Walsh, for all the appreciation, the great appreciation he has shown me since 2002 in the things I've been privileged to do here. I'd like to say that he and all the staff here deserve the greatest consideration for the future and all the children, I've been very impressed with the attitude and the appreciation of so many children since I started here and it's a great sadness to think that this school will close. I just hope a way round it is able to be found, and wish them all the best for the future, thank you very much.
- Parent – Go on then, I've got a big gob, I'll take it...For the last couple of days I've been around Birkenhead getting 630 signatures and I will be getting more of them, and every single person, you hear, "oh, my such and such went to St Laurences", four generations of my family have gone to St Laurence's, there's three teachers sitting there that are still here from when I was here, and Joanne, and I look round and there's that many people who mean something to the community, it's not just a school, it's not just a building, and you've watched it go further and further down, with all this that's going on, everyone's taking their kids out because they're panicking, "oh I can't leave my child here in case there's no place left, if I leave them in for too long they're going to get too attached to the teachers", they shouldn't be thinking like that and I think that's got to do with, you've been doing this for five years, the community didn't know you've been doing this for five years, maybe the community would have been getting behind the school and trying to get more kids coming in. You can't say, you're sitting and saying "oh there's not enough, people aren't having enough children", all the government's gone on about is have a career, leave your child, put your child into, we'll pay for people to take care of your children, make sure you've got a career behind you, so people are having their kids later, so you say, you think, you can't turn round, I think it's more traditional values, you've got to try and instil, install into people about looking after the children, looking after the community, not just passing the buck, oh we'll put your children in this other school, it's only two miles away so if it's raining, and you've got a baby in the buggy, don't worry about it, it's only two miles so you can walk to the next school as long as there's a place for yer. This school means something to the community and I bet if you went out to anyone on that street, they'll tell you they don't want the school closed.
- ...but on the board it said the decision would be September 2010...the final...
So that's when the final decision would be made.
- Acting Head – Thank you. Just returning to the staff side of it, in January 2010 there'll be 21 members of staff here, who could well be 6 months away from the end of their school life here. We were a bit disappointed when we heard that, it's not a lot of time is it, not a lot of time to get things sorted out, but it's the wait till then that's the problem.

We were told that we couldn't get any human resources interviews, or one to one, or any sort of idea of what might be a possibility. You know, we all have lives, we all have mortgages, we all have husbands, wives or partners, who are, you know, in situations. People say well, we don't know, we don't know. We're just a bit disappointed that January 2010 will give us hardly any time, and isn't there a possibility that we could get some idea, if we were to close, it would be a shame, but then we have our lives to carry on with.

- Staff – I came to this school, I'm one of the Parish members as well, and I just want to say, you keep saying about small schools and about the workload on the staff, and about vertically grouped classes, and all these things and I just think that these children here deserve better. I think it's important that the children here get what they need. They have lots of support, one to one, they have lots and lots of extra-curricular activities and I think it's important you should think about the children here, not just as we said before, the finance, but the children. And also, as one of the ladies said over there, is there no way we can actually scale the school down, do something else for the children, I think the children are important.
- Former parent/pupil – My family I think are fourth generation to attend this school and it's ok, what, what we're hearing here is a lot about initiatives that I don't understand, I don't know what initiatives mean, but one thing that I know about this locality is there's an awful lot of social deprivation, and there's an awful lot of poorly educated people and poor parenting as well in this area, and the nurturing that this school provides hasn't been noted. I want that to note it's second to none. St Laurence's gave me a fantastic start in life, it gave me confidence, it gave me a fantastic education and the extra-curricular activities that I participated in were second to none. And the teachers, the staff here, all the staff go above and beyond the call of duty every single day. Every single day, that's one thing I've noted from when I was a child, it didn't go unmissed and it certainly didn't go un-noted by my son. And that's not been noted, it needs to be, there's time, there's more time, there's love given here, and the children are loved and looked after and a lot of them are not getting that at home. And I think that's one of the reasons that this school needs to remain here, because that's, it's worth more than gold, it really is.
- Can I just say, what she was saying then, the kids love the teachers, it's not just respect, the kids love the teachers in this school. You see them, the last day when they go out the school on their last day, the new term starts you think they're all out with their mates because they're teenagers nearly, no, they're back at the gates, they're back at the gates, seeing the school, seeing the teachers every single time. Two things I wanted to ask, one was, what is the Diocese position on the school closing, and why is it just St Laurence's closure when two other schools are getting joined together? Why is it just closure that's the option for St Laurence's?

- Sister Patricia – The Diocese doesn't have a position on the closure at the moment, we haven't made a decision. We have all the papers given to us by the Local Authority and what our state is, we're here to hear the views of the governors, the staff, the head, the parents, the community, all the stakeholders, we want to hear everybody's view...I'm sorry I wasn't quite on the ball there because I was scribbling notes. I've taken copious notes, they go back, and they'll all be considered. When everything's considered, and the result of your consultation, then a decision will be made.

I'm Sister Patricia Goodstadt, I'm assistant Director of Schools for Shrewsbury Diocese.

- Is it just funding that basically, there's not that many children in the school, does it just boil down to funding, we can't afford to let your kids stay in the school 'cos there's not enough, that we're not getting enough money for them. Is that what it's about?
- Sister Patricia – Can I just say another thing from the Diocese point of view, we're very conscious of the situation at St Laurence's, we're conscious of the feeling in the community, the roll that St Laurence's has played in the community and how important that is. As you know the Catholic church, wherever it goes, goes first to areas of social deprivation. The first thing it does when it gets there is establish a school. That's what it did in Birkenhead, that's what it's done throughout the country so we're very conscious of that heritage, and it's very important to us. We know the value, the added value that the children are getting here at St Laurences. You know, socially deprived children, socially deprived area and the education is not, quality of education is not in question here.
- Governor – I went to this school as a child myself, and it's part of me this school, it always has been and it always will be. We were in the same situation about 20 years ago, maybe a bit longer, when Canon Byrne was here, we were supposed to amalgamate with St Werburgh's then, but a gridiron came in here and that saved us on that day, otherwise you're not going to get people crossing two main roads to go to a school, or, well, a mile up the road to Our Lady's, it just won't happen. And I'd just like to say that the love here these children have from the staff we have here is absolutely excellent. The staff here could not be bettered. And it just sickens me that at the end of the day it just boils down to pounds, shillings and pence. The same old story. It would just sicken me to see it close because obviously, for me, being honest, it's done and dusted. You go through these things and you say no decisions been made, but I tell you what, you wouldn't get a bet at the bookies that it's going to stay open...

PD replied that no decision had been made.

Statistics prove.... I thought you wasn't coming in.

PD said again that no decision had been made, and that Cabinet did not meet until September.

Yes true. You're sitting there all of you, knowing full well, knowing full well, it's going to go, you know that, I know that. You're educated people, you know.

PD said the gentleman was entitled to his opinion.

Well so are you.

- Acting head – Just to go back to...It's a plea really to the parents. There are cases on my desk at the moment where staunch Catholic families from here have gone to get children in already. Ok you might say, and they try Catholic schools and they haven't been able to get in Catholic schools in the local area. So therefore they're going to non-Catholic schools. The plea to me is, if the Diocese are going to say that every child who's here in September 2010, 9, 10, that if they're guaranteeing a Catholic education, if that's the case then my plea to the parents is, they stay here. Because at the moment, the ball is rolling, people are starting to go, and we're losing wonderful children, as our children are, and the school's getting smaller and we're basically going to close ourselves, aren't we. The parents need, if the Diocese are going to say they'll get a Catholic education then wait, because if they're going to guarantee it, then wait.
- Sister Patricia – I'll quote to you... Is this on? If St Laurence's, and it is if, were to close, the Diocese working with the Local Authority and the governing bodies at Our Lady and St Edward's Catholic Primary School and St Werburgh's Catholic Primary School will ensure, I must stress that, will ensure that there are sufficient places at those two schools for all children whose parents wish them to go there.
- Parent – My little girl's in Nursery, and I don't know whether to, she's just got settled in half a day, and I don't want her in full day and be told she's gotta move. So, the other two Catholic schools are too far for me to go, I put her down, she's meant to be going to the Priory in September, but I want her to stay here. I don't want her to get settled in here being a full day then be told you've gotta move.
- Parent - Hiyah, I'd just like to ask how the Diocese can ensure that all the children are going to receive places at Catholic schools and I'd like to ask how they're going to ensure the quality of education that they get in this school is going to be the standard that they'll get in that school.
- Sister Patricia – Working with the Authority, you've seen on the slides that the Authority will build places at schools to ensure smooth transition of youngsters from this school to the other two schools. Think that was quite clear on the slides. And certainly the Diocese is well aware of that. The quality of education at the other two schools I do not think is in question at all...I understand that, I do understand why each of you is here tonight, and if I were in your position I'd probably be here, if I were a parent I'd probably be here as well. Of course it matters to you and that's what we want to hear.
- Can I just ask, how youse can say you'll build places and the quality of education's going to be no different, but them teachers are getting

added children that they haven't been expecting because you're closing this school.

DA explained that the quality of teaching was the key factor in children's education, not building or class size.

- But it is a key factor, sorry, sorry, it is a key factor because that's one of the reasons you're closing this school, because there's not enough kids in the classroom. So that is the key factor in this case. And the key factor of the kids going to a different school is when I was in school there was too many kids in the classroom, everyone was crying out, oh my god we've got 30, 40 kids per classroom. Now it's gone the other way where we haven't got enough. So this one on one teaching that you were crying out for years ago, don't need it no more, let's just get rid of it that way. The other question I wanted to ask was, that's what I was on about before with the funds, now, the Catholic church, I was thinking to myself, wouldn't they be able to help with the funds to try and keep this school open, if it's that much of, we like, we try and help our parishioners, wouldn't they like to?
- Sister Patricia – The Catholic church doesn't have money to fund the education in schools. We're as strapped as we can be to fund the responsibilities we have for the buildings and, as you know the Diocese has worked really hard with parents for that, over the last 10 years particularly, but, the state has the responsibility for actually funding the education of the children within the school. And I honestly would say, I think you'd bear me out, the Diocese does not have the funds in order to educate the children.
- Just one point. The state does have a responsibility for the children in the school, but so does the Catholic church. When the church got knocked down, did the funding come back into the Catholic school or did it go to the Catholic church?
- Sister Patricia – I'm sorry, I really have no idea about that.
- I just wanted to ask, it's all about money, obviously we all know that, but you're going on about not having enough kids on seats, but if you're going to build on Catholic schools, then surely that's going to cost a lot of money to build and to amend schools, why can't we just keep this one open?
- Former parent – You're saying before, mentioning Our Lady's, but isn't Our Lady's full, and they can't take any more pupils in, and is this why you're building extra buildings on Our Lady's to take pupils from St Laurence's down to the school?

DA said governing body had raised admission number from 29 to 45. Consequently larger numbers moving through, lower numbers higher up the school, accommodation was being build to accommodate the larger numbers.

- Father Phil – I just want to follow up what David said there, it's important for us to be totally 100% about. The buildings taking place at Our Lady's at the moment is to cater for the majority of the children

who are in my presbytery and my sitting room, the meeting room, the conservatory, there isn't enough space at Our Lady's at the moment and that's why the building work is being done. It's not, it's not being done because decisions have been made to close St Laurence's, ok, if whatever happens, we're going to have to look, I think, at both schools of more provision, but I think you've got to be clear that that building isn't done, isn't being done because decisions have been made. That's been on the go for a long long time.

Noises off

- I'd like to ask how many houses the Council think they can get on this land once the schools gone.

DA explained again that the Council didn't own the land, and also that new housing generated very few children.

Can I just ask then, if is it Our Lady's that's full already, if Our Lady's was already to capacity, and youse have decided to build extras, extra room to fit these in, why wouldn't they have walked down to a different Catholic school which is what, a mile away, which is reasonable for them to walk in the eyes of the Council?

- Why didn't they send them here, basically, take up places here, instead of building more buildings.

DA explained that the Council is not the admission body for Catholic schools. Governing body at Our Lady's made the decision to increase the admission number and building work was now being carried out to address the need.

- Governor - I'd just like to express my disappointment at Mike Clarke not being here tonight. I know he's got pecuniary interests...in...what's being said here tonight but at least as representative of the Diocese. This school, 1867, so it's 142 years old and the biggest day of the schools history and he's not here. With all due respect to Sister, Sister (Patricia) was the third choice from what we've been told. I think Dave Roberts was the second choice.
- Sister Patricia – Definitely I'm the third choice!
- Governor – I just think, Sister, you've been thrown in at the deep end and I do feel, I am apologising to you. I just feel as if, the biggest day, the most important day of this schools life, 142 years and we've e-mailed him, we've e-mailed him, a personal letter has gone up to him, handed to him, and yet as I say he's got other pecuniary interests at this meeting, I know the situation, and yet he couldn't even get down here, that for me says it all.
- Sister Patricia – No, I'm sorry, I'm sorry that's not right. The fact is there is a conflict of interest, there is a conflict of interest, and in the Local Authority's protocol on conflicts of interest it is right that Michael Clarke is not here. He could not be here and that was agreed with the Authority because of his conflict of interest and therefore a substitute had to be found. He could have been asked, had he been here, he

would probably have been asked to leave the meeting because of his conflict of interest. It isn't a personal thing, he'd far rather have been here himself, and he's spent many hours briefing us on this. So it isn't, believe you me, he would rather be here than not be here. He's probably hanging about outside waiting to hear what exactly has happened this evening.

- If the Council decides the school's gotta close, do you sell the land then to the Council, and the Council builds houses on it?
- Sister Patricia – The land belongs to the Diocese, and belongs to the trustees of the Diocese, and as such the education service would have no say whatsoever in what happened to the land. We're only users of the land. The land would revert back to the trustees of the Diocese and it would be up to the Bishop and the Trustees to determine the best use of the land in light of the needs of the Church.
- Father Phil – Can I just say what I've been hearing tonight is a very real sense of community here at St Laurences really, and I think there is something unique and special here. Father Michael sadly can't be here this evening, so I just want to speak up on his behalf really. There is something very special here at St Laurences and I very much put that down to the head and the staff team and the love and the care that we've heard so much about this evening. I really just, I really just urge everyone who's involved in this process just to listen very carefully and to reflect very carefully on what's been, on what's seen and heard this evening particularly about what the children get here, which is that real sense of love and care so just reflect very carefully on what you've heard here because the issues are far more outstanding than, you know, the monetary issues, it's about the care and the love of the children.
- I would just like to say again, to reiterate what other people have said about the teachers, the job they do is fantastic, above and beyond, but not just for the kids, they support the children as well, the parents. They've always supported me with my four children and they always ask how they're doing in the secondary school and I've just now become a grandmother and my wish is to bring my granddaughter here, not to take her three roads up that way or two roads up that way across roads, I want her to be brought here and be taught like I was taught.
- Governor- Do the Diocese own the whole of the land here? Thankyou.
- Chair of Governors – Can I just say thank you to the panel for being here tonight, I can't say a big thank you for your content, because it's been hard to sit and listen to what you've had to tell us. And a lot of feeling has been shared here tonight, very honest feelings, and I suppose really it's because we're not talking about 50 years of history or 100 years of history, and that's very hard to let go of. You know, we've heard about all the good things that go on here, you know, and I suppose if a book could be written, it would be a bestseller of the history of St Laurence's. Can I just say to each and every one of you

here tonight a big thank you for your support here, for taking the time to come, to speak honestly, to give us your support and your care. Now, the word that has also been branded about tonight, that is "if" St Laurence's closes. I would like to hold onto that for the time being and to work really to keep it open. Now we know there are many people out there who have maybe a great attachment to St Laurences. If you know them, and you're in touch with them, maybe you could share with them some of the things that have gone on here tonight, ask them in some shape or form to get in touch with the Local Authority, tell them what reason for keeping the school open. So thank you again.

Cllr Davies thanked everyone for coming.