

The Resident

Councillor Gerald Wilkinson
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Tel: 0113 37 88557
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Dear fellow resident,

We are writing this public letter, as your elected Ward Councillors, in response to a communication issued by the Head teacher of Boston Spa School on 31 January 2018.

We were disappointed to read the Head teachers letter which is inaccurate, misleading, alarmist and irresponsible. The letter has caused unnecessary concern and distress, amongst pupils who attend Boston Spa and Wetherby secondary schools and their families.

Here are the facts:

There will be no snap closure of Boston Spa or Wetherby High schools.

Your Ward Councillors will hold a public meeting for all to express their views.

A Government Minister will now decide whether Boston Spa School can become an academy, in partnership with the Gorse Academies Trust Ltd. The Minister has three options.

1. Allow the application by Boston Spa School to go ahead and partner with the Gorse Academies Trust Ltd.
2. Reject the application.
3. Defer any decision to consider schooling and school places across the wider district.

The Minister is likely to rule on the matter within the month.

We are further aware of two proposals that have been put to the Regional Schools Commissioner regarding secondary school provision in our area.

- 1) Boston Spa School and the Gorse Academies Trust Ltd. have proposed a merger with Wetherby High school, they would then close Wetherby High School and relocate all pupils to the existing Boston Spa School, the Sixth Form at Boston Spa School would also close.
- 2) Officers of Leeds City Council have put forward an alternative plan, it proposes the closure of Boston Spa School and a new school built on the site of Wetherby High School.

- Both options agree it is only viable to have one secondary school that serves our area.
- Either option would be an academy or a free school
- Last Friday, we were presented with a further option for a new high school by a local developer, we are referring this proposal on to the relevant decision makers.

We feel it would be helpful to set out some background information and to be clear and honest about the challenge facing secondary education in our area. You will no doubt be aware that a very high number of secondary school children travel into and out of Boston Spa & Wetherby to go to a secondary school. Many parents from Inner East Leeds choose Wetherby & Boston Spa as the best school for their children although this has been declining in recent years as the inner-city schools have improved. Similarly, a significant number of families from our district choose to send their children out of our area altogether for a whole variety of reasons. Only around 1/3 of families in the local catchment areas chose their local school as their first preference and around half of all secondary age pupils in our district attend schools in North Yorkshire. We have attached some data which shows you the current figures. The numbers attending Boston Spa and Wetherby High schools has been falling consistently for several years and are not projected to increase any time soon, even when new housing is taken into account. We want to really emphasise that this is not an immediate pressure but if long term decisions are not taken soon one or both schools could get into real difficulties.

Around two years ago Leeds City Council decided the numbers at both schools had fallen to a level that meant that neither school would be financially viable moving forward and that something needed to be done to address the issue before one or both schools reached a crisis point. A public consultation process was begun with an initial event held in Clifford Village Hall on 22/06/2016. Every Parish Council in the area was invited, every primary & secondary school was invited and a variety of other stakeholders were also invited and attended. You will appreciate I'm sure that putting this sort of information into the public domain must be done carefully and sensitively so as not to alarm pupils, their families and the wider community. All the stakeholders were presented with the data and the scale of the challenge and asked for their views about the future. This was to help Leeds City Council formulate realistic possible options for the future of Secondary Education provision in the Outer North East of Leeds. A full public consultation on all the options was due to be held late last year, unfortunately, this could not happen as Boston Spa School made its application to become an academy as part of the Gorse Academies Trust Ltd. Our view, both then and now is that in any other circumstance, we would have welcomed and supported this move but we felt then, as we do now that it should not be considered in isolation, but as part of the wider challenge facing the whole district.

To add to this complex picture new schools, providing secondary education, are to be built in the Inner East area as part of new housing proposals, this will inevitably reduce the number of pupils traveling long distances to Wetherby and Boston Spa.

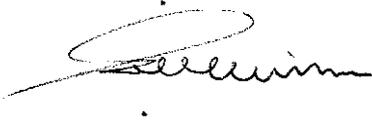
We also need to challenge the negative comments about Wetherby High School contained in the letter written by the head of Boston Spa School. Boston Spa is a good and improving school, the staff and governors should be pleased and proud of the progress they are making. We fully understand their desire to become an academy, but we do not feel there is any need to criticise any other school, particularly when the content used is not accurate. We believe that Wetherby High School is a good & improving school, we are confident when OFSTED visit again, that will also be their judgement. Under new leadership Wetherby High School has achieved impressive results the school should be applauded for the fantastic work it is doing.

As your local Councillors, we need to be clear that we are not the decision makers in this process. Our role, is to ensure that your views are properly represented to the decision makers and to ensure that full and proper public consultation is held and that decision making is open and transparent. In an issue as sensitive as this, it is particularly important that information and options are presented in a calm and factual way to ensure that you have all the facts when you come to share your views. It is always the opinions of our whole community that will guide the representations that we make to the decision makers. When there are firm proposals on the table we will ensure that the whole community is properly consulted.

The letter written by the Head Teacher of Boston Spa School alleges a Councillor conflict of interest, Councillor Lamb has publicly declared his interest and his continued involvement has been approved by Leeds City Council's Chief Legal Officer.

In conclusion, while we regret the way this information has been brought to light and the anxiety and uncertainty this has caused, we hope that all the attached information will enable you to fully understand what is going on. We do intend to organise a public meeting and will advertise a date, time and venue as soon as possible but in the meantime, we would be pleased to hear your views and would be very happy to provide any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Gerald Wilkinson
Wetherby Ward



Councillor John Procter



Councillor Alan Lamb