

**MARYBURGH PRIMARY SCHOOL - 20th November 2008**  
**Highland Council – Option Appraisal Exercise**

For a period in excess of five years Maryburgh Community Council had advocated the need for a detailed Option Appraisal in respect of the provision of Education Facilities in Maryburgh & Conon Bridge

On the 25<sup>th</sup> May this year the Director and Chairman of the Education Culture & Sport Committee of the Highland Council held an informal meeting with M.C.C. and they advised that the need for an Option Appraisal would be reviewed.

At a Dingwall & Seaforth Ward meeting held in Conon Bridge on the 27<sup>th</sup> August the Director of Education confirmed that the option Appraisal would be carried out and would be completed by end of December.

The H.C. advised that the Option Appraisal would be conducted by an external consultancy and that an “Invitation to Qualify” along with a Specification and Enquiry document was issued to a number of consultancies.

Following a bid analysis the company of Caledonian Economics was awarded the contract.

The Appraisal will consider three primary options:

1. Amalgamated new school on the Conon Bridge Primary school site
2. Autonomous Schools established by part refurbishment of Maryburgh P.S with new build extension and part new and part refurbished at Conon Bridge.
3. As 2 but with new build at Conon for Conon

It is anticipated that the appraisal will take into account the following factors:

- Potential use of existing buildings
- Projected pupil rolls
- Education benefit of each option
- Capital Costs (based on life cycle of 60 years and inclusive of financial costs)
- Operating costs (Revenue Budget)
- Traffic Impact / Environmental Impact / Carbon Footprint
- Community benefits
- Disruption to education during construction /transition
- Safety concerns
- Traffic impact
- Implementation timescales

**MARYBURGH PRIMARY SCHOOL - 19th January 2009**  
**Highland Council – Option Appraisal Exercise**

There has been major slippage in the completion of the Option Appraisal Exercise.

Mr Brian Hemming, Manager of the Education Estate Strategy for Highland Council, reported to a Ward 9 Business Meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> January that the status was as follows:

Action ongoing by H.C.:

- Detail surveys of existing buildings
- Preparation of Drawings & Costings of Building Options
- Review of population and school roll projections

Future time table is of the following order:

- Finalise outline drawings and costings by end Feb
- Forward all data to Caledonian Economics
- Caledonian Economics to complete the Appraisal by end March
- H.C. to prepare report for E.C.S. committee by end of April
- E.C.S. to consider the report and make a decision
- E.C.S. decision to be ratified by Full H.C. in summer

A further update will be available on 10<sup>th</sup> Feb.

**Highland Council Amalgamation Recommendation - 17th May 2009**

**Death Knell for Maryburgh Primary School - 21st May 2009**

**Community Council bulletin - 6th June 2009**

## COMMUNITY NOTICE - 18th August 2009

### MARYBURGH PRIMARY SCHOOL

The residents of Maryburgh wish to place on public record their concerns relating to the Option Appraisal exercise conducted by Caledonian Economics Ltd on behalf of The Highland Council in respect of Primary School Education Provision in Maryburgh and Conon Bridge.

In 2002 the Highland Council had plans for the retention of a school in Maryburgh and subsequent proposals for an Amalgamated School in Conon Bridge were opposed by Maryburgh for reasons which are well documented in Consultation Reports etc. It was therefore anticipated that the Option Appraisal would be robust, comprehensive and would be inclusive of all the issues and concerns relevant to a matter of such fundamental importance to the communities.

The Option Appraisal fails to address, in required detail, the following concerns:

#### 1. SAFETY

The introduction of Hazards arising from travel to and from the proposed Amalgamated School. No Risk Assessment has yet been completed.

No amount of expenditure will eliminate the hazards.

The measures to reduce the hazards to acceptable levels of risk have not been determined and therefore have not been costed.

It is the opinion of this community that a Risk Assessment is a prerequisite of the Option Appraisal.

#### 2. COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The report does not identify the needs for Community Facilities and therefore gives no details of any proposed provisions.

#### 3. ASSET DISPOSAL

The report gives no details of the arrangements for disposal of redundant assets. This (and all associated conditions) has significant cost and community implications.

#### 4. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The report gives no evaluation of the impact of school provision in respect of Community Development.

#### 5. BUILDING CONSTRUCTION OPTIONS

An option for Maryburgh (proposed for a number of years) is to refurbish the original buildings and to construct a new class-room wing using Modular Construction techniques - this option has been rejected by Highland Council apparently on the basis that the Highland Council has limited experience of this method of construction and cannot consider it at this time.

Indicative costs for this option have been given as approximately £1.0m only.

In view of the prevailing *economic and financial crisis* and considering the urgency in Maryburgh is this option not the Best Value?

#### 6. EDUCATION PROVISION FOR 3 YEAR OLD TO 6 YEAR OLD

As an option (within the Amalgamation Proposal) the suggestion to retain provision for the education of 3 year old to 6 year old children within Maryburgh was rejected by the Highland Council on the basis that it did not best satisfy curricular requirements for that age group and also the need to ensure, if practical, "continuity" of education. There may be some merit in these two "indicators" but surely retaining provision for this age group has safety & community benefits which greatly outweigh the "curricular" and "continuity" indicators.

#### COMMENTARY ON THE OPTION APPRAISAL EXERCISE

It is accepted that the Option Appraisal was undertaken generally in accordance with the Guidance issued by the Scottish Executive all of which is geared towards creating an objective evaluation

with minimal value judgements. The essence of the system is a Matrix of “Indicators” (selected and “scored” to ensure all objectives of the appraisal are considered) and to which “Weightings” are applied to ensure the relevant importance of each “Indicator”. The selection of “Indicators” and the level of “Weighting” are very much value judgements and a subjective process.

It appears to this Community that the selection of “Indicators” and related “Weightings” were established to ensure an outcome of the Option Appraisal exercise which would support the Highland Council Amalgamation Agenda, an example is the cost (estimated at £614,000) of providing temporary accommodation during construction of new facilities at Maryburgh is of greater significance in the Option Appraisal than all safety issues.

An Amalgamated School will undoubtedly serve the communities but there is insufficient evidence to support the decision that it is Best Value, the Option Appraisal is incomplete and appears to be flawed in content and structure – it is, in the considered opinion of the representatives of Maryburgh, not a good basis for decision making.

The community has been informed that if it wishes to challenge the content of the Option Appraisal and to challenge the decision of the Education, Culture & Sport Committee that the four Local Councillors have been advised not to support the community in that challenge.

## **WARD 9 – PRIMARY SCHOOL PROVISION - 20th August 2009**

### **Maryburgh & Conon Bridge Option Appraisal**

#### **Matters of Concern for Discussion on Thursday 23<sup>RD</sup> July**

The Scope, Procedures and Report of the H.C. Option Appraisal exercise have given cause for concern and for criticism by the community of Maryburgh.

The causes for concern relate to a number of issues which have been identified for a period well in excess of five years - it was the expectation that ALL such issues would be addressed in the Option Appraisal.

The community is particularly critical in respect of communication and representation issues throughout the Option Appraisal exercise.

In reviewing the Option Appraisal, relevant reference documents are:

- Corporate Asset Management Plan – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Highland Schools Program 2003
- Option Appraisal – Building our Future: Scotlands School Estate. Published by Scottish Executive 2004
- H.C. Report ECS/44/05 Outcome of Consultation Maryburgh & Conon Bridge PS August 2005
- Option Appraisal: Primary School Provision Maryburgh & Conon Bridge prepared and issued by Mr Steve Westbrook July 2006
- Safeguarding our Rural Schools & Improving School Consultation Procedures. Published by Scottish Government in 2008
- Draft Supplementary Guidance: Education & New Residential Developmant. Issued by H.C. in May 2009
- The Local Plan
- Enquiry Document issued by H.C. inviting pre-qualified consultants to quote for project work to produce an Option Appraisal for the development of Maryburgh & Conon Bridge Primary Schools. Document issued 10<sup>th</sup> October 2008
- The tender Document from Caledonian Economics Limited submitted in October and amended on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2008
- The Option Appraisal Report prepared by Caledonian Economics and issued in May 2009
- The dossier of correspondence between M.C.C. and H.C relating to questions and comments – (all as issued).

The Questions which M.C.C. wish to submit to the Ward 9 Councillors and Officials are:

1. Does H.C. have a strategy for the future development of Primary School provision throughout Ward 9 i.e. inclusive of Mulbuie & Ferintosh?
2. Does the H.C have a strategy for the retention of Rural Schools? Is Maryburgh classified as a rural School? With reference to the Scottish Government publication “Safeguarding Our Rural Schools” (Section 39), what category would Maryburgh be designated? It is recognised that this is a draft document but as such gives guidance on best practice and, if adopted, would give a presumption against closure of Maryburgh
3. Has the H.C. undertaken a Condition Survey (roadway and pavements) of the road from Maryburgh roundabout to the Conon Bridge School site? If so can a copy be given to M.C.C.?
4. Has the H.C. undertaken a Traffic Survey of the road through Conon Bridge and Maryburgh – does the survey include projected figures associated with the Amalgamated school traffic? Does the Traffic Survey also take into account the increased heavy traffic arising from the weight restriction imposed by Highland Council on Moy Bridge - this additional heavy traffic includes transport associated with timber extraction and bus routes. If the survey has been completed can a copy be given to M.C.C.?
5. Has the H.C. undertaken a Risk Assessment for pedestrian / cyclist traffic on the road through Maryburgh & Conon Bridge? If the assessment has been undertaken can a copy of the report be gicen to M.C.C.?

6. What are the Asset Disposal proposals relating to Maryburgh P.S. facilities? This issue has significant implications on Cost and on Community Impact and does not appear to be considered in the Option Appraisal.
7. What are the financial implications (Accountancy treatment) for the “write off” of the n.b.v. of Conon Bridge P.S?
8. Why was the option of retaining Pre-school and Infant provision in Maryburgh (3 year to 6 year old) not considered as a derivative of the Amalgamation Option?
9. Why was the Modular Construction method not considered for all new build facilities both at Conon Bridge and Maryburgh?
10. What figures have been used in the Option Appraisal for the potential provision of residential developments in Maryburgh (number / type / rate)?
11. What provision of Community Facilities is incorporated in the proposed Amalgamated School?
12. How will the Community Facilities be funded?
13. Who will manage the Community Facilities?
14. When will the drawings of the proposed Amalgamated and Autonomous Schools be provided to the Communities?
15. Is the Capital Budget under review? What is the anticipated completion date?

In view of:

- The above questions
- The questions and concerns raised in the correspondence between M.C.C & H.C. in the period 27<sup>th</sup> April to 8<sup>th</sup> June (all as issued).

what amendments / additions / revisions do the Ward 9 Councillors consider to be necessary to the H.C. Option Appraisal Report including change to the CEL Indicator matrix? What do the Councillors understand to have been the purpose of the Option Appraisal Exercise?

**Q&A Sheet for 23 July 2009**

**Notes of Meeting 23 July 2009**

