

REPORT ON THE CONSULTATIONS RESPONSE TO THE SECONDARY ADMISSIONS REVIEW

Section 1 Executive Summary

Wokingham Borough Council conducted a first set of consultations in the first part of the Autumn Term 2010 about possible changes to the secondary admissions scheme from September 2012. This report, written by an external consultant, describes and details the response to the consultation. The consultant has added a commentary on the key points raised and makes recommendations at the end.

There was a substantial response to the consultation with nearly one thousand on line responses, several petitions totalling nearly three thousand signatures and 144 separate written responses. There was some criticism about the nature of the consultation process.

There were three main components to the consultation.

Firstly proposals to simplify the oversubscription criteria by deleting the linked primary school and single sex/coeducational factors. There was a majority but not a decisive one in favour of deletion and therefore the recommendation is that these deletions be included in the admissions consultation for entry to school in September 2012.

Secondly there were proposals for a new shared area for Maiden Erlegh and Bulmershe encompassing an area defined as Earley/Lower Earley. This would have meant the transfer of Park Ward in Reading to the sole designated area for Bulmershe. There was strong feeling both for and against this proposal. Overall there was a large majority in favour but a forcefully argued case against. There was also significant concern from those in Lower Earley who currently are in the designated area for Holt and Forest Schools. The proposed shared area had a possible excess of demand for the places available at Maiden Erlegh and two variations for reducing the area within Wokingham borough were the subject of specific consultation. These possible deletions were supported.

The third set of proposals centred on a proposal to create a shared designated area for the whole of the south of the Borough which contains two co educational and two single sex schools. Bulmershe would no longer be a shared designated area school for the former Ryeish Green area. The proposal received majority support but there was a high level of "unsure" expressions of view. The "no change" option was decisively rejected. As there is a possibility that not all the implications of the proposal are fully understood there will need to be a further set of intensive consultations. There was some concern from those in the Shinfield area about the distance they have to travel to school.

Overall the first set of consultations support the desirability of consulting formally on changes to the “2012” scheme. The recommendations at the end of this report ask for a decision on how to achieve a better balance of places for the shared DA for Maiden Erlegh and Bulmershe and some options are discussed including a different tie breaker than radial distance. A separate report from Wokingham officers will make a response to these recommendations.

Section 2-Introduction

1-This report sets out the responses to the first stage of public consultations on possible changes to the admissions scheme for secondary schools in Wokingham. The report will cover the level of responses, the main arguments used for and against proposals and suggestions for changes. The report will also review the issues raised and suggest, if required, possible amendments to the proposals for further consideration and, if necessary, further consultation.

2-This report will first be submitted to the Admissions Forum on 23 November and then with their comments to the Executive. The Council will then decide which proposals should be included in the statutory consultation process for the September 2012 admissions scheme.

Section 3-Context

1-The admissions scheme for secondary schools was inherited from Berkshire County Council and has not been reviewed for 28 years. Since then there has been substantial housing development in the Borough, which has altered the pattern of admissions. In 2010 Ryeish Green finally closed after ceasing entries in 2006 as it had been undersubscribed for many years and its intakes were affected further by the success of the John Madjeski Academy in Reading. In 2009 The Schools Adjudicator commented that an admissions review was necessary in West Wokingham in rejecting a complaint from parents in Lower Earley. Further major housing developments are being planned including a proposal to relocate Emmbrook to Arborfield and these changes would require changes to admission arrangements. Wokingham secondary schools are successful and all but two are fully subscribed each year.

2-In February 2010 the Council engaged an external consultant Mr Steve Clarke to undertake a secondary admissions review and report to a project Steering group and a Review Board of key stakeholders including head teachers, governors, neighbouring local authorities, Diocesan and parent’s representatives. The project steering group and Review Board was chaired by Mr Alan Parker who co authored the report.

3-The Review Board approved their joint report and the Council included it in their consultation. The recommendations for changes are listed in each section of this report with the comments received.

4-The external consultant was not involved in the consultation and the Council has engaged him to analyse the responses, provide a professional analysis of the points made and draft this report. Where the consultant has made a comment these are in italics. The report will be submitted to the Admissions Forum on 23 November and the Executive on (date). Designated areas are shortened to DA throughout this report.

Section 4-Consultation

1-The Council began consultations at the start of term with a response date of 31 October 2010. The consultation method included:

- A leaflet sent to every primary school parent
- Notification of the review to every key stakeholder group including schools, Dioceses, local authorities. Town and Parish Councils and the MPs.
- A comprehensive set of documents on the Council website including the review report, the leaflet, and minutes of the project review board. Further information was added during review including 11 pages of "Frequently Asked Questions" and responses.
- An online response facility
- Two well attended public meetings

2-There was also high profile media coverage including BBC South Today and the local press. There were local campaigns in support and in opposition to the proposed changes to the Maiden Erlegh Designated area, in particular by a Park Ward Parents Campaign Group who has submitted a lengthy submission and a Green Party draft letter of key points to make. In favour of change "In Touch" the local Conservative Party group raised a petition.

Section 5-Level of Response

1-The consultation generated a significant response. There were nearly a thousand responses to the online survey and 144 individual submissions. There were several petitions with about three thousand signatures in total, some of which will be the same people who replied to the other means of communication.

2-There was a low response by school governing bodies. Only one other local authority (Reading: the most affected) made a response although others had been involved in the review group.

3-Compared with the total number of year R to Year 5 children in the designated areas of the six secondary schools likely to be most affected –

about 6000 households-this response rate represents a minority of the potential respondents. However for consultations of this kind it was a **substantial** response. The arguments for and against change for the Earley/Lower Earley/Park Ward area were articulated clearly with force and passion and the reviewer is left in no doubt of the strength of feeling on both sides of the argument. **The Council will want to consider** whether it can use the level of consultation response as a relevant factor in the decisions it makes.

4-When this report deals with the proposed changes to the Wokingham Town /south of the Borough area the questions will be raised as to whether the implications were understood. There is a limited number of individual submissions and a high number of “unsure” responses.

5-The further period of consultation required for admission scheme changes will need to be intensive in this area so that the potential implications are clearly understood.

6-Respondents were able to give comments in the *online survey* and a large number did so. Many used that facility to support/explain their views on particular propositions. A smaller number also wrote separately with detailed arguments on the issues raised either in letter form or by email. Codifying these comments in a scorecard is more difficult as some comments are part questions part comment and the comments often appear at variance with the recorded answer to the question. A description code of a “few” (under 5 recorded comments) several (under 10) a significant number (10-50) and a large number (over 50) is used to differentiate the volume of comments made. Where respondents wrote several times to different people making similar points this is recorded as one submission. For ease of clarity these separate responses are called “*written submissions*”

Section 6-General comments about the consultation

1-A numbers of critical comments were made about the consultation process with the greatest level of criticism from those in the Park Ward area. However a number of parents outside this area commented separately on the process in particular that the report and consultation document was not in plain English and the options/consultation questions were unclear.

Comments included:

- The external consultant should have conducted local consultations in the Park Ward area before coming up with a proposal (*comment: this was outside his terms of engagement*)
- The maps used were unclear
- There was in practice a lack of opportunity for Park Ward parents to have been a parent representative on the Admissions Forum and therefore the Review Board

- Question 6 on the response form was misleading as parents in Park Ward believe themselves to be part of Earley In other words apparent support for the proposed change may in fact have been intended as support for the status quo (*Q6 reads That a new shared designated area should be created for Maiden Erlegh based on Earley and Lower Earley*)
- There was no status quo option
- The leaflet was issued after the web document and this may have reduced response levels
- The questionnaire was poorly framed
- The review report was not in plain English and was written for the review Board, not for consultation (*the review report was written with the Review Board/Council as the intended audience*)
- There was confusion about what constituted Earley and Lower Earley
- The brief of the Review Board did not include the effect on Reading parents
- The brief should have included school organisation changes such as making Forest School co-educational
- The 5.30pm start to the public meetings created problems of attendance for those who worked
- The consultation should have been available in minority languages at the start of the review and the minority language communications were issued towards the end of the review
- The report summarising the review should not be undertaken by Wokingham Borough Council and should be written independently (*this has now been commissioned*).

2-The Council will want to consider whether these perceived shortcomings invalidate or affect any of the findings. *The most serious appears to be the alleged ambiguity about question 6 as this could invalidate the scoring.* The consultant did not take part in the consultations and the Council will want to examine the strength of this point in the context of local campaigns, which probably helped to illustrate the effect of actual responses on question 6.

Section 7-General Comments made about the review

1- Timeframe: A significant number of respondents (although still a minority) felt that the proposal to implement in 2012 was too rushed and implementation should take place over a longer period. The longest suggested was ten years (as there would be sufficient school places up to then). The Park Ward Parents Campaign group said that if the Council was minded to proceed, implementation should take place after 4 years allowing current Key Stage 2 children to have the same admissions scheme as before. "This would also allow time to invest in Bulmershe to raise standards, open a new school in East Reading and address the coeducational issue with Holt and Forest."

2-A significant number of respondents stated that the issue would not be so difficult to resolve if the Council had not closed Ryeish Green removing a school accessible to Lower Earley and the west of the Borough. Several parents in the Shinfield\Spencer Wood area felt strongly that they came last in the admissions process, as there was no local school south of the borough.

3- A significant number commented that the perceived gap between the performance of Bulmershe /Emmbrook and Maiden Erlegh still appeared to be very wide and the Council had not taken action on the Adjudicator's recommendation that the Council should close this gap. For some this was the first step the Council should take.

4- the question of increasing the number of preferences from three to four was not included in the online response as officers felt this would automatically receive support. Several respondents however felt that the current close match between demand and places meant that in practice they had very little choice. One respondent asked for five preferences.

5-The issue of the borough boundary featured high in online and written responses. Those from the Reading side of the boundary felt that "artificial" demarcation lines should not be a factor in the drawing of designated areas. A significant number of Wokingham parents felt that Wokingham schools should be for Wokingham children.

6-A significant number of respondents stated that they had made a conscious decision to move into the designated area for Maiden Erlegh school or the Holt school in order to gain access to an outstanding school and that it would be unfair of the Council to change the DA. A smaller number explicitly referred to the effect on house prices.

It has never been enshrined in law that parents should expect to be able to purchase a school place for their child and that residence in a designated area should guarantee admission. Indeed the School Admission Code explicitly rules out any such expectation, which would of course be entirely inconsistent with equal opportunities. **The Council should not have regard to the" purchase of a house/house prices argument" in consideration of the issues.**

7-There was significant concern about possible Academy status for one or more schools and whether any assurance or agreements made in this review would be honoured. Possible changes to academy status were one of the highest levels of comment in the comment section of Q4 of the consultation document. A few suggested this was a reason for delaying the review.

Section 8-Consultation responses on admission criteria

1-The review proposed two significant changes to the oversubscription criteria, namely the deletion of the criteria for linked schools between primary and secondary and the ability to express a preference for a single sex or co

educational school if it was outside the applicant's designated area. On the face of it these are both desirable criteria but in practice the relatively low priority given to these factors in the admissions scheme has meant that they had little practical effect when a school was heavily oversubscribed and no relevance if there were sufficient places. It was uncertain whether the complexities of the argument would be communicated effectively in a consultation.

2-There were relatively few separate *written submissions* on these questions. One of the most significant was from **Forest School** objecting to the loss of the Single sex criterion. The Governors recognised that although it was not frequently applied at the moment it was "a major factor for many families especially certain ethnic cultures" and the effect was masked by other criteria. The school felt that parents should have a choice on gender as boys "perform better than boys in local coeducational schools." **Barkham Parish Council** opposed the deletion of the single sex criterion as this would reduce parental preference and "in many ways children perform better academically at single sex schools." in the online comment section four requests were made to retain the single sex criterion. The WBC Liberal Democrat Group wrote to say that they opposed the deletion of this criterion, as it was "extremely important to some parents".

3-Linked school criterion: The Piggott school wrote to say

Piggott School proposes to retain linked schools in its oversubscription criteria whatever the decision of the LA in respect of controlled and community schools. We believe that children attending our linked schools should be given priority over all other applicants after catchment children and siblings have been accommodated. This is because we believe that the benefit to such children of being able to move school with their friends can be significant and is not matched by any equivalent benefit in respect of other children. That is the whole point of having criteria other than distance; grouping children according to the potential benefit of their being given a place. We recognise that the benefit depends upon there being significant numbers of children from the linked schools moving on to the same secondary schools, which is true in respect of our school. We believe that the arguments against having linked schools put during the consultation (potential abuse and confusion) are wholly theoretical; we have seen no evidence during the many years that WBC has had linked schools of abuse or confusion. The LA argued that the significant numbers of children allocated under this criterion in recent years would have been offered places at the school anyway. We have seen no evidence to support this but even if it is true, that does not mean that it will remain so in the future, particularly given the likely tightening of capacity in comparison with demand.

4- The WBC Liberal Democrat Group opposed the deletion as it aided transition to secondary school and kept pupils together. One Finchampsted parent also wrote to object to the loss of the linked school criterion. In the online survey comment section there were several responses asking for the linked school criterion to be retained.

5-Transitional protection: This was a significant area of comment in the online survey. Some asked for clarification-did it apply to siblings of sixth formers (*yes as phrased*) did it apply for more than one year of the scheme? (Yes), did it apply if the sibling had left (*no*), did it apply to twins (*yes*). One also asked if transitional protection applied to the single sex schools if the sibling was of a different gender (*no*). Most concern centred on whether the protection would

be honoured if a school became an Academy with its own powers over admissions. The WBC Liberal Democrat Group supported the transitional arrangement. *(Comment:the questions underline the need to phrase this “protection of entitlement” more precisely).*

6--Nearest school

A number felt that the key criterion should be the nearest or local school or one within walking distance rather than designated area. In section 13 below the consultant comments that it is simply impossible for everyone to get their nearest school and that a set of principles is required to establish who can be admitted. Three respondents said those furthest away from their nearest school should be given priority if those closer to their nearest school had a closer alternative school (the “next nearest” principle). This is discussed further below.

7-Other comments

There was a number of wide ranging comments which were only made by small numbers including “all siblings should have priority”, “travel routes should be used rather than radial distance”, a “lottery” was better than radial distance, “length of time in the feeder school/designated area” should be taken into account” etc.

8-The on line survey results are as follows:

Q1	That the oversubscription criteria are reduced by the deletion of the linked schools criterion.		
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	245 (24.8%)	
	<i>Agree</i>	226 (22.9%)	
	<i>Disagree</i>	132 (13.4%)	
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	199 (20.2%)	
	<i>Unsure</i>	184 (18.7%)	

Q2	That the oversubscription criteria are reduced by the deletion of the single sex/coeducational schools criterion.		
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	212 (22.0%)	
	<i>Agree</i>	237 (24.6%)	
	<i>Disagree</i>	139 (14.4%)	
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	130 (13.5%)	
	<i>Unsure</i>	247 (25.6%)	

Q3	That siblings living in existing designated areas in the year before the area changes should continue to have priority, through a transitional criterion.		
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	360 (36.6%)	
	<i>Agree</i>	307 (31.2%)	
	<i>Disagree</i>	71 (7.2%)	
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	181 (18.4%)	
	<i>Unsure</i>	64 (6.5%)	

9-Comment: For Questions 1 and 2 there is a significant unsure score and neither proposition is supported by a majority. The view could be taken that if the unsure respondents are eliminated there is a clear lead for both propositions which should be a **sufficient endorsement** to include them in the next round of consultations.

For Q3 there is an **absolute majority** for the proposed transitional protection.

Section 9 Proposed changes to the Maiden Erlegh/Bulmershe Designated Areas

1-This has proved to be the most controversial change as it created a shared designated area for Maiden Erlegh and Bulmershe based on an entity called Earley/Lower Earley as defined on a map. The new shared area would incorporate areas previously in the sole designated areas for Bulmershe and Holt /Forest and remove the sole designated status to Maiden Erlegh for Park Ward in Reading which would be transferred to the sole designated area for Bulmershe School.

2-Bulmershe would have a reduced sole designated area but it would comprise W Woodley and East Reading. It would be geographically coherent whereas its current areas are disparate and, to the south of the M4, shared with Emmbrook.

3-Objections to the proposals came from two main areas:

- 1- The Park Ward area of East Reading which was being transferred from Maiden Erlegh to Bulmershe
- 2- The SE of Lower Earley which is currently in the DA for Holt /Forest (dealt with in Section 11 below)

4-Transfer of Park Ward to the designated area for Bulmershe

5-Reading Borough Council requested that Wokingham preserve the existing DA for Maiden Erlegh for these reasons:

- Reduction in choice for those living in the Alfred Sutton DA
- The longer journeys forced on pupils who currently live close to the school

- The splitting of the Whiteknights primary DA and therefore separate destinations at secondary transfer

6-If it is not possible to retain the current DA the Borough made three suggestions:

- 1- Creation of a shared DA between Maiden Erlegh and Bulmershe including the current Reading area with the tie breaker based on the middle of the DA
- 2- Extending the DA for Bulmershe further into Reading
- 3- Allocating the residential area of Lower Earley into the DA for Emmbrook

7-The Park Ward Parents Campaign Group made several objections to the proposal

- Park Ward residents will have their Secondary School options reduced to one school, namely Bulmershe
- Maiden Erlegh is the nearest school for the vast majority of Park Ward residents (the submission provides details of this and the difficult walking route to Bulmershe)
- Park Ward children should be treated equally with Wokingham children
- Park Ward parents have made” a proactive educated decision to be in the Maiden Erlegh catchment area and have played an active role at Maiden Erlegh”
- Park Ward has a very diverse socio-economic\ demographic profile and the consultant does not appear to have researched this
- If any changes are made they should not be made for four years
- The proposed DA for ME has too many pupils and would still mean Lower Earley children would have to travel whereas the existing DA is in balance
- There is no immediate need to change DAs and the existing DA should be retained

8-The detailed submission has additional arguments:

- It disputes that Park Ward is as advantaged as Lower Earley.
- The Park Ward area north of Wilderness road is part of Earley
- The Wokingham proposal is in breach of the Greenwich judgement as the new DA is drawn up along the Borough boundary

9-Robert Wilson, MP for Reading East opposed the proposal on these grounds: It ‘removes any substantial choice of secondary school from...Park Ward.’ Distance to school for them would be lengthened and the proposal divided the community in Earley. Parents had supported Maiden Erlegh actively for many years. If not the status quo “at the very least any proposal should be for a shared catchment area” which allowed choice.

10-The Earley Rise Residents' Association opposed the proposals as they were "discriminatory", on a "deeply flawed" basis and they did not offer a genuine solution to the problem. The local Green Party Councillor Cllr White also wrote in opposition.

11-Those responding to the online survey also gave comments which supported the arguments given above. In all 224 comments were given by those who disagreed with Q6

12 -The largest number of individual submissions (43) was made by parents in the Park Ward area. Those making individual submissions have probably also responded to the online survey but the time and trouble people have made to write separately and often at length is an indicator of strength of feeling. The arguments advanced were similar to those made by the Park Ward Parents Campaign group and were also argued with force and intensity. The respondents felt Wokingham was discriminating against their area because it was under the control of another Council and they were being unjustly penalised. There was a lack of confidence that Bulmershe could offer the same quality of education as Maiden Erlegh. Almost all either proposed the status quo or that Park Ward is included in the shared area proposed for Maiden Erlegh and Bulmershe (*comment - on radial distance most would gain admission and a fewer number in Lower Earley could be admitted*).

13- Some separate individual variations were suggested but none of these was put forward by a large number of people . For example two respondents proposed that Maiden Erlegh increase it's intake by becoming a 11-16 school with post 16 going to a Sixth Form College.

14-One Park Ward parent made the proposal that the tiebreaker by radial distance to Maiden Erlegh should be altered by taking into account the distance to the alternative school, Bulmershe. The formula would be radial distance from Bulmershe School minus radial distance from Maiden Erlegh School with those with the higher score being admitted to Maiden Erlegh. The respondent produced a worked example. *On this formula all from South and South West Lower Earley would be admitted (and some of Park Ward) and East Earley closer to Loddon Bridge would be excluded.*

15-The principle of considering distance to the next nearest school was one of the options considered briefly by the Review Board. It is a principle, which has been adopted by some Counties for part of their area. This report will review again the shared recommended DA for Maiden Erlegh and whether distance to the alternative school should be a factor in defining the DA.

16-The Vicar of Earley St Peters wrote in to say that the community of Earley extended much wider than the definition of the proposed shared DA and political boundaries did not feel so "on the ground"

17-Support for Proposal

By a large margin there was greater on line support for a shared DA for Maiden Erlegh and Bulmershe as defined in the consultation. This is reflected in the on line survey and the number of signatures on the petitions but, of course Earley/Lower Earley is a much larger area than for example Park Ward. In the online survey most of the 199 comments were in support of Q6. There were 33 individual submissions, broadly in support with some making additional comments.

18-The main arguments from respondents are that they feel Maiden Erlegh is their local school and is within walking distance. The current DA school for many, Bulmershe, is much further away requiring transport and they have to pass Maiden Erlegh to get to it. Going to Bulmershe is a much longer journey than it would be for those currently in the DA.

19-Earley Town Council “unanimously” supported the Earley/Lower Earley option as defined in the consultation. (Question 6)

20-John Redwood, MP for Wokingham wrote to say that he supported the revised DA, which would include the whole of Lower Earley. “This makes sense for a number of reasons, not least because it would allow more children to walk to school which in turn would relieve traffic congestion in the area. It would also help create a greater sense of community if more students from the immediate area attended Maiden Erlegh School”.

21-The WBC Liberal Democrat Group did not agree or disagree with questions 5-8. Cllr Deegan wanted to explore the option of keeping the Holt/Forest DA in Lower Earley at least in the short term. Secondly that the option of increasing Maiden Erlegh by 30 pupils a year should be explored. *(Comment: this was outside the terms of the review as the accepted view is that the Maiden Erlegh site is already overdeveloped and vehicular access is already an issue.)*

22-The online and petition response is as follows

Q5	That a new designated area should be created for The Bulmershe School? This will comprise its existing areas with the addition of the Whiteknights area and University of Reading campus and the deletion of the shared designated area with Emmbrook south of the M4.		
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	410 (42.0%)	
	<i>Agree</i>	189 (19.3%)	
	<i>Disagree</i>	47 (4.8%)	
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	236 (24.2%)	
	<i>Unsure</i>	95 (9.7%)	

Q6	That a new shared designated area should be created for Maiden Erlegh and Bulmershe based on Earley/Lower Earley.		
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	416 (42.4%)	

		<i>Agree</i>	153 (15.6%)
		<i>Disagree</i>	73 (7.4%)
		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	238 (24.3%)
		<i>Unsure</i>	101 (10.3%)

Q7	That the area north of Wokingham Road and south of the Wokingham-Reading railway should be deleted from the proposed Maiden Erlegh area.		
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	344 (35.2%)
		<i>Agree</i>	177 (18.1%)
		<i>Disagree</i>	91 (9.3%)
		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	184 (18.8%)
		<i>Unsure</i>	181 (18.5%)

Petitions

	Format	Text	Signatures
A	Petition	<p>“We the undersigned note the plans of Wokingham Borough Council to change the Catchment area of Maiden Erlegh School to exclude children currently attending Alfred Sutton Primary.</p> <p>We do not agree with this plan and request that Wokingham review this decision and leave Alfred Sutton School within the catchment area for Maiden Erlegh School.”</p>	555
B	Petition	<p>WE the undersigned as residents of Earley call on Wokingham Borough Council to accept Proposal 1 of the consultation put forward by the independent Schools Advisory Forum, as set out above, to include the Wards of Maiden Erlegh, Hawkedon and Hillside in Maiden Erlegh catchment area.</p>	1956
E	Letter	<p>“As a resident of Lower Earley, I strongly agree with the proposed changes to the secondary school designated areas.”</p>	110

F	Letter	<p>As a resident of Lower Earley, I support the proposed changes to the secondary school designated areas.</p> <p>In particular, I support the inclusion of much more of Lower Earley and Earley in the designated area for Maiden Erlegh School.</p> <p>The current arrangements which mean that residents of Lower Earley often have to send their children to a school much further away than their local school are clearly not in the best interests of the environment or the Lower Earley population in general.</p>	111
H	Petition	<p>“We the undersigned urge Wokingham Borough Council to take this opportunity to amend the secondary schools catchment areas for the Cutbush and Hillside districts of Lower Earley, so that children may attend Maiden Erlegh, their local secondary school, and no longer have to travel past it to a school further away, Bulmershe.”</p>	14

It will be seen that there is a clear majority in favour of both proposals but the disagree vote is still substantial.

Section 10: Possible Variations to the Shared Area

1-The anticipated number of applicants in Earley/Lower Earley is likely to exceed the places available and two variations to reduce the mismatch were suggested.

2-**Q7** dealt with the area north of Wokingham Road and south of Wokingham-Reading railway, which generates about 11 pupils a year at year 7. It is currently in the Bulmershe DA. The argument for including the area in the DA is that it is clearly part of Earley (it contains Earley railway station), and vehicle access to Bulmershe can only be made at either end of the DA. There is pedestrian access at Earley Station across the railway and the dual carriageway A3290 but probably a route which parents would feel unsure about their children using in winter.

3-Earley Town Council supported its retention. About 8 on line survey responses explicitly asked for the area to be included in the shared DA. One individual letter expressing support for retention was received. One letter and one online response opposed its inclusion, as pupils did not have to pass Maiden Erlegh on the way to Bulmershe.

4-**Q8** dealt with the small triangle of land north of Wilderness Road, which is in Hillside Ward in Wokingham and produces about 8 children a year. The retention of this area in the shared DA was argued by ease of access to Maiden Erlegh and the close identity with the school and the area. Both Earley Town Council and John Redwood MP supported the retention of this

area in the new shared DA. There were 16 comments in the on line survey asking for it be retained in the Maiden Erlegh DA. One letter was opposed to including this area “as it is far away from Maiden Erlegh”.

5-A Petition was submitted supporting retention

C	Petition	<p>We the undersigned as residents of Earley call on Wokingham Borough Council to accept Proposal 1 of the consultation put forward by the independent Schools Advisory Forum, as set out above, to include the Wards of Maiden Erlegh, Hawkedon and Hillside in Maiden Erlegh catchment area.</p> <p>i.e. including the area of Hillside ward bounded by Pepper Lane, Elm Road and Leighton Park School</p>	115
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6-The online response was as follows:

Q7	That the area north of Wokingham Road and south of the Wokingham-Reading railway should be deleted from the proposed Maiden Erlegh area.		
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	344 (35.2%)	
	<i>Agree</i>	177 (18.1%)	
	<i>Disagree</i>	91 (9.3%)	
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	184 (18.8%)	
	<i>Unsure</i>	181 (18.5%)	

Q8	That the area bounded by Shinfield Road, Pepper Lane and Elm Road should be deleted from the proposed Maiden Erlegh area.		
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	333 (33.7%)	
	<i>Agree</i>	127 (12.9%)	
	<i>Disagree</i>	88 (8.9%)	
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	250 (25.3%)	
	<i>Unsure</i>	189 (19.1%)	

7-Analysing the implications of this result is not straightforward as any larger area can outvote a smaller area (as with Q6). The consultant reviews the proposed DA in his conclusion.

Section 11: The Holt/Forest issue in Earley/Lower Earley

1-Part of the South East section of Lower Earley is currently in the DA for Holt /Forest. There is no obvious geographical logic in this but must have arisen as the new estate was being built. There is now an established pattern of transfer from this area to the single sex schools, which reflects the good reputation of both schools.

2-No question about this specific area was put in the consultation but 16 separate submissions were received expressing concern about the loss of access to Holt/Forest under the proposals. 16 is a significant number in this context. A number of online comments also raised the issue. The respondents foresaw a situation whereby they lost their access to Holt/forest and would not gain admission to Maiden Erlegh under the radial principle rule. Their only effective choice would then be Bulmershe, which was seen as a less attractive option, and they would therefore prefer to remain linked to Holt/Forest.

3-The Governing Body of Forest School wrote to express concern at the loss of this area if no other compensatory proposals were agreed for the school such as the shared area for South Wokingham described in section 12 below. Forest School estimates that up to 38 pupils a year could be lost to the school if this area was removed and not replaced.

4-Two Petitions were received

D	Petition	<p>“We the undersigned note the plans of Wokingham borough Council to change the catchment area of Lower Earley which will exclude us from our current catchment schools of Holt and Forest. This is the preference for many parents living in this area and the new Maiden Erlegh catchment area will not accommodate all children in catchment.</p> <p>We do not agree and request that Wokingham review this decision and we become part of the new Maiden Erlegh catchment whilst retaining Holt/Forest catchment”</p>	65
G	Petition	<p>“We the residents of Lower Earley ask for the new proposed Maiden Erlegh catchment of Lower Earley to also include the nearby Forest school, so the children of Lower Earley would be encouraged to attend one of their two most accessible schools</p>	8

5-Comment-There is a risk that the radial principle could exclude at least some in the South East and this argues for ensuring the proposed shared DA is in balance. This issue is returned to in Section 16.

Section 12

The area south of the Borough and Wokingham Town

1-The proposal in the consultation document is to create a shared designated area for the whole area from the western boundary with Reading and Hampshire to Bracknell Forest in the east with the northern boundary as the M4 and further east the River Loddon, a natural barrier. Tiebreakers to the 4 schools in Winnersh and Wokingham Town would be by radial distance with the exception that for the single sex schools it would be radial distance to either of the schools irrespective of gender. This would ensure Winnersh pupils still had access to the Holt. The shared area would not need revision if Emmbrook moved to Arborfield in the future. A pattern has already arisen that those in the west of the area travel to Emmbrook despite the distance.

2-The thinking behind the change was to increase choice as three of the four schools do not currently fill from their designated area and a shared area with a tie breaker of radial distance would provide a logical basis for deciding which pupils should be admitted if there was oversubscription. Currently the Holt School is almost isolated geographically from its designated area.

3 -The changes generated relatively few individual or school submissions and there was a high percentage of “unsure” recorded. This may be because the implications of the proposals were not understood or there was general acceptance of them. The consultation questions 10-12 were also less directly worded than for Q1-3 and 6-8 by the addition of the phrase “That consideration should be given...”

4-The consultant anticipates the effect of the changes as being:

- That Forest School can recruit with more legitimacy over a wider area
- That the heavily oversubscribed Holt School will draw more from Wokingham Town\Winnersh and less from rural areas
- That St Crispin’s and Emmbrook may, as a result, admit fewer children from Wokingham Town as more have an opportunity to chose single sex places; but they would be the main schools for the areas south and west of Wokingham Town for whom there would be increased choice.

5-On-line comments

About 230 wide ranging comments were made on these issues (87 For, 71 Against, 72 Unsure). A considerable number took the opportunity to repeat concerns about the Maiden Erlegh/Bulmershe proposals. A relatively small number foresaw the effect in paragraph 3 with some in support and some against (particularly those who could lose their access to the Holt.) There was a significant expression of feeling from those in Shinfield/Spencer’s Wood/Three Mile Cross who were concerned at the lack of any nearby

secondary school and they feared a long delay in carrying out the proposed relocation of Embrook to Arborfield. Some felt that the move should take place before admission arrangements changed. A number used identical wording to say that the arrangements were “not future proof as they failed to take into consideration the planned relocation of Emmbrook School.” One objected to the “arbitrary” use of Forest as one of the points for radial distance to the Holt.

6-Written submissions. Barkham Parish Council opposed the shared DA concept until such time as there is new secondary school in Arborfield and Barkham. Two letters from Finchampsted and one from Finchampstead Parish Council opposed the shared DA concept. One felt that rural families might not get into any school. Another that access to the Holt would be more difficult. The suggestion was made that a formal arrangement should be made with Hampshire for a designated area from the south of the area to that school. If not the proposal should await the opening of the new school at Arborfield.

7-Shinfield Parish Council opposed the proposal as “illogical” and did not meet the needs of a substantial swathe of the Borough. There was an “immediate need for secondary school places available in the West of the Borough” as so much new housing was being built/planned. The “South of the M4 Consortium” supported Q12 (“status quo”) until new housing and school relocation was clarified.

8-One parent felt that more time should be given for implementation, as the effects were uncertain.

9-The Governing Body of the Forest School supported the shared DA concept

“The arguments for this can be summarised as:

- All 4 schools currently work well together as evidenced through Federation collaboration, a behaviour and attendance partnership, shared courses at 14-19, emerging collaboration on procurement
- Logical in terms of communities
- Greater and more logical access to both single sex and co-educational schools than the current irrational provision
- Offers future proofing for the time when a new school is built in the south of the Borough and Emmbrook is closed”
- Could promote further collaboration between the four schools resulting in more cost-effective provision through shared courses and staffing and collaborative procurement
- Will aid The Forest in serving a better-defined community than the current Wokingham-wide scenario plus east Reading and Bracknell as the reality of its intake.

The Head teacher of Emmbrook School also wrote in a personal capacity supporting the shared DA concept. The WBC Liberal Democrat group supported the shared area DA.

10-Cllr Deegan felt that the DA for the Holt and the Forest need not be coterminous and this would recognise the different recruitment patterns to the two schools.

11-Online survey results

Q10	That consideration should be given to a shared designated area for all the four Wokingham Town/Winnersh schools.		
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	179 (18.6%)	
	<i>Agree</i>	204 (21.2%)	
	<i>Disagree</i>	104 (10.8%)	
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	175 (18.2%)	
	<i>Unsure</i>	301 (31.3%)	

Q11	That consideration should be given to a reduced designated area for the Holt/Forest.		
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	61 (6.3%)	
	<i>Agree</i>	113 (11.7%)	
	<i>Disagree</i>	166 (17.3%)	
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	270 (28.1%)	
	<i>Unsure</i>	352 (36.6%)	

Q12	That consideration should be given to the proposal that everything remains the same, except for the Lower Earley deletion and sole designated area status for Emmbrook south of the M4.		
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	117 (12.1%)	
	<i>Agree</i>	126 (13.0%)	
	<i>Disagree</i>	129 (13.3%)	
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	319 (33.0%)	
	<i>Unsure</i>	277 (28.6%)	

12-Comment

The answers to Q 11 and 12 seem decisive and there is support for change. The proposals in Q10 should be seen as endorsing further consultation as

part of the admissions review; but such consultation should be presented as a “fresh consultation” in which the principle has not been decided already.

Section 13

Principles for drawing up designated areas

Designated areas and the nearest school argument.

1. A significant number of respondents felt that they should be able to go to their nearest school and gave the impression that they did not understand why a designated area was being proposed that would prevent them from going to their nearest school.
2. It is accepted by the consultant that the original review report did not explain clearly enough the thinking behind designated areas and why it is impossible for everyone to go to their nearest school. If all schools were at the centre of their local populations, there was a perfect match between places and demand and there were no communications barriers everyone would be able to go to their local school and designated areas would not be necessary. Such a situation does not exist anywhere. In urban areas the surplus of places and close proximity of schools usually mean that distance can be a tiebreaker without creating “black holes” where no school within reach is available. In less urban areas where designated areas are used to prevent “black holes” the shape of the areas is often skewed to reflect natural barriers, communication routes and where people live. The consequence of that is that not everyone can go to their nearest school.
3. Those drawing up areas therefore have regard to natural barriers such as rivers and railways and natural communities (a concept admittedly easier to define for self-contained towns and villages than interlinked urban areas). Where choices have to be made about which areas should be in a designated area or not, the proposer of the DA will have regard to the **alternative school** pupils would have to go to in terms of *accessibility*, one of the key policy criteria Wokingham set out for the consultant.
4. In the case of West Wokingham, Maiden Erlegh is to the north of the Early/Lower Earley settlement and if radial distance was applied those living furthest to the south would be excluded. The question then to be asked is what is **the next nearest** alternative school - in this case Bulmershe - and the travelling distance to this is much further for Lower Earley residents than those currently in the designated area; and in particular for those to the north of the school. The consultant would therefore have recommended skewing the designated area to the south **irrespective** of the local authority boundary.
5. In the final section on recommendations the consultant will look at the next alternative school principle in assessing whether to vary the recommended area further.

Section 14 Comments on representations made in respect of the proposed Maiden Erlegh and Bulmershe proposed designated area

1-Park Ward Parents Campaign Group. The concerns of the respondents are recognised and are understandable. For many parents Maiden Erlegh is the nearest school and the journey to Bulmershe will be longer than at present. In theory Reading parents already have four preferences. Apart from the selective and restricted option of the grammar schools the situation at the moment is that Park Ward parents can choose between two co educational non-selective schools with places they are likely to get into whereas the certainty in the future is that only one nearby school can be certain to have places for them-in this regard they will not be in a different position from many children in Reading. (They are also within travelling distance of single sex schools with places).

2-The natural community argument: the boundaries of the Earley community are disputed and therefore open to debate and interpretation. It would be unwise to rely on this as the determining feature of a new DA. Other factors need to be considered. It is agreed that the proposals should not be framed to discriminate against Reading children or the socio-economic or ethnic characteristics of the area and this was not the intention of the original proposal.

3-Some of the other objections are matters of degree. Both areas are relatively advantaged compared with the national picture on the statistics supplied. The data used by objectors correctly shows that "Earley/Lower Earley" is significantly more advantaged than the Park Ward area of East Reading but both are above the national median. The consultant used the socio-economic map for Wokingham borough which is on the website and it was an omission not to list it in Annex A . The objectors made the valid point that Alfred Sutton Primary School has a high percentage of EAL pupils (and therefore the proposed change could be contrary to the Admissions Code.) A majority but not all of Alfred Sutton pupils transfer to Maiden Erlegh and a number of Reading parents gain admission under other criteria and the detailed impact is difficult to assess Wokingham officers will use PLASC and other information to make an impact assessment before final decisions are made. As already noted the proposed shared DA was based on logical criteria and Park Ward was not artificially excluded and therefore in the consultant's view the proposal is not contrary to the Code of Practice.

4-The point about the proposed shared DA for Maiden Erlegh having too many children for the places available was recognised in the original review report but is still well made and this is addressed in the recommendations.

*5-Quality of schools. An admissions scheme has to make arrangements for all schools and it is almost certain that there will be differences in quality (as measured by Ofsted) at any particular time. The reputation and performance of schools can change rapidly. Although there is a difference at the moment Bulmershe is judged to be improving and these perceptions could change.**An***

admissions scheme should be based on more objective criteria such as accessibility, which are unlikely to change significantly over time. All the Wokingham schools are satisfactory or better and even the lowest performing outperforms some schools in neighbouring boroughs.

6-The representations quote selectively from paragraph 77 in arguing that there is no need to change but not paragraph 79, which state, “most of the existing DAs are illogical and cannot be justified rationally”. The consultant will deal with timing of implementation issues at the end.

7-Reading Borough Council

The views of an elected neighbouring authority need to be particularly respected and the Borough has requested consideration of the status quo. However, as argued above, the current arrangements are illogical and unfair to those in Lower Earley.

8-The borough has asked for consideration of a shared DA for Maiden Erlegh including those currently in the DA and with a mid point centred on the middle of the DA. This is still likely to mean that those who currently have the furthest to travel will have to continue doing so.

9-The second suggestion of increasing the DA for Bulmershe to include more Wards in Reading is, in one sense, outside the terms of this review as the purpose is to relieve roll pressure in Reading. (The initial response from Wokingham officers is that Wokingham BC on behalf of Bulmershe would welcome applications from Reading parents. However there is such a close fit between demand and places in Wokingham that the Borough would not want to commit its remaining co educational places to an expanded Bulmershe DA in Reading.)

10-Holt/Forest DA changes in the Lower Earley area. The parents are naturally concerned about the proposed change and the new proposal would fail in its intent if it left Lower Earley children in the new DA unable to gain access to Maiden Erlegh. It would however be quite illogical to leave the current Holt/Forest DA as it is on a permanent basis.

Section 15 Comments on the representations made in respect of Wokingham Town and the South of the Borough

1-The concerns of the Governing body of Forest School are understood. It would be a perverse outcome of this review if a good school with spare places found itself disadvantaged by the outcome. Decisions on the DA for Lower Earley must be linked to the decisions on DAs in the south of the Borough.

2-The anxiety of parents in rural areas such as Finchampstead are understood as radial tie breakers will favour those living closest to the school in question. Overall the numbers indicate that there are sufficient places at the four schools to accommodate all Wokingham applicants from the proposed shared DA. Currently a number of parents opt for Yateley school and are free

to exercise choice. Earlier contact with Hampshire CC indicated that there is likely to be spare capacity in North Hampshire for this pattern to continue and the view of Wokingham officers is that a formal Designated Area request to Hampshire is not required. Wokingham officers have said they wish to review the issue of tie breakers to the single sex schools and one variation is that a pupil's distance to both schools (not just one of them) is taken into account.

Section 16 Possible revisions to the shared DA

1-Overall there was a strongly expressed majority view that there should be a shared DA encompassing the whole of Earley/Lower Earley (as defined in the consultation) with a difference of view about the variation areas. Any suggestion of reducing the Earley/Lower Earley DA further would be unpopular and would require a full consultation.

2-The original review report estimated that the demand from the Earley/Lower Earley area in the proposed shared DA was likely to be in the order of 310-315 pupils for the 278 places available but **there is no precision** about this figure - more parents could move into the area or other schools attract from the area. The probability therefore is that not all Lower Earley applicants could be admitted to Maiden Erlegh and those who lived furthest away would have to travel to Bulmershe and have the longest journey. There would be huge disappointment that this change had not delivered on its intention.

3-The Council has some options for resolving this dilemma:

- a) Introduce the new-shared area as proposed and review if there is still a problem for Lower Earley residents
- b) Reduce the size of the area by 1) removing the variation areas and 2) additional areas of Earley/Lower Earley (this is discussed below)
- c) Introduce a different tiebreaker than radial distance such as distance to the next nearest school

4-Option A runs the risk that not all will get in and parents will feel they have been let down by the Council. Another review is undesirable so soon after this one.

5-Option B is a serious option.

The consultations showed a majority for deleting the two "variation areas" but views on this are divided and there are insufficient pupils living there to close the gap. On the "distance to the next nearest school argument" the area between Wokingham Road and the railway (Q7) should be deleted. On Q8 the argument is more balanced as the whole of the areas is considerably further from Bulmershe than Park Ward.

6-Consideration could be given to a further reduction in the proposed shared DA to provide a closer balance between anticipated demand and places. A significant group of parents currently in the Lower Earley DA for Holt \Forest

would be pleased to have the status quo or a shared area with Maiden Erlegh but this would be illogical and against the principle of accessibility. It is not clear from the responses how many parents in the "Holt \Forest area" prefer the status quo, as the option was not put in this consultation.

7-The other area suggested for possible deletion (and be retained in the Bulmershe sole DA) is that currently in the DA for Bulmershe east of Mill Lane and towards Loddon Bridge. It contains about 25 pupils a year. On the next nearest school principle it is the nearest to Bulmershe by road routes. The area is centrally placed in the borough and currently many parents' access places in Winnersh and Wokingham Town.

8-Option C-A different tie breaker such as the distance to the next nearest school (Bulmershe)- is also a serious option and a good way of ensuring all have as reasonable a journey to school as possible. The option of a larger shared area is more possible with a different tie breaker. The tie breaker under consideration by Wokingham officers takes into account distance from Bulmershe School as well as Maiden Erlegh. The Council officers have produced a map, which shows which areas would be excluded first. Broadly speaking areas to the north and east of Maiden Erlegh would be more at risk of being "excluded".

9-The Council officers will make a recommendation on the way forward in an accompanying report on the proposals for the secondary admissions scheme 2012.

Section 17 Timing issues

A significant number felt there should be a longer period before the proposals were implemented. Some explicitly stated that they had moved to a particular DA in order to gain admission to that school for their child.

The proposals are interlocking in that it is not recommended that only one area be dealt with and not the other. The issue is whether to consult on implementation in 2012. There is a clear majority in these consultations to make changes. The next stage of Consultation would be related to the debate that has just taken place. The secondary schools have been involved in the discussions and have accepted the leadership role of the Council on this issue. More schools could become their own admission authority in another year.

Section 18 Recommendations

First to the Admissions Forum, which will advise the Council:

1-That consideration is given as to whether the process of consultation and level of consultation response is sufficiently large that the responses to the various propositions can be regarded as important factors in decision making (Section 5 of report)

2-That a view is given on whether the wording of Q 6 on Earley\Lower Earley was ambiguous to the point that the results cannot wholly be relied upon (Section 6)

If the answers to recommendations 1 & 2 are deemed valid:

3-That the deletion of the linked school oversubscription criterion be included in the next round of consultations on the admissions scheme for September 2012

4-That the deletion of the single sex/coeducational criterion be included in the next round of 2012 consultations

5-That siblings living in existing designated areas in the year before the area changes should continue to have priority through a transitional criterion and a more detailed articulation as to who this will be applied is included in the 2012 consultations

6-Depending on the view taken on recommendation 2, whether to create a new shared designated area for Maiden Erlegh and Bulmershe based on "Earley\Lower Earley" (as defined), or a larger or smaller area.

7-Consideration be given to the three options set out in section 16 on how to deal with the possible imbalance of demand and places in the proposed DA.

10-That a full consultation be undertaken on a shared designated area for all the four Wokingham Town/Winnersh Schools as part of the proposed admissions arrangements for 2012

Steve Clarke
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16.11.10