

CORPUSTY & SAXTHORPE PARISH COUNCIL

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Dear Chief Executive and Members of the Trust Board (referred to collectively with the Trust as 'Synergy'),

This letter is the response of the Corpusty and Saxthorpe Parish Council ('the PC') to the proposed closure of Corpusty Primary School.

In the consultation document ('the Document'), at 'K What alternatives (sic) options have been considered?', against 'Closure', the response 'Dismissed' is stated.

The document, at 'B' proposes two options only, amalgamation with either Gresham Village School and Nursery or Reepham Primary and Nursery School. A possible future life for the school buildings is proposed, and this is the justification for stating that 'Closure' is not an option. This is an exercise in semantics and the proposed removal of the primary school function should rightly be expressed as its proposed closure. This response will more accurately refer to Synergy's proposal in relation to the primary school as its proposed closure.

The PC wishes to place on record its deep sadness and disappointment at the proposed closure of Corpusty Primary School. We are saddened for the children who currently attend the school, for their families, for the dedicated staff who have supported pupils through often challenging circumstances, and for the village as a whole. A village primary school is a cornerstone of a rural community, and its loss significantly diminishes the long-term ability to sustain and grow that community.

The Document, at 2., states that 'the number of children attending Corpusty Primary School has reduced significantly, due to a reduction in the number children in catchment (sic).' This bald statement is at odds with the 'Numbers on Roll' data in that paragraph of the Document. This shows that in the 5 years from 2016/17 pupil numbers dropped from 100 to 30, a reduction of over two thirds. Synergy was responsible for the management of the school for almost this entire period.

At paragraph 3 of the Document, catchment data for future years is provided. No historical catchment data is provided, nor any explanation of why numbers dropped so dramatically during Synergy's period of management.

The PC states above: 'A village primary school is a cornerstone of a rural community, and its loss significantly diminishes the long-term ability to sustain and grow that community.' This

is all the more so as Corpusty and Saxthorpe are designated service villages in the Neighbourhood Plan and a Small Growth Village in the North Norfolk Local Plan. The PC observes that the catchment data predicts an increase to 44 for the year 2030/31. That is a significant increase from the current position, and does not or not adequately factor in the prospect of an increase in the number of houses in the village, a potential change to catchment or the 'pull factor', which previously existed, to attract children from outside the catchment area.

Current and projected numbers are similar to a number of other primary schools in North Norfolk, not all of which are based in 'service' or 'growth' villages. The PC does not understand why in these circumstances Synergy wishes to rush to closure of the primary school, rather than considering other options that would allow it to continue, and the PC hopes, thrive. The significance of the location of the school in a service/growth village is ignored in the Document.

The PC regards the pupil number projections at paragraph 5. of the Document as symptomatic of Synergy's managed decline of and lack ambition for the primary school.

At paragraph 6. of the Document Synergy seeks to head off arguments about possible additional pupils from the known building of 38 new homes in the village. The PC considers it likely that additional building and occupation of unoccupied houses is likely to further enhance the number of future potential pupils. This is a matter of conjecture, but against this background and the fact that it is policy to build more homes to meet an increasing population, the PC is highly sceptical about the projections contained in this paragraph of the Document. The North Norfolk Local Plan anticipates 67 new dwellings in Corpusty/Saxthorpe which would be expected to produce 19 additional primary school pupils as shown on the attached spreadsheet.

The PC is therefore disappointed to note that the consultation document presents the closure of the school as a fait accompli. The only options proposed are the amalgamation of the school with either of the schools at Reepham and Gresham. No consideration is given to the continuation of the primary school from its present site, and steps that can be taken to maximise the potential number of pupils that can be attracted to the school.

As the current and projected low numbers of primary school pupils is stated as justification for closure of the primary school, the PC is disappointed to see that no consideration is given to the shared use of the site, so as to attract greater funding. Historically the school site hosted a nursery school. The PC suggests that the option of reviving a nursery school should be considered. Also, if there is a demand for SEND provision, why should that not be alongside the primary school. As Synergy's figures demonstrate, the site has recently hosted more than 100 pupils. There is therefore obvious available capacity.

Against this background, the PC is strongly of the view, that the consultation has been commenced on an incomplete basis, as if the decision to close the school has already been

made. It is equally strongly of the view that the consultation should be redrawn, or at least continue by including the options referred to above, critically the option that the school remains open.

In closing, the PC urges those considering the responses to this consultation carefully to consider the wider and long-term impact of the proposed closure of the Corpusty Primary School on rural sustainability, community cohesion, and parental confidence in local education provision. The PC respectfully requests clear written responses to the points raised above as part of the consultation outcome.

Yours faithfully,

Corpusty and Saxthorpe Parish Council