



HOLY TRINITY CHURCH



21st March 2018

The South-West Edinburgh Schools Consultation

To whom it may concern

This letter comes from the ministers of the congregations in the four communities affected by the proposal to reshape the secondary school provision from Wester Hailes to Balerno, with the suggested closure of Currie Community High School and Wester Hailes Education Centre, the refurbishment of Balerno High School and the building of a new South-West Edinburgh High School at a location still to be determined (or is it revealed!)

The Churches and the City Council share a common aim; we are working to create flourishing communities. From our faith-based starting point, as community parish ministers, we and our congregations are working to try to ensure that our communities flourish, are happy places in which to live, and are places where the quality and value of life is high. The City of Edinburgh Council website says that: *"Our vision is that "Edinburgh in 2020 will be a low carbon, resource efficient city, delivering a resilient local economy and vibrant flourishing communities in a rich natural setting."* The notion of communities that flourish seems to be a common theme in council discussion and publications.

However, this School proposal is the latest in a series of blows to our communities, that contradicts the notion of "flourishing communities". None of the communities of Balerno, Currie or Juniper Green now has a local bank due to closures. As a result of this, some of the local shops have also begun to lose business. Wester Hailes likewise, aims to be recognised as a place where families and business can flourish. There has been exciting investment here in recent years. There is local pride in the school where attainment and attendance have seen incredible growth in comparison to many city schools. These achievements and the work they represent have not been mentioned at all in considerations for closing the school.

It is therefore alarming when the City Council presents a proposal that will further attack the notion of flourishing communities. There are two areas of concern:

First of all, the schools in our areas are at the heart of our communities. They serve our large populations of young people educationally and not least enhance our community wellbeing and health because of the well-used facilities beyond school hours. Should Currie Community High School be closed, the community of Currie will be seriously disadvantaged. There has been High School provision in Currie for a long time and many of the pupils who attend the present High School can walk to school – it is *their* local school! We understand that, no matter which option is finally settled, when Currie High School is closed, every secondary pupil in Currie will need to be transported by bus to their new school, be it Balerno or Baberton. The economic advantage to



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local shops of having the High School in the community will be lost; that will be a greater loss than has so far been estimated.

Secondly, we are concerned that the Council's tactics have been to set one local community against another. Will it be Balerno High School that will survive? Will it be at the expense of Currie? Or will there be a plan to reverse that situation and if Currie were to survive, will it be at the expense of Balerno? We understand that the City Council needs to take an over-view of the provision of secondary education across the city, but to set neighbouring communities against each other like this would only create and fuel long-standing resentments for what one gets and the other loses. If the new proposals go ahead, we, the Church leaders in the South-West believe firmly that all of the communities in the South-West area will be disadvantaged and diminished, and the notion of communities flourishing is given a serious setback.

It is our firm notion that all our communities are in this together, for the good of all and the well-being of our children and young. Given the fact that this is the year of the Young Person, it is the churches view that these proposals will actively disadvantage the young as well all active members of the area. The High Schools play such an important part in all of these communities both educationally and communally. There needs to be a solution to work together rather than be set against each other on this "divide and conquer" tactic employed by the City Council.

There are sound arguments for keeping the three existing High Schools open. We have not yet heard any sound educational arguments for closing one, two or more of the existing schools and creating a new one on an out-of-the-way site. We have heard lots of arguments about money and budgets, but nothing about the discomfort of the children and young people who will need to be bussed to school every morning, or the pupils of Woodlands school who have been forgotten in this whole process. Will they be made to move to a new site at Baberton or Balerno? WHEC has a sound and solid place in its community with lots of community resources and support around it, including the local church. Currie Community High School is the same, albeit in a different way. All of these existing support networks will be lost by the council's proposals and the school communities themselves will be seriously disadvantaged.

We hope and pray that the City Council will take note of these comments with regard to the provision of Secondary School education in the South West of Edinburgh. We long to see these communities flourish, but together with the loss of other local facilities, we fear that the Council's proposals will leave all of our communities disadvantaged and so much poorer.

Yours faithfully,

Rev James S. Dewar, Juniper Green Parish Church.

Rev Dr Andre Groenewald, Balerno Parish Church.

Ian Macdonald and Jo Black, Holy Trinity Church, Wester Hailes.

Rev Dr Easter Smart, Currie Kirk.