

THE FUTURE OF BURNHAM SCHOOLS

WE NEED TO RAISE OUR GAME!

The past few months have been very challenging for us all but there is that old saying – ‘When the going gets tough – the tough get going’!

I appreciate that there is currently uncertainty regarding when and how all our existing schools are going to reopen. My focus, however, is to ask for your support to help the headteachers at both Burnham Grammar and Lent Rise Schools. They are working on the proposal to open a through-school on the site previously occupied by Burnham Park Academy and are finding it difficult and need your support.

Forty years ago there was a proposal to close Burnham Grammar School and I gained some insights by becoming involved as a parent in the successful campaign to keep the school open. The campaign must have lasted for a couple of years and our focus was more on challenging Bucks County Council members and we had a sound rationale. The closure proposal was based on a forecast excess of grammar school places within the County. We maintained that Burnham deserved an educational framework and local provision that supported all children of all ages and abilities. And, most importantly, it was the energy and commitment of parents that won the day.

Today – we face an even more difficult and complex challenge but I am again confident that we can develop a strong rationale to reopen the school. However, parental support is absolutely essential.

Five years ago Burnham Park Academy was oversubscribed but parental confidence in the school drained away very quickly and it was generally accepted that the best outcome was for the school to close. With the benefit of hindsight – we made a strategic and tactical error as we saw the main challenge to be to persuade central government to remove the school’s existing management body. We did not, concurrently, have a locally-based proposal to keep the school open but this was understandable. It would have been inappropriate for local school leaders to campaign for the removal of their colleague at a neighbouring school.

Clearly our challenge now that the School has closed is more difficult as we are starting from ‘ground zero’. But it may well be that there are some lessons from the current pandemic crisis that can work in our favour. We will all seek

to provide better local provision and avoid unnecessary journeys by public transport. All schools should aim to become more and more local and encourage pupils to walk or cycle to and from them. Furthermore, more focus is being given to the need to 'level up' and provide more opportunity for the less affluent in our society. But here in Burnham, we are blessed with a grammar school but now no other secondary school!

I have recently conducted a hypothetical exercise and imagined that I was forty years younger and needed to select a secondary school for an eleven year old child. I accessed the relevant Bucks County website and put in my address and was provided with eight schools for consideration based on distance from my address. Four were grammar schools and all Ofsted rated as excellent. The other four are secondary schools – the two closest to my home are rated inadequate and requiring improvement respectively whilst the further two are rated as good.

How can any stakeholder that has an interest in the quality of life in and around the Burnham community be prepared to accept this situation?

We should all appreciate that it is likely that probably more than half of the children who would attend the new through-school will live in neighbouring West Slough. Our proximity to Slough has always been a mixed blessing! It is wonderful to learn that SEGRO are celebrating their centenary this year and they have brought great prosperity to Burnham. Burnham Grammar and Secondary Schools were opened in in 1960 and 1969 when Slough was still part of Bucks.

As a community – we need to develop a strategy that embraces the needs of Burnham, its Buckinghamshire hinterland and also West Slough.

Personally – I have committed to writing an update in every edition of Round and About until the new through-school is opened on the Burnham Park Academy site. And I am also happy to collate and put forward the thoughts of all those who share my concern. However, I am absolutely clear that it must be the parents of all of our local primary school children that come forward and raise their game and lead the campaign.

I will be looking forward to celebrating some of these new green shoots hopefully in my next update.

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