

POST COVID – POST BREXIT

LET'S BRING BURNHAM BACK TO LIFE!

Fireworks in Burnham Park and the Christmas Fayre in Burnham High Street are early and welcome signs of recovery following lockdown. The most significant step that we can all take to ensure the future health and prosperity of Burnham and its surrounding community is to campaign effectively for immediate access to the sporting facilities at Burnham's non-selective secondary school and then for its re-opening after its closure in Summer 2019.

Burnham's non-selective secondary school opened in 1969 as Burnham Upper School and was renamed E-Act Burnham Academy in 2012 when the Academy chain took over the running of the school from Bucks. County Council. The school was fully subscribed in 2014 but then parents lost confidence in the management and leadership of the school and its number on roll fell to the extent that the only option was for the school to close. Burnham and its surrounding community need to make the case for the school to re-open and follow Burnham Grammar School's example by building a new school on the existing site whilst retaining the sports hall which was built with funds generated by the local community in 2004.

Burnham Grammar's head teacher together with its governing body and staff deserve enormous credit for managing the complex process necessary to secure the building of their new school adjacent to the old school on its existing site. The new school opened after the Autumn half-term break and the old school, built in 1960, will now be demolished and the ground made available for school use.

In Autumn 2019, the head teachers at Burnham Grammar School and Lent Rise School made an imaginative and compelling proposal to re-open the non-selective secondary school as a through school whereby children would start school at four and have the option to complete their education until the age of 18 years at the same school. The through school provision approach has been successfully established in Aylesbury, Wycombe and also Slough.

Buckinghamshire has throughout all its history been a Conservative Party shire and during the 1960's started to grapple with the complexity of supporting the building of the new town of Milton Keynes which remained administratively

part of Bucks. before becoming its own unitary authority in 1997. Slough was established as a parliamentary constituency in 1945 and from that time until the present day has returned a Labour Party candidate but for two years between 1964-66. In the early 1970's central government resolved to realign county boundaries and a consequence was that in 1974 Slough transferred to Berkshire and transitioned into an unitary authority in 1998.

The impact on Burnham was particularly severe as the boundary between the two shires spliced Burnham into two parts. And interestingly, both Burnham secondary schools were sited directly adjacent to the new boundary whilst both being located in Bucks. And yet, the two biggest primary schools in the area, Priory and Our Lady of Peace, were also located close to the new boundary but located in Slough/Berkshire!

The confusion in educational terms that resulted from this boundary change have lived with us from 1974 to the present day!

One example is to read the front cover of the very first edition of Round and About published in September 1979.

The dominant article is written by the headteacher of Haymill Secondary School, located close to Burnham railway station but on the opposite side of Burnham Lane, voicing alarm at the closure of the school and observing that pupils would have to travel to Warrenfield (now Beechwood) or Westgate School.

And the headteacher makes no reference whatsoever to the proximity of Burnham Upper School which had been open for 10 years!!

Another example was the proposal made by Bucks. County Council to close Burnham Grammar School in 1986 on the basis of a falling roll. The proposal did not give sufficient account to the number of pupils that were attracted to the school whilst living across the boundary in Slough. It is again interesting to read the copies of Round and About from 1986 to 1988 which highlight the extraordinary efforts made primarily by the school's parents campaigning for the school to remain open and the County's earnest proposal was rejected in 1988 by the then Education Minister – Ken Baker.

It is evident from local demographic data that there are sufficient young children in Burnham and its surrounding community that would benefit from attending a far more local secondary school. For example – there are on average 240 children of primary school age registered at Burnham Health Centre.

Bucks. Council's current viewpoint is that there is no requirement for a non-selective secondary school in Burnham and that children can travel to schools in Maidenhead (whilst places remain available), or Slough, or Bourne End Academy which since 2019 has been managed by E-Act Multi Academy Trust – the same organisation who had previously managed Burnham's non-selective secondary school!

Burnham is a strong and significant community, with a substantial heritage, and yet it currently finds itself as the only conurbation in Bucks. with a grammar school and no non-selective secondary school!

Local education will allow our young people to remain at the heart of our community. A through school will provide a dynamic educational environment and facilities that will bring benefits to the whole of Burnham and its surrounding communities. Every child matters and every child has the right to be educated in a local school community. We continue to pursue the case for our village and our school and will update you in future editions of Round and About.

Viv Nicholas November 2021