Greetings all

You will no doubt already have heard the news that having considered all of the information submitted in GHS's impact assessment (or possibly having done nothing of the kind) Powys CC have decided to revert to their earlier plan and to resume progress towards the ultimate closure of GHS. The Governors have been summoned to County Hall this coming Tuesday to hear their full rationale - although once again I doubt we will hear anything of the kind.

For the record, and for what it’s worth (i.e. not much) I have attached for you a copy of the report I submitted on behalf of Gwernyfed CC.

I have also attached the copy of the letter from Ian Robertson (Head of Schools) notifying the school of their decision. The salient points to draw from it are these:

1. PCC has not deviated in any way from its proposals last year. Not one jot.
2. Powys intends, in the long term, to build a new school in Brecon and to close GHS and the existing high school in Brecon. PCC believes that without closing GHS it will be unable to access the funding to replace Brecon’s unsatisfactory premises.
3. In the interim period, it intends to merge the two schools under one management and under a new name. This will allow them to quietly eradicate Brecon High’s embarrassing £750,000 deficit. It will also facilitate the early closure of GHS’s 6th form without having to face an external review – because it won’t be a “closure, it will be a “relocation” within the same school!.
4. The new school to be built will cater for 11-16 year-olds only. There will be NO school-base 6th form provision whatsoever; students will be forced to go to NPTC College – with virtually no local track record in A level provision
5. The new school is to be English Language only. Students from Ysgol y Bannau in Brecon wishing to continue their education in the medium of Welsh will have to travel to Builth Wells or Ystradgynlais.

In justifying this position Ian Roberts make the following contentions:

1. It improves cost-effectiveness and efficiency. This is no more than speculation (AKA a lie) since PCC have admitted on record that they have no idea of the financial impact of students leaving to study out-of-area, nor the likely numbers who will do so. They have also taken NO account of the secondary economic effects, but looked ONLY at the balance sheet in one council department. The economic benefits are also soundly refuted in Cardiff University’s Cost-Benefit Analysis of Rural Secondary School Consolidation. (I’ve attached a copy for you herewith. It’s commendably clear and very readable.)
2. It will reduce overall surplus places. This is technically true, but since GHS has managed its budget responsibly and reduced its teaching cost to meet the pupil requirement, this does represent excess cost. Just because the school has a couple of spare classrooms, does not mean we are paying teachers to occupy them. Furthermore, Government figures show that pupil numbers will rise sharply over the next 10 years. “Spare” school places will become vital in the medium term.
3. It provides an opportunity for learners to have a broader post-16 curriculum. This is entirely dependent upon NPTC College deciding to run any particular course locally. (Remember, Powys Council and Schools will have NO influence in what NPTC’s choose to provide. NPTC is autonomously funded (similar to the Government’s academies in England) and will only run those course it finds financially beneficial. NPTC’s established modus operandi is to advertise a very broad range of subjects, and then run them only in those locations where there is sufficient uptake. Students in other locations are given the option of travelling to the next nearest campus to access the course there – in this case in Neath!
4. It removes the need for post-16 inter-school/college transport. What kind of an idiot does it take to try to make a merit out of forcing 100% of Gwernyfed students to travel to Brecon for their education, on the grounds that they won’t have to travel any further after they’ve got there? This would be pathetic even if it were true. It isn’t.

This is not the end of the process. PCC must now move to its formal consultation stage, and must also try to persuade the Welsh Government that it will foot most of the capital costs of the project. I believe we must explore every avenue to try to rescue our communities from this foolhardy and injurious scheme.

Regards

Andy