



**Proposal to Amalgamate
Ox Close Primary School and
Oxclose Nursery School into one
Primary School on the Durham Road site of the
former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School
from 8 April 2024**



Introduction

Durham County Council recognises that the primary phase of education (age 0-11) is a critical part in developing children, as it is the foundation of future learning and growth. The council aims to move towards a model of 'all through' Primary Schools instead of separate Nursery, Infant and Junior Schools where it is practicable to do so. All schools must be viable and sustainable for the long term as well as being able to respond to 'growth'.

The council realises that school reorganisation can be an area of concern as local communities often see a school as being at the heart of the community and sometimes cannot immediately agree with the need for change. Taking this into account, the council must continue to have a system of education that will continue to bring about the highest possible standards of education for the children of County Durham for the short, medium and long term and in some cases 'keeping things as they are' may not achieve that in this rapidly changing educational landscape.

In line with that strategic objective, the council is consulting on a proposal to amalgamate Ox Close Primary School and Oxclose Nursery School into one Primary School (age 2-11) in a new build on the Durham Road site of the former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School. The Department for Education (DfE) official school number for Ox Close Primary School would be the school number for the proposed single primary school. Oxclose Nursery School would close as a registered school.

You may have some questions to ask about this proposal. This document attempts to answer some of these questions and explains how you can let the county Council know what you think about the proposal.

1. Why is the County Council proposing to amalgamate Ox Close Primary School and Oxclose Nursery School?

Earlier this year, the council agreed to allocate funding for a new build primary school to replace the current Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools to address the pressure on primary school places in Spennymoor. However, to enable the current schools to operate from the proposed new build as one primary school, a formal process has to be gone through to consult on a proposal to amalgamate the two schools. This will determine whether amalgamating the two schools is the right thing to do from an education perspective. If the proposal is agreed, work can then commence on the design and construction of the school.

The amalgamation proposal also reflects the work being done across County Durham to move where possible towards a model of 'all through' Primary Schools so that children can benefit from primary education in one school rather than changing schools at age 4 or age 7. Ox Close Primary School and Oxclose Nursery School became part of the Ox Close Federation in November 2018 and this arrangement is working well. Amalgamating the two schools into a single primary school is a logical progression from the federation arrangement. Amalgamating them will also lead to a larger and more viable education establishment. If the proposal to amalgamate the two schools is approved, the Local Authority would work closely with staff and Governors to provide support with governance, finance, personnel and curriculum issues.

Spennymoor is an area of County Durham that has experienced and continues to experience significant growth via housing developments. This is putting pressure on school places across the town. To respond to this, some of the schools in the area have been expanded in recent years. Ox Close Primary School was one of those schools, but despite this, without further expansion, it cannot meet the demand for places moving forward. The most effective solution for Spennymoor therefore to address the pressure on places at Ox Close and across Spennymoor generally is a new build replacement school. It is intended therefore that the proposed new build primary school will replace the current Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools with additional capacity to meet the pressure on school places in the area. To meet this objective the school will have a capacity for up to 630 pupils (aged 4-11). A 45 place nursery unit will also be included to provide nursery education. This will 'future proof' the school and the area should any further housing developments be planned.

2. What are the benefits of the proposal?

The council believes that the proposal will have many benefits for children, parents and staff. Some of these include:

- Continuity and progress of learning between Nursery and Primary education;
- School ethos and aims and values shared in a single school in the same building;
- Access to a curriculum planned and assessed across the full primary range;
- A unified approach to early literacy and maths to allow accelerated learning;
- Increased opportunities for professional development of staff, which should lead to improved outcomes for children;
- School Inspectors will be able to make judgements more accurately about the education children receive when they can see 'the whole picture' within Nursery and Primary education being delivered in a single school.
- Transition from the nursery phase into the primary phase would be seamless in a single school. There will be opportunity to work as a single Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), encompassing both nursery and reception.

3. Will the standard of education that the two schools currently provide be affected if they become one school?

Ox Close Primary School is judged as 'Good' by Ofsted. The most recent Ofsted report (March 2019) stated that pupils enjoy their learning and work conscientiously and the quality of teaching in English and Maths is effective. As a result, pupils make good progress in these subjects. Ambitious leadership and excellent teaching from teachers and teaching assistants have ensured that children in the early years thrive both academically and socially.

Oxclose Nursery School is judged as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. The most recent Ofsted report (June 2017) stated that staff consistently make learning fun and put the children at the centre of all they do. The wide range of

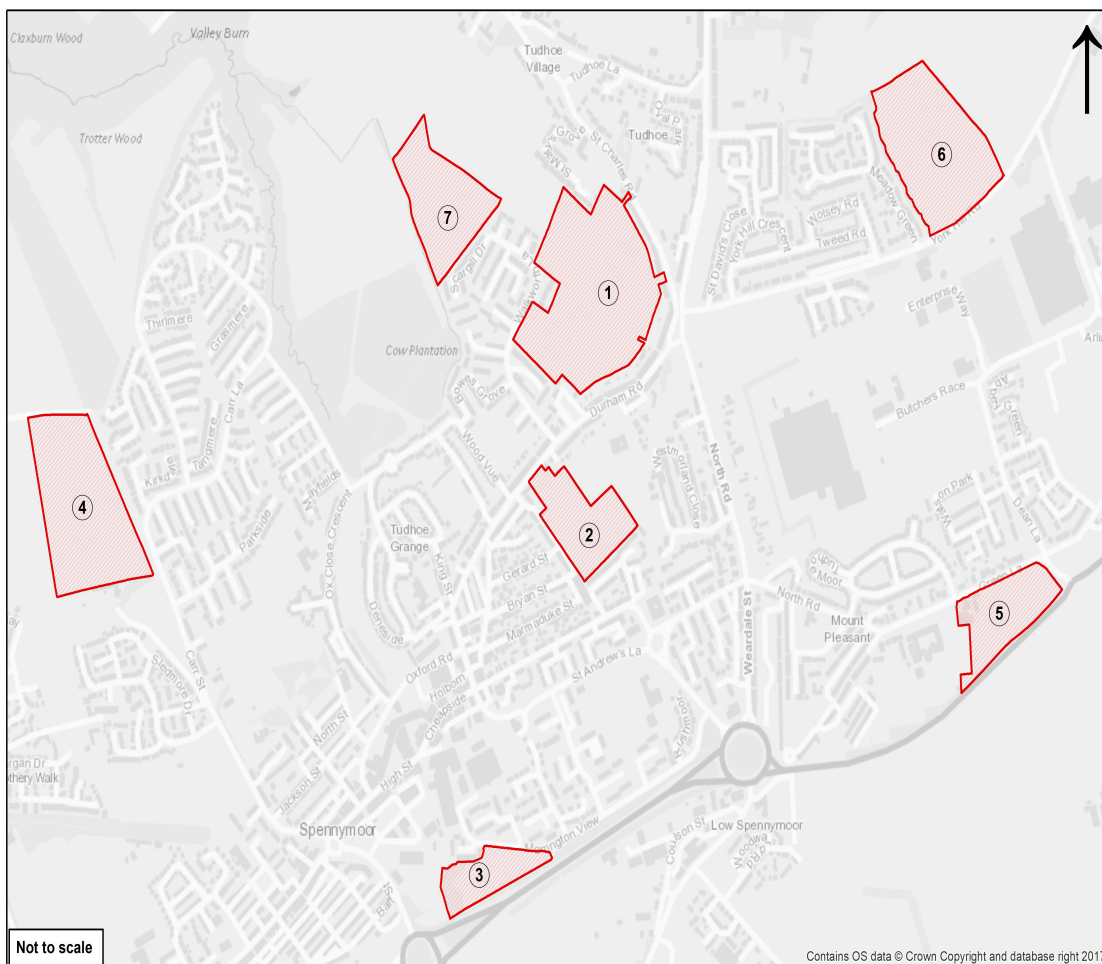
experiences provided for the children engages them in their learning and their community. All children, including those who have special educational needs and / or disabilities, make outstanding progress.

The two schools therefore start from a strong position, they already work closely together, especially so since they federated. Officers in the Education Service in addition to the Senior Leadership Team of the two schools believe that learning and progress can be improved further if the two schools are amalgamated in one building.

4. Where would the Proposed New Build Primary School be located?

A site options appraisal has been undertaken to determine the most appropriate site for a new build for the size of school required. The sites considered were:

- **Former St Charles Road site of Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive.** Although suitable in principle it was not considered to be the optimum site.
- **Former Durham Road site of Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive.** The site is large enough for the size of school required and is in a central location. It is located on one of the main vehicular routes into Spennymoor, and because the site has been previously used for a school, it would be favoured from a planning and highways perspective. This site is therefore the preferred site for the proposed school.
- **Reclamation Land adjacent to Former Gas Works.** This was discounted due to the topography of the additional land needed to provide outdoor space for the proposed school.
- **Land west of Carr Street, Whitworth Park.** This site is large enough for the size of school required, and would be centrally located within the residential development elements of the Master Plan for Whitworth Estate. The site is privately owned and has some complex legal issues to overcome. Initial enquiries have been made with those parties with a legal interest in the site, however due to the complexities and the likely timeframes involved in overcoming these issues this site is not considered to be the preferred site for the new school and has therefore been discounted.
- **Land adjacent to Green Lane Council Offices.** This was discounted as the site is not large enough for the size of school required.
- **Land to the north of York Hill road and east of Meadows Green.** This was discounted as the site is on the edge of town so is less central than other sites and the location of the land in relation to the rest of the town is unsatisfactory.
- **Land to the west of Walkworth Lane.** This was discounted as the site is located on the edge of town so is less central than other sites and is comparatively remote from public transport routes. The diagram below shows the location for each of the site.



5. How large will the Proposed New Build Primary School be?

The proposed new build primary school will be for 630 pupils with a 45 place (45 places on a morning and 45 on an afternoon) nursery unit. This will be the largest primary school in County Durham but only slightly larger than some that have capacities for between 570 and 600 pupils. The council therefore has experience of having the responsibility of maintaining and supporting larger than average size primary schools. The proposed new build primary school is not yet designed, but it would have 21 classrooms, each one capable of accommodating up to 30 pupils. The admission number for a place in Reception would be 90 (3 classes – each one taking up to 30 pupils), but it is anticipated to be a number of years before the school would be near its capacity. Outdoor areas would be designed so that Foundation, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils have their own discreet areas.

The table at the back of the document shows the projected rolls for schools in the Spennymoor pupil place planning area up to 2034/35. It demonstrates that there will be a shortfall of 225 pupils without any action to address the problem.

These projections take account of housing applications that have been approved and where there is a high probability that they will be built. They also clearly demonstrate that the school where the greatest demand for places will be is Ox Close Primary School.

Although Ox Close Primary School was expanded by two classrooms in 2016, this expansion is not sufficient to meet the future demand for places. In addition some elements of the building are in poor condition, as are parts of Oxclose Nursery School. The most cost effective use of resources therefore to address the pressure on school places and to address condition issues at both buildings is to build a larger, new build replacement primary school for Ox Close Primary School and Oxclose Nursery School.

6. What other options have been considered for Primary Education across Spennymoor?

- (a) Do nothing. This would mean that there will be insufficient primary school places in Spennymoor.
- (b) Expansions to the majority of schools in Spennymoor could have been carried out. However, some of the sites may not be large enough for the expansion required and some of them have issues with access. Furthermore this is not likely to provide a long term solution and future proof the area should any further housing developments be planned.
- (c) An additional primary school could be built of an appropriate size to address the pressure on school places. However, this would not resolve the condition issues at Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools. In addition, because this would be an additional school, rather than a replacement school, current legislation dictates that the school would be either an academy or a Free School. This means that the Council would be responsible for funding all costs associated with building the additional school, but would have no control once it was built. It would become part of whichever Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) it became part of. Depending on which MAT that was, the community values and ethos of the area may be lost.
- (d) The preferred option of the Council is to establish an amalgamated primary school to replace Ox Close Primary School and Oxclose Nursery School in a new build. This will lead to a larger, more viable school to respond to the growing population in Spennymoor which will bring about the benefits outlined in Section 2 of this document.

7. If the Proposed Amalgamation is agreed, will children automatically transfer from the Nursery to the Primary Sector of the School?

Parents will still need to apply for a place in the Reception year group at their preferred primary school(s).

8. What will happen to the existing site of Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools?

If the proposed amalgamation is agreed, the two schools will continue to operate from the existing site until Easter 2024. After this date the site will become part of the council's land disposal process and will likely be sold off.

9. If the proposed amalgamation is agreed, what will happen to staff, ?

If the proposed amalgamation is agreed, the Governing Body will in due course, consider an organisational structure that will enable the primary school to effectively operate as one school rather than two separate schools.

10. If the proposed amalgamation is agreed, will there be changes to school opening and closing times?

School opening and closing times are a matter for the Governing Body to determine.

11. What is the timescale for the process?

The table below sets out the expected timescales for the amalgamation process:

Date	Stage
November - December 2020 (6 weeks)	Consultation All responses received by the closing date will be considered and included in a report for the council to consider and decide whether to take the proposal forward.
January – February 2021 (4 weeks)	Statutory Public Notice If the council decides to proceed with the proposal, statutory notices would be published in the local newspaper, posted on school gates and the DCC website. Those notices would provide an opportunity for comments or objections to be made.
April 2021	Decision Making Durham County Council's Cabinet would consider responses to the statutory notice and make the final decision whether to agree the proposal or not.
April 2021 –April 2024	Preparation for the amalgamation including HR, Finance, Governance. Design and construction of the new build school will also commence.

PLANNING AREA 10: SPENNYMOOR

School	Type	Nursery	Capacity															
				2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029	2029-2030	2030-2031	2031-2032	2032-2033	2033-2034	2034-2035
Middlestone Moor Primary	P	Y	266	262	272	281	288	294	309	316	329	336	343	350	357	357	364	364
North Park Primary	P	Y	266	213	208	211	218	224	230	229	225	229	231	231	238	238	238	238
Rosa Street Academy	P		210	168	160	160	151	160	170	179	179	177	187	189	189	189	196	196
Byers Green Primary	P		112	84	84	80	81	83	87	87	91	91	91	98	98	98	98	98
Tudhoe Colliery Primary	P		210	216	216	222	222	230	230	238	238	238	238	245	245	245	245	245
Ox Close Primary	P		315	307	314	325	335	341	350	358	365	370	378	378	385	385	392	392
King Street Primary	P		210	209	207	210	213	219	228	228	234	237	238	245	245	245	245	245
St. Charles' RC Voluntary Aided Primary, Tudhoe	P		210	219	216	220	224	226	228	229	235	237	238	245	245	245	245	245
PA Total			1799	1678	1676	1709	1732	1777	1832	1864	1892	1915	1944	1981	2002	2002	2023	2023

How do you respond to the Consultation?

We would like to hear what you think about this proposal. Unfortunately, due to the current COVID-19 guidelines we are unable to hold face-to-face meetings with parents and other people interested in the proposal. Instead we would ask that any questions you have around the proposal be submitted to schoolorganisation@durham.gov.uk

Those questions most frequently asked and the responses to them will be posted on the council's website. You can respond to the consultation in one of the following ways:

- (i) Preferably due to the current Covid – 19 guidelines that mean staff are working from home, Email your views to schoolorganisation@durham.gov.uk or complete the response form online via the Current Consultation Section of the County Council's website www.durham.gov.uk by **13 December 2020**

- (ii) Send in the the attached response form or write to: Adam Williams, School Places and Admissions Team, Children and Young People's Services, Business Reply Service, License No. DU63 (Freepost), Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5BR by **13 December 2020**.

RESPONSE FORM

CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL TO AMALGAMATE OX CLOSE PRIMARY SCHOOL AND OXCLOSE NURSERY SCHOOL INTO ONE PRIMARY SCHOOL IN A NEW BUILD ON THE DURHAM ROAD SITE OF THE FORMER TUDHOE GRANGE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL FROM 8 APRIL 2024

1. Please tick **one** box from the list below to let us know if you are responding to this consultation **mainly** as a:

Parent/Carer of a pupil(s) at

Ox Close Primary School

Oxclose Nursery School

* Other School

*Please state which school:

OR a Pupil at

Ox Close Primary School

Oxclose Nursery School

* Other School

*Please state which school:

OR a Governor/Member of Staff (circle to indicate which) at

Ox Close Federation

* Other School

*Please state which school:

OR a

Resident

Councillor

Trade Union Representative

Parish/Town Council Representative

Community Group

Diocese

Neighbouring Authority

MP

Other (please state):

2. Looking at the information in this document do you support the proposal to amalgamate Ox Close Primary School and Oxclose Nursery School into one primary school on The Durham Road site of the former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School from 8 April 2024?

Yes No



3. Do you have any comments on this proposal including any impact the changes would have on you? If relevant, please also let us know of any impact in terms of disability or any other equality related area such as race, age or gender.

Please return this form by 13 December 2020 to:

Mr Adam Williams, School Places and Admissions Team, Children and Young People's Services, Business Reply Service Licence No DU63 (Freepost), Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham DH1 5BR

(The information that you send may need to be passed to colleagues or shared with partners. It may also be published in a summary of responses received to this consultation but results will not contain your name or anything that could identify you. If you require an acknowledgement to your response, please provide details below.)

Name:

Address:
.....

Signed: **Date:**