

To:

Mr Dave Hill
Executive Director, Social Care and Education
Essex County Council
Chelmsford,
CM1 1QH
Dave.Hill@essex.gov.uk

12 May 2017

Dear Mr Dave Hill,

Re : Closing Down of Walden School/The Friends School in Saffron Walden

As I'm sure you are aware, Uttlesford is suffering from a lack of secondary school places. In effect, parental choice has been removed and students are being bused all over the district and even outside Essex. This is clearly an unsustainable situation.

It is further compounded by the number of new homes that have recently been approved and more that are proposed under the emerging Uttlesford Local Plan. It is understood that at least one new secondary school will be required in the district. Whilst the Local Plan is not yet set in stone, Uttlesford District Council has a good idea of the number of new homes that are required – and the lack of school places is **already** a problem.

In Saffron Walden the County High School (SWCHS) has run out of places for students that live in the town; and the most recent ECC education forecast is that students from the new homes that have recently been approved will instead need to be bused to Joyce Frankland Academy in Newport. So not only has parental choice been removed, but pupils will no longer be able to go to their nearest secondary school. Even siblings are being separated to meet targets.

The problem is not easily solved as suitable school sites are hard to find and it is difficult to fund the +£40m to build a new secondary school.

This week the private Walden School, formerly the Friends School in Saffron Walden, has announced that it will close from July this year. Apparently the school has been under financial stress for some time. Teachers and staff will be made redundant in 2 months' time and pupils will need to find new schools to complete their studies. However there aren't many in nearby schools.

If Walden School were rescued and turned from a private school to a state school a number of problems could be solved. This in fact, would turn a near crisis into a rare opportunity.

We are writing to you to ask that you urgently consider a plan to take on the Walden/Friends School as a state school, retaining the teachers and education for existing students, and allowing the school to expand to fill the education places deficit in Saffron Walden and the surrounding villages. We'd also ask that you consider having the Saffron Academy Trust take on the running of the school. They are highly regarded locally, are already responsible for a number of local schools, and the close proximity of Walden School to the SWCHS means that there are real operational benefits. And I'm

sure the residents of Saffron Walden would welcome the opportunity of offering an outstanding 'SWCHS education' to many more students.

But time is of the essence. Unless something is done very quickly, it would be likely that this excellent large educational site will be permanently lost to new homes.

I look forward to your urgent reply.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Paul G Fairhurst
paul.fairhurst@residents4u.org

Residents for Uttlesford
Uttlesford District Councillor, Saffron Walden Shire Ward
Deputy Mayor, Saffron Walden Town Council