

Consultation on proposal to move Tipton St John C of E Primary School to a new school site at Thorne Farm, Ottery St Mary

Frequently asked Questions v.1, 8 May 2024

This document will be kept updated through the statutory process.

Q. Why does the school have to move?

Flooding has affected the school on numerous occasions and most recently in 2023. The Environment Agency has identified that flooding from the Metcombe Stream and River Otter gives rise to life threatening flood risk to users of the school site and these risks are predicted to increase due to the effects of climate change. The Otter Valley Governors (the Governing Board for Tipton St John CofE VA Primary School), Diocese of Exeter and Devon County Council have been working for a number of years to find a solution to the significant flood risk present at the school. The Environment Agency has confirmed it is important that every effort is made to relocate the school to a site that is located in Flood Zone 1, "Low Probability" of flooding, at the earliest opportunity.

It has been questioned whether new flood resilient buildings can be constructed on the lower site but the Environment Agency adopts a general principle that "buildings on stilts", to provide a suitable underfloor void for flood conveyance, are unsustainable. External areas to the school, essential for the full operation of the school, would also continue to be impacted by flood waters as would issues associated with building services and drainage and safe pick up and drop off at times of flood.

Tipton St John Primary is currently a four class school, operating on a split site with the lower site most impacted by the flood risk. The lower site is on a single level more suited to the KS1 Children with the older children located on the two-storey upper site. The Governing Board has considered reducing the size of the school to a two-class structure with the whole school operating only from the upper site. The upper site has many limitations and does not have the support accommodation needed in a school. The buildings are unsatisfactory for Key Stage 1 provision due to the cramped layout and small size and limitation of access to external areas to deliver the curriculum. The school does not possess meeting rooms, a hall, library or sufficient spaces for staff to undertake planning, preparation or assessment. It does not meet standards for wheelchair/disability access. No funding would be available through the Schools Rebuilding Programme for this proposal to reduce the size of the school and move it all to the upper site.

The Department for Education has confirmed they will not rebuild the school on its current location through the Schools Rebuilding Programme.

Q. Why can't the school stay in Tipton St John?

As part of the Department for Education (DfE) Schools Rebuilding Programme, a Site Appraisal Report, commissioned by the Secretary of State and the DfE, has assessed the viability of four sites for the proposed relocation and identifies a preferred site to progress through to a feasibility stage. Two of the four sites assessed are located in Tipton St John. The four sites assessed were:

1. Carters Field, Tipton St John
2. Land South of Otter Close, Tipton St John
3. Thorne Farm, Ottery St Mary
4. King's School Playing Fields, Ottery St Mary

The location and assessment of the viability of each site is available in the DfE's Site Appraisal Report which has been published on the school's website via: <https://tipton-stjohn.devon.sch.uk/> and also on DCC's Have Your Say website via: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/haveyoursay/categories/education-and-schools/>

Following the review of the sites, which took into account the various constraints and planning considerations, Thorne Farm, Ottery St Mary has been recommended to be taken forward to feasibility.

Devon County Council undertook a Transport Technical Assessment to assess each of the four sites in terms of accessibility, noting potential travel patterns and the suitability of available infrastructure in terms of safety. The Transport Technical Assessment has been published on the above websites. This assessment concluded that relocating the school to one of the sites in Ottery St. Mary would be preferable. Although the sites within Tipton St John have space to accommodate a new school, there are significant engineering challenges to deliver a safe and suitable and affordable access for the school.

Q. Has land owned by Sundial Nursing Home been considered for expanding the upper site to accommodate the whole school?

Land at Sundial Nursing Home was not included in the DfE's assessment of available sites. The site was not considered by DfE as it has not been advertised for potential development and the owners of the site have not indicated to Devon County Council that it is for sale. That said, over the last decade, 3 sites in and immediately around Angela's Court (as it was at the time) have been considered and discounted for reasons primarily relating to access/levels, highways, flooding (direct or indirect), or issues with extending the village development area.

Q. Have the local drainage issues been fully investigated to ensure the solution does not lie with Highways or the Environment Agency?

Flooding issues do not solely affect the school site in Tipton St John and the wider flooding experienced by the village results from wider issues. The Governing Board of the school initiated the commissioning of a report by consultants in 2015, and the Environmental Agency. Localised improvements to the highways and associated drainage have happened since by the relevant responsible authorities, but the wider flood risk remains.

Q. Isn't Thorne Farm prone to flooding?

The Thorne Farm site is within a Flood Zone 1 category (source: Environment Agency) which means the site has a low probability of flooding.

Q. Who will pay for the new school?

Devon County Council is responsible for securing the school site and fund all works required outside of the 'red line', this is principally highways infrastructure works and connections to services to the border of the school site.

Inclusion in the national Schools Rebuilding Programme means that Central Government through the Department for Education will fund the construction of the school build within the red line.

Q. Who is responsible for the safety of the children?

Tipton St John School is a Voluntary Aided School for which the Governing Board is responsible for both the premises and for the Health and Safety of the children at the school. The Governing Board are the employers of the school staff and therefore they also have the Health and Safety responsibilities to their employees alongside a duty of care to visitors to the school and to parents dropping off and collecting their children. The Governing Board have received professional advice that there is a “risk to life” if the school remains on the current site and therefore, they are duty-bound to actively resolve matters and relocate the school off the floodplain as soon as it can be practically achieved. The current proposal is considered the only deliverable solution available.

Q. When could the newly rebuilt school be operational?

Further work is required to establish a project programme and any new school building would be subject to planning consent.

If approved, it is unlikely that the newly rebuilt school will be operational before September 2027. The DfE are responsible for delivering the school building.

Q. When will the planning application for the school be submitted?

The Department for Education are responsible for the delivery of the programme including the planning application. The programme will depend on decisions from this proposal.

Q. Will there be a nursery or pre-school?

There will be early years provision on the new site. Tipton St John Primary School currently has a Governor-run Pre-School. Newly built primary schools usually include nursery provision. The Governors may consider establishing a Nursery rather than a Governor-run pre-school on the new site and extend this provision to accommodate 2 year olds, but this would be subject to a separate consultation.

Q. Will the school's name change as a result of the re-location?

The Governing Board (which is the relevant body in this matter) has no intention of changing the name of the school. The school still serves the village of Tipton St John and it has a long and proud history which it will take to its new site location.

Q. Will the school uniform change?

The Governing Board (which is the relevant body in this matter) has no intention of changing the school uniform as part of this relocation – it is only the site location and building facilities that is changing.

Q. Will the link with St John's Church be maintained?

The school is a Church of England school and will still continue to maintain its strong links and will attend services at St John's Church and engage in activities in the Village. The church parish of Tipton St John with Venn Ottery is within Otter Vale Mission Community as is the new site for the school in Ottery St Mary, and this continuity will help support in the transition.

Q. Why not close the school and then re-open a new school, rather than a transfer?

Tipton St John Primary School is a successful and popular school (Ofsted Good; SIAMS Outstanding) with a long history serving its community. It has excellent staff and governance and is well respected in the local education community. Unfortunately, the school is located on an unsuitable site and in unsuitable buildings.

It is the issues regarding the site and buildings that need to be resolved rather than the school itself.

Under School Organisation Prescribed Alterations Legislation, a school can transfer to a new site that is over 2 miles from the existing site by following a statutory process. The process is outlined in the consultation document but consists of a pre-publication consultation, a formal consultation – representation period, decision and implementation.

If proposals were instead brought forward to close and establish a new school, then the pupils on roll and staff employed by the school would not be able to automatically transfer to the new school site.

Q. Is the funding from the Department for Education guaranteed?

The project is currently in the first phase of the School's Rebuilding Programme and therefore prioritised. This does not preclude changes in the programme in the future.

Q. What would happen to the lower and upper school vacated sites?

The lease to the lower site will be surrendered and so it will revert to the local Trustees. The lease to the rear playground to the upper site will be surrendered and so will revert back to the landowner. The main upper site in accordance with the relevant Trust Deed will be sold on the open market and the proceeds of sale will contribute to the funding of the school on its new site.

Q. Will the relocation move disrupt learning?

Any relocation would be carefully planned and managed once a final decision is made and planning consent received. Devon County Council and the Diocese of Exeter would support the school to ensure a smooth transition to the new school building.

Q. Will school transport be available for pupils in Tipton St John to the new school site?

All children are entitled to free home to school transport, in line with [DCC's home to school transport policy](#), if they attend the nearest school to their home address and they:

- are of statutory school age
- live more than two miles away by the shortest walking route (for primary)
- live under two miles away but all walking routes are considered unavailable

This entitlement on nearest school grounds is according to the school's location and is unaffected by a school's designated area.

Children in Devon are also entitled to free school transport to the school designated to serve their home address - provided it is still further than the statutory walking distance. There would be an entitlement to free transport on designated school grounds where the walking distance is over 2 miles to school.

Q. If a significant number of stakeholder are opposed to this proposal, how will the Governors and Council take into account their views?

Following the closure of the pre-publication consultation, the Governing Board will meet to consider all responses to the consultation and decide whether to proceed with the statutory process.

Before making any final decision, Devon County Council will take into account views gathered from both stages of consultation, from all interested parties, and will consider and balance this against the significant safety concerns, viable alternative options, quality and diversity of provision, travel and accessibility, funding and its wider responsibility to effectively utilise the educational estate and its statutory duty to provide sufficiency of places.

Q. Other than moving to a new school site, what are the other options?

The school cannot remain on the lower school site due to the flood risk from both the River Otter and the Metcombe Stream. The Governors have considered reducing the size of the school to a two-class structure with the whole school operating only from the upper site. The upper site has many limitations and does not have the support accommodation needed in a school.

The buildings are unsatisfactory for a Key Stage 1 provision due to the cramped layout and small size and limitation of access to external areas to deliver the curriculum. The school does not possess meeting rooms, a hall, library or sufficient spaces for staff to undertake planning, preparation or assessment. It does not meet standards for wheelchair/disability access. No funding would be available through the Schools Rebuilding Programme for this proposal.

The proposal to move to Thorne Farm is considered the only deliverable and viable option. If this proposal fails and no other viable options become available then the Governing Board will inevitably have to strategically consider the long term future of the school given the ongoing flood risk and its associated risk for pupil and staff safety.

Q. What alternative solution is there should this scheme fail at the Planning stage?

There is no deliverable viable alternative option that exists at present. If this were to fail, the Governing Board will inevitably have to strategically consider the long term future of the school in light of the ongoing flood risk and its associated risk pupil and staff safety.

Q. Does my child have to move to the new site?

All children on the school roll at the time of the relocation will remain on roll and move to the new site, unless parents/carers have applied to other schools and been offered a place in another school.

Q. Can children from other schools go to the new site?

If there are still school places available once all the children then on roll at Tipton St John Primary School have transferred to the new site, then children from other schools can apply for places at the school as an in-year admission (as is the case at all schools).

Q. What will parking be like at the new school site?

Parking arrangements and any facilities for dropping-off and collection of pupils will be subject to the full planning application and decision.

Q. Will the timing of the school day change?

The school has no plans to change the timings of the school day, but some minor adjustments might be necessary. This will be decided in collaboration with stakeholders at the time of any transition to the new site.

Q. Is a four class school big enough?

The school will transfer as a four class primary school with a Published Admission Number of 15 per year group (as at present). The newly rebuilt school will be developed on a site which is large enough to expand provision in the longer term if required. The school currently has circa 80 learners on roll.

Q. Is Ottery St Mary Primary School currently completely full?

The current primary school in the town has a capacity of 420 places with 425 children on roll (Spring 2024 school census) and the school cannot expand on its current site.

The continual review of birth data and registrations with GPs confirms a projected falling primary cohort across Devon in the short term. Pre-school cohorts in the designated area of Ottery St Mary Primary School currently sit below the town primary school's published admission number for the academic years 2026/27 and 2027/28*, however, the adopted East Devon Local Plan identifies development of 497 homes in Ottery St Mary in the period 2013 to 2031. There is also a historic inward migration into the catchment area during primary phases to be in catchment for secondary at normal round. (*NHS data Autumn 2023.)

Q. Isn't this just a school closure?

No. The proposal is that the existing Tipton St John Primary school – its pupils, staff, leadership and governance – moves from one set of buildings in Tipton St John into another building at Thorne Farm, Ottery St Mary. This relocation retains the existing ethos, reputation and quality of the school in new buildings and appropriate education facilities.

Under school organisation legislation, a Local Authority maintained school such as Tipton St John Primary School can transfer to a new site which is over two miles away from its existing site by following a prescribed alterations statutory process.

Q. Doesn't the King's School need to expand?

The King's is a highly popular school and is oversubscribed annually. The school is full and has high numbers in the sixth form.

Historically around 20% of children allocated a place at the school each year are from outside the school's catchment area. The King's School has a published admission number of 180 and its current feeder primary schools have a combined published admission number of 150.

There was a high cohort for admission September 2023 which meant that in-area children were refused a place. However, from the academic year 2026/27 onwards, all future in-area cohorts currently sit below the published admission number of 180. (NHS data Autumn 2023.)

Devon County Council, in its role as Education Authority, has ongoing discussions with The King's School and is content the current published admission number meets future local needs.

This proposal in no way changes The King's School catchment area.

Q. Will there be priority for Tipton children in the new location?

The village of Tipton St John will be included in the revised catchment area of the relocated school. The exact boundaries will need to be agreed with neighbouring schools and will be subject to separate consultation. That said, Tipton St John School on a new site, will still serve Tipton St John village and therefore pupils will have priority. In addition, as a VA School, Tipton St John's Governing Board is its own admission authority and therefore has control over its own admissions policy and oversubscription criteria including its catchment area.

Q. What happens to the next generations of Tipton children?

The revised Tipton St John school designated area for the school (in its new location) will include Tipton St John village and, as such, future generations of Tipton children will be fully provided for at the school. The future generations will have access to a new school with high quality, purpose built modern buildings with a full range of facilities. The location of the new site, away from the floodplain will ensure the safety of Tipton's children into the future. The number of pre-school aged children currently living in Tipton St John's catchment area is very low with future cohorts of 6 children due to start in Reception in the academic year 2025/26, 5 for the academic year 2026/27 and 3 for 2027/28. (NHS data Autumn 2023.)

Q. How will Tipton St John's community be affected with the movement of the school?

It is fully recognised that the transfer of the school from the centre of the village will be a loss for the Tipton community. However, this needs to be balanced against the benefits of the proposal which ensures a sustainable long-term future for the school in the new location, for it to retain its excellent staff and core values and to continue

to serve the children and community of Tipton St John for many years to come. Please also see the published draft Impact Assessment.

Q. Is there a danger that the moving of the school out of the village will lead to new families not moving into the village?

Individual's choices for moving to a new house are predicated on a full range of considerations and the proximity of good schools is often a key consideration to many. The safety of their children and the long-term sustainability of the school in the community would be important considerations too. Relocating the school sustains an excellent school in the locality, and therefore prospective buyers will still have the attraction of moving into the catchment area of a highly reputable school, with excellent facilities. The number of pre-school aged children living in the catchment area for Tipton St John Primary School is very low. There is no housing allocated for Tipton St John village in the adopted East Devon Local Plan.

Q. How can I respond to this consultation?

We are keen to hear the views of all interested parties on the proposed relocation of the school to the site at Thorne Farm in Ottery St Mary.

The closing date for responses is by midnight on the **19 June 2024**.

You can respond either by:

- Emailing: admin@tipton-stjohn.devon.sch.uk
Please mark your email 'Consultation on relocation'

Or by post to;

- Board of Governors, Consultation on relocation, Tipton St John Church of England Primary School, Tipton St John, Sidmouth, EX10 0AG

All responses to the consultation will be shared with Devon County Council unless you request otherwise. We will not send individual responses to any specific points made.

Please see Devon County Council's Privacy Notice for further information on how consultation responses are managed: www.devon.gov.uk/privacy/privacy-notice/privacy-notice-for-representations-to-school-organisation-statutory-consultations/