

School closure not a done deal, vows MP

PARENTS have been promised that plans to shut their school are not a "done deal".

South Holland and the Deepings MP John Hayes, a government education minister, vowed to do what he can to ensure concerned residents and parents can have their say on plans to shut the St Guthlac School - which they fear is doomed.

People in Crowland, who have launched a campaign to save the school, fear that the decision has already been taken before a consultation even begins.

Lincolnshire County Council is set to ask their views when it runs a consultation on whether an academy should be set up in Holbeach - which would replace the George Farmer and St Guthlac schools.

Education bosses have said that the St Guthlac is too small to attract the funding needed and believe it may have to close in the long term, regardless of the success of the academy bid.

by **LYNNE HARRISON**
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Speaking at last week's public meeting on the matter, Mr Hayes said: "I am now a minister in the education department and I now have considerably more clout than some of the people sitting around this table. I will not allow this decision to be a fait accompli."

Later, the MP pledged: "I will guarantee you, in any way, shape or form that I have influence in this, I will not allow it to be a done deal. You have my absolute word of honour on it."

At the heated meeting, supporters shouted as Coun Patricia Bradwell spoke about falling pupil numbers at the school which were making it "vulnerable" and putting it in a "deficit budget".

Mr Hayes yelled above the uproar: "Order! This is not going to turn into a riot. I want to be absolutely

clear that all possibilities will be explored and costed and there will be views listened to from all interested parties."

At the outset, Mr Hayes said: "I called this meeting with the parish council because I was absolutely determined that the people of Crowland would have their say about the provision of secondary education in this town."

"I didn't think they were getting their say, to be honest."

Summing up the meeting to huge applause, parish council chairman Coun Peter Haselgrove said: "We want honesty and transparency in this process and not just a mere box ticking exercise."

Petitions containing 1,100 to 1,200 signatures were handed to the MP and education officials on the night.

● For more on why Lincolnshire County Council thinks the St Guthlac will have to close in the long term see this week's Spalding Guardian.