

PROPOSED NEW SCHOOL AT MARSH LANE: NOTES ON A MEETING HELD AT CBC 24th FEBRUARY 2015

Present: DCC Cllr Margaret Phipps; Paul Scothern DCC Premises Commissioning Manager, Children's Services; Greg Auld DCC Project Manager, Dorset Property; Steve Roberts representing Marsh Lane Action Group; Nick Smith representing Christchurch Schools Action Group; Jim Biggin representing WCRA

Background

1. DCC emphasised that plans are still in development and so in that respect *nothing is confirmed at this stage*. The eventual plans will be subject to a rigorous planning process involving CBC.
2. The proposed school is a primary school, catering for both infant and junior aged pupils.
3. The current demand for infant places significantly exceeds available local capacity. In 2014 there were 247 applications to Christchurch Infant School which has a capacity of 120 places. Of the 247, 161 gave Christchurch Infant School as a first preference choice and of those 149 were within catchment area. As a result virtually every child living in an area west of Christchurch Hospital was refused admission.
4. Whilst the problem is particularly acute in West Christchurch – caused by young families moving into the area and an increase in the birth rate – it is also apparent across Dorset and it will be necessary to expand in other locations such as Burton and Highcliffe.

Site Details

5. The site chosen at Marsh Lane is large enough to accommodate the school building as a single entity with appropriate play areas, teacher parking, etc. It also has room for future expansion. This arrangement is the most cost effective and manageable (as distinct from splitting the school across two smaller sites for example)
6. DCC has investigated a list of other potential sites provided by the Marsh Lane Action Group. In summary the sites all have drawbacks in that they are some combination of: too small; have no capacity for future expansion; are in the wrong geographic area of Christchurch; are not available or present huge legal problems (allotments, common land, etc.); poor outlook for the children; within flood zones and surface water flooding; too close to existing schools when the intention is to 'spread the load'.
7. Use of existing playing fields as an alternative site was also deemed a non-starter by DCC as the existing fields are already too small given the size of the schools, and formal consent would be required from the Secretary of State to develop on playing field areas, which was unlikely to be forthcoming.
8. DCC will provide a full analysis for each suggested alternative site.

School Design

9. The outline design for the Marsh Lane site places the single storey school at the back of the site. The lines of the former railway behind the properties adjoining the site will remain in the ownership of Sembcorp, and is not intended to be developed as part of the school proposal. The existing hedgerows and school play areas will then create a buffer between

the school building and the houses in Marsh Lane. A single storey construction is considered important when dealing with primary age children.

10. The school will have a single access point from Marsh Lane. Parents taking children to school will have to park in local roads. They will not be allowed to drive into the school grounds themselves (unless dealing with a disabled child).

Impact Upon Local Road System

11. DCC are in discussion with Highway Officers in respect of traffic calming and other traffic management measures and there will be further discussion and consultation with the Action Groups and WCRA on these matters. In this respect attention is particularly drawn to the incident in Suffolk Avenue at around 11.30am on 27th February when the 111 bus became jammed between parked cars, completely blocking the road.
12. Some of the traffic calming/management measures could include the provision of pinch points in Marsh Lane, close to the proposed entrance to the site and double yellow lines and 'School Keep Clear Markings'. These issues will be discussed further with the respective officers at DCC.
13. DCC will investigate the likely impact upon the B3073 Fairmile Road.

Ecological Considerations

14. DCC will investigate any potential problems caused by mosquitos in the area near the reed beds and the Avon. This issue has been raised by those living close to the site. A flood risk assessment will also be carried out and the provision of alternative grazing space is also being looked at.

Jim Biggin

28th February 2015