

## **Councillor Robert Gould wrote to WCRA in an e-mail:**

*Thank you for your e-mailed letter of 9 July and I am sorry for the delay in responding. As you indicated I did need to talk to various officers involved in the project before being able to give you a full response and some of them have been away from the office recently. However, they are now back and I have been able to catch up with them.*

### ***Funding***

*Funding for any project is always critical, particularly in the current financial climate and officers working on projects are always expected to deliver the outcome of the projects as cost effectively as they can.*

*In the case of the new school in West Christchurch this is intended to follow the County Council's baseline approach to school projects. This is looking to standardise design and construction of buildings as far as we can to ensure the limited funding we have is used as wisely as possible, to deliver as much as we can in terms of meeting our 'Basic need' requirements across the County. Having said that, the current estimate for the (cost of the) new school is still in excess of £6 million.*

(WCRA Comment: this must be read against a background of DCC struggling to balance its books and to pay out less than it takes in – projected deficit for this financial year is £15 million. For details see previous newsletters and notes of ACRA meetings with Councillor Robert Gould)

### ***Basic Need for the School***

*As you have indicated, numbers (of infants) in the area are continuing to rise and for this September demand for places at Christchurch Infant School was in excess of the places available, and the majority of those children who couldn't get in to their local catchment school are now in the 'school within a school' (portakabins), which is hoped will become the new primary school in due course. We are predicting that this demand for places over and above the current capacity at both Christchurch Infant and Junior School will continue into the future.*

(WCRA Comment: we are not now aware of any serious disagreement as to the basic need for the school)

### ***Alternative Sites – Bailey Bridge***

*I fully understand the views and concerns of the residents of Marsh Lane about the choice of the site for the new school, and that they feel that there could be more appropriate alternatives. However, you will know from the details officers have already given you, and which have been published on your web site, that there really is no other suitable site in the right location and of the correct size which would meet the needs of this school.*

*I understand that at the time that information was issued the site you have referred to as Bailey Bridge was not on the market, and so cost was not a factor in the comments made about the unsuitability of that site for the new school. The decision to reject that site at the time was based on: (a) its location to serve the community of West Christchurch; (b) its proximity to the existing school (concentrating all the provision at the southern end of the catchment area); and (c) the size of the site.*

*Looking at its location, at the rear of the retail park and bordered by the river and railway line, and its previous uses and levels, it would have been expensive to develop as a school either as the new primary school, or indeed along the lines you have suggested in terms of re-location of the existing Junior School.*

*I believe that the site has since come back on to the market for a short period of time and the closing date for best bids for the purchase closed earlier in the month. Initial indications we have been able to ascertain from the selling agents are that the expected price for the site is far in excess of what the County would be able to pay for a site, so whilst this was not a contributing factor in the initial decision, it would be a major one now.*

*It should also be noted that this site is located in 'flood zone 3', so whilst it may not have shown any signs of flooding in the recent past there would be no guarantee that permission for the development of a school in an area of such designation would be permitted.*

### ***Alternative Sites – Parkfield School***

*The issue of Parkfield School in this process is a difficult one.*

*There is the question of whether parents would choose to send their child there over a 'non' free school, however, you are right there is a question of whether that school would have the capacity to take the additional children predicted in the area, as well as those they are already catering for. As it is, their re-location to the site at the Airport has now been delayed for a further year.*

*Parkfield are currently advertising a capacity in their reception year group for 2016/17 to 2018/19 of 56 pupils. Even with this provision in the local area, taking into account those parents who the school is already catering for, and who may already wish their child to attend the school through choice or sibling link, it is unlikely that this provision will be able to also accommodate those children within the catchment of Christchurch Infant School who would thus be unsuccessful in securing a place there if the new primary school were not provided.*

(WCRA comment: we now have in writing evidence provided by the most senior member of DCC that their officers have investigated all other reasonable sites. We have from outset believed that we owed it to our members who live in and around Marsh Lane to ensure that was done. We will continue to endeavour to ensure that the impact of the school upon those residents is mitigated as far as is possible but we do think the time has come to accept that the Marsh Lane site is the best of what is available and affordable)

### ***Access to the Marsh Lane Site***

*All the concerns which have been raised with officers regarding traffic problems in the area have been considered by the relevant Highway officers. This is what led to the traffic proposals which formed part of the public information event.*

*However, from the event those plans are likely to develop further to look to address the continuing concerns which are being raised, although it should be noted that this scheme will not solve the existing traffic congestion in the area, but hopefully will not make it any worse.*

*The plans which were shown at the public event were initial plans based on the experience of the Highway Engineers in such matters (and were presented) for comment.*

***They were not cost driven in what was presented, and indeed, if it is felt they need to be enhanced further following the reactions received to ensure safety and to ensure an appropriate access to the proposed school site, then they will be.***

(WCRA Comment: this is very good news. We felt that the proposals presented at the public event were minimal and largely failed to address the concerns we had previously submitted to officers – they're on the website [www.wcresidents.co.uk](http://www.wcresidents.co.uk) if you want to read them. We now have a degree of confidence that further measures will be incorporated into the scheme – and they need to be.

On a daily basis local residents see speeding cars, vans and motorbikes around Bronte, Marsh and Suffolk. The sharp bends and narrowness made worse by parked vehicles are a constant source of concern. DCC needs to get a grip on this issue. Local residents raised a traffic calming petition in 2012 that has been ignored up to now. DCC needs to tie this up with the provision of the new school as none of us want to see children maimed or killed.

As to traffic on the B3073, the planned lorry movements transporting gravel from sites like Roeshot Hill, plus the planned housing increases at Parley and Roeshot are all going to make matters worse. The new school will just form part of that pattern – a problem to which DCC admit they have no solution)

### ***Validity of the Traffic Volume Measurement***

*I have queried the traffic survey details with the relevant engineers, taking on board your comments about when they were undertaken. I have been advised that the counts were taken from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015, with the one in Suffolk Avenue commencing on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015. The flows for the Election Day (7<sup>th</sup> May 2015) were removed from the flow profiles for the purposes of the public event and I am advised that this resulted in a negligible difference overall in the average traffic flows for the period the counts were undertaken. It should also be noted that the count stopped on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015, and the half term holiday did not commence until the week commencing the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2015, so this would have had no impact on the count details.*

### ***Problems with the site***

*Officers are aware of the issue of midges in the area, and this was reiterated to them at the event. The County's Senior Ecologist, who was present at the event, has been engaged to advise on this issue as well as many other ecological matters associated with this site. This will be followed up further as the scheme develops, and where possible, mitigation measures will be put in place as part of the scheme.*

### ***Future Demand for school places***

*I can assure you that officers are planning ahead to ensure sufficient primary and secondary places are available in both West and East Christchurch. Works are already in hand at a number of primary schools in the area to increase capacity further and as you will be aware from previous correspondence with (Councillor) Margaret Phipps, Dorset County Council has identified the need for at least 3 additional forms of entry in the secondary sector in the Christchurch area moving forward, although at this stage it has not committed as to where these places will be provided.*

*The issues around the provision of this proposed new primary school are not easy to resolve and both I and the officers involved are fully aware of the sense of feeling the proposal has created, both for and against the development. There is demonstrably a need for additional primary school places in the area and that is what officers are endeavouring to do as quickly as they can, and in what is considered the most suitable and appropriate site.*

*Councillor Robert Gould*

*Leader of the Council*