

## **WEST CHRISTCHURCH RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION**

[www.wcresidents.co.uk](http://www.wcresidents.co.uk)

Cllr Robert Gould

Leader of the Council

Dorset County Council

9<sup>th</sup> July 2015

Dear Robert

### **Proposed School, Marsh Lane, West Christchurch**

You will be aware that DCC Officers attended a public presentation here in West Christchurch last Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July at which their current plans for this proposed school were discussed with a large number of local residents. We would like to thank those Officers for their endeavours.

We have received a lot of feedback from our members, both for and against the proposal, and as a result can now consolidate local concerns.

We are addressing this letter to you because whilst we know that for much of the detail you will need to call upon others to respond there is one underlying issue that we believe you are best qualified to deal with. That is the financial constraints that appear to underpin some of the most important decisions. It is being suggested by residents that the preferred location of the school, its design and the paucity of response from DCC to issues related to the roads and the environment are all driven by a shortage of available funds.

We should start by confirming that we have heard no strong denial of the need for a new infant school in this area. We have learned that there are currently 90 children without a school place for this September and a further 120 children so placed in 2016.

### **Alternative Sites**

Residents who live close to the Marsh Lane site are understandably keen to suggest alternative sites. DCC Officers have reviewed a list of such sites and have rejected them all. We can appreciate their arguments but feel that two alternatives require a more detailed treatment than they have received to date.

The first, a site known as Bailey Bridge, is up for sale. DCC Officers have previously rejected it on grounds of size, shape and proximity to Christchurch Infant School but many local residents are questioning this logic. For example, could a two storey junior school be built at Bailey Bridge and take junior pupils away from Christchurch Junior School – thus creating additional capacity for infants adjacent to the existing Christchurch Infant School.

Our own view is that the potential cost of site acquisition and the increased cost of school design associated with this site will have played a significant part in the Bailey Bridge decision. If that is so then we believe DCC should say so – it isn't an unreasonable argument given DCC's current financial situation but it does need to be out in the open.

The second is a relocated school at Hurn called Parkfield School. We do not consider that DCC Officers have given sufficient thought to this site and believe that as a potential alternative it warrants a more detailed appraisal. We suspect that, all other arguments apart (such as the potential reluctance of parents to use a Free School not under LA control) the school is too small but again it would be helpful if DCC confirmed that.

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

As you know the existing road infrastructure of West Christchurch is fraught with problems. In particular the B3073 Hurn Road – Fairmile Road is at key times unable to cope with existing traffic volumes. Planned developments at Parley, Roeshot Hill and Roeshot Quarry will exacerbate the situation.

Roads running from Fairmile Road to and from Marsh Lane are narrow, twisty, and full of parked cars. We provided DCC Officers with a full analysis of the local road system (the paper can be read at [http://www.wcresidents.co.uk/Pages/WC\\_Schools.php](http://www.wcresidents.co.uk/Pages/WC_Schools.php) ) but sadly so far have little evidence that they have digested our comments. *The plans presented at the public presentation were inadequate in our view and gave rise to the thought that safety was being jeopardised in favour of cost reduction.*

We were pleased to see the results of a traffic survey but did wonder why it had been conducted during the week of half term with the General Election occurring at the same time and with a polling station located in Marsh Lane. *We are concerned that the results may not provide a sound basis for planning.*

### **Problems with the Site**

A number of residents have commented that the design of the school appeared to be rather basic. Again the thought was voiced that a lack of funds is restricting design options.

We were pleased to see the flood plain analysis. However, the area is well known to be plagued by midges. *We saw no evidence that this problem has been considered and ask that Officers now take it up as a matter of some importance.*

### **Future Demand for School Places**

Finally we are far from convinced that DCC Officers are planning ahead to ensure sufficient junior and senior school places in our area. For example, we have no numerical analysis showing current capacity and assumed future demand – surely a basic prerequisite of sensible planning

With best personal wishes

Yours sincerely

Jim Biggin

Chairman