



The Bearsted & Thurnham Society

The Residents Association for the Civil Parishes of Bearsted and Thurnham



C/O The Chairman
Bearsted & Thurnham Society
92 Ashford Road
Bearsted
Kent ME14 4LT

Richard Timms
Planning Officer
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
King Street
Maidstone
Kent ME15 6JQ

18th April 2019

Dear Mr Timms,

APPLICATION 18/506656/FULL: FOR THE ERECTION OF A NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SECONDARY SCHOOL WITH FORMATION OF NEW ACCESS ON BEARSTED ROAD, TOGETHER WITH ASSOCIATED CAR PARKING AND DROP OFF AREA, PEDESTRIAN ACCESS, DRAINAGE, AREAS FOR FORMAL AND INFORMAL PLAY AND LANDSCAPING WORKS

Further to our letters dated 12th January and 1st April we wish to add the following comments.

The letter from the KCC Area Education Officer seeks to confirm the impression that the two schools have been awarded by the Department for Education to the Leigh Academy Trust; that it is a requirement for them to be co-located; and that Pope's Field is the only place in the Borough where this can be achieved. The letter completely fails to mention that, until the site was selected, the location was considered by KCC Education to be in "Maidstone East", which had a relatively insignificant shortfall in Primary school places. On the other hand, the northern part of the town centre, where housing developments have been permitted with no regard for school places, was predicted to have a significant deficit. The amendment to boundaries of the areas used for planning of primary school places to suit this site gives the impression of a perfect example of modern-day Gerrymandering.

Under normal circumstances, and applying simple common sense, it would be absurd to place a primary school in a totally unsustainable location where the vast majority of pupils will have to travel to school by car. It is not surprising that in excess of 700 letters of objection have been submitted; it is blatantly obvious to local residents who understand the road network and understand the choices made when selecting primary schools that the site is unsuitable.

It is also not surprising that residents have gained the impression that decisions have been made to promote these schools by people in central government or a commercial organisation with no local knowledge. Their influence appears to have affected the judgement of local council officers who have been convinced that this proposal represents the only solution to a shortage of school places in central Maidstone. It is now time for the Planning Authority to demonstrate that it does possess local knowledge, and to respond to the local population rather than edicts from elsewhere.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Vanhecke
Chairman