

Theale Parish Council Statement 19th January 2018

Theale Parish Council was saddened to read WBC's press release of 18th January 2018 which was provided to the parish council by the Reading Chronicle.

The issue of the proposed new primary school has been a very complex, time consuming and lengthy one and has placed huge pressure on the councillors and staff of what is a relatively small parish council. However, the parish council has worked hard throughout to try to negotiate with West Berkshire Council to resolve the issue. The parish council would not choose to enter into a 'blame game' with West Berkshire Council, it would rather use its limited resources to resolve the important issue of education provision for Theale residents. The parish council believes that district councils should be able to work in partnership with all its parishes.

Theale Parish Council accepts that the letter from West Berkshire Council, received on 4th January, did acknowledge the parish council's letter of 30th November - but it did not address the parish council's offer of further discussions.

The parish council is not aware of when the West Berkshire Council Executive made the decision to pull out of the school project unless an unconditional assurance was provided by Theale Parish Council by 31st January 2018, as referred to in WBC's letter of 4th January, and therefore cannot comment on why an acknowledgement was not received beforehand. The WBC Executive did meet on 21st December 2017 but the matter of the school appears not to have been on that agenda.

Between 30th November 2017 and 15th January 2018 the parish council received three items of correspondence from WBC:

- the open letter from Nick Carter, CEO WBC, (4th January)
- a copy of WBC's press release dated 4th January 2018 (after a call from the Newbury Weekly News informing the parish council office that a press release had been issued)
- a response to a request made by Cllr Becky Williams, (Chair, Theale Parish Council), for clarification of matters contained in the letter of 4th January 2018, received on 11th January 2018.

The parish council wrote to West Berkshire Council and Alok Sharma MP on 11th January 2018 with a list of possible dates for an urgent meeting to discuss the current situation. As the public are aware, the parish council has now managed to arrange such a meeting which will be held in the near future and chaired by Alok Sharma MP.

Theale Parish Council is disappointed that it has now been accused of introducing a "new reason for delaying the decision". Legislation dictates that, when considering the disposal of non-charity land, local councils must not dispose of it for less than 'best price', normally the open market valuation of the land or interest. The Secretary of State can give consent for local councils to dispose of land at an undervalue - if certain criteria are met. The parish council cannot dispose of land unless it is legally able to do so. This is **not** a "new reason", Theale Parish Council pointed out this legal principal to West Berkshire Council by letter back in September 2015.