

Council halts Theale Primary School project

Decisions comes as deadline for legal agreement passes

Work on a new school in Theale has stopped after Theale Parish Council failed to meet the latest deadline and sign a legal agreement on land which would deliver a new school.

As part of its commitment to the education of young people across the district, West Berkshire Council was proposing to build a new £8.5m school in Theale. The existing school is too small to meet current and future demand for school places locally and, due to its location, expansion is unfeasible. Eleven sites in the village were considered for a new school and only one was a viable option - on a small part of North Street Playing Fields. The land is owned by Englefield Estate and leased by Theale Parish Council.

Over the past couple of years West Berkshire Council has been working to deliver a new school for the village. Englefield Estate has agreed to provide the five acres of land needed but Theale Parish Council - which has 11 years left on its lease of the land - has not been prepared to release it. In return for relinquishing its lease on one corner of the playing field, Theale Parish Council had been offered two acres of replacement land, extended leases on the remaining land and other benefits.

In January a decision was made to cancel the project after negotiations with Theale Parish Council failed to secure any commitment to release the land. The decision was subsequently postponed to allow Theale Parish Council to conduct a parish poll and in March villagers voted in favour of releasing the land for the new school. With no progress made by June, West Berkshire Council gave Theale Parish Council until the end of July to sign the legal documents which would allow the new school to go ahead. This did not happen and when schools return in September work will begin with nearby schools to discuss creating new school places outside the village.

As this work cannot begin until the start of the new school term and after listening to requests from local residents to allow Theale Parish Council

more time it now has been given until Friday 14th September, 2018 by West Berkshire Council to surrender its lease, if that is what it decides to do. This will also allow it time to consider a revised offer made last week by the Englefield Estate.

West Berkshire Council has written to Theale Parish Council to confirm its position.

[2018.07.31 Letter to Theale Parish Council \[57kb\]](#)

Speaking about the decision [Councillor Lynne Doherty, Executive Member for Education](#), said:

"Words cannot express my frustration and disappointment that after so much hard work we have been unable to build a new school for the children of Theale. We have really tried to progress this with a parish council which through indecision, obfuscation and delay has for two years put off making any decision on the lease.

"We know that it would have been an important decision for Theale Parish Council had it resolved to get on and decide on the lease. We offered to pay its legal fees so that it could get support and speed up its decision-making process - which was not taken up - and we also provided advice about the steps it would need to take. With construction costs increasing by £100,000 because of the delay, the existing primary school overpopulated and under pressure and with a need to get on and create new school places we do not have the luxury of any more time. We have tried our best and now it is time to move on and start creating elsewhere the new places we so desperately need."

To find a summary timeline of communication between West Berkshire Council and Theale Parish Council: [New Theale School - Timeline](#)