

Theale Parish Council

Statement re Theale Primary School Project – published on 3rd August 2018

Theale Parish Council would like to update its residents on the latest developments on the Theale Primary School project.

TPC confirms that parish councillors have met to consider the objections received in relation to the Public Notice advertising the possible sale of NSPF land. At that meeting, councillors also discussed the pros and cons of the proposal to build a primary school in NSPF in terms of the social, economic and environmental benefits or otherwise, in accordance with the legislation governing the disposal of public open space.

Residents will probably be aware that Nick Carter (WBC) sent a letter to TPC on the subject of the primary school proposal (dated 31st July 2018, not received by the TPC office until 1st August 2018) and that WBC also issued a press release (not provided to TPC but councillors have had opportunity to read it subsequently on social media). Both documents are available to view on the parish council website.

Councillors were once again disappointed that WBC had chosen to inform social media of its actions on this very important matter before informing Theale Parish Council, especially as a very constructive meeting between representatives from the three parties, WBC, TPC and Englefield Estate, had taken place just the previous week.

At a meeting facilitated by the Englefield Estate Manager, the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Clerk of the parish council met with two senior officers from WBC in an effort to bring about a resolution to this long running issue. Open and frank discussions took place and all those present agreed that it had been a very constructive meeting. The parish council representatives agreed to take the information discussed back to Full Council at their imminent 'consideration of objections' informal meeting (referred to above). **All those present at the meeting between the three parties agreed that the discussions would remain confidential until such time as all three parties issued a joint press release, approved by all three parties.**

Mr Carter's letter refers to a 'revised offer' from Englefield Estate and so, not surprisingly, residents have asked the parish council for details of that offer. The Estate has requested that TPC does not release its letter, or the details contained within the letter, at this point in time. They have requested that the information is not disclosed until such time as TPC issues formal documentation for its 'decision meeting'. The parish council wishes to continue working closely with the Estate and the parish of Englefield and therefore it will be respecting this request.

With regards to Mr Carter's letter of 31st July 2018 and the accompanying press release the parish council would like to comment as follows:

TPC notes that the letter states "**Members have agreed that if they receive *clear evidence* that Theale Parish Council *has surrendered* its lease on NSPF no later than 5pm on Friday 14th September 2018 they will *revisit their decision to cancel* the Primary School project**".

TPC has written to Mr Carter seeking clarification, among other things, on exactly what evidence would be required to demonstrate that the lease had been surrendered. Council notes that if this was achieved the commitment by WBC is only to revisit their decision to cancel, not to reverse it.

WBC's press release would suggest that the writer has been misinformed, and that Cllr Lynne Doherty has not been made aware of the facts. Anyone who has taken an interest in this long running saga would be well aware that Theale Parish Council is not being asked to relinquish "its lease on *one corner of the playing field*". The truth is that TPC is being asked to give up more than 5 acres of public open space land, land that is currently home to a full size football pitch, part of a second full size football pitch and all the on-site parking for North Street playing fields. In return it is being offered a 2 acre site suitable only for an Under 15s pitch, a site that is currently agricultural land and thus wouldn't be available for use for another 2 years.

With reference to Councillor Doherty's comments about WBC offering assistance in terms of legal fees and so on, the offer from WBC was to pay the legal fees incurred by TPC (and the Estate) in the drawing up and adopting of a new lease, not an offer to pay the not insubstantial legal and valuation fees incurred by a parish council when following due legal process after the district council has proposed building a school on its playing fields. WBC and Englefield Estate are aware that the parish council has appointed an experienced solicitor to provide advice to TPC. It would be professionally inadvisable for WBC's legal advisors to also provide advice to TPC, solicitors acting for both sides are unable to act in the best interests of both their clients.

TPC will continue its dialogue with the Estate and will await clarification from Mr Carter before setting a date for its decision meeting. Residents will be informed, via the parish council website, when a date for such a meeting has been set.

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