

3<sup>rd</sup> January 2018

Jo Friend  
Clerk to Theale Parish Council  
The Pavillion  
Englefield Road  
Theale  
Berkshire  
RG7 5AS

**Chief Executive**

Council Offices  
Market Street Newbury  
Berkshire RG14 5LD

**Our Ref:** nc/rae

**Your Ref:**

**Please ask for:** Nick Carter

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Dear Ms Friend

Thank you for your confidential letter dated 30th November 2017 regarding the above. Your letter was delivered to this Office on the 19th December 2017.

On the 21st December 2017 I met with the Members of the Council's Executive to discuss progress with the above project and options for moving it forward. Mention was made of your letter dated 30th November but it did not have a significant bearing on the debate that ensued. The main focus of the discussion was Theale Parish Council's unwillingness to make a decision on relinquishing their lease to Englefield Estate for the land on which the new school would be built, and the impact that this is having and will continue to have. To clarify, this impact manifests itself not only in the form of additional cost and ongoing delay but also directly on the education of primary age children in Theale and the surrounding area, and on their parents. Members of the Council's Executive were also given a copy of a recent letter from the Governors and Headteacher at Theale Primary School expressing their concern at the current situation and the difficulties that have already occurred due to the delay.

You will be aware that this Council has previously agreed the use of CPO powers as a means of securing the land for the new Primary School in Theale. This was discussed at length at the meeting here on December 21st. Subsequent legal advice has highlighted the fact that the use of the CPO powers in this particular case is likely to be both protracted and costly. Given the ongoing need to secure additional primary school accommodation in the area this is no longer a viable option.

Members of the Council's Executive have therefore reluctantly taken the decision that in light of Theale Parish Council's continued objections to relinquishing the land for the construction of a new school in Theale, the project will be taken no further. Following discussions with Theale Primary School it has been agreed that, from the earliest possible date, the School's admission number will be reduced from 45 back to 30. The School has raised concerns with the Council regarding its current admission number and the significant risk, if retained, that pupil numbers will have a detrimental effect on teaching and learning, behaviour and the recruitment and retention of staff. The current admission number was agreed, along with the placing of additional temporary classrooms on the current primary school site, as a holdover measure whilst the new school was being built. Since this will no longer happen the Council and School have agreed to set the admission number back to 30 in order to reduce the risk.

Clearly, the reduction in the admission number will help address immediate issues concerning the current site but it will not resolve the underlying demand which triggered the need for a new school in Theale. As a result of Theale Parish Council's unwillingness to relinquish the land required for the new school, West Berkshire Council will now seek to make arrangements for the necessary additional provision to be made at nearby schools, most notably in Calcot. Our pupil demand modelling shows that we will shortly reach a position where primary age children living in Theale will be unable to be accommodated within their local primary school. When that point is reached they will need to travel to a nearby school.

In coming to this decision Members of the Executive have asked me to be clear about two further points. Firstly, this letter is being treated as an open letter. As you would expect this Council is keen to ensure that parents and residents in Theale are made aware of West Berkshire Council's decision not to progress the new school project any further, and importantly, the reasons for this decision. If necessary, Council officers and Members will meet parents, residents and the local MP to explain its decision in more detail.

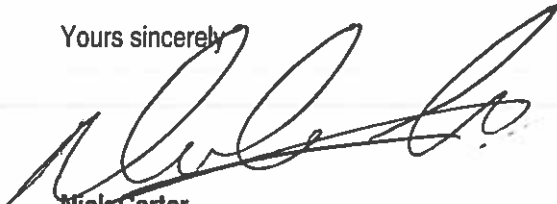
Finally, I have been asked to make it clear that should Theale Parish Council decide in the very near future to release the land then this Council will reconsider its decision outlined in this letter. The Council remains firmly of the view that the future education of Theale children would be best met by a new school in Theale and we have worked for over 4 years to try and achieve that. I would however want to emphasise and be clear what is meant by the 'very near future.'

In March 2017 Theale Parish Council were invited to confirm surrender of the land required for the new school, subject to West Berkshire Council achieving planning permission to convert 2 acres of agricultural land into playing field land. Theale Parish Council said they were not comfortable with this approach and confirmed they would make no decision until after any planning decision in respect of the two replacement acres. Permission on the two acres was achieved on July 28th 2017. In August 2017 Theale Parish Council was asked again to confirm their position; the reply was that no decision could be taken until the Parish Councillors returned from their summer holidays. In September West Berkshire Council wrote to the Theale Parish Council asking for confirmation of their position. Nothing was heard until December and even then the letter received provided no assurance that Theale Parish Council had any intention of releasing the land. An unconditional assurance will be required by the end of January 2018 if this Council is to reconsider its decision.

I hope this letter confirms this Council's position on the matter. I would be happy to clarify specific points or any outstanding matters you may have. In the meantime this Council will be communicating the decision outlined in this letter to those who have an interest in it.

A hard copy of this letter is being sent in the post.

Yours sincerely



**Nick Carter**  
**Chief Executive**

cc. Cllr Graham Jones  
Cllr Lynne Doherty  
Cllr Alan Macro  
Cllr Mollie Lock  
Alok Sharma MP  
Headteacher Theale Church of England Primary School  
Chair of Governors Theale Church of England Primary School  
Ian Pearson, WBC  
Rachael Wardell, WBC