

Bishop's Tachbrook Parish Council
c/o Mrs Corinne Hill (Clerk to the Council)
Gaydon Fields Farm,
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Cllr. Isobel Seccombe OBE, Leader of Warwickshire County Council
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Delivered by email to cllrseccombe@warwickshire.gov.uk

17 January 2022

Dear Cllr. Seccombe

New School – Bishop's Tachbrook

We write in relation to the new school planned for construction in Bishop's Tachbrook. At our Parish Council meeting of 13 January we were joined by WCC officers, Mr. Mark Evershed and Mr. Bern Timings, to receive an update in respect of the new school's progress and an explanation as to some of the setbacks they have been experiencing. We were grateful to them both for attending this meeting and restarting communication from WCC with the Parish on this very important matter.

A number of points raised at the meeting will require follow-up and further discussion over the coming months and we were pleased to hear that WCC intends to restart regular meetings of the school's steering committee where a representative of our Parish Council will be present.

One specific point caused a great deal of concern on the night and, as a Parish Council, we agreed that we should urgently follow up with you in the hope that you will intervene to take positive action thereby allaying our resident's concerns.

Background

The (WCC produced) "Information for Academy Proposers" document succinctly sets out the clear need for a new school to be provided within the South Warwickshire area. This need was apparent when the school was first considered in 2017 and it was clearer still when planning permission was granted in November 2019. Throughout that process, parents of children within our community along with parents of children relocating to our community have been reassured by the plans of WCC to provide education provision in this area and (following planning permission) at the proposed location.

The Parish of Bishop's Tachbrook has seen considerable housing growth throughout the second half of the last decade and this is forecast to continue for at least the next ten years. Occupation rates are high, the demand for both the market and affordable homes is substantial; families want to live in Bishop's Tachbrook with its vibrant sense of community, semi-rural views, fantastic transport links and proximity to innovative businesses.

However, what is clear from the conversations we have had with residents over the past few years is that the school is an essential part of what will make our community work for themselves and their families. They have known that they will have a school within walking distance from September 2023 and this has been a huge comfort to those already here and a huge draw to those relocating to this area. The expectation is that, if your child is due to start secondary school in September 2023, they will be going to 'Bishop's Tachbrook Academy'.

Timing

It was therefore a shock to residents in the room at the meeting last week to discover that the school may not be ready until September 2024; given the length of time that has elapsed since the planning permission was granted, councillors and residents were disappointed that the project is behind schedule and that sufficient safeguards were not put in place at the point the agreement was made with the present landowner so as to ensure there was no risk of the delays now being seen.

We cannot dwell on what has happened; however, for children expecting to start in September 2023 Mr. Timings suggested that two potential options are being considered. These are:

- 1) that the children starting at Bishop's Tachbrook Academy in 2023 would be temporarily accommodated offsite while construction completed and then would move onsite from summer 2024; or
- 2) that the children who would have expected to start at Bishop's Tachbrook Academy in September 2023 will instead be allocated to other schools (schools which we would note are generally at capacity) within the county for the entirety of their schooling.

Mr Timings advised the meeting that there was a "50/50 chance" of either option arising.

Impact

It was clear at the meeting (and this has been reinforced by conversations we have had since that time) that there was a strong preference for option 1. Reasons included –

- a) Residents have moved to the area with children expected to start school in September 2023 and therefore they feel that this was part of their decision-making process in moving.
- b) Residents who have children expecting to start the school in September 2023 feel they have been promised this by WCC in all announcements and communications; they do not feel that the delays that have been experienced should impact on their children's education.
- c) Residents who are expecting their children to start at the school in September 2023 are concerned about any younger children they may have who will likely end up at Bishop's Tachbrook Academy therefore creating a logistical issue.
- d) The impact on all children if additional pupils/classes are placed within existing, at capacity, schools.

Every family will have their own thoughts on this matter; however, we would note that this change has the potential to considerably impact our residents' lives and is undoubtedly already doing so by causing concern and worry. The wellbeing of our residents is paramount to everything we do as a Parish Council and therefore we are keen to do everything we can to see this situation resolved.

Proposal

Whilst a number of factors will undoubtedly feed into the ultimate decision, it was clear that (at the time of the meeting) there has been little thought as to the practicality and specifics of delivering Option 1, whilst Option 2 had an air of being the path of least resistance.

Lack of a developed and well thought-through alternative is the reason the school is to be sited in its present agreed location; we do not believe it should now become the justification for a sub-optimal approach to the pupil experience.

Further, a purely financial decision at the expense of wellbeing for our community would not be appropriate (this will be equally true when it comes to the design, layout and aesthetic nature of the building).

Consequently, we would request that you work with us in ensuring a positive outcome for your residents within the communities surrounding the school site, insisting that immediate and full consideration is given to Option 1 and that the decision ultimately taken reflects all factors and viewpoints (especially those of the affected families).

Trust has been eroded throughout this process; we now need to show residents that we can work together to deliver this project in a way that exceeds (rather than falls short) of what has been promised. To this end we would welcome your response that you intend to explore and seek to find a way to make Option 1 the preferred and ultimately adopted option. We would also welcome a clear timeline to expedite this decision so that our residents can plan accordingly.

Should you wish to discuss any of the above before responding formally, please do not hesitate to contact Matthew Greene or Corinne Hill (Clerk to the Parish Council).

Yours faithfully,
For and on behalf of Bishop's Tachbrook Parish Council



Cllr. Matthew Greene

Chairman
Bishop's Tachbrook Parish Council

Cc: Mrs. Corinne Hill, Clerk to the Council, Bishop's Tachbrook Parish Council
Cllr. Jan Matecki, Warwickshire County Councillor, Bishop's Tachbrook and Budbrooke
Cllr. Adrian Barton, Mayor, Whitnash Town Council