



LOCAL SCHOOL PLACE AVAILABILITY REMAINS UNDER PRESSURE DESPITE THE NEW SCHOOL ANNOUNCED FOR TWESELDOWN

On Monday this week, Hampshire County Council (HCC) announced that a three-form entry infant school in Church Crookham is a step closer, after planning permission was granted on 20 June 2012. The go ahead has been given for the three-form entry school to be built on land, which was the former Queen Elizabeth Barracks (QEB).

The school, Tweseldown Infant School, has been designed for potential expansion and will have nine classrooms, and other school facilities. It will also be available for the wider community to use after hours, with a main hall, library and ICT learning resource centre, food technology classroom, a community room and toilets. It will provide primary school places for children from the new housing on the former MOD site.

FACE-IT research has found that HCC estimate that there will currently be sufficient primary school places in Hart until 2015/16, when they believe there will be a shortfall of 329 places. However, it is not clear how this shortfall will be distributed across Hart's schools. HCC have suggested that current proposals, covering Tweseldown Infant School and Crookham Junior School, planned for 2014, may go a long way to address this shortfall.

HCC have also calculated that they will need an additional 19 primary schools across Hampshire in the next 5 years. The planning section on HCC's website currently only has requests for temporary classrooms. Other than Tweseldown, there are no planning applications yet for further permanent classrooms at any of the local primary or secondary schools.

There are currently insufficient school places for children in Fleet to attend a Fleet secondary school. At present, 12 children are

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bussed daily to Connaught School in Aldershot. When the Aldershot Urban Area is completed (4,500 houses), it is likely that all the schools in Rushmoor will be full. HCC are not proposing to build another secondary school in that area.

Children from QEB will be bussed to Calthorpe Park. A FACE-IT spokesperson has learned that parents with one child in Court Moor School, who were hoping that a sibling would also attend that school, have been allocated a place in Calthorpe Park for the second child. They had hoped both children would walk together to their local school but now face having their children in different schools and the daily challenge of an increasingly difficult school run to Calthorpe Park.

Calthorpe Park is planned to grow in size to cope with increased demand but will still not be large enough to cater for all those needing places (according to HCC's prediction model). HCC predict that an additional 6 forms per year will be needed but Calthorpe's expansion will only cater for 4, leaving a shortfall of 2 forms (about 60 children). This prediction only provides for Elvetham Heath, Edenbrook and QEB. It does not take into account any further development proposals, especially the 450 houses currently scheduled for Grove Farm.

Just increasing the size of existing schools is not necessarily the answer. A recent study by the London School of Economics and Lancaster University indicates that, if a secondary school exceeds 1200 students, academic success starts to decrease. This study also states that, if a school exceeds 1400 students, attendance and behaviour also start to become more of a problem. It recommends that the optimum year group is between 150 and

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230 students. Any significant expansion to Calthorpe Park is likely to take the school size beyond these thresholds.

On the Planning section of HCC's website, there are only requests for extending the time for the temporary classrooms (currently 8). There is nothing yet approved for permanent expansion of Calthorpe Park school.

The FACE-IT research has so far reviewed 33 local schools and found that most were already technically full, being within 5% of the Planned Admissions Number agreed with HCC. Some 25 (76%) of these schools were at or above their agreed limits for two or more year groups.

Parents who have moved to the area because of the good reputations of local schools are now increasingly concerned that their hoped for school place allocations will not be available and that complex journeys to more distant schools will be needed, with increasing numbers of siblings allocated to different schools. The lack of plans for permanent school buildings is worrying and the potential growth of Calthorpe Park to 1,400 or more students is an increasingly grave concern for many parents.

With Hart District Council currently favouring continued development around the edges of settlements such as Fleet, surely sufficient school places must first be provided to meet the existing demand for good quality, local schooling before there is any more population expansion in Fleet and its surrounding settlements. Similar school facilities should also be provided to meet the new demand created by future developments, timed to coincide with the arrival of the new housing and not some years later. How can cramming ever more children into existing schools sustain the integrity and reputation of these establishments?

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