

Arwel Evans

From: Neil Tiley <neil.tiley@pegasusgroup.co.uk>
Sent: 30 April 2024 09:32
To: james.wigmore@n-somerset.gov.uk
Cc: Roger.Willmot@n-somerset.gov.uk
Subject: Land North of Mulberry Road, Congresbury

Dear James,

I have been instructed to represent the applicant on behalf of educational matters and I was hoping that you would be able to provide some assistance on a number of matters.

I see from the committee reports that the Council has indicated that St Andrew's Primary School is at and likely to remain at capacity and therefore pupils will have to travel to other schools, and that all pupils travelling to Churchill Academy will be eligible for free home to school transport as there is no safe walking route to the secondary school. On this basis, I understand that the Council has requested a contribution of £964,536.91 towards home to school transport for both primary and secondary school pupils for a 10-year period.

The Council acknowledge in the committee reports that St Andrew's Primary has sufficient built floorspace to expand its capacity by 105 places such that there would then be sufficient capacity in the local primary school to accommodate the proposed development. However, the Council suggest that the expanded school would not be viable as the number of pupils arising from the proposed development will not be sufficient to fill these additional places. The Council has however neglected to take into account the pupils arising from the existing and proposed allocations at Congresbury which will necessitate the expansion of St Andrew's Primary regardless of the proposed development, and in combination with the proposed development these allocations will ensure that the school is viable. Indeed, in order to ensure the viability of the expanded school which is necessary to support the existing and proposed allocations, there is a need for the additional pupils arising from the proposed development. Accordingly, the most appropriate and sustainable course of action would be for the Council to seek to expand the existing school such that no contributions towards home to school transport for primary school pupils will be required. However, obviously if the Council choose not to do so or the expansion is not complete prior to the proposed development being occupied, there will be a need for home to school transport provision for primary school pupils. I trust that the Council will be agreeable to the inclusion of a clause within the legal agreement which provides for both of these scenarios.

The need for home to school transport provision for secondary school pupils is also agreeable in principle.

I am however unable to discern how the contribution of £964,536.91 has been calculated or what this will be used to fund and would welcome your assistance on this. In particular:

1. I'm aware that there are existing bus services running from Congresbury to Churchill Academy. I would welcome confirmation as to whether these are designated home to school transport services and if so whether these already have available places which could cater for the pupils arising without any additional cost.
2. If not, or for the remaining pupils, has the funding sought been calculated on the basis of the provision of new services and if so, will this be a new minibus or bus service to St Andrew's Primary and Churchill Academy, or will it be provided through vouchers for pupils to access existing public bus services?
3. If a new service is to be funded, will this be a single service to both schools or two separate services to each school?
4. How has the contribution of £964,536.91 been calculated?

The one element of the contribution that has been set out is that this has been calculated on the basis that it will fund home to school transport for 10 years. However, paragraph 45 of the DfE's guidance entitled Securing Developer Contributions for Education (August 2023) states:

“When there is no suitable solution for sustainable access to school but a local planning authority (or Planning Inspector) is still minded to approve a development, you can seek developer contributions towards the cost of home-to-school transport for an agreed period, such as three years following the occupation of dwellings to reflect the usual timescale for government revenue funding to take account of the latest pupil projections.”

I therefore trust that the Council will agree that it is only necessary to fund home to school transport for three years rather than ten, as any funding necessary for the remaining seven years will be secured through Government revenue funding. Accordingly, I trust that as a minimum the Council would agree that the requested contribution should be reduced by 70% to £289,361.07.

I look forward to receiving your response on the queries raised above, and hope that this provides a constructive basis for progressing towards a timely agreement.

Kind regards

Neil Tiley

Senior Director – Economics

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