

# The Parish Council of Leckhampton with Warden Hill

*Cheltenham, Gloucestershire*

---

Clerk: Ms Arlene Deane, The Gate House, Cedar Court, Humphris Place, Cheltenham, GL53 7FB  
tel. 01242 465762 email: [lwwhpc@gmail.com](mailto:lwwhpc@gmail.com)

14 November 2018

Councillor Lynden Stowe  
Gloucestershire County Council  
Shire Hall  
Gloucester  
GL1 2TG

Dear Councillor Stowe

I understand that you are being invited as Cabinet member for Economy, Skills and Growth to approve a proposal from officers to permanently expand Leckhampton Primary School from two form entry to three form entry. As Chairman of Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council, I am writing to express the Council's concern over this proposal and to recommend that you should defer taking any final decision at this stage.

There is huge concern among residents in this area and parents of children at the school about the proposed expansion, as is demonstrated in the responses to the two public consultations that GCC has held on the proposal. The biggest concern for residents and for the Parish Council is over the impact the expansion would have on the already very serious traffic congestion. Leckhampton Primary is located on Church Road which is the bottleneck on the only traffic route round the south side of Cheltenham. Church Road is critical to the Cheltenham traffic system, carrying around 1300 vehicles in the peak morning traffic period. It is a narrow winding country lane with insufficient width for the traffic queues in the peak period to pass in both directions without having to drive on the pavement. Parents taking children to Leckhampton Primary create a major problem because they disrupt and block the traffic flows as they manoeuvre and park and as they cross the traffic flows to get to and from the school entrance in Hall Road. Occasionally Church Road gridlocks, also blocking Leckhampton Road and Charlton Lane. The traffic issues are discussed in more detail in the evidence that the Parish Council has submitted to the consultation which includes data from recent traffic surveys that the Council has conducted in Church Road.

Various mitigation measures have been suggested including introducing travel plans. The Parish Council is working with the school and officers and Cllr. Iain Dobie, the County Council member on the Parish Council, is also working with GCC Highways on a possible safety zone for the school. But at present these possibilities are still just conjecture and totally unproven. One proposal that Tim Browne discussed in a recent meeting with us would be to provide a path from Burrows Playing Field directly to the school over land that GCC owns adjacent to the school in order to provide a safe walking and cycling route to the school. The Parish Council believes that whether or not the school is enlarged this is a worthwhile idea because it may allow some children to cycle to

the school. Currently children are forbidden to cycle because of the danger from the traffic. Another measure proposed by the Parish Council is to seek to provide drop-off points and walking trains so that parents bringing children to school by car do not have to park in order to personally escort their children to the school gate. However, Sam Porter, the Head Teacher, said in a meeting with us and GCC officers (Tracy Eames and Gareth Vine) that she could not ask her staff to collect children from the roadside because they were already overburdened and that she could not rely on parents or volunteers to do this either. She said that a previous attempt to use a walking train had failed. Providing drop off points might also prove counter-productive if it made it easier for parents to take children to school by car and thereby increased the traffic. So it is vital to thoroughly test the potential mitigation measures in practice and determine how much benefit they can provide before making any irreversible commitment to permanently expand the school.

The traffic problem is compounded by GCC's proposal to locate a new secondary school for 900 pupils on land close to the junction of Kidnappers Lane and Shurdington Road (A46). The morning traffic queue on the A46 extends from the Moorend Park Road junction past the Kidnappers Lane junction and often as far as the Up Hatherley Way roundabout. This is a queue length of 1.4km with a driving time in the queue of typically 18 minutes. The traffic queue lasts from about 07:50 to 09:15 and sometimes for as long as two hours. It is because of this queue and the traffic congestion in Church Road that the Secretary of State in 2016 rejected an application for a major housing development in the area on grounds of severe cumulative traffic congestion.

The secondary school is intended, according to statements from Tim Browne, to deal with the shortfall of secondary school places that is particularly acute in the area of east Leckhampton and Charlton Park where there is a large gap between the *de facto* catchments of Bournside School and Balcarras School. There is no public transport route from Charlton Park to the proposed location of the new secondary school and the travel distance is 1.5 to 2 miles. Cycling even for secondary school children is hazardous because of the traffic. The car routes to the proposed secondary school from Charlton Park are either via Church Road or via the A46. Cars coming via Moorend Park Road and the A46 would have a very major impact in worsening the A46 traffic queue and, as discussed in the Parish Council's evidence on the proposed secondary school, this could easily create a level of severe traffic congestion that would debar planning permission for the secondary school. So if the secondary school is to be feasible at the proposed location it makes sense to try to improve the traffic flow via the alternative route through Church Road.

The Parish Council therefore strongly recommends that you should defer any decision on the expansion of Leckhampton Primary School, but should proceed with the proposed mitigation measures in order to establish how much benefit they can provide. Whether the improvement will be sufficient to render the proposed secondary school viable from a traffic point of view is not clear. But certainly it would be a big mistake to make the situation worse by approving the Primary School expansion at this stage given there is so much difficulty and uncertainty over the proposed secondary school.

We also recommend that you consider the option of removing the sibling rule at Leckhampton Primary in order to make it easier to provide enough places for local children. In the recommendation submitted to you by officers it is stated that the number of new entrants coming to the school this year from more than 0.6 miles away, all of them under the sibling rule, is only 12 out of the 90 new entrants. The implication is that the sibling rule is not a significant factor. However, we are informed by governors and ex-governors of the school that the number admitted under the sibling rule from such distances has been larger in previous years. Also, if the 12 pupils admitted under the sibling rule this year together with their siblings already at the school were instead to attend a school closer to where they now live, this would reduce the number of children at Leckhampton Primary by at least 24. That does not of course provide 24 places for new entrants in

the reception year, but it does suggest that by removing the sibling rule and also taking account of the planned expansion at Warden Hill Primary School and capacity elsewhere you could provide sufficient primary school capacity in the Leckhampton area without needing to expand Leckhampton Primary. As is well known, the sibling rule is quite often exploited by parents to get their children into excellent schools such as Leckhampton Primary. Removing the sibling rule, if only temporarily, could provide a stop-gap to cope with pupil numbers whilst you test the traffic mitigation measures in practice and whilst you resolve the very difficult issue of the proposed new secondary school.

The consequences of creating severe cumulative traffic congestion on the A46 and in the traffic route through Church Road do not just affect local residents. They also affect residents in Brockworth, Painswick, Stroud and other areas in the Cotswolds and Severn Valley who commute to jobs in Cheltenham via the A46 and A417/M5. The A46 is the main route into Cheltenham from the south and from the A417. Driving times due to the traffic queue are already long (up to 30 minutes for the 3.2 miles from the A417 to the Moorend Park Road junction) and they are becoming worse. The travel times could easily become so long as to prevent many people living in areas south and south-west of Cheltenham from commuting into jobs in Cheltenham. As said in the Secretary of State's 2016 findings on the traffic congestion, most people using the A46 in the morning peak period do not have a choice to travel at some other time. If they cannot travel in the peak period, they have to find work elsewhere, and employment also moves elsewhere.

For the future strength of Gloucestershire we vitally need good primary education and it can make sense to expand outstanding schools such as Leckhampton Primary. But we also vitally need jobs and a strong economy and a traffic system that can sustain this. So this is not just a decision on education capacity but also on the future of the economy and growth in Cheltenham and the livelihood of people in areas south of Cheltenham. The decision has to be taken with great care and to be properly and objectively informed.

Thank you for your time in reading this letter. If you would like any further information we would be delighted to respond.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adrian Mears CBE  
Chairman  
Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council