
Earley Infant School Admissions 2015

There has been a problem this year over the allocation of Infant/Primary School places in Earley, mainly focussing around the centre of Maiden Erlegh, but with knock-on effects across the whole Town.

This year the focus is on about 30 families, who live in the middle of the Aldryngton/Loddon/Hawkedon Triangle, with all three schools within easy “toddler” walking distance, indeed one of these schools would have to be passed before going to any other schools.

As a local councillor, I was asked to write to the Appeals Panel, in support of the cases being put forward by local residents and a copy of the letter submitted is attached. The Appeals process is a statutory one and outside of our remit.

That officers have been prudent in their approach to the problem is clear, they have – obviously – identified an increasing need, hence the expansion of Hawkedon by 30 places. Discussions indicate that their forward planning identified the possible need for more places and that the actions taken should have been adequate. However we now have some 30 young children displaced this year

Our problem is that the schools are too successful, and we are the victims of our own success. Whenever a house becomes vacant the main selling point is the schools, thus the homes are snapped up by families desperate for a decent education for their offspring. We have no reliable way of predicting this demographic change but that it happens is clear, and that it will continue for some years is also accepted in the property world.

I re-iterate that officers implement policies, and it is us councillors who are, finally, responsible for setting those guidelines. I have not been able to speak out before as it would have been inappropriate during the pre-election “purdah”, and I was a candidate at those elections.

The problem faced by the Borough is that of identifying future needs, in a sustainable fashion. Should more places be provided, when the statistics available only indicate a need in the short term? The second point is where should school places be?

I ask the Scrutiny Panel to look into those procedures, to give officers all the help and assistance they need. The responsibility for providing adequate school places is ours. In Earley the problem is across the whole Town but, this year, is focussed around Maiden Erlegh. This main section is known as the Gough Cooper estate (those dating from the 1960ish time, where future sales are certain). That numbers will increase seems inevitable.

Neither I, nor any of my Earley councillor colleagues, believe that children going to “big-school” for the first time should have to travel major distances, if it can be avoided in any way. Whether simply changing the way that forms are designed and filled out as parents apply for school places would be sufficient seems unlikely, but could assist. There are also legal requirements that we have to follow in the way we approach this problem.

Officers are not in favour of surge classes and we need to understand why. Also School sizes may need revision. It is the system we are required to work under that requires investigation as we suspect this will be a problem across most of Earley and Woodley in the next few years.

Thank you

David Chopping