

Brooke School

Correspondence between Sebastian Gasse (Head of Education Participation, Infrastructure and Partnership Service, Children's Services, Norfolk County Council) and Edward Jinks (Brooke PC Chairman)

Email from S Gasse 4 July 2018

Dear Mr Jinks,

Following the recent meeting and a considerable amount of correspondence from Brooke residents to County Council officers, I attach a statement explaining the position from Children's Services in relation to the housing proposal for Brooke.

Kind regards

Seb Gasse

The housing proposal currently being put forward by FW Properties in Brooke is outside the Local Plan. When a proposal comes forward in this way, the Planning Authority (in this case South Norfolk District Council) will consider a number of factors. One of these is whether the scheme offers any 'over-riding benefits'. An example of this can be whether the application can offer the provision of a school site to address existing need, which would be one of a number of material planning considerations that are evaluated. These are afforded weight in this planning balance and test of overriding benefits when the District Council, as Local Planning Authority, makes its decision. Developers can put forward applications for housing alone and they would be considered in the same way.

Children's Services has a legal duty to ensure sufficient school places, and the District Council asks Children's Services officers for a view on the need for school places when a planning application is made.

In the light of the previous ambition to replace the school building in Brooke, it is reasonable for Children's Services to consider seriously the offer of a school site for Brooke. There is a large amount of housing development in the wider area close to Brooke. Poringland in particular has seen more housing than originally expected and the expansion of the existing primary school in the Village by another 105 places has now exhausted the capacity of that site to expand any further. Both Stoke Holy Cross Primary and Alington and Bergh Apton Primary schools are at capacity on confined sites with no further expansion possible. Any offer of land for a new school could help ensure there are sufficient school places in the locality. It will be for the District Council, as the local planning authority, to take the need for a new school into account as part of the planning balance.

If this application gets approval through the planning process, a school site will be secured under a Section 106 agreement. Within this agreement there will be triggers laid out that not only secure access and services to the school site but also allows the County Council time to make a decision as to whether pupil numbers justify the investment in a new school building.

Reply from Edward Jinks 13 July 2018

Dear Mr Gasse,

Many thanks for your statement, which arrived when I was on holiday.

I want to share your note with other members of the Parish Council, but before doing so I would like clarification on a specific point, namely the viability of a new school in Brooke.

You state that the number of houses built in the Poringland area in recent years has exceeded expectations, and that the primary schools in Poringland, Stoke and Alington/Bergh Apton are full. Against this background, and with ongoing development in Poringland, it appears to me that there is a requirement for a new school in this area. On this basis there should be a viable business case for a new school in Brooke without the need for new housing development in Brooke and without the requirement for free land.

A new 210 place school at Brooke would fulfil two requirements. Firstly it would accommodate the pupils from the existing school in a new state-of-the-art school with its own dedicated playing field. Secondly it would have the capacity to meet the demand from nearby villages where existing schools are full, recent new developments have already exceeded expectations and more houses continue to be built. A new school in Brooke would ensure there are sufficient school places in the locality for the next few years.

In summary I do not feel that the business case for a new school at Brooke should rely upon new housing being built in Brooke or the availability of free land for the school. In my view there is a viable business case now.

I would appreciate your thoughts on these points so that I can brief PC members more fully.

With kind regards,

Edward Jinks, Brooke PC chairman

Letter from S Gasse 20 July 2018

Dear Mr Jinks

Re: Brooke LA Statement

Many thanks for your response.

As mentioned in previous correspondence, a developer has come forward and offered a site for a new school in Brooke and officers are asked to consider whether this is acceptable.

When there is pressure on school places the first option for the Local Authority is to consider, whether there is space in existing schools. There is currently spare capacity in Brooke Primary School that could take some children from new housing in the immediate or nearby vicinity.

The second option is to explore whether the existing schools could be extended on their sites to take more children. It is our view that this wouldn't be possible with the local schools in the area.

Thirdly, we would look at either relocating and expanding an existing school or opening a new school (which would have to be a Free School Academy). We are not at the stage for a search for a new school site as there is spare capacity currently at Brooke.

If the new school site had not been offered at this time, NCC would be seeing future pressure on school places in our forecasts and would certainly have in mind that a new school site would potentially be required for the area in the future.

As the offer of a school site in Brooke will come free of charge, serviced and with access provided, it is prudent to consider this in line with future school place need in the area. A new school site for Brooke not only satisfies longer term need for more school places, but gives the village a possible a new school building and a more sustainable future with higher pupil numbers. As stated previously, there is currently no capital provision for such a project and a successful business case would be required for prioritisation.

Should we not consider the offer of a school site in Brooke at this time, future need could be provided elsewhere – on a new site in Poringland for example, which is likely to affect pupil numbers in surrounding schools.

Yours sincerely

Sebastian Gasse
Head of Education Participation, Infrastructure and Partnership Service