



ABBOT'S WAY SCHOOL

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26th April 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

As you will be aware everyone at Abbot's Way School has been working hard for the past 12 months to attain the planning permission needed to offer a provision for up to 40 students onsite. In our first application, groundworks were carried out which, most importantly enabled the school to open but only provide places for 15 students on site at any one time. With the advice from Mendip District Council regarding what works/plans were required to attain an extension in capacity, these items were reflected in our latest application. This was submitted and attempts were made to consult with Somerset Highways prior, but a response was received via email that they were "too busy due to Covid".

As a new application, part of the planning process required Mendip District Council to consult again with Somerset County Council as the highway authority for the area. The Highway Officer eventually responded on 9 April, even though the application was registered as valid on 22 February. His response set out a number of minor concerns relating to the access/egress and parking layout drawings plus some more significant points he felt related to highway safety and capacity. Our consultants provided a full and detailed response on 16 April indicating that the drawings would be adjusted to address the minor layout points, but also setting out very carefully why they believed the officer was mistaken in his concerns over wider highway safety and capacity. The response concluded with an offer to meet with the officers from Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council in order to discuss and seek resolution of any remaining issues.

Mendip District Council, having consulted again with Somerset County Council, responded on 22 April, and to ours and the astonishment of our consultants said they were not prepared to meet or consider the points that had been previously made by them. They repeated a number of the comments originally made on 9 April, but provided no hard evidence to back up the concerns they had expressed on safety and capacity, and concluded with the statement that "they do not intend to spend any additional time on negotiating this scheme". Their response went on to say that

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unless the application was withdrawn by close of business the following day it would be refused by the officers under their delegated powers. It is common practice to extend the determination period on planning applications in order to allow discussions to continue prior to a decision being made either by officers under delegated powers or by the Mendip Planning Board or Planning Committee. In refusing the application the officers will be obliged to set out very clearly their reasons for refusal.

After careful consideration we have accepted the advice of our consultants to accept a delegated refusal and to move forward as quickly as possible with a resubmission of our application, backed up by all the details necessary to specifically address the refusal reasons. Unfortunately this means an unexpected delay in our progress and the developments we need to expand the school, which we are still hopeful to achieve by September. We should add that our consultants remain confident that permission will be secured.

We are aware that several students and families are fighting hard to attain a place at Abbot's Way for September 2021, please rest assured we are working as hard as we can to ensure places are available at that time. The school simply needs to expand due to the need, and any alterations to the site can be made to accommodate this. We sincerely hope that our new application to address the points raised by Highways will be met with a "working together" attitude from this moment forward, as this appears to have been lacking up to now.

Rest assured our viability as a school remains unchanged, and whilst, we all remain confident that planning will be approved our proposed time scale for the September increase in capacity is our most pressing issue at the present time.

If you have any concerns, or wish to discuss anything in connection with your child's place/entry at Abbot's Way School, please contact Hellen Lush and Gareth Wright our Joint Headteachers in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,

David Pugh

David Pugh
Chair, Advisory Governing Body

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