

County Council – 24 March 2017

Agenda Item 5 – Petition: Woodlands Meed Special School

Statement by Petitioners

In 2010, the Council put forward a Proposal to close two special schools in Mid Sussex, Newick House and Court Meadow, schools which catered for different types of need and severity, and replace them with a single, all through, generic school, catering for a wide range of needs, including MLD, autism, SLD and PMLD, and an age range from 2 to 19. The Proposal was approved by a Determination by the Official Schools Adjudicator under the Education Act 2006. The details were described and approved at the original planning meeting in November 2010 which showed our older students accommodated in a new college building to be built to the north of our current new school.

For reasons which have never been made clear, WSCC stated that they did not have sufficient funds to build the whole school. Since Woodlands Meed opened, the older students – nearly 40% of our total school – have languished in temporarily refurbished buildings and old huts on the old Newick House site, with leaking roofs, holes in the floor, inadequate toilet and hygiene facilities, faulty heating and electrics, poor access and vermin. Furthermore, there is insufficient accommodation to deliver the full curriculum or the facilities required in their EHC Plans and children have to be bussed back to the school site daily.

The Council has now leased our college building land to University of Brighton Academies Trust, frustrating their ability to complete their legal obligation under the Determination of the Schools Adjudicator.

As the college building site is no longer available, the governors have reluctantly decided to look at the possibility of completing the school by building on the Newick House site. We are pleased that £1.5 million of funding, originally identified as a quick fix to our urgent issues, can be carried forward towards a permanent solution to complete the school.

It was thought that a significant step forward had been taken when Louise Goldsmith, Leader of West Sussex County Council, stated that she “wanted to explore how the council may be able to support governors in securing funding to build a new school” and set up a Task & Finish Group to do so.

However, since that group was established, we have made little progress. We haven't even been able to agree a joint press release. We have been pressing the Council on further sources of funding. S106 monies, thought to be £2.5 million; an extra £3.5 million just granted to the Council for the development of SEN facilities; the value of Court Meadow £2 million. The governors have also been working on alternative new build proposals and believe that the new college can be completed for less than half the £20 million that the Council has suggested it will cost.

It is time to finish the job. The governing body of Woodlands Meed call upon the Council to commit to completing the school and secure the funding to do so.