



Gavin Murray  
Flood & Development Management  
Economy & Infrastructure  
Cumbria County Council  
Parkhouse Building  
Baron Way  
Carlisle  
CA6 4SJ

17<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Dear Gavin,

**PLANNING APPLICATION FUL/2020/0250**

I am writing to ask you to reconsider your response on this application, in relation to education contributions. I am disturbed by some of the misleading comments on school capacity, which amount to a perverse abuse of s106 in favour of the developer – not only harming the children who are directly impacted, to whom you have a statutory duty as the education authority, but damaging communities and families and ignoring the precipice at which the education authority stands.

I'm increasingly concerned at the proselytisation in which the county council seems actively engaged – particularly in Harrington. You will know from my representations elsewhere that I am staunch defender of faith schools of all types. As a Conservative Anglican Christian I attended a Catholic secondary school, and my baptised Anglican children have attended both Anglican and Catholic schools, but I also recognise the inalienable right of a parent to choose a school close to their community that is not of religious character.

You will know from my previous representations that I consider your school places formula to be seriously flawed in respect to the actual pupil yield in West Cumbria. We know that, on average, every three and four-bedroomed house on this estate will yield significantly more than 0.5 children. A proper assessment, specifically for West Cumbria using the significant data we hold, is within your gift. So is a request for the whole cost of provision, outwith any calculations using default models.

Nevertheless, I note your pupil yield assessment using that formula calculates that the proposed development would yield an estimated fifty-six children: consisting of thirty-three primary school age pupils and twenty-three secondary school age pupils.



## Primary Schools

Your responses states that:

*“The catchment primary school for this development is Beckstone Primary School which lies approximately 1.2 miles from the development site. Two further primary schools are located within the 2 mile statutory walking distance threshold of the site - St Mary’s Catholic Primary School (1.2 miles) and Distington Primary School (1.9 miles).”*

Beckstone Primary has had significant capacity issues for some time, and have previously taken pupil numbers way in excess of Published Admission Numbers on promises of additional classroom capacity. In fact you have previously secured s106 funding for a two-classroom extension that you later diverted to St Marys Catholic Primary school, while the community school continues to suffer.

Such an extension, you tell me, would normally come in at £450-500k, but the additional works required for Beckstone’s site conditions mean that the cheapest option came in at £1.6m. I remind you of your ability to make £1.6m the required education contribution – it is then up to the developer to assess viability of their scheme. It is not for the council to determine financial liability on their behalf.

On Primary school capacity, your disappointing response states:

*“There is no space in the catchment school of Beckstone Primary to accommodate the yield of 33 primary age pupils from this development. However, both St Mary’s Catholic Primary School and Distington Primary are within the statutory safe walking distance from the site and have sufficient capacity between them to accommodate the yield from this development. In light of this it is considered that no primary school capacity contribution is required”*

I note that your calculation of 1.9 miles for Distington Primary comes in at just under the statutory maximum distance of 2 miles, but that you have chosen not to publish that route, the guidance you have used to calculate it or any traffic assessments. Please set out each of these to me in detail. The alleged ‘safe route’ in this instance crosses at least two main roads on bus routes that do not have pedestrian crossings; the entrance to three colleges and a nursery; and two working car repair centres

Furthermore, I note that Cumbria County Council appears not to have published *any* methodology in relation to Safe Routes to Schools - unlike many other authorities. Such a publication would avoid any doubt in future.

In conjunction with Cumbria County Council, St Mary’s school sets its own admission policy. In that policy, non-Catholic local children feature at **tenth** in the **ten** ordered admission criteria. It is also already conferred an advantage by virtue of the fact that the council must provide subsidised transport to school for children living more than two miles



away, but who choose to attend the school by virtue of it's religious character. This is not an option available to non-Catholics.

In making the decisions that Cumbria County Council has, in this and previous applications, it is conferring advantage on a particular religious section of the community that it would simply not find acceptable to do were it an orthodox or non-conformist school, or indeed any religion outside of Christianity.

Beckstone Primary has a maximum capacity of 372, with 383 on roll. Distington Primary has a capacity of 105 with 128 on roll. St Marys Catholic Primary School has a published maximum capacity of 216, with 201 children on roll. That's a current place deficit of 19. To say that there is not a requirement for places for an additional 33 children, which we know will be significantly higher, is quite simply incorrect.

### Secondary Schools

Your response states:

*"The catchment primary [sic] school for this development is Workington Academy which lies approximately 2.9miles from the site. The next nearest secondary schools are the Energy Coast University Technical College (UTC) (1.7 miles) and St. Joseph's Catholic High School (2.7 miles). It is noted that intake at the Energy Coast UTC is from the age of 14."*

On places:

*"Taking into account existing committed developments within the catchment of Workington Academy, it is considered that there would be insufficient places to accommodate the estimated yield of 23 secondary-age pupils from this development. However, two other schools catering for secondary-age pupils are present within the statutory walking distance threshold for secondary schools and have sufficient capacity to accommodate the secondary yield from this development. Therefore no contribution toward secondary education contribution is required."*

The UTC cannot feature in your calculations. It has capacity but cannot take students until they are 14. It needs a feeder school to take the children for the first three years. While initial yield will likely span school years, natural yield in future years is less likely to. If it should feature, by virtue of the fact that it can only accommodate two of the five secondary school years, the maximum number of places you can offset is nine (2/5 of 23). That leaves a deficit of thirteen places, even on a flawed model that undercalculates.

I have already set out the issues we have with proselytisation and the benefits conferred on one particular religious section of the community. Similarly to the Catholic Primary school, non-Catholic pupils feature at **eleventh** on and ordered list of **eleven** admittance criteria.



Problems with place numbers in Secondary schools are also compounded by the fact that Secondary pupils from lower income families, choosing a school by virtue of its religious character, no longer have partially subsidised travel to school, but it becomes *wholly subsidised*.

St Josephs has a published capacity of 615, and currently has 626 pupils – a deficit of 11 for clarity. Workington Academy not only has “insufficient places to accommodate the estimated yield” from your own report, you are well aware that it is expected to have a deficit in excess of 200 places in the near future.

Story Homes, from experience, have no wish to shirk their responsibility to the communities they expand – but they cannot do anything in isolation. Your flawed modelling, and the narrative you consistently produce around school places in my constituency, means that everyone is hamstrung.

I look forward to the day, in the very near future, that Education and Planning responsibilities sit in the same authority, and I welcome forthcoming planning legislation changes that would give everyone in the planning process more certainty – but in the meantime I ask the County Council to step up to the plate and serve it’s communities as they deserve.

I implore you to revisit your planning consultation response with haste, and ask the planning authority not to consider it until you have.

Yours sincerely

**Mark Jenkinson MP**

cc. Sara Brook, Allerdale Borough Council Planning  
David Hayward, Story Homes  
Gill Steward, Cumbria County Council Chief Executive  
John Readman, Cumbria County Council  
Councillor Mike Johnson, Allerdale Borough Council Leader  
Councillor Tony Annison, Chair Allerdale Borough Council Development Panel  
Andrew Seekings, Allerdale Borough Council Chief Executive  
Mr D Warbrick, Headteacher Beckstone Primary  
Mr D Bird, Headteacher Workington Academy