

Emmer Green Residents' Association

The Heights Location Consultation

We, as stakeholders, were invited to comment upon all sites put forward for consideration. This is the full statement the EGRA committee submitted to the Education Funding Authority in February 2015 (minor updates reflect final site selection for consideration). It does not address the complexities of trustees or covenants which affect three of the five potential sites.

Whilst primarily a decision for the parents and residents of Caversham Heights, as neighbouring community, it is an area many residents of Emmer Green are familiar with and use.

EGRA plans to provide as much information as possible for its members to participate in this democratic process. We will not be making recommendations, but do support the Save Bugs Bottom Campaign, as that is the site which impacts most on Emmer Green. (See statement of January 14th).

EGRA has prepared a series of photographs for each site, which we hope to display on our website

LOCATION SITES:

High Ridge is of limited size and could only be effective if used in conjunction with Mapledurham Playing Fields. Access to those playing facilities is via unmade road and footpath (which emerges in the middle of the southern boundary of the park). A safe area would need to be designated with changing facilities or building to leave belongings / shelter if the weather changed.

Mapledurham Playing Fields

A battle ensued to preserve the playing fields nearly ten years ago. The proposal Then, was not for an additional school, but a replacement for Caversham Primary School (whose land would be sold for housing). The current scenario will be considered by the trustees, but we would hope that if safeguards about any future development were put in place, a guarantee to preserve all football pitches, this may be an opportunity for the new school to be seen very much a community project and for all parties to work together for the mutual benefit of all sides.

Albert Road Recreation Ground

The location of this site works both for and against it. It is a well-loved and much used recreation area within the heart of Caversham Heights. Many more children could walk to school (see below) but a school on site would have a great impact and mean loss of much cherished facilities.

Hemdean Valley / Bugs Bottom (see separate statement)

The location is on the very eastern edge of catchment area, at the bottom of a steep sided valley, and nearest of all the sites to neighbouring schools. The Hemdean Valley is currently

designated as 'Public and Strategic Open Space' under policy SA16 and also designated as a 'Landscape Feature.' Any building on the site would need to be environmentally sensitive.

Dyson's Wood Farm (Farthingworth Green)

Located out of school catchment and over the border in South Oxfordshire, at the northern tip of Caversham Heights. At the junction a number of narrow roads / lanes – Kidmore Road, Tokers Green Lane, Shepherds Lane and Gravel Hill.

EGRA sees the Berks /Oxon boundary as the natural barrier between town and country. We oppose the building of houses on the Oxfordshire side of the boundary. Any building would likely weaken our case for future opposition. Land to the north of Gravel Hill (Caversham) remains vulnerable as do all areas adjacent to the Emmer Green built-up area. The site falls within the Parish of Kidmore End and the views of the residents of that parish need to be an important part of the consultation process.

LOCATION ACCESS:

We support the walk to school policy and within catchment. Whichever site is chosen some children would need to cross the busy A4074 at various points.

Bus route Not all parents own cars or have cars available during school drop off/collection time. All sites except Bugs Bottom and High Ridge are on the 22 bus route.

High Ridge location is on the western edge of catchment. Vehicular access via Upper Warren Avenue, with no obvious parking arrangements. No nearby bus route.

Mapledurham Playing Fields location could focus on one potential A4074 crossing point where we would hope safety measures could be put into effect. Already a one way system for entering and exiting a possible site has been suggested by another group.

Albert Road is probably the most central location and safest for children to walk to, but traffic on Albert Road would increase considerably, requiring safety measures.

Bugs Bottom Vehicular access is via Hunters Chase at the very northern end of Kidmore Road. Steep footpath access is located further south, but there is no obvious parking for potential drop-off. It is imperative that the bollards at the bottom of the valley remain in place to avoid vehicular access from narrow roads in Emmer Green. Pedestrian access would also be possible from the northern end of Hemdean Road.

Dysons Wood Farm (Farthingworth Green) The road and lanes around the farmland are very narrow with little or no parking. It is at the very north of and outside catchment area, and a considerable walk for many children and parents. Gravel Hill was closed to traffic a few years ago and we support it remaining as such.