

Shaw-cum-Donnington Parish Council strongly objects to planning application 25/02302/MDOPO.

The planning application has been submitted by David Wilson Homes and seeks to remove Schedule 5 of the Unilateral Undertaking from Genevieve Elizabeth Mather, Virtus Trust Limited and CEG Land Promotions Limited dated 27 January 2017.

Schedule 5 requires the provision of a new primary school on a defined parcel of land followed by its transfer to West Berkshire Council or, alternatively, the transfer of that parcel of land by the developer to the ownership of West Berkshire Council for the construction of a school, together with suitable finance from the developer. This application, if successful, would remove the requirement to provide land for a new school and its construction or, in default, the land and finance for a new school. The future use of the land, should this application be permitted, is not defined but could be used for further housing by David Wilson Homes which would probably provide some 50 dwellings, but without any provision of social infrastructure which is already desperately lacking in the area.

The argument for the removal of Schedule 5 is contained in a document prepared by Alfredson York Associates Ltd. for David Wilson Homes and submitted with the planning application, stating that the recent reduction in the birth rate has resulted in a sufficiency of junior and infant school places in the area. The document states that there are 1,979 places within a 2-mile radius, 98 of which are at Shaw-cum-Donnington Primary School. As of January 2024, there were 24 surplus places and, as of January 2025, 33 surplus. For Shaw-cum-Donnington Primary School, there were 9 and 13 places respectively.

It is noted that, in the Unilateral Undertaking, there is no reference to the need for a new school and no condition that this should only be provided if there is an identified need. The Alfredson York Associates document is based on the assumption that the new primary school is a Council Infrastructure Levy (C.I.L.) requirement, although it is part of the Unilateral Undertaking. The Parish Council considers the document from Alfredson York Associates irrelevant and does not argue with the technical data provided.

The Shaw-cum-Donnington Parish Council strongly objects to the application on the following grounds:

1. Shaw-cum-Donnington Primary School ("the school") is currently located in a Grade II listed Victorian building which is in a structurally poor condition and is totally unsuitable for use as a modern school. This fact is known to put some prospective parents off sending their children to the school, despite it having recently been awarded a Good rating by Ofsted (with Early Years provision rated as Outstanding). The School has a small hard surfaced play area but no grass anywhere for recreation or sports. There are no catering facilities and no dining area; there is no hall suitable to hold a whole school assembly (instead, a limited number of classes are squeezed uncomfortably into the biggest classroom available) or in which physical education lessons can take place. The School therefore has no alternative but to pay to hire the Village Hall for various activities during the week, including to serve meals to the children every lunchtime. The knock-on effect is that this limits the use of the Village Hall, with potential bookings regularly having to be turned away. Lunches have to be purchased and cooked off site and brought to the Village Hall in insulated bags every day. There is absolutely no land that is available to extend the school on its current site.

2. The document from Alfredson York Associates states that there is currently a sufficiency of junior and infant places within a 2-mile radius of the proposed new school site. This is not disputed by the Parish Council, but the requirement to provide a new school is not only dependent on pupil numbers but also on the state of the current school building. The expectation was for a one form entry school to replace the current 0.5 form entry school and to provide extra capacity for the new housing being built nearby. Given

that additional new housing developments are very likely to take place in the near future to the North and East of the current Donnington Heights and Shaw Valley estates, it would be shortsighted not to build the proposed new school, only to then suffer from a lack of school places near the new housing in the future.

The suggestion in the Alfredson York Associates document that very young children should be expected to walk up to two miles along busy roads every day to their school is totally unrealistic; in reality, families living further and further away from their school (especially as more new housing appears) will almost certainly use their cars – especially if there is no provision of a new primary school with sufficient places at the Bastion Street site as promised. This makes a mockery of the climate emergency and the ecological emergency declared by West Berkshire Council on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2023 – only 2 years ago.

3. The number of expected children in the estates cannot be accurately measured, so the exact requirements for the Shaw-cum-Donnington school are unknown. However, the Parish Council does not agree that the current smaller size of families is necessarily a permanent trend; birth rates have always gone up and down and there will undoubtedly continue to be peaks and troughs. Eventually, there will be proportionally more children requiring school places. It does not need much research to realise that there are already many young families on the two new estates. Whilst school age children have obviously already been found places at various schools on the north side of Newbury (as certain year groups were full at Shaw-cum-Donnington), the younger siblings of these children – and those children yet to be born into young families on the estates, as well as on adjacent housing estates in the near future – will certainly need places over the coming few years; this has not been taken into consideration in the Alfredson York Associates document. David Wilson Homes have always been keen to mention the benefit of the proposed new school in their sales pitch to prospective house buyers.

4. Although the “roll forward” of the WBC Local Plan does not expect to see further developments between Shaw Valley and Long Lane, this land was recently put forward but was rejected in favour of a large development near Thatcham. The expectation, however, is that such a development will reappear with the next roll forward of the Local Plan – or even earlier if the pressure for housing continues.

5. In the view of the Parish Council, the infrastructure requirements for new developments have lagged behind the developments; the proposed new school would be an example where the primary school requirements would be ahead of the need.

6. The new primary school can be looked on as part of the contribution to the public benefit from the development. It is estimated that the land value and cost of the new school could be close to £7m and, if this application were to be successful, it would be appropriate for there to be a contribution of such a sum to West Berkshire Council as a result of the Unilateral Undertaking.

7. The Parish Council regards the provision of the new primary school, purpose-built with its own hall, catering and dining facilities and playing field, to represent a major improvement to the quality of the primary school education offering in this ever-expanding area to the north of Newbury, irrespective of any current need for increased school numbers. The children and staff at the current primary school deserve better than the conditions they have to endure at the present time. If the opportunity to build the new school is not grasped on this occasion, then it is unlikely that it will ever be possible in Shaw-cum-Donnington in the future, with potentially disastrous consequences for the area.

Shaw-cum-Donnington Parish therefore strongly objects to planning application 25/02302/MDOPO.

Cllr. Paul Bryant,  
on behalf of Shaw-cum-Donnington Parish Council