PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL
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Ask for: Christine McInnes
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Date: 20th May 2025

Dear Ms Cowperthwaite

Reference: Urgent Action Required to Ensure Safe Walking and Cycling Access to Chilmington Secondary School

Thank you for your email of 14th May 2025 addressed to myself and Haroona Chughtai regarding walking and cycle access to the new secondary school at Chilmington Green I am responding on behalf of the Council.

I am aware of previous correspondence that you have had with the Council on this matter and that of access to the primary school.

I am sure that you are aware that there is a planning condition which prevents the occupation of the new secondary school building until certain new road and pedestrian access routes have been opened to public use. This includes the following works:

- A new roundabout on the A28 at Sandy Lane (Access C).
- The extension of Chilmington Avenue from Access C to Chilmington Green Road.
- A walking/cycle route from the junction of Chilmington Avenue and Chilmington Green Road to the secondary school known as The Active Travel Route.
- A toucan crossing at the junction of Chilmington Avenue and Chilmington Green Road to enable safe crossing from the development to The Active Travel Route.
- The closure of Chilmington Green Road to the A28.
- A pedestrian/cycle route from Access A (the start of Chilmington Avenue) to the secondary school site.

These should have been delivered and paid for by the developer, Hodson Developments Ltd (Hodson). To ensure the school could be occupied, and to help Hodson meet the obligations, the Council agreed to loan Hodson the funds to deliver these works. Hodson started work to provide these, but despite drawing down a significant proportion of the loan funds, these works remain incomplete. KCC have stepped-in to complete the infrastructure

listed above. Work on this commenced during the Easter holidays and is expected to be completed by the end of August 2025.

The KCC's focus is on completing these works to enable the school to relocate for the start of the academic year. However, as you would expect we are working on all available contingencies in case there is a problem, and these works are not complete for then.

One contingency is a s73 application to have the planning condition lifted or amended to allow the new school building to be occupied in the event the required road and/or footpath access is not complete for September. In the scenario that the s73 application is approved and the infrastructure is not complete for September, this will make some children/young people temporarily eligible for free school transport because of the lack of a safe walking route.

To be eligible for free school transport, a child must be attending the nearest appropriate school to their home and the journey must exceed the statutory walking distance (3 miles for a child over the age of 8 years). Our policy is aligned with legislation which makes it a parent's responsibility to get their child to school if this is within the statutory walking distance. KCC's School Transport policy assumes that the parent or responsible adult will accompany their child when they deem it necessary. It is a parents' responsibility to ensure that a child has suitable clothing and equipment for the journey. Where a child lives within the statutory distance and attends their nearest school, but there is no safe walking route available to them that is within the statutory distance (accompanied by a responsible adult as necessary), the child will be eligible for free school transport.

In the first week of June, the Transport Eligibility Team will be writing to all parents/carers of pupils currently attending the school and those who have been offered a place for September 2025 to explain if they would be eligible or not for free school transport. Parents/carers will be asked if they would require school transport and routes will then be planned accordingly. If a child/young person is deemed as not eligible for transport according to the policy, the parent/carer has the right to request KCC Members review this decision. This will be outline to parents/parents in the June correspondence.

A copy of the policy is published on our website at:
https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/161316/Transport-policy-4-to-16.pdf.

There are a number of walking routes available along existing roadways and public rights of way which link to or through the Chilmington development which KCC's School Transport policy would assess as suitable ways for children to access the secondary school. The routes are taken into consideration when a decision is made regarding a child eligibility for transport. It is noted that walking routes to the secondary school may be reliant on the pedestrian/cycle route from Access A (the start of Chilmington Avenue) to the secondary school site, which is something we are endeavouring to get in place for September and again will be factored into decisions about free school transport eligibility.

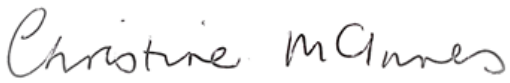
I note your suggestions of the creation of a footpath across the currently undetermined Parcel K land. It is important to note that the developer is responsible for footpaths more widely across the development, including across Parcel K.

You have also suggested a dedicated shuttle service from Singleton Hill to the secondary school. Should pupils in Singleton temporarily be eligible for free school transport to the new site, Transport Officers will organise appropriate transport routes and pickups.

A second contingency is to ensure there is sufficient accommodation at the current Jemmett Road site should the new road and pedestrian access routes not be open to public and the s73 application not approved. We appreciate that this would not be ideal. The planning application for additional mobile accommodation on site has been approved. I want to stress that this is a contingency measure.

I hope this response fully explains the current situation.

Yours sincerely



Christine McInnes
Director of Education and SEN