

# Lakenheath Community Primary School

Mill Road Lakenheath Suffolk IP27 9DU

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Headteacher: Mrs Emma Vincent, BEd (Hons) NPQH



27<sup>th</sup> July 2016

Mr Gareth Durrant  
Principal Planning Officer - Major Projects  
Planning, Forest Heath District Council

Dear Mr Durrant,  
Reference Development Control Meeting, Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2016  
Planning Application DC/14/2096/FUL - Land North of Station Road, Lakenheath

We write concerning the above application and request that this letter be read out at the Development Control meeting as we had insufficient notice to respond before your report was published.

The Governors of Lakenheath Community Primary School only recently found out that Forest Heath District Council are aiming to finalise and pass through the planning application for a school at the site in Lakenheath North, on Station Road. We are surprised at this, as our understanding is that Suffolk County Council has only recently requested a range of detailed assessments (including a noise survey) before determining an appropriate site for a future school. We are disappointed that the Governing body has not been kept fully informed of developments as we began this process with a series of stakeholder meetings involving School Governors, Parish, District and County Council representatives.

We have now looked at related documents on Forest Heath planning website and have seen that an "aviation advice report" has been submitted on behalf of the developers, which mentions our school. The report talks about noise at the existing school, implying that it is not a significant issue, and that there would be very little difference in the impact of noise at this new school site. We find this surprising since no noise data is provided either in relation to the proposed site or to noise levels currently experienced at Lakenheath Community Primary School. The report authors have merely speculated and given an opinion on the impact, as part of a remote desktop exercise. The school has not been consulted, nor has any noise data been collected from our school environs.

Having to live and/ or work in Lakenheath as most of the governors do, we can categorically tell you that real world experience would give completely different conclusions. The current school has no choice but to live with the disruption of jet noise because it was built before the airbase existed. In school, staff often have to pause when teaching or conducting assembly to wait for the noise to pass and consequently the children's concentration is lost. Visitors to the school have commented that they do not know how teachers are able to teach with the level of noise from aircraft.

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With regards to the health and wellbeing of our children there are a number of studies, in particular a World Health Organisation report (WHO 2011), which expresses concern on cognitive impairment in children and on learning and memory being negatively affected by noise. Over 20 studies have shown negative effects of noise on both reading and memory in children. The report states that exposure during critical periods of learning at school could potentially impair development and have a lifelong effect on educational attainment. Impacts could be particularly detrimental for children with some Special Educational Needs. Aircraft noise, because of its intensity and unpredictability is thought to have a greater impact than, say, traffic noise, with the effect continuing after the noise has passed.

We feel we have a moral duty to speak up on behalf of any future school, prospective pupils and teachers, as no one else is in a position to do so. This is not a case of an existing school having to 'make do'. We have a choice about where new schools are sited and it cannot be justified that we subject a future school community to the same, or potentially worse, environment. We understand that the proposed new school, unlike us, is directly below or close to one track of the twin flight paths as the jets return to RAF Lakenheath.

We are also concerned for the future of the village and the school's environment with the news that two squadrons of F35 fighters will be deployed to RAF Lakenheath. A full and comprehensive study should at least be undertaken as to the characteristics of this new aircraft and to its effects on the village and the children in our care. We understand from data provided from the United States (Eglin Airforce Base) that the F35 is up to 10dB louder than the current F15's, not 1dB as suggested in the aforementioned report, which states that it obtained its data from Wikipedia rather than an authoritative source. As the scale is logarithmic, 10dB equates to twice the noise level.

Some commentary has suggested noise mitigation can be made to a new school building. We question the reality of the day-to-day operation of a school building to being sealed from external noise. Outdoor learning is an integral part of the Early Years curriculum so the youngest children spend much of their day outdoors. Learning outside the classroom is actively promoted by the government for older year groups too, as a means of bringing learning alive and creating experiential opportunities for fulfilling the National Curriculum. This would be jeopardised by siting a school close to or under a flightpath. Furthermore, an important element of sustainable buildings is internal air quality, and this is best achieved by naturally ventilated buildings. Using a noise mitigation argument to justify building a school near to the flightpath is, therefore, simply not valid.

We therefore request that the Committee defers a decision until a thorough noise impact assessment has been completed, as requested by Suffolk County Council and the Ministry of Defence.

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Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'E Vincent'.

Emma Vincent, Headteacher

On behalf of the Governing Body, Lakenheath Community Primary School

Reference: (WHO 2011) World Health Organization: Burden of disease from environmental noise