

Dear Editor

Further to the letter published in October, may we take this opportunity to provide your readers with the facts about Little Dragons Pre-School's plans to operate from Church Meadow Bungalow. This may help dispel some of the rumours circulating in the village.

Government Policy – On 7th October 2011, Ministers announced help for less well off parents to enable them to go out to work, by introducing enhanced childcare support. Our plans directly support Government policy, by providing more flexible childcare thus enabling parents to return to the labour market. Our plans also secure the future of Little Dragons Pre-School.

Use of the bungalow: The owners of the bungalow are not seeking planning permission for change of use to commercial premises. What has been applied for is for use under Use Class D1 non-residential institution. This is the same use as churches, parish halls, libraries, clinics etc.

Use of the land: Another business cannot move in with little or no approval. The deeds of the bungalow contain a covenant which expressly states that the premises cannot be used other than as a private dwelling house or children's nursery/pre-school. Rumours about use of the land are therefore fundamentally misleading.

Noise and traffic: There will be a maximum of 24 children registered at Little Dragons Pre-School. The children will benefit from structured, supervised outdoor play. The play area has been moved to the rear of the property to meet one neighbour's concern (as was the reduction and relocation of on-site parking spaces). Putting this into perspective, there are approximately 120 children at St George's School, which is about 150 metres away. The school and neighbouring properties are situated on a busy "B" road (Hall Road).

The operation of Little Dragons Pre-School will not lead to any noticeable increase in traffic or pressure on existing public parking. On average we expect up to seven parents/carers to drive and drop off/collect children from Little Dragons Pre-School. However, the arrival and departure times will be staggered and will not therefore be exactly the same as Leonard Cheshire staff or school traffic.

Demolition: To repeat what we said in May; the Bungalow is not being demolished. This was never on the agenda.

Opening Times: The proposed opening times of Little Dragons Pre-School will be from 08.00 to 17.30. Opening times of 7am to 7pm have never been on the agenda.

Fencing: The fence that has been erected around the bungalow is an outer boundary fence only. A secondary inner fence (yet to be erected) will provide a secure and safe play area for the children.

Affordable housing: Affordable housing relates to social rented and intermediate housing, provided by the local authority or housing associations, to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the local market. Privately owned houses – even if currently rented at below market rates – do not constitute affordable housing.

Support: The Regeneration Team at Essex County Council view the project as “a highly valued community facility” and they believe “*the rationale behind the relocation is based on sound and balanced business and community reasoning*”. The evidence suggests that concern being expressed is from a very small minority, whereas we have lots of evidence that there is a significant majority who actually support the application and use. With the backing of Essex County Council and so many hard working and respected local people, we are confident that we will deliver the kind of childcare every child in our community deserves.

Future of the Pre-School: Little Dragons Pre-School has been in existence and operating successfully for 34 years. We have a 15 year lease agreement with the owners of the bungalow. Our business plans have been scrutinised by Essex County Council – The Directorate of Schools, Children & Families Early Years and Childcare are supporting our plans with a cash grant. Many other local businesses and tradesmen have also pledged their support, making this a true community project.

Leonard Cheshire: The Chairman of Leonard Cheshire in his latest annual report (2010/11) commented that Leonard Cheshire continues to face challenges – in addition to spending cuts, they have to contend with the harsh economic climate. As part of its review of properties and land, Leonard Cheshire privately sold one of its bungalows (and land, solely owned by Leonard Cheshire) at full market value to an investor who purchased it for Little Dragons Pre-School. The sale of any Leonard Cheshire assets and decisions on how the money is used is a matter for their senior leadership team and trustees.

Both Leonard Cheshire Seven Rivers and Little Dragons Pre-Schools will directly benefit from new partnership initiatives that are building between the two organisations.

Councillors: We hope very much that you will support us in what we truly believe will be a wonderful, much enhanced, community resource and we encourage you to write to your elected official expressing your views, requesting that they represent these and the views of the significant local majority that clearly do support the application and use.

Questions: If you require more information, the trustees and management of Little Dragons Pre-School are always available to answer questions and provide you with the facts. Please feel free to email us at littledragonspreschool@gmail.com

Yours sincerely,

Jean Chubb (Chair), Declan Montgomery (Secretary), Carole Davidson (Treasurer)
& Karen Montgomery (Manager) Little Dragons Pre-School