

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

25 March 2021

## **Liberal Democrats Urge County Council to Get on the Front Foot Over School Places**

### **Concerns have been raised about school places at Downlands Community School in Hassocks being oversubscribed**

Fiona Jackson Liberal Democrat Candidate for Hurstpierpoint and Bolney in May's elections to West Sussex County Council has called for the Conservative controlled Council to get on the front foot in providing enough school places at Downlands Community School in Hassocks.

Ms Jackson has written to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills Cllr Nigel Jupp asking him to take urgent action now to save parents months of uncertainty and worry about where their children will go to secondary school. This follows the devastating news for twelve families who live in the catchment area for Downlands Community School who have not been offered places because the school is oversubscribed.

In her letter to Cllr Jupp, Ms Jackson made the case that the shortage of places was predictable and should have been avoided with better planning.

Ms Jackson commented, "Two years ago families outside the catchment area with older children at Downlands missed out on the offer of a place for their younger children. With hundreds of new houses recently built in Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint, and hundreds more still to be built, the County Council could be doing a better job of anticipating this problem.

"I very much hope that those families that have not received an offer of a place this year will be successful through the appeals process, but they have been placed in a worrying and stressful position and this should have been avoided.

"Families make life-changing decisions about where to live and work in order to help their children get into their preferred school. I am aware of families here who upon hearing about this year's twelve families are now agonising over whether to move from communities that they are established in, so that they can be closer to Downlands. Looking to the future, it is very clear that demand for school places is only going to increase as more houses are occupied. I am calling on the County Council to conduct a proper survey of the local population, so that they know how many children are likely to be eligible to attend Downlands in the next few years. Armed with this information, the County Council would be able to state publicly whether they intend to provide a bulge class or classes. Families deserve peace of mind and I hope that Cllr Jupp gives serious consideration to my suggestions which would reassure the community that the Council is planning ahead for the infrastructure needed to support a growing population. If elected I will make this one of my priorities."

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**ENDS**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:**

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**NOTES TO EDITOR:**

1. Fiona Jackson is the Liberal Democrat Candidate for Hurstpierpoint and Bolney in the West Sussex County Council elections on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May
2. Fiona has lived in Hurstpierpoint for seventeen years where she and her husband have raised their family. After a long career in commercial roles within large businesses, Fiona founded her own small business nearly two years ago. As a regional volunteer for a national youth charity, Fiona is passionate about giving young people their voice and the best start in life.
3. Hurstpierpoint and Bolney is a rural and urban division. As well as the villages of Hurstpierpoint and Bolney, and a portion of Burgess Hill, it also includes a number of smaller villages such as Fulking, Poynings, Newtimber, Pyecombe, Albourne, Sayers Common and Twineham.
4. The catchment area for Downlands Community School can be found here:  
<https://www.downlands.w-sussex.sch.uk/information/admissions/>