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School plan mediation

By GREG McFARLAND

ORANGE City Council will hold a mediation next week to try and settle differences between the Exclusive Brethren community and local landholders over a planned new school campus on Ophir Road.

A council spokesperson advised yesterday that a mediation process had been triggered because of the large number of submissions made by the public.

"Council's protocol is to have a mediation whenever there are more than five submissions received on such a matter, and obviously in this case there have been more than that," he said.

To date, 35 submissions – all understood to be objections – have been lodged with council staff over the school plan, which would see an integrated primary and secondary school created on a two-hectare land block.

Adjoining residents in the semi-rural subdivision adjoining the school site have been vociferous in their opposition, saying a school does not suit the character of the area.

The mediation, scheduled for next Wednesday, will be behind closed doors. Invitations were mailed by council today to all persons who have made submissions.

Meanwhile, details have also emerged about a contentious part of the project related to traffic movement.

The Exclusive Brethren have promised a minimal impact on traffic on Ophir Road, because all school traffic will go into a special cul-de-sac before dropping off students.

Council's spokesperson yesterday scotched rumours that the Exclusive Brethren had purchased additional land from council to create the new road.

"The exact situation is that the cost of the cul-de-sac construction is to be paid for by the Exclusive Brethren, but the land being used there is road reserve," he said.

"This land stays in the ownership of council, and the road into the school will still be a public road."

Councillors will gather next Thursday night for their first general meeting of the year, the night after the mediation meeting, but the Brethren School project will not come forward at that time.

The development application is not expected to be put in until February and the results of the mediation meeting will have to be provided first to councillors, in the form of a report by staff.

However, councillors are unlikely to get peace in the meantime, with Daydown Place residents yesterday vowing to lobby all councillors personally.



CALLING ON COUNCILLORS: Jo and Kelvin Tom are among a group of Daydown Place residents who wrote to all councillors this week as part of their opposition to the Exclusive Brethren school plan.

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