

Redevelopment of existing school site to provide a new Academy at The Skinners Kent Academy, Tunbridge Wells – KCC/TW/0434/2010

Executive Summary from the Submission by Sandown Park & Blackhurst Lane Local Community Group dated 27 February 2011 in response to the amendments:

1.0 Executive Summary

This document contains the submission of the Sandown Park / Blackhurst Lane Local Community Group (LCG) to Kent County Council Planning Committee in response to the formal amendments to Planning Application KCC/TW/0434/2010 registered on 7th February 2011.

Where relevant our filing of 28th January 2011, continues to apply unless an element is superseded by detail in this document.

1.1 Failures in the Community Consultation Process

Paragraph 4.2.3 of the Planning Statement says on the subject of Residential Amenity and Environmental Impacts: *"The key elements of the scheme that will affect the living conditions of the Academy's neighbours are considered to be traffic congestion, noise, lighting and security."*

As one resident has written in their personal submission *"It is unreasonable to make decisions that affect the lives of people living near the Academy without understanding the consequences of those actions"*. The resident has gone on to point out that her home and family are rooted in the Sandown Park locality: a sense of permanence and belonging which is not shared by the students and sponsors of SKA which is currently such a disruptive force in her life. Clearly the Applicants did understand the consequences of many of their actions for the Academy's neighbours but coldly and cynically decided to sacrifice those rights and interests in order to pursue the SKA Project.

TWBC Environmental agrees with this position: they say in one response *"the application does not contain any assessment or mitigation of impacts upon local residents"*.

We are concerned, even at this late stage, that the Planning Process and Decision Making should give due and proper weight to key issues of neighbourhood and residential amenity. This is a test of the integrity of the Planning process as well as the credibility of KCC Education as sponsors of the Academy Programme with its constant emphasis on Community involvement which somehow by passed the community in the Sandown Park neighbourhood. The following instances of the failure of the Consultation process are informative:

- 1.1.1 On 31st January 2011 a consultation meeting was summoned with just a few days notice by an unsigned undated flyer mailed out by KCC Education. Most neighbours never received this communication but our Local Community Group ensured a healthy attendance.
- 1.1.2 The SKA questionnaire completed at that 31st January 2011 meeting showed a clear majority of neighbours disapproved of the amended Site 2 developments. Less than 7 days later, SKA (whilst claiming "to work collaboratively with neighbours") submitted a paper to KCC Planning ("SKA Site 2 Rationale") which simply ignored these objections and, more poignantly, those from their close neighbours, the Leonard Cheshire Home for the Physically Disabled at Seven Springs.
- 1.1.3 We are concerned that in the second paragraph of the SKA Site 2 Rationale document, the phrase "neighbours and local community" is used and subsequently these phrases appear as if there were two different groups of people: the "Community" is characterised as being worthy of every consideration and "Neighbours" receive no consideration whatsoever as the TWBC quotation illustrates. "Benefits" & "Concessions" for neighbours described in the Rationale paper are totally fallacious. As in, reducing the proposed AWP opening hours (when no agreement or ruling on new hours existed), or placing a 3 metre acoustic fence next to one's house will somehow "considerably improve the environment for local residents".

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- 1.1.4 A year earlier at the inception of the KCC Academy Program in January 2010, KCC Cabinet was misinformed in a budget paper¹ by KCC Education that they would not be required to fund vital road modifications at Blackhurst Lane relating to the establishment of SKA. The Cabinet was given incorrect data to support this submission by KCC Education. These traffic mitigation measures had been demanded vigorously at a public meeting held six weeks earlier to receive the first SKA plans: this decision to ignore neighbourhood submissions and refuse funding for traffic mitigation was not reported or explained to local residents. Now that the traffic light funding decision has been reversed the priority implementation of these works **ahead of construction** is seen by Sandown Park residents as the first specific and serious test of KCC integrity and goodwill.
- 1.1.5 A controversial proposal for a Boiler House (modified in the latest proposals) was not shown at the 17th November Public Consultation Meeting 2010 but was quietly lodged with the Planners a few days later. Major questions are still outstanding – including TWBC questions on Air Quality because of weakness in hard detail provided in the planning submission.

1.2 Principle Issues Requiring Resolution

Our position on key issues is summarised below. This summary is followed by a detailed discussion of each item: the fact that our issues are primarily concerned with matters which are peripheral (i.e. they address subjects like logistics, sports fields, elimination of nuisance and danger from the roads situation, and seek clarification of the biomass arrangements) is a fair indication of our continued support for the Academy in its core mission of educational excellence for its own students. *But this must not be achieved at the expense of residential amenity and quality of life of our families and neighbours which hitherto have been neglected.*

- 1.2.1 Traffic & Parking Issues:** without amendment, the current road infrastructure is incapable of supporting simultaneously the Academy, the Sandown Park neighbourhood and this major Construction Project. The potential danger for all users, the operational impact on the school and risks to the Construction programme itself are all too serious to contemplate. This is recognised by KCC Highways² in its filing which says “The school should not open until the junction of Blackhurst Lane and Pembury Road has been signalised” : but the Academy is *already* opened in the old buildings. Clearly it is vital that the planned signalisation and other measures are implemented **before** the start of any construction or related works, which would only exacerbate the current situation.
- 1.2.2 The Relocation of the Site 1 MUGAs:** we oppose the works to relocate these facilities nearer to existing residences which already suffer levels of noise and light pollution and are the subject of formal action by TWBC. The proposals to add non continuous 3M high acoustic fencing are likely to prove ineffective but will add visual nuisance and loss of amenity to the existing noise nuisance which can amount to 1,600 shrill whistles in an evening.
- 1.2.3 The Site 2 Floodlit All Weather Pitch:** This proposal fails to consider neighbouring residential amenity in any way, runs directly counter to the findings of the Community Consultation exercises, has aroused major misgivings among TWBC officers and violates KCC’s own guidelines for floodlighting usage. We are totally opposed to this development on the grounds of its inappropriateness and its unacceptable impact on the visual and residential amenity of neighbouring homes, particularly the Leonard Cheshire Home for the Physical Disabled at Seven Springs. Site 3 is a far more appropriate location for this facility.
- 1.2.4 The Amphitheatre:** we would wish to see the Applicant’s intentions to exclude external audio and sound facilities incorporated into the planning permission.

¹ Agenda Item 6 – Kent Academies Batch 2 Procurement Program – 11th January 2010

² Kent Highway Services Paper registered with KCC Planning on 15th February 2011

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- 1.2.5 **Construction Plan & Related Factors:** The Construction Plan is still missing. The Traffic Management Plan attempts to meet this requirement in part but lacks specifics in many areas.
- 1.2.6 **The Biomass Heating Facility:** The new Biomass proposals³ and drawings proposals appear to contain many uncertainties about equipment, fuel, performance, Air Quality and design: in these circumstances we believe that they should be referred back for further development, to permit appropriate consultation, design finalisation, testing of Air Quality to be carried out and validation of the fuel delivery arrangements