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APPLICATION MA/07/1007 – OUTLINE APPLICATION FOR NEW SCHOOL ACADEMY AT OLDBOROUGH MANOR SCHOOL, BOUGHTON LANE, LOOSE, MAIDSTONE

NOTES of a Planning Applications Committee Members' site meeting at Oldborough Manor School, Maidstone on Tuesday, 19 June 2007.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr A R Bassam (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), Mr J A Davies, Mr C Hibberd, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr G A Horne, Mr S J G Koowaree, Mr J F London, Mr T A Maddison, Mr A R Poole and Mr F Wood-Brignall.

OFFICERS: Mr J Crossley, and Mr P Hopkins (Planning) and Mr A Tait (Legal and Democratic Services).

THE APPLICANTS: New Line Learning Federation (Mr D Keenan): Mr S Milliken and Mr T Campbell (TCA Property).

OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES: Maidstone BC (Mrs J Holford - Planning); Boughton Monchelsea PC (Mr R Fuller and Mr D Gouldsworthy – Clerk).

- (1) The Chairman opened the meeting. He explained that its purpose was for the Committee Members to familiarise themselves with the site and to listen to the views of interested parties.
- (2) Mr Hopkins introduced the application by saying that the total site area was 16.6 hectares, about half of which was built development. However, there were green landscaped areas around the buildings and about half of the site was open playing field land to the south and east. The site was located within the boundary of the urban area, but also adjoined the "Southern Anti-coalescence Belt" intended to maintain the separation of the rural settlements around Maidstone from the urban area and from each other. There were many trees along the western boundary, including Five Acre Wood. These served to screen the complex from the housing to the west.
- (3) Mr Hopkins went on to say that development of the site for school use had begun in the 1950s with the construction of buildings in the northern part. Due to falling rolls over more recent years these buildings had been largely given over to other users including Five Acre Wood Special Needs School and Loose Baptist Church. Oldborough Manor Community School now used the buildings which had been added in the 1960s, which had been built to address an increase in the school roll at that time.
- (4) Currently there were 400 pupils and 62 staff at Oldborough Manor. Senacre was attended by 600 pupils and 105 staff, some of whom were part time.
- (5) Mr Hopkins said that the outline application was for an academy, catering for up to 1050 pupils and 190 staff. It would involve the demolition of the

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current 1960s school buildings and the construction of a new school, three storeys in height to the east. The proposal also included a new vocation centre, a 6 court indoor sports hall, and a 6 court Multi Use Games Area (MUGA). The YMCA pitches were to be relocated. New strategic landscape provision would help create a campus style setting. This would include a nature garden, a sound garden, an energy garden, a sanded lunch garden, a courtyard and seated areas. New car parking would be provided for 153 vehicles, with drop-off and pick-up facilities. The aim would be to complete the development by the 2009/10 school year.

- (6) Mr Hopkins informed Members that the proposals would be part-funded by the redevelopment of Senacre Technology College for housing. A parallel application for this was being considered by Maidstone BC.
- (7) Mr Hopkins concluded his presentation by outlining the determining issues. These were:-
 - (a) the impact of the development on the openness of the site bearing in mind the Southern Anti-Coalescence Belt;
 - (b) the Landscape/Visual impact of the development;
 - (c) the impact of the development on local amenity given the proximity of residential properties; and
 - (d) Transport issues arising from the transfer of Senacre pupils and staff to the school, particularly the impact of additional traffic. This had been highlighted in many of the representations received.
- (8) Mrs Holford (Maidstone BC) said that she was not in a position to comment officially as the application was still being evaluated.
- (9) Mr Fuller (Boughton Monchelsea PC) said that the Parish Council broadly supported the proposal but had some concerns over vehicular and pedestrian access.
- (10) In response to a question from Mr London, Mr Keanan said that it was not expected that the school roll would grow significantly. Mr Milliken added that it was projected that the combined rolls of Oldborough Manor and Senacre would fall to 700 if the development were not to go ahead.
- (11) Mr Keanan (New Line Learning Federation) said that in 1992 Oldborough Manor School had been the first choice school outside of the grammar school system with a roll of 1275 students. This figure had now fallen to 350 due to parents exercising parental choice in favour of Cornwallis. This was partly explained by a "them and us" culture which had grown up between residents of Mangravet (mainly of whom had moved from London) and those of Loose.

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- (12) Mr Keanan confirmed that many of the independent users had long-established rights on the site. For example the Baptist Church had a 25 year lease.
- (13) Mr Keanan said that no decision had been made on the name of the academy. It was more than likely that the current school name would not be used.
- (14) The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the formal part of the meeting.
- (15) Members inspected the entire school site. They were shown the view of the proposed development from the vehicular access point off Boughton Lane (where it was proposed to create an attractive village green setting) and then walked to the Farm at the northern end. This would remain as part of the academy. The existing Baptist Church premises, private sports centre and the Five Acre Wood Special School would remain unaffected by the current planning application.
- (16) Members then walked through the pedestrian entrance in the north east boundary to the edge of the Mangravet Estate. The Public Right of Way which ran along the site boundary before linking up with Boughton Lane was also pointed out.
- (17) Mr Keanan informed Members that a very high percentage of pupils (89%) would walk to school from the various Shepway estates, crossing Sutton Road and using the Mangravet entrance.
- (18) Mr Campbell (TCA Property) said that in considering Safe Routes to Schools with Kent Police it had been proposed to use CCTV cameras and to involve Police Liaison Officers. He showed Members a map which demonstrated the high number of pupils who were already walking to Oldborough Manor from the Mangravet, Shepway and Parkwood Estates.
- (19) Members were then shown the proposed layout from the eastern side of the site. This included the possible location of the MUGA, the indoor sports hall, the larger buildings, in relation to the existing science block.
- (20) Members were then shown the existing playing fields and the trees in and around the site. Mr Crossley explained that the proposed landscape planting involved the introduction of shelter belts between pitches to emulate the historic pattern of orchards in the locality. He also said that Maidstone BC had indicated a strong preference that the construction of new buildings should be avoided in the currently open areas. As a result, the buildings would be concentrated in largely the same built up area as at present. The implication of this was that there would need to be two phases of decanting: firstly for pupils from Senacre to Oldborough and secondly from the old buildings to the new via temporary classroom space.