

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 16 January 2007.

Application by the Governors of Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls and Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for construction of new Art and Drama Block and Sports Centre, introduction of a one-way traffic management system with new exit and slip road onto Pembury Road and refurbishment of the existing reception (collectively Phase 2), Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge – TM/06/2488

Recommendation: The application be referred to the Secretary of State and that subject to her decision, and receipt of details of tree protection measures and a satisfactory landscaping scheme, permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Members: Dr T R Robinson and Mr G A Horne MBE **Classification:** Unrestricted

The Site

1. Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls is located on the south east edge of the built up area of Tonbridge. It is bordered by Tudeley Lane to the north, Pembury Road to the west/south west and Woodgate Way to the south east. There are residential properties to the north side of Tudeley Lane and to the west/south west side of Pembury Road where there is also a Public House. The school site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt together with the adjacent highways. The Woodgate Way boundary of the school to the south east adjoins the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Special Landscape Area, and an Area of Local Landscape Importance that covers the area of Somerhill Park, a historic park with a Grade 1 Listed Building. *A site location plan is attached.*
2. The school buildings adjoin the built up area of Tonbridge occupying a triangular area on a plateau of land above the playing fields to the east. Apart from the floodlit netball/tennis courts on the south side to the south east of the buildings and a new 37-space car park off Tudeley Lane to the east side of the bus lay-by the playing fields remain undeveloped. The main school buildings, which are up to 3 storeys in height, were built in the 1960's but in the last 10 – 16 years there have been a number of extensions, detached buildings and temporary buildings added to provide for an incremental increase in the roll and changing curriculum needs. The most recent additions are a detached kitchen and dining hall building granted permission in October 2002 and a three-storey classroom block granted permission in July 2005 together with the new car park, considered by the Planning Applications Committee in June 2005.

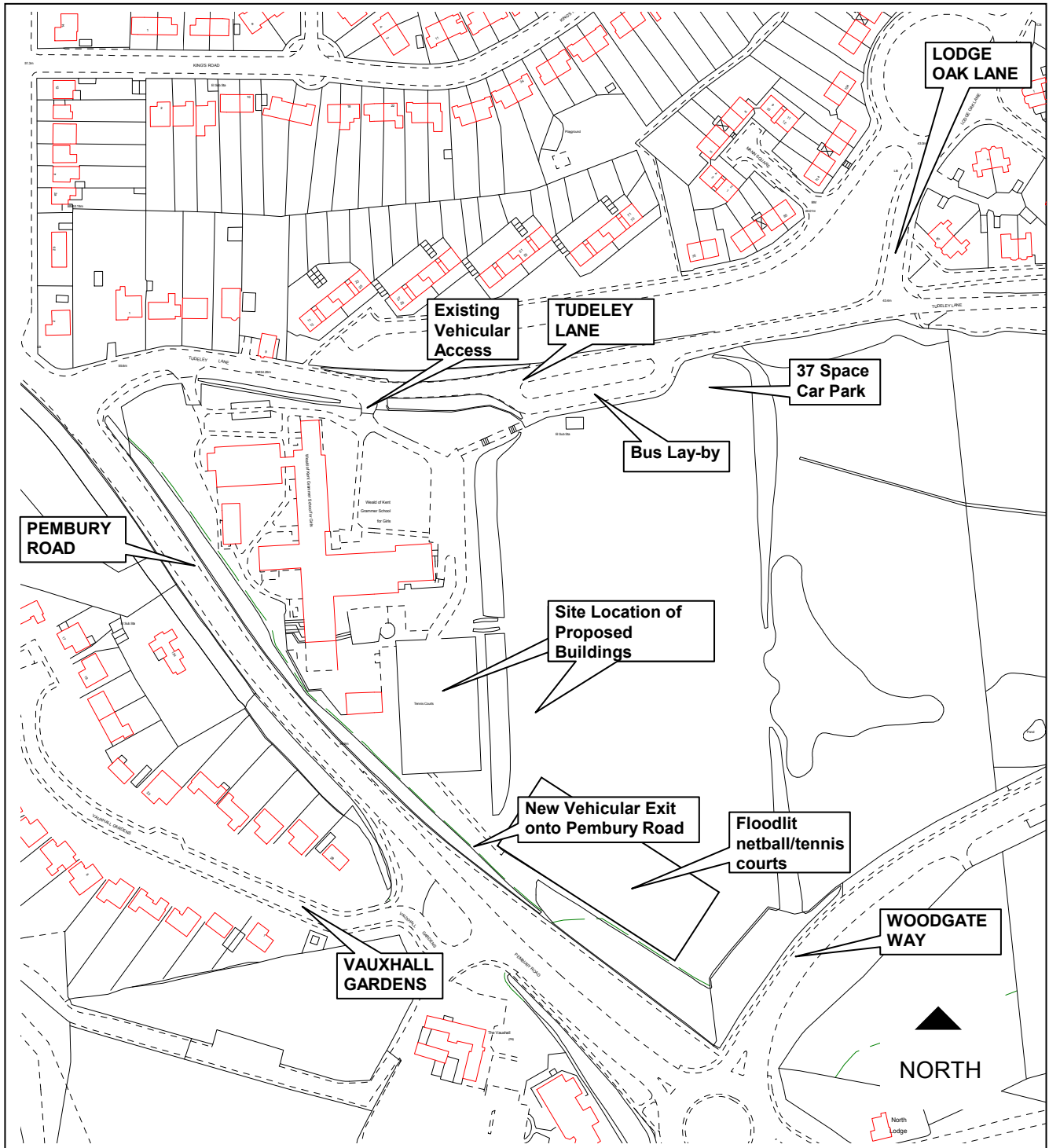
Proposal

3. Planning permission is sought for four phases of development as set out below, which in the case of the two later phases the applicants have indicated are subject to funding being secured. The applicants have stated that the School would continue to be a girls' school of around 1200 pupils and that it is not intended to increase the number of pupils as a result of the proposed development. The application is accompanied by a Design Statement, Landscape Appraisal, a Protected Species Assessment and a School Travel Plan.

Item B6

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

Site Location Plan



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Item B6

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

Drawings showing the proposed site layout, exit road, elevations and site sections are attached.

Phase 2a. Refurbishment of the School main reception.

4. Permission is sought retrospectively for this element of the proposal. It has involved increasing the size of the reception area by removing the external front entrance doors and screen, which was set back, and erecting a new white UPVC glazed screen within the line of existing columns to the front of the building with a lean-to roof.

Phase 2b(i) Art and drama block.

5. A two storey building is proposed linked to the recently completed three storey (English and Humanities) classroom block to the north and to the dining hall to the west. This area is currently a hard standing providing 22 parking spaces. On the south side of this, an existing single storey prefabricated modular building (the maths mobile unit) providing five classrooms (the subject of a temporary permission that expired at the end of 2005) would be removed upon completion on the new building. Its removal would free up hard standing, which would provide parking space for 32 vehicles and allow for delivery vehicles to access the new kitchen service yard.
6. It is proposed that the design and appearance of the new building would complement the adjoining classroom block and dining hall. It would have yellow stock brick elevations relieved with a mix of brown brickwork and white cladding panels and a shallow pitched roof finished with slate grey, concrete roof tiles. Windows would be white UPVC and the gable screen and entrance doors would be aluminium powder coated to match the window colour.

Phase 2b(ii) Implementation of a one way traffic management system and creation of a new exit and slip road onto Pembury Road.

7. It is proposed to introduce a one way traffic management system from the existing vehicular access from Tudeley Lane routed through the car park area at the front and along the eastern side of the buildings to a new exit and slip road onto Pembury Road. Some trees would need to be removed to make this possible, together with earthworks and re-routing of the existing footway along Pembury Road to accommodate level changes. The applicants indicate that this proposal has partly arisen in preparing the School Travel Plan. It is intended to reduce congestion on Tudeley Lane and the Pembury Road, increase pedestrian safety, both on the school campus and its adjacent highways, segregate pedestrian routes from those used by motorists within the school site and create a dedicated delivery area away from pedestrian routes. The proposals would increase the number of car parking spaces available on site and create a drop off/pick up zone, promoting student safety and reducing congestion on adjacent roads.

Phase 2c Sports centre

8. The proposed sports centre would be located opposite the proposed art and drama block on the edge of the playing field. It would include two-storey accommodation on the western side and double height space for the sports hall on the eastern side accommodating badminton courts (suitable for national standard play) and a basket ball court together with storage space.

Item B6

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

Item B6

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Item B6

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

9. The building would also contain other accommodation, including medical room, staff offices, changing rooms, a PE classroom and dance studio, viewing gallery and servery. It is the School's intention to hire the facilities out to outside groups and non-school users when not required for school use.
10. The building would have yellow stock facing brickwork to match adjacent buildings, low level plinth and banding constructed with brown facing brickwork, projecting first floor, and high level cladding and gable ends clad with powder coated insulated composite panels. The roof would be of powder coated insulated composite panels, and doors and windows powder coated aluminium.
11. Construction of the building would result in the loss of several mature trees along the top of the existing embankment as well as those lost as a result of the new exit. To compensate for the loss of these, additional trees are proposed to be planted around the new exit and on the embankment between the upper and lower sports fields to the east of the existing tennis courts. It is also proposed that a management plan would be established to provide for the trees to be maintained.

Construction Access

12. Due to congestion and safety issues raised by contractors accessing the site through the existing School, it is proposed that if the exit road for the one way traffic management system is approved, this would be used temporarily to access the construction site as a two way road. That would only be for the duration of the construction period. On completion of the building works it would be reinstated as a one way road, exiting onto the Pembury Road.

Planning Policy

13. In ODPM Circular (11/2005), the Government's commitment to the principles of the Green Belt and to maintaining tight planning controls over development on Green Belt land has been reaffirmed. It is expected that all planning applications for development in the Green Belt be subject to the most rigorous scrutiny, having regard to the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy as set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 2. That is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The openness of Green Belts is considered to be their most important attribute and therefore there is a general presumption against inappropriate development, which is by definition harmful and should not be permitted, unless it can be justified by very special circumstances.
14. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:
 - (i) The adopted 2006 **Kent & Medway Structure Plan**:
 - Policy SP1 States that the primary purpose of Kent's development and environmental strategy will be to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern and form of development.
 - Policy NR5 The quality of Kent's environment will be conserved and enhanced. This will include the visual, ecological, geological, historic and water environments, air quality, noise and levels of tranquillity and light intrusion.

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

Development should be planned and designed to avoid, or adequately mitigate, pollution impacts. Proposals likely to have adverse implications for pollution should be the subject of a pollution impact assessment.

In assessing proposals local authorities will take into account:

- (a) impact on prevailing background pollution levels; and
- (b) the cumulative impacts of proposals on pollution levels; and
- (c) the ability to mitigate adverse pollution impacts; and
- (d) the extent and potential extremes of any impacts on air quality, water resources, biodiversity and human health.

Development which would result in, or significantly contribute to, unacceptable levels of pollution, will not be permitted.

Policy QL1 Requires that all development should be well designed and be of high quality. Developments, individually or taken together, should respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surroundings. Development which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, functioning and character of settlements or the countryside will not be permitted.

Policy QL11 Existing community services (*including schools and other education provision*) and recreation facilities will be protected as long as there is a demonstrable need for them. Provision will be made for the development and improvement of local services in existing residential areas and in town and district centres, particularly where services are deficient. Flexibility in the use of buildings for mixed community uses, and the concentration of sports facilities at schools, will be encouraged.

Policy EN4 Seeks protection for Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The primary objective will be to protect, conserve and enhance landscape character and natural beauty. Major commercial development will not be permitted unless there is a proven national interest, and a lack of alternative sites.

Major commercial, mineral or transport infrastructure developments will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that:

- (a) there is a proven national interest;
- (b) there are no alternative sites available or the need cannot be met in any other way; and
- (c) appropriate provision can be made to minimise harm to the environment.

Other development which would be detrimental to the natural beauty, quality and character of the landscape and quiet enjoyment of the area will not be permitted.

Development that is essential to meet local social or economic needs should be permitted provided that it is consistent with the purpose of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Policy EN5 Seeks protection, conservation and enhancement of the quality of the landscape in Special Landscape Areas whilst having regard to the need to facilitate the social and economic well-being of the communities situated within them.

Policy E9 Seeks to maintain tree cover and the hedgerow network. Additionally, states they should be enhanced where this would improve the landscape, biodiversity, or link existing woodland habitats. Ancient

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

and semi-natural woodland will be protected and, where possible, enhanced.

- Policy SS2 Sets out a general presumption against inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Further states that new building should accord with the provisions of PPG2 and Annex B of PPG3.
- Policy TP3 States that local planning authorities should ensure that development sites are well served by public transport, walking and cycling, or will be made so as a result of the development. Travel Plans should be established for larger developments that generate significant demand for travel to promote the use of these means of transport. Developments likely to generate a large number of trips should be located where there is either a good choice of transport already available or where a good choice can be provided in a manner acceptable to the local transport authority.
- Policy TP12 States that development will not be permitted which involves either the construction of a new access onto the local transport authorities' primary or secondary road network or the increased use of an existing access, where a significantly increased risk of crashes or traffic delays would result, unless appropriate measures to mitigate the effect of development have been secured.
- Policy TP19 States that development proposals should comply with vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by the County Council.

(ii) The adopted 1998 **Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Plan**:

- Policy P2/16 Long-term protection will be given to the Green Belt. Development outside the built up confines will not be permitted unless acceptable under the terms of other policies of the Plan, or otherwise exceptionally justified.
- Policy P3/5 Gives priority to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty including landscape, wildlife and geological features, over other planning considerations.
- Policy P3/6 Gives priority to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of Special Landscape Areas.
- Policy P3/7 Within Areas of Local Landscape Importance (in this case Somerhill Park) development which would materially harm the landscape character will not be permitted.
- Policy P4/11 Development must not harm the particular character and quality of the local environment, and wherever possible should make a positive contribution towards the enhancement of the area. The Policy also sets out a list of criteria to be met that include built form and its relationship to site context, development being of a high quality in terms of design, detailing and use of materials, regard to principles contained in Kent Design, regard to good practice relating to daylight and sunlight, security issues, and the need to for landscaping proposals and amenity areas as appropriate.
- Policy P7/18 Provision for parking.

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

Consultations

15. **Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council** raises no objection subject to a technical and safety audit which would ensure traffic maintains appropriate speeds at the pedestrian crossing points and where the exit merges with the public highway.

Has further commented on the proposed new exit onto Pembury Road, as follows:

1. It would be appropriate to position Traffic Regulation Orders along Pembury Road to ensure there is no unsuitable parking at school drop-off and pick-up times.
2. The use of speed cushions within the one way system may not be sufficient to reduce vehicular traffic speeds. Consideration should be given to provide a raised pedestrian crossing on the egress road.
3. Consideration should be given to the possibility of extending the 30mph speed limit in Pembury Road.

Divisional Transportation Manager has commented as follows:

“The application seeks to deal with both the existing traffic congestion that occurs in Tudley Lane at school drop off and pick up time, as well as the potential additional traffic associated with the development proposals.

This proposal introduces a one way system that permits vehicles to in effect 'kiss-n-ride' with traffic entering the site via Tudley lane and egressing onto Pembury Road. This will reduce the resulting congestion experienced at present on the highway network in the immediate area and improve highway safety for residents and school children.

Earlier submissions raised issues that following a site meeting with the applicants' agent have been addressed. The gradient of the egress route has been reduced, gates introduced to prevent unacceptable reversing manoeuvres, anti pedestrian paving to deter pedestrian use included, along with other modifications to deal with the safe use of the egress.

The alignment now shown on drg.6746.AL(90)02 Rev B will require a Stage Two safety audit but has addressed former concerns related to vehicle approach speeds, sight lines, and includes additional work to deter right turns from the egress onto Pembury Road.

Whilst Pembury Road in this location is designated as a Primary Distributor road and would normally attract a policy objection to the formation of a new access I am satisfied that the resulting reduction of traffic at the Lodge Oak Lane balances the highway impact.

Further recommendations should this application be approved would be that the applicant is to discuss and potentially fund extensions of Traffic Regulation Orders related to extending parking restrictions and the relocation of the 30mph speed limit nearer to the round-about.

Therefore subject to the imposition of conditions for the proposals to be built as shown on the submitted drawings (including the stage two safety audit modifications if required) and the funding of alterations to Traffic Regulation Orders as mentioned above I raise no objections.”

Sport England raises no objection. It further comments that, should the new sports facilities be built in compliance with Sport England's technical standards within its Guidance Notes and be subject of a Community Use Agreement then it would be in a position to support the application

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

Jacobs (Landscape) has commented as follows:

The existing site is located within Green Belt land and so any development of the site should respect the constraints of this designation. The development of the new Art and Drama block and sports hall in the proposed location should not cause an adverse impact on the landscape or detract from the site in any way. The formation of the Art and Drama block may enhance the school campus and provide an enclosed courtyard. The new block and sports hall will not impinge significantly on the existing field, which will still accommodate the 400m running track.

The site is visually contained by vegetation and is situated adjacent to a residential area, with few significant views of the proposals from surrounding properties. Views from properties along Tudeley Lane opposite the site currently have views of the bus layby and the proposed new car park to the Grammar School behind existing mature vegetation. The existing school building does not support local character and the proposed new buildings would not be visually intrusive in size or scale. The proposed materials will be in keeping with the existing permanent School buildings. There would be insignificant visual impact from neighbouring properties.

A small number of properties off Tudeley Lane currently have glimpses through the existing vegetation and trees of the playing field and existing school buildings. There would be a slight visual impact from these properties principally from the upper storey windows. The existing vegetation and mature trees are currently beneficial in providing a visual screen between the housing and school site. Its protection and retention is therefore important

Properties off Pembury Road are unlikely to have views of the proposals due to the existing mature vegetation and trees between the housing and school proposals. The removal of the mature trees to accommodate the exit adjacent to Pembury Road will have an adverse visual impact. Views from users of Pembury Road will be affected, although this impact is not considered severely adverse. Providing the existing vegetation is retained along Woodgate Way, visibility of the new development will be minimal.

Conclusion

The proposals are acceptable in terms of size, scale, siting, design and material use. Visual impacts from the removal of vegetation and some mature trees with construction of new built structures as a result of the development are slight. In addition, requests full landscape details, tree survey and tree protection plans.

Following receipt of a Landscape Appraisal Jacobs (Landscape) has made the following further comments:

The landscape planting proposals for the location should provide adequate screening to the new development in the locations indicated on the submitted drawings. However, full landscape comment is not possible without detailed plant specification as previously requested. It is recommended that native species are used. Planting stock should be of adequate size at the time of planting to provide mass, and be planted at a suitable density.

The construction of the proposed development would result in the loss of 24 trees, several of which are mature, and some of which are of high amenity value. There

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

would inevitably be a large adverse impact on existing trees. The mitigation strategy states that compensatory tree planting of preferably native species trees is planned, but there are deficient details as to what species will be planted and at what size the planting stock will be. Replacement trees should be of a reasonable size at time of planting and consist of locally appropriate species to reflect the character of the existing site and surrounding landscape. Whilst tree protection fencing to the correct standard is noted within the appraisal, we would like to see an illustration of the fencing location to ensure it incorporates all retained trees and vegetation adequately.

Local Member

16. Dr T R Robinson and Mr G A Horne MBE, the local County Members were notified of the application on the 26 July 2006.

Publicity

17. The application was publicised by an advertisement in a local newspaper, the posting of site notices and the individual notification of 56 neighbouring properties. Given that the site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt, the advertisement and notices indicate that the proposed development does not accord with the provisions of the Development Plan in force in the area in which the land to which the application relates is situated.

Representations

18. I have received 7 letters of representation from nearby residents in Vauxhall Gardens. The issues raised/points made includes the following.
- Has no issue with the proposed changes within the school and fully support the continued upgrading of the school facilities. However is concerned about the new vehicular exit onto Pembury Road both in terms of the practicality of it at peak times and also the additional hazards it would potentially cause to an already difficult junction between Vauxhall Gardens and Pembury Road. There are two main issues. The first is the parked cars all down the eastern side of Pembury Road waiting to pick up pupils being an obstruction to cars exiting and the likelihood of cars displaced parking on the other side as well or in Vauxhall Gardens. The second is there is always a queue from the roundabout back up the Pembury Road and traffic emerging from the school would have to filter into the queue virtually on the roundabout itself.
 - It is suggested that consideration be given to the following matters:
 - Moving the start/end of the 30mph restriction zone to the roundabout itself. Installing a 'flashing' 30mph sign between the roundabout and Vauxhall Gardens to reinforce the message.
 - Re-locating the Tonbridge and Malling sign out of the line of sight for drivers emerging from Vauxhall Gardens.
 - Removing the slip road outside the Vauxhall Inn to create a standard junction.
 - Extending further the bollards and raised kerb for the school slip road to stop u-turning.
 - Welcomes the proposed facilities and the drop off for the school but concerned about the potential hazard created by traffic merging from the slip road which would conflict with that turning right out of Vauxhall Gardens. At peak time traffic from the school and from Vauxhall Gardens, which carries traffic from the Inn and Travel

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

Lodge, would be competing for the same gap which would be exacerbated by the speed and heavy flow of approaching traffic.

- An alternative safe exit point for the school should be considered.
- As the traffic often exceeds 60mph, to reduce the danger the 30mph restriction should be restored to its old position near the Vauxhall Inn or a roundabout or traffic lights might prove necessary to calm traffic.
- Double yellow lines should be extended to prevent the hazards to traffic from parents parking along Pembury Road including on the Vauxhall gardens side.
- Has no objection to the new building but asks the Planning Applications Committee reject the proposed slip road and additional parking on the following grounds:
 - Bearing in mind the existing situation an additional flow of vehicles would create an unnecessary hazard.
 - Pedestrian safety given that the proposal is likely to lead to more pedestrians crossing Pembury Road in the vicinity of the new exit, for example, being dropped off on the opposite side.
 - Creating 35 new car parking spaces is not consistent with the objective of working towards sustainable transport. The proposals make no provision for cyclists even though 30% of pupils live within 3km. No justification is provided for the additional spaces and no assurances are offered that on-street parking would be curtailed during school events.
 - The application gives few details about lighting around the new car park overlooking Pembury Road. Hopes that measures are put in place to ensure that night-time levels are controlled and that delivery times are reasonable. Also comments that no details are given about what road-signs would be installed and that there is already plenty of unsightly street furniture and extraneous lighting.
 - Use of the access for construction traffic bearing in mind that it is one-way.
 - Loss of trees and inadequate landscaping proposals.

DiscussionIntroduction

19. Although the existing use of the land to accommodate school buildings and activities is well established there are a number of issues arising from the proposed development. These include siting, design and appearance in terms of impact on the Green Belt and landscape, and transport and access considerations, which have to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, referred to in paragraph (14) above, and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity.

Siting, design and appearance

20. It will be noted that the whole of the school site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and in the context of the relevant National Planning Policy and Development Policies that apply, what is proposed has to be considered as inappropriate development. It is therefore necessary to consider the impact of the development on the openness of the Green Belt and whether or not there are very special circumstances that would warrant setting aside the general presumption against the development.
21. Arguably, at first consideration, the development of a two storey building, a large double height sports hall, use of land for car parking and the new exit, would collectively, if not

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

individually, significantly impact the openness of the Green Belt. However this needs to be examined in more detail.

22. The existing school buildings form a relatively compact grouping and are contained on a triangular plateau of land above and separate from the playing field land from where they are partly screened by trees along the bank that lies between. This area of development immediately adjoins the urban area confines of Tonbridge to the north and west, identified in the Local Plan. Previous proposals for additional or replacement buildings, including the recent three storey classroom block have been located on this developed part of the site and have not therefore extended the built development onto the playing field to the east, i.e. the open part of the site. Such development has been accepted as not having a significant effect on the openness of the Green Belt, largely on the basis of these factors. In respect of the current proposals, this would not entirely apply since the Sports centre would be located on part of the playing field below the developed part of the site.
23. It will be noted, however, that the new art and drama building would adjoin the dining hall and the recently completed three storey classroom block in the developed part of the site without encroaching onto the open part of the site. That would be on an area of a former hard play area/tennis courts, in effect an area of land already developed, and also until recently occupied by temporary buildings. In terms of layout, massing and built form it would complete and balance the planned arrangement of buildings in this part of the site, including the formation of a courtyard and the step down from three storeys to two. Furthermore upon completion it would result in the removal of a further temporary building (maths mobile) to the side of it, and I now understand two standard mobiles at the front of the site. Taken on its own, bearing in mind the above factors, I do not consider the proposed art and drama block would have a significant effect on the openness of the Green Belt.
24. The area to be used for replacement/additional parking is also in the developed part of the site, currently occupied by the temporary building and formerly a hard play area/tennis courts. I consider that it would have very little additional impact on the openness of the Green Belt limited by its location close to the boundary and its two dimensional nature when not in use.
25. The new exit route would continue from the existing service road along the edge of the developed part of the site and then down the slope breaching the site boundary onto the Pembury Road highway verge before joining the carriageway. Although mainly two dimensional, given quite intensive use during peak times of the day, I consider that it could be argued that it would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt. On the other hand it does not encroach onto the open part of the site and would in part be mitigated by careful alignment through the site and its boundary.
26. As already indicated the Sports Centre building would be located on the edge of the playing field and as such encroaches into what has always been acknowledged as being the open part of the site. It has a sizeable footprint and mass, given the double height space, and would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt. However the applicant has sought to minimise intrusiveness by locating it partly within the embankment, close to the netball/tennis courts and so it is not isolated from other buildings. As such, it would not appear that the buildings are sprawling into the open part of the site. I accept that there is no available space for a building of this size on the already developed part of the site. An alternative site considered off Tudeley Lane

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

where it would be isolated from other buildings and more obviously within the playing field, would in my view be unacceptable. A path to serve the Sports centre is proposed across the playing field at the foot of the embankment but I do not consider that this would significantly affect the openness of the Green Belt.

27. The proposed new buildings have been put forward largely on the basis of curriculum needs arising from an incremental expansion of the school over a number of years and the need to provide improved accommodation to meet the challenges of an evolving curriculum and increased expectations of secondary education. The applicants also wish to address the adequacy of existing access arrangements and reduce the traffic impacts particularly on Tudeley Lane. These factors are cited in justification of the proposals by the applicants and, in essence, I consider that taking account of the detailed siting considerations, discussed in paragraphs (23) - (26) above, are sufficient to demonstrate the very special circumstances for overriding Green Belt policy constraints in this particular case. I would not therefore raise an objection on the basis of the effects of the proposed development on the openness of the Green Belt. However, if Members are minded to grant permission, the application would have to be referred to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for consideration. This is required under The Town and Country (Green Belt) Direction 2005 because the proposal involves inappropriate development that would significantly impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
28. The siting of the development also needs to be considered in respect of any potential impact on the landscape, particularly bearing in mind that land on the other side of the Woodgate Way boundary is subject to important landscape designations, as referred to in paragraph (1) above. Development Plan Policies seek to protect, conserve and enhance such landscapes. The school site is, however, on the whole well screened with trees and/or hedgerows along most of its boundaries and across parts of the site. Therefore immediate views of the new buildings from outside of the site in general would be limited and to a greater or lesser extent filtered. There are though some long views of the school buildings from higher land to the east and therefore it would be possible to see the new buildings. However they would be seen against the backdrop of the other buildings on the site and trees, and as such I do not consider they would be particularly conspicuous or have an adverse impact on the wider landscape setting.
29. The main landscape/visual impact would arise as result of the new exit road onto Pembury Road and the need to break through the existing tree belt. This involves the removal of a number of mature trees as well as less mature trees and whilst not necessarily of high individual value they are important as a group to the integrity of the boundary in screening views into the site. Although the exit road has been carefully aligned to minimise impact on trees and to restrict the opening, the proposed car parking, existing and proposed buildings would become more noticeable, from the south east, but more immediately from the lower end of Pembury Road. Furthermore, Structure Plan Policy E9 seeks to maintain and enhance tree cover and the hedgerow network. In addition to these impacts, the slip road and realigned footway/cycle way would have a visual impact on the highway verge, which is a fairly wide grassed area and visually prominent in the street scene and approach to the roundabout junction to the south east.
30. New planting is proposed to mitigate the visual impacts and to integrate the new development into its surroundings, without which, in my view, the proposals would not be acceptable. Jacobs (Landscape) comments will be noted, including the request to

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

see full details of landscaping and tree protection measures. Bearing in mind the impacts referred to, I have asked for these details to be submitted now rather than reserve them for later consideration, to ensure that they can be satisfactorily addressed. Whilst it has to be acknowledged that it would be sometime before any new planting establishes and matures to meet the intended objectives, subject to receipt of satisfactory planting details I would not raise a planning objection on the grounds of landscape/visual impact.

31. In terms of the design and appearance of the buildings, I consider that the buildings are appropriate to the context of the site, would complement the existing buildings and would accord with the Development Plan Policies that require development to be well designed. *See attached elevations.* The 2-storey building provides a balance between the massing of the dining hall and recently completed 3-storey classroom building and completes the enclosure of the courtyard. Elevation treatment is similar to the 3-storey building. Overall this building would result in an enhancement of this part of the site bearing in mind removal of the existing temporary accommodation. The Sports Centre building is a large building of significant bulk but careful use of materials (generally matching the other buildings) and window fenestration help to break this up and reduce its overall scale. The result is a very reasonable balance of solid and void. Furthermore, a shallow pitched roof and the fact that it is built at the lower level into the embankment would help to integrate the building into the site and with the adjoining buildings.
32. As the Sports Centre building encroaches onto the playing field Sport England has been consulted. The existing running track can still be accommodated and any sports pitches. Accordingly Sport England has not raised objection.

Transport and access issues

33. There is not intended to be an increase in the school roll as a result of the new classrooms and Sports facilities but there would be a net increase of 10 in the number of parking spaces. As part of new one-way access arrangements it is proposed to provide a drop off within the site and improve the flow of school traffic and reduce congestion in the local area. This is part of the measures promoted in the School Travel Plan, which also seeks to reduce reliance on car travel and increase use of other modes of travel.
34. It will be noted that a number of concerns have been raised by local residents about the new access arrangements including issues about conflict with the speed of traffic and on street parking. Following negotiations about the technical aspects of the new exit and slip road, the details have been amended to address concerns raised by the Divisional Transportation Manager. It will be noted that he comments that, whilst the formation of a new access onto a designated Primary Distributor road would normally attract a policy objection (Structure Plan Policy TP12 refers), he is satisfied that the resulting reduction of traffic at the Lodge Oak Lane balances the highway impact. Therefore, subject to the imposition of conditions (including the stage two safety audit modifications if required) and the funding of alterations to Traffic Regulation Orders to extend parking restrictions and for the relocation of the 30mph speed limit nearer to the roundabout, he raises no objections.
35. It is intended that the new access arrangements be implemented following erection of the two-storey arts and drama block. If permission is granted I consider that the new

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

access arrangements should be implemented before the new Sports Centre is constructed. That could be covered by an appropriate condition, which also requires the use of the one-way system and drop off to be safeguarded and made available for use at all times during school term time and/when the sports facilities are in use.

Community Use

36. It is proposed that there would be some community use of the Sports Centre. I am seeking further details and will report verbally on this at the Committee meeting. It does raise some concerns about traffic generation, parking and impact on local amenity. In principle I see no objection to it, subject to hours of use relating to community use outside of normal school hours being controlled, in order to protect the amenity of nearby residential properties. If planning permission is granted, that could be reserved for approval by an appropriate condition.

Construction

37. Given that there are nearby residential properties, if planning permission is granted it would, in my view, be appropriate in order to protect their amenities to impose a condition restricting hours of construction and demolition. I would suggest that this should be between the hours of 0800 and 1800 Monday to Friday and between the hours of 0900 and 1300 on Saturdays, with no operations on Sundays and Bank Holidays. It is also normal on school sites for contractors to be required under the terms of their contract to manage construction traffic/deliveries to minimise conflict with traffic and pedestrians at the beginning and end of school day. The applicant is proposing to use the new exit point, once it is constructed, temporarily as access for construction in connection with the Sports Centre. The Divisional Transportation Manager has advised that it would be acceptable in principle but a programme of works/detailed arrangements would need to be considered in the interests of highway safety, and could be reserved by condition.

Ecology

38. The Protected Species Assessment identifies the need for a bat emergence survey to be undertaken on school accommodation affected by the proposed development. It also recommends a badger survey around the proposed development prior to any work commencing because although there were no signs of badger setts at the time, signs of badger have been noted along the A26 and in the scrub adjacent to Pembury Road. In addition, it recommends the examination of any vegetation or structures that are removed during the bird-nesting season to be examined by an ecologist within 48 hours of commencing work. I consider that the requirement for these surveys could be covered by condition together with submission for approval of any necessary mitigation measures. Bearing in mind that the surveys are more relevant to the later phases of the development, the first phase being on an area of hard standing, it would in my view, be premature to undertake them too far in advance of development taking place.

Conclusion

39. This proposal has given rise to a number of issues including the impact of the proposed development on the openness of the Green Belt, as discussed above. However, I consider that there are very special circumstances for overriding Green Belt policy constraints in this particular case. In the first place, the accommodation is necessary to

New Art and Drama Block, Sports Centre and new exit onto Pembury Road, Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls, Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge - TM/06/2488

meet secondary education provision in this locality on an established education site as supported by Structure Plan Policy QL11, which also encourages the concentration of sports facilities at school sites. Secondly, the careful siting, as discussed above, would also to some extent mitigate the overall impact on this part of the Green Belt, and in the case of the Art and Drama block would result in a qualitative visual improvement over the temporary building that in effect is being replaced. On balance therefore, subject to resolution of the outstanding issues, and imposition of conditions, I am of the opinion that the proposed development would not give rise to any material harm and is otherwise in accordance with the general thrust of the relevant Development Plan Policies. Accordingly, I recommend that the application be referred to the Secretary of State and that subject to her decision and receipt of details of tree protection measures and a satisfactory landscaping scheme, permission be granted subject to appropriate conditions.

Recommendation

40. I RECOMMEND that the application be referred to the Secretary of State and that subject to her decision, and receipt of details of tree protection measures and a satisfactory landscaping scheme, PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions, including conditions covering:

- the standard time limit,
- the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details,
- external materials,
- tree protection and methodology for working in close proximity to trees,
- implementation of a scheme of landscaping and maintenance,
- new egress and slip road to be constructed in accordance with the permitted details and/or as otherwise amended in accordance with stage 2 safety audit;
- subject to Traffic Regulation Orders, extension of parking restrictions and for the relocation of the 30mph speed limit nearer to the roundabout prior to use of the new egress,
- provision of new one-way access arrangements before the construction of the Sports Centre and safeguarding of vehicular access, drop-off and parking,
- external lighting,
- continuing implementation and ongoing review of the School Travel Plan,
- ecological surveys prior to work commencing on the relevant phases and submission for approval of any necessary mitigation measures,
- details of the hours of use relating to community use outside of normal school hours for the Sports Centre,
- measures to prevent mud and debris being taken onto the public highway,
- hours of working during construction,
- details of construction access, and
- removal of the temporary building (maths mobile) and the 2 standard mobiles at the front of the site within 3 months of the completion and first occupation of the new Arts and Drama block.

Case officer - Paul Hopkins

01622 221051

Background documents - See section heading
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