

## **Appendix 1 to Item D3**

### **APPLICATION TM/08/2857 – NEW SPECIAL SCHOOL, PARKING, PLAY AREA, LANDSCAPING AND ANCILLARY WORKS AT WROTHAM SCHOOL, BOROUGH GREEN ROAD, WROTHAM**

NOTES of a Planning Applications Committee Members' site meeting at Wrotham School on Tuesday, 4 November 2008.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr J F London (Chairman), Mrs V J Dagger (local Member), Mr W A Hayton, Mr S J G Koowaree, Mr T A Maddison, Mr J I Muckle, Mr W V Newman, Mr A R Poole and Mr F Wood-Brignall.

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

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL: Cllrs D Evans, B Luker, Mrs S Murray and Ms M Geary (Planning).

PARISH COUNCILS: Mr H Rayner, Mr P Gillin (Wrotham). *Mrs Murray was also a representative of Borough Green PC.*

THE APPLICANTS: Mr R Collier (KCC Children, Families and Education) with Mr J McNamara (KCC Property), Mr M Blythin (D H A Planning).

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Balfour (Chairman of Governors – Grange Park School).

- (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 which was for the erection of a new special school with parking, play area, landscaping and ancillary works on land immediately to the north of Wrotham School. This land was currently being used informally for recreation but was surplus to the requirements of Wrotham Secondary School as there was sufficient open play space on the main playing fields to the east.
- (3) Mr Hopkins then set the application site in its geographical context by pointing out that it was surrounded on three sides (north, east and west) by mature hedgerows and trees. It was bordered to the north by the M26 (which ran below the level of the site), and to the west by the A227 Borough Green Road. He also pointed out that there was a Public Right of Way from the southern side of the motorway, coming out on the opposite side of the A227. The developed part of the site (Wrotham School itself) was faced by a line of residential properties on the west side of the A227. The proposed access was already in use as one of the two main accesses to the Wrotham School site.
- (4) The site lay within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This meant that planning policies applied which presumed against inappropriate development in the Green Belt and sought to protect, conserve and enhance the landscape character and natural beauty of the AONB.
- (5) Mr Hopkins moved on to consider the proposal itself. He said that it had arisen from the need to relocate Grange Park Special School, which was currently located at Leybourne Grange. Grange Park School was a special

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school for young people with '*Severe Communication Needs associated with a combination of Autism and Severe Learning Difficulties*'. The applicant had advised that the existing Leybourne Grange site was inadequate to meet the special needs of its pupils.

- (6) The Wrotham School site had been identified (following a detailed assessment of alternative solutions and potential relocation sites) as the only suitable location, offering significant benefits associated with a fully integrated co-locational curriculum provision.
- (7) The proposal included the provision of a new single storey building providing about 2000 m<sup>2</sup> of accommodation for 55 pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), together with teaching staff.
- (8) The proposed building would be a curved form with the main facades facing north and south. Within the building there would be a linear 'street' with communal spaces at the western end and 6 teaching home bases at the eastern end on the south side of the building. A number of courtyards would also be provided on the south side of the street. The special subject teaching areas would be arranged along the north side of the street.
- (9) The building would be cut into the site slope and have a mono pitch grass covered roof rising out of the ground. The cut would be about 2 metres deep at the western end, reducing to nothing at the eastern end. The front part of the building would have flat grass covered roofs.
- (10) The roof would be up to about 9.7 metres in height at the western end (where the hall would be located), about 3.7metres high for the flat roofs at the front and 7.7 metres high for the mono pitch to the rear.
- (11) The vertical faces of the building would be clad with Kalwall (a translucent fenestration system), high level louvre panels and render in a subdued, green colour finish.
- (12) Mr Hopkins said that It was intended that the north, convex shaped façade would act as a noise deflector and would be positioned so as to minimise the sound of the M26 traffic; whereas the south façade would be a light collector with minimal aspect, reducing external visual distraction for the children.
- (13) Mr Hopkins continued by describing the external works. A hard play area would be provided to the front of the building. The parking area would have 35 car spaces, 4 mini bus spaces and 3 people carrier spaces. In addition, 4 parking bays would be provided together with a wider access aisle for the 20 taxis which would set down and pick up the pupils in the morning and afternoon. Both the hard play area and parking area would follow the curve of the building.
- (14) Mr Hopkins added that a landscaping scheme was included as part of the application. Existing trees would be retained with the loss of only a few smaller trees adjacent to the existing Wrotham School's vehicle hardstanding area.
- (15) Mr Hopkins concluded his presentation by identifying the main issues that would need to be considered in the determination of the proposal. These were:

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- (i) considerations relating to the application involving 'inappropriate' development within the Metropolitan Green Belt, the impact on its openness and whether or not this was outweighed by very special circumstances;
  - (ii) the impact of the development on the landscape and visual amenity, taking into account the site's location within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
  - (iii) the impact of the development on playing field provision; and
  - (iv) the design of the proposed development.
- (16) Mr Collier (on behalf of the applicant) said that he agreed with Mr Hopkins' description of the proposal.
- (17) Mr McNamara (KCC Property) stressed that the layout and location of the proposed building had been set in order to mask the sound, which was a particular concern for children with ASD. In response to questions, he said that the boundary of the site would be at the edge of the hardstanding area where the meeting was taking place. The number of staff at the new school would be approximately 35 including non-teaching staff. The parking facilities for the two schools would be separated by road linings, with access and exit being regulated through a two-way traffic system. This would ensure that the parking needed by Grange Park School would be confined to within its own area. The pupils would only be affected by noise when they came out to play during morning break time.
- (18) Mr Rayner (Wrotham PC) said that his Parish Council was still at the stage where it would need to reserve its position. He did, however, have some observations that were pertinent. He commented that the A227 was in need of traffic calming and drew particular attention to the Cemex Landfill site just to the south of the School, which had approximately 300 HGV movements per day.
- (19) Mr Rayner then said that the proposal for the Borough Green Bypass was due to come forward in March or April 2009. The traffic currently using the A25 and A227 would eventually use a roundabout some 20 metres north west of the site. There might therefore need to be some reconsideration of the shape of the building, which would be concave when facing westwards, where the increase in noise would be coming from.
- (20) Mrs Murray (speaking on behalf of Borough Green PC) said that noise was the main concern. Would the bund be big enough to screen it? She agreed with Mr Rayner's comments about the A227. She pointed out that there had been an agreement with Cemex and RMC that they would not accept heavy loads between 8.20 and 8.50am in order to avoid a clash with vehicles taking pupils to school. She considered that it would be appropriate to re-instate such an agreement.
- (21) Mr Evans (Tonbridge and Malling BC) asked the Committee Members to note the narrowness of the pavement along the A227 to the south of the site just opposite Potters Mead. There had been several near misses over the past year.
- (22) Mr Balfour (Grange Park Special School) said that there had been considerable efforts to find a suitable site for the School. The Leybourne Grange site was in a dire condition with both the electricity supply and the

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phones having been cut off, leaving the school isolated on occasions. It had been recognised that the Wrotham site would be unsuitable from a noise point of view. The design of the proposed building had therefore been prepared with the intention of overcoming the noise from the M26. Account had also been taken of the A227 given the nature of the proposed roundabout onto the Borough Green Bypass. The children would arrive at the School in shared taxis. The hardstanding where the meeting was taking place and the Potters Mead car park were used as drop-off points by Wrotham School.

- (23) Mrs Thompson asked about the relationship of the site to the depth of the cutting of the motorway. In this respect it was possible to get some idea by observing how much could be seen of the passing traffic. Mr Balfour explained that a bund would effectively be constructed on the north side of the building from the soil excavated from the site in order to screen it from the motorway.
- (24) Mr Balfour went on to say that Sport England had questioned the loss of space for football. There were, however, facilities available at Potters Mead, whilst Tonbridge and Malling BC would be applying for an all-weather pitch on the south side of the site.
- (25) The Chairman thanked everyone for attending. The notes of the visit would be appended to the report to the determining Committee meeting.
- (26) In response to a question from Mr Rayner, Mrs Thompson said that the earliest likely date for the application to be reported to the Committee was January 2009.
- (27) Following the meeting, Members inspected the easternmost point of the proposed building. They then noted the screening of the site from the Wrotham School playing fields and the location of the two alternative sites considered. Finally, they walked along the pavement by the A227 so that they could see the point at which the pavement grew narrow and the route of the proposed Borough Green Bypass onto the A227.