

Wrotham Parish Council

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Reference : TM/08/TEMP/0056 Erection of a new School within the grounds of Wrotham School

The application site consists of an informal sports area and unofficial car park between Wrotham School and the M26. The area is Green Belt and part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and therefore highly protected in planning terms.

The proposal is to build a new school building for Grange Park School and the special needs of its pupils, all of which have Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The particular ASD needs of the Grange Park School pupils results in any noise impact being more acutely felt than would ordinarily be the case. A school is classed as a noise sensitive receptor in planning terms and with the special needs of these pupils this results in a particularly acute example. The sites close proximity to the M26 and the A227 results in high ambient noise levels across the site.



Ref: Artists impression of the view from the South of the proposed building as supplied by the applicant.

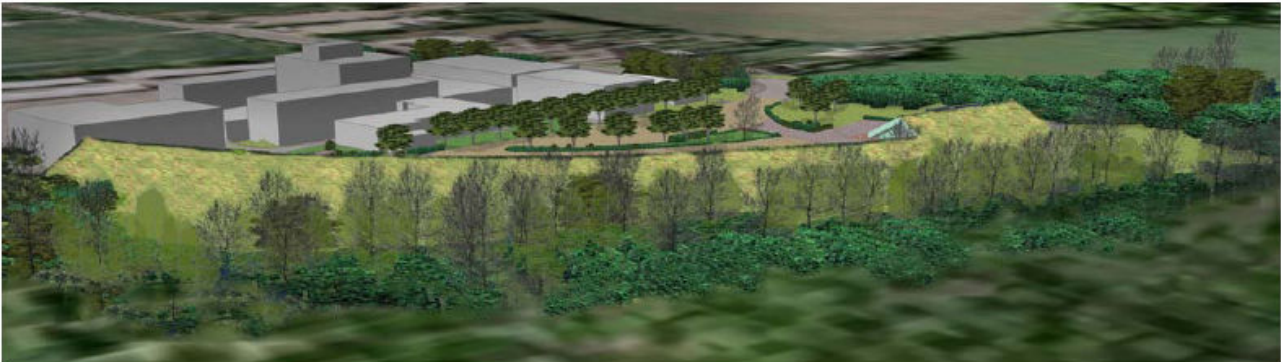
WPC notes that the proposed predominantly single storey building is linear in format with curved facades facing north and south. The curved north face is cut into the site slope and has a mono pitch roof rising out of the ground. The green roof is covered with sedum and various succulents and visually merges with the surrounding grassed areas and hedgerows. Extensive proposed new planting of beach hedgerow, indigenous semi mature trees and low level planting will substantially mitigate negative impacts of the development. In particular we fully support the proposed Northern aspect to the development as it will protect views from the North Downs Scarp and serve to mitigate negative aspects of the existing built development in Wrotham School.

The north, convex shaped façade acts as a noise deflector and has been positioned so as to minimise the sound of the M26 traffic whereas the south façade is a light collector with minimal aspect to reduce external visual distraction of the children. The overall design is in our opinion of good quality and minimises the impact on the AONB and the noise from the M26.

The internal ark of curvature of the building, whilst deflecting sound from the M26 to the north acts as a significant receptor for noise from the A227 in the East. Whilst noting that the acoustic assessment states that current predicted noise levels within the school and recreational areas will be at acceptable levels due to the innovative design, WPC is concerned regarding the impact of the

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proposed Borough Green Bypass. This application is completely formalised as Policy TP8 in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan of 2006 and a current application is nearing completion and is due to be submitted in March 2009. (Ref: Cllr Paul Carter, Malling Chronicle 30/10/2008).



Ref: Artists impression of the North view of the proposed building, which is predominately a green roof, with the existing Wrotham School buildings in the background. Image supplied by the applicant.

The Borough Green Bypass will redirect traffic from the A25 up to the A20 and the A25 through Platt will be down graded. This will result in 8000 extra vehicles per day joining a roundabout immediately adjacent to the proposed school on the A227. (Ref: Statistics and plans submitted on behalf of Celcon in their application to build a Concrete Block Factory 2003 to 2007)

The existing traffic flow is 5,500 vehicles per day according to the Traffic Assessment submitted by the applicant and the Bypass, as formalised in District and County Plans, will result in an increase of 145% in traffic volumes at a roundabout immediately adjacent to the proposed school site. It seems somewhat perverse to progress two separate applications that conflict fundamentally as the road application will bring unacceptable noise levels to an acutely noise sensitive receptor.

The School is promoting a scheme to use Tonbridge and Malling District Council's land that is adjacent to the existing school as an all weather sports pitch to replace the sports facilities lost to the proposed development.

WPC is of the opinion that the alternative site survey, whilst covering a large area, almost half the county, the search criteria employed were somewhat narrow.

WPC considers that the proposal is innovative and high quality, and therefore acceptable in the context of the AONB, it clearly falls within the category of inappropriate development within the Green Belt as it does not comprise built development for any of the purposes listed in paragraph 3.4 of PPG2. The question therefore is whether there are very special circumstances that outweigh the harm caused to the openness of the Green Belt?

The applicant contends that the co-location of the two schools in an education campus will give significant benefits for the sharing of resources and skills and that the site will be secured for secondary education for the future.

In conclusion WPC agrees with the applicant that these benefits do constitute Very Special Circumstances and would consider that the harm caused to the openness of the MGB had been outweighed and offer no objection to this proposal in the event that the following concerns were also addressed.

1. The application is creating an extremely sensitive noise receptor in an inherently noisy location. Any planning permission granted should require internal noise levels in teaching rooms not to exceed 35dB Laeq T, as required in the Building Bulletin 93 'Acoustic Design of Schools'. In the event that this application is consented then any subsequent application that

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has the potential to increase noise and disturbance above this level would be unacceptable to the welfare of the children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and be rejected.

2. Traffic calming / speed reduction measures are installed outside the multiple accesses to the two schools. An interactive visual indicator of the 30mph limit would be helpful in this respect.
3. An all weather pitch on adjacent Tonbridge and Malling District Council land is actively and financially supported to replace the sports facilities lost to the community.