

SECTION D  
DEVELOPMENT TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Background Documents: the deposited documents; views and representations received as referred to in the reports and included in the development proposals dossier for each case; and other documents as might be additionally indicated.

**Item D1**

**Provision of floodlights to the All Weather Pitch at Knole Academy – SE/13/2981 (KCC/SE/0296/2013)**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 12 March 2014.

Provision of floodlights to all weather pitch approved under application reference SE/12/1163 and amended under reference SE/12/1163/R, at Knole Academy, Bradbourne Vale Road, Sevenoaks - SE/13/2981 (KCC/SE/0296/2013)

Recommendation: planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

**Local Members:** Mr N Chard

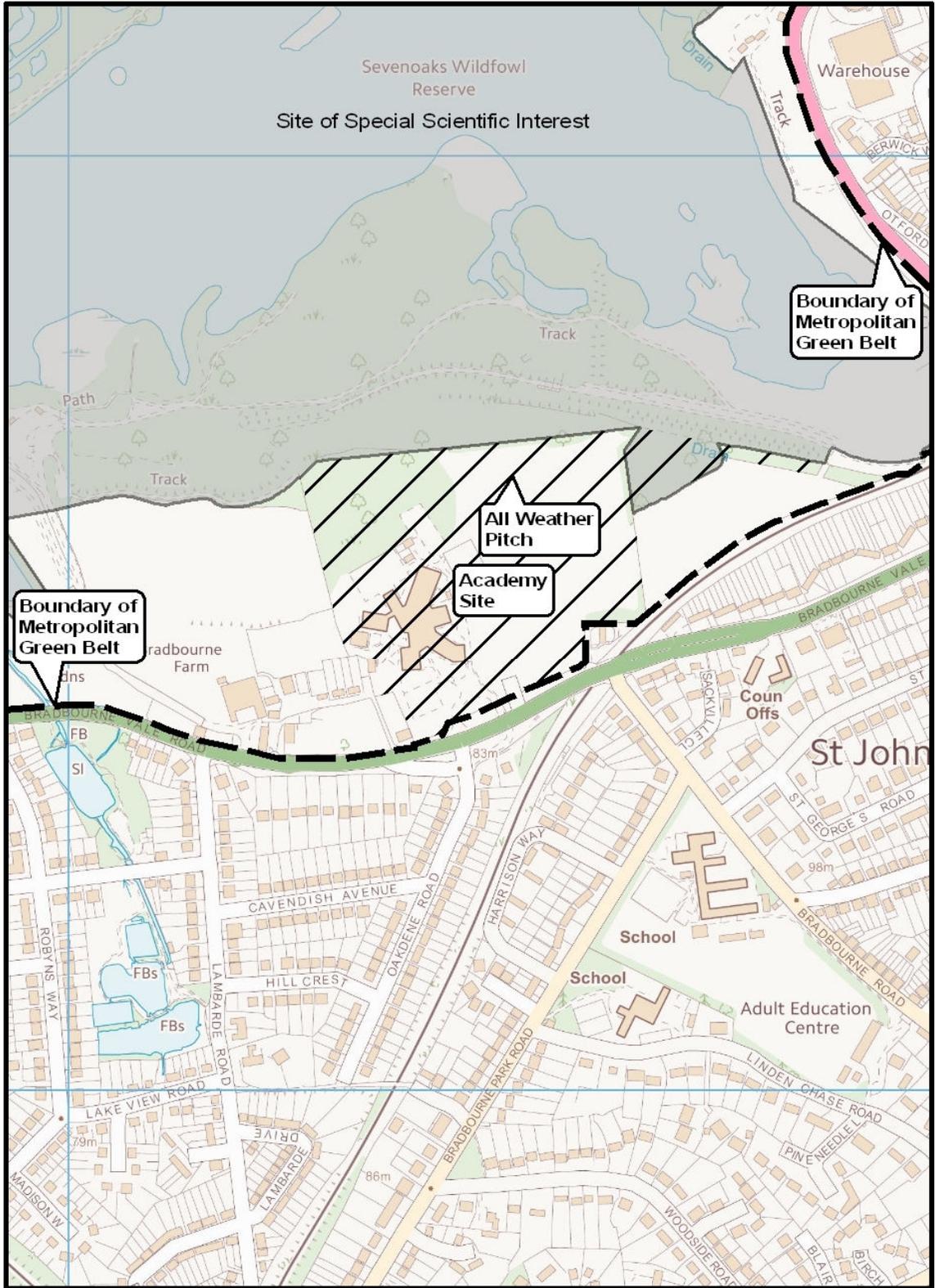
**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Site/Relevant Planning History**

1. Knole Academy is situated on the west side of Sevenoaks just over a mile from the town centre, on the site of the former Bradbourne School for Girls. The site lies on the northern side of the A25 Bradbourne Vale Road, which is a main arterial route into and out of Sevenoaks from the west. Planning permission was granted in November 2012 for the redevelopment of the existing school site, including the retention of existing school buildings, the erection of a new three storey academy building, the retention of an existing floodlit hard surfaced games court and existing sports playing fields, the creation of a new All Weather Pitch and hard and soft play/recreation areas, the provision of 195 on site car parking spaces, 12 motorcycle parking spaces, 2 mini-bus parking spaces, 1 mini-coach parking bay, 8 bus/coach pick up/drop off bays and 222 cycle spaces. That application, reference number SE/12/1163, was considered by Members of the Planning Applications Committee on the 9 October 2012, and subsequently referred to the Secretary of State as a departure from the Development Plan on Green Belt grounds. Construction is nearing completion.
2. The Knole Academy site is 9.36ha, and comprises a mix of two and three storey buildings, with some single storey elements, largely built in the 1970/80s, but with a newer classroom block and reception area to the front of the site and the newly constructed three storey academy building located to the north of the existing. The Academy buildings are set back from the A25, behind an area of natural landscaping, and access/circulatory spaces and coach parking. The topography of the site slopes down steeply in a northerly direction, away from the site boundary with the A25. As a result, the academy buildings are set at a lower level than the road although the site remains fairly even in terms of gradient.
3. Access to the site for both vehicles and pedestrians is from the A25 Bradbourne Vale Road. From the eastbound carriageway there is a dual access which provides entrance and exit from this side of the road. From the westbound carriageway the site is accessed via a dedicated underpass which extends from Oakdene Road, under the A25 to the school. This underpass is two way and allows for both entrance and exit from the site. There are footways along the underpass, as well as at the eastbound access.

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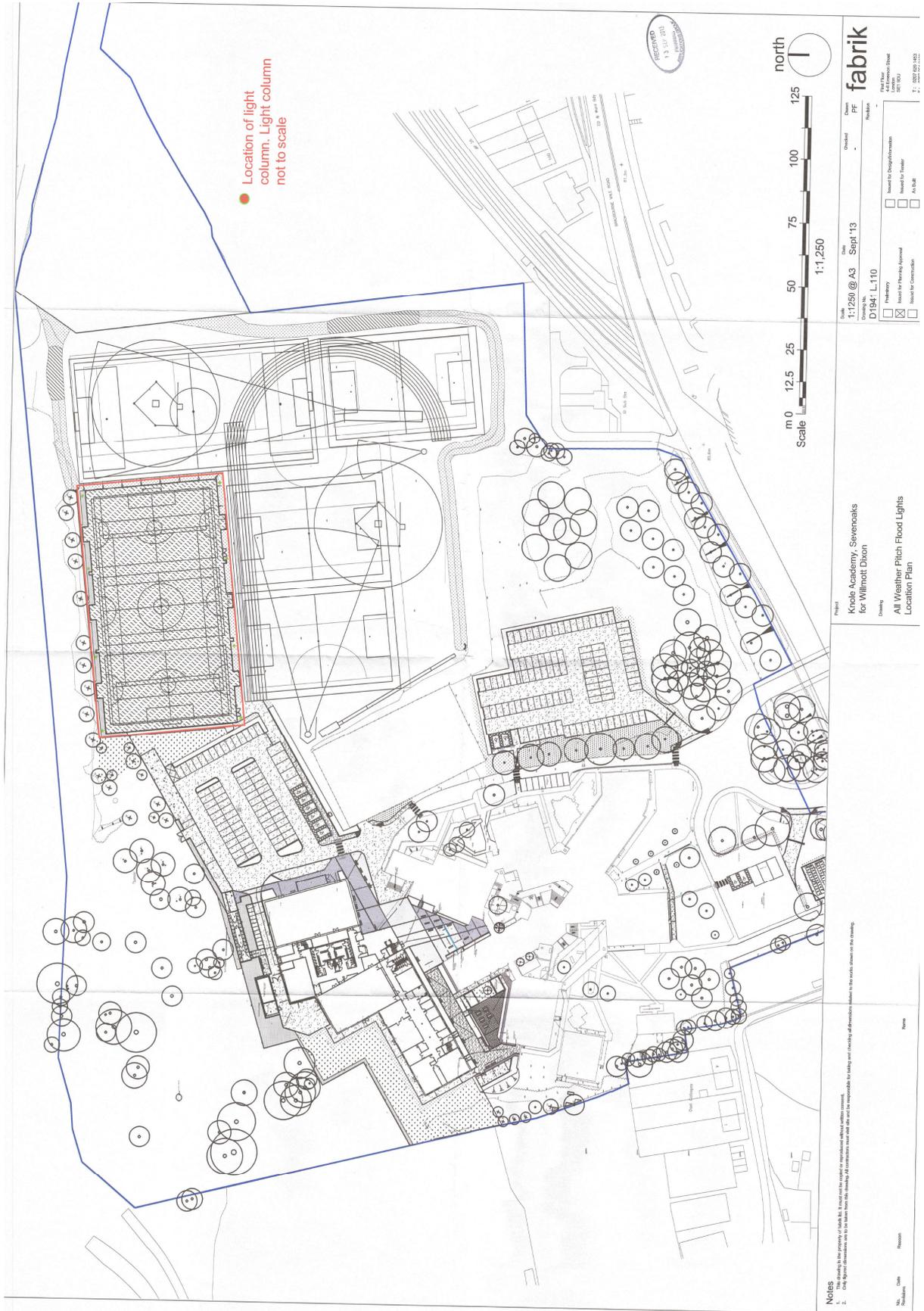
SITE LOCATION PLAN



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# Item D1

## Provision of floodlights to the All Weather Pitch at Knole Academy – SE/13/2981 (KCC/SE/0296/2013)



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4. The whole of the academy site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt, and outside of the settlement confines of Sevenoaks. Adjacent to the northern boundary of the academy site lies Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve (a Kent Wildlife Trust Reserve), which is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Academy site does not lie within any other statutory designations. There is little built development surrounding the academy site, but areas of residential development lie to the opposite side of Bradbourne Vale Road, to the south, and further east along the road. Two pairs of semi detached cottages lie to the south west of the site, with number 4 Oast Cottages lying immediately adjacent to the academy site of the south western boundary. A further detached dwelling lies to the west of the academy site frontage.
5. Planning application reference SE/12/1163 included the provision of an all weather pitch (AWP), located to the north of the site, to the east of the newly constructed three storey teaching block and car parking area. In April 2013, a Non-Material Amendment was submitted to vary the details of the approved AWP including the addition of goal recesses within the perimeter fencing, and the subsequent movement of the pitch by approximately 1.75 metres to the south. The Non-Material Amendment, reference number SE/12/1163/R, was approved in August 2013, and the pitch has subsequently been constructed in accordance with the approved details.
6. The AWP measures approximately 96 metres in length and 51.5 metres in width, and is orientated in an east/west direction, parallel to the academy sites northern boundary. The pitch is surfaced with a green astro-turf equivalent and secured with 3.6 metre high weldmesh sports rebound fencing, powder coated dark green. To the south and east of the AWP lie the academy's grass playing fields/sports pitches. To the north of the AWP a treed embankment rises in height away from the pitch, with the academy site boundary with the adjoining Nature Reserve being approximately 18 metres away from the AWP boundary fencing.
7. In light of the site's Green Belt designation, this application has been advertised as a Departure from the Development Plan.

*A site location plan is attached.*

### **Background**

#### Academy Status

8. The Knole Academy was formed in 2010 as part of the Government's Academies Programme. The Academy has, until recently, operated from the sites and existing buildings of two predecessor schools, Bradbourne School for Girls (on the application site), and the Wildernesse School for Boys. The two schools have recently amalgamated onto one site, at the former Bradbourne School for Girls, leaving the Wildernesse site vacant. Planning application reference KCC/SE/0375/2013 has recently been submitted by Kent County Council Property and Infrastructure Support, which proposes the redevelopment of the Wildernesse School site to provide two new secondary schools (a 6 form of entry Sevenoaks Grammar Annex and a 4 form of entry Trinity Free School) and associated car parking and infrastructure.

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**Proposal**

9. This application has been submitted by Kent County Council Property and Infrastructure Support, and proposes the erection of 12 metal halide floodlights, mounted on eight 12 metre high galvanised steel columns. Four columns would be located on the northern pitch boundary (which would be fitted with baffles), and four on the southern boundary, and all would be capable of being retracted, on a pivot system, so that maintenance could be undertaken. The floodlights would be arranged so that there is a single floodlight on each of the four 'corner' columns, with the 'central' columns housing two floodlights each. The floodlights would provide an average of 321 lux level of light across the all weather pitch (AWP), providing suitable light levels for football, rugby and other recreational sports.
10. The AWP is used by Knole Academy throughout school term time, weekends and school holidays. However, when the existing pitch is not in use by the Academy it is offered to third parties, other schools and the wider community. The floodlighting hereby proposed would enable the existing AWP to be used as outlined above but over longer hours, with proposed hours of operation being 07.30 to 22.30 Monday to Friday, 07.30 to 21.30 on Saturdays, and 07.30 to 20.30 on Sundays and Bank Holidays. The applicant advises that during these hours, and only if light levels fall below an acceptable level, the floodlights would be switched on.
11. The design of the existing AWP is such that it can provide for a full size football pitch, three separate 5-a-side football pitches, or one game of 9-a-side football. The pitch also has markings for use in rugby training. In response to this, the floodlighting proposed would be fully flexible, in that it could illuminate the whole of the AWP, or individual 5-a-side pitches, depending on what is being used at the time. The lighting would also be timer controlled to ensure that the floodlights would not be in use beyond the proposed hours, and lighting would only be on when the AWP, in all or part, was in use.
12. Access and car parking would be as existing, with community use of many of the facilities on site approved as part of the Knole Academy redevelopment application (SE/12/1163), and access and car parking arrangements assessed at that time as being sufficient.

*The application is supported by a Planning, Design and Access Statement, and a Lighting Specification.*

**Planning Policy Context**

13. (i) **National Planning Policies** – the most relevant National Planning Policies are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012), which sets out the Government's planning policy guidance for England at the heart of which is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The guidance is a material consideration for the determination of planning applications but does not change the statutory status of the development plan which remains the starting point for decision making. However the weight given to development plan policies will depend on their consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the development plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

The NPPF states that, in determining applications, local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

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In terms of delivering sustainable development in relation to this development proposal, the NPPF guidance and objectives covering the following matters are of particular relevance:

- achieving the requirement for high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings;
- the great importance that the Government attaches to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities, and that great weight should be given to the need to create, expand or alter schools;
- the great importance the Government attaches to Green Belts, with the fundamental aim of Green Belt Policy being to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open;
- minimising impacts on biodiversity, and protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity.

**Policy Statement – Planning for Schools Development** (15 August 2011) sets out the Government's commitment to support the development of state-funded schools and their delivery through the planning system.

**(ii) Development Plan Policies****Sevenoaks District Local Plan: Adopted 2000:**

**Policy EN1** - Proposals for all forms of development and land use must comply with the policies set out in this Plan, unless there are overriding material considerations. Scale, height, design, layout, retention of important features, residential and local amenity, access and parking are just some of the criteria which should be considered in the determination of a planning application.

**Policy EN31** - Where a lighting proposal requires planning permission low energy lighting is used, and the alignment of lamps and provision of shielding should minimise spillage and glow in order to safeguard the night sky. The lighting intensity should be no greater than that required to provide adequate illumination and proposals to floodlight sports fields will not be permitted if they would result in a significant loss of privacy or amenity for nearby residential properties.

**Policy NR10** – Proposals for all forms of development should minimise pollution of the environment through careful design and layout. Potentially polluting activities must consider the need to protect natural resources including sites of nature conservation importance, wildlife habitats and other sensitive environmental areas.

**Sevenoaks District Core Strategy: Adopted February 2011:**

**Policy LO8** – Seeks to maintain the extent of Green Belt, and conserve and enhance the countryside, including the distinctive features that contribute to the special character of its landscape and its biodiversity.

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- Policy SP1** – Requires all new development to be designed to a high standard, reflect the distinctive local character of an area, create safe, inclusive and attractive environments, incorporate sustainable development principles and maintain biodiversity.
- Policy SP10** – Promotes the provision of multifunctional green space by linking existing green space areas. The Policy also seeks the retention of open space, sports and recreational facilities, including outdoor sports facilities of value to the local community, unless any loss can be justified by additional provision of at least equivalent value to the local community.
- Policy SP11** - Seeks to conserve biodiversity, to ensure no net loss through development and to promote opportunities to enhance biodiversity. Sites designated for biodiversity value will be protected with the highest level of protection given to nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, followed by Local Wildlife Sites and sites of local importance for biodiversity. Designated sites will be managed with the primary objective of promoting biodiversity whilst also providing for appropriate levels of public access.

**Consultations**

14. **Sevenoaks District Council** raises no objection.

**Sevenoaks Town Council** welcomes the proposed new sports facility, and recommends approval subject to Planning and Environmental Health Officers being satisfied that there would be no loss of amenity to nearby properties. It is also requested that the timing restriction be consistent with other floodlit pitches in the Town.

**Kent County Council Highways and Transportation** raises no objection.

**The County Council's Biodiversity Officer** comments as follows:

"We have reviewed the information which has been submitted with the planning application and we are satisfied that sufficient consideration has been given to the impact the proposed lighting will have on the SSSI and commuting and foraging bats.

We are satisfied that the lighting has been designed to minimise the light spill on the woodland from the proposed development. As such we require no additional information to be submitted for comment prior to determination."

**Kent Wildlife Trust** objects to this proposal and requests that it be refused. A copy of Kent Wildlife Trusts letter of objection is appended to this report.

**Natural England** has not assessed the application for impacts on protected species as their 'standing advice' should be followed. With regard to statutory nature conservation sites (SSSI), Natural England raises no objection and comments as follows:

"The application is in close proximity to the Sevenoaks Gravel Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Natural England is satisfied that the proposed development, being carried out in strict accordance with the details of the

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application, would not damage or destroy the interest features for which the site has been notified. We therefore advise your authority that this SSSI does not represent a constraint in determining this application.”

**The County Council’s Landscape Advisor** comments as follows:

“Overall the application is supported. The development would impact on the character of the site, but with careful choice of design and siting, this can be mitigated. The site is likely to be most sensitive in terms of impact upon wildlife given it’s proximity to the SSSI. This along with the edge of settlement location justifies a requirement on the applicant to complete the design and lighting of the site to the highest possible standard.”

**The County Council’s Lighting Consultant/Advisor** confirms that the proposals in relation to lighting are acceptable.

**Local Member**

15. The local County Member, Mr Nick Chard, was notified of the application on the 7 October 2013.

**Publicity**

16. The application was publicised by the posting of 2 site notices, advertisement in a local newspaper, and the individual notification of 38 neighbouring properties.

**Representations**

17. At the time of compiling this report, no letters of representation had been received.

**Discussion**

18. This application has been submitted by Kent County Council Property & Infrastructure Support, and proposes the provision of floodlights to an existing all weather pitch at Knole Academy in Sevenoaks. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 13 above. Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, this proposal needs to be considered in the context of Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance, and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. Issues of particular relevance in this case include impact upon the Metropolitan Green Belt and impact upon the adjacent Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, which is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Green Belt Considerations

19. Policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan, and Core Strategy Policy SP1, seek to conserve and enhance the environment and require development to be well designed and respect its setting. This is particularly relevant to this site which is identified within the Sevenoaks District Local Plan as being within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Policy LO8 of the Sevenoaks District Core Strategy seeks to resist inappropriate development

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within the Green Belt, unless justified by exceptional circumstances. Reference is made within Policy LO8 to PPG2 which has been replaced by the NPPF. The NPPF states “as with previous Green Belt Policy, inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances”. The NPPF does not explain in any detail what ‘very special circumstances’ means, but does go on to state “very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations”.

20. The NPPF, section 9, paragraph 80 states that the Green Belt serves five purposes:
- a. to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;
  - b. to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
  - c. to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
  - d. to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
  - e. to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The NPPF goes on to state (paragraph 89), that local planning authorities should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt, but lists a number of exceptions to this assumption. One such exception is the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and/or outdoor recreation, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it, as listed above.

21. Although the site is currently in use for education and sporting facilities, and the all weather pitch (AWP) is in situ, it is acknowledged that the erection of floodlights within the Green Belt would constitute inappropriate development if the works are considered to impact unacceptably on the openness. The applicant is of the opinion that the lighting has been designed not to create a ‘halo’ and that the facility would be well screened. In addition, the applicant considers that the facility lies adjacent to a well lit road (A25), on the immediate edge of Sevenoaks, and that the lighting of the AWP would be seen in that context, against a backdrop of street lights on the A25. The applicant is strongly of the opinion that the floodlighting proposed would fall within the NPPF exception criteria, and should not be considered as inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
22. Whilst I do have some sympathy with the view of the applicant, I consider that the provision of floodlighting in the location proposed could have an urbanising effect and that this needs to be subject to further assessment. Although I do agree to a point with the applicants view, the AWP is located to the northern boundary of the academy site, separated from the A25 and the edge of the urban area of Sevenoaks by playing fields and tree planting, with the school buildings and associated built development predominately located to the western half of the site. The lighting could, therefore, have an urbanising effect and give an impression of further encroachment of built development into the Green Belt. The development is, therefore, to my mind inappropriate and needs to be considered accordingly. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and it is for the applicant to demonstrate why permission should be granted. Such development should not be approved, except in very special circumstances. 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 inappropriate development.
23. Although the applicant is of the opinion that the development is appropriate, a case of very special circumstances has been provided by the applicant in support of the

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proposal. The following are the applicants three main points which they consider justify the proposed development and outweigh any Green Belt policy objection:

- the need for the new development to deliver the Academy's education model and to meet the needs of the 1500+ students;
- the significant policy and Central Government support for the delivery of state funded secondary schools and associated sporting facilities; &
- the benefits of the new academy development in providing facilities accessible to the wider community.

24. First, with regard to the need for the development to deliver the Academy's education model and to meet the needs of the existing students on site, the applicant advises that the school's own use of the AWP is currently limited due to a lack of sufficient lighting. I am advised that during the winter months use of the AWP during day light hours is also limited due to low light levels making use of the facility unsafe. The redevelopment of the academy site as a whole has involved a significant amount of investment, and the Academy is therefore seeking to maximise the use and availability of their external sports facilities. They have therefore considered, designed and budgeted for a scheme of floodlighting to the AWP which would overcome the existing limitations on use of the unlit facility. The Academy also has strong links with neighbouring schools, and the AWP has increased opportunities for inter school competition and sharing of the new facilities. The floodlighting proposed would further increase use by other local schools, and would encourage physical and sporting activity by providing students with a facility that could be used outside of school hours throughout the year. The Academy consider this to be vital to the future physical and mental health needs of pupils. Income realised from wider use of the floodlit AWP would also contribute to the life cycle replacement costs of playing surfaces and other associated facilities, ensuring provision of high quality facilities for years to come.
25. With regard to policy support for school development, at a national level the NPPF places significant importance on the provision of state funded schools, as further supported by the Policy Statement – Planning for Schools Development. There is a strong policy presumption in favour of supporting the development of state funded schools, which includes a presumption in favour of development 'necessary to the operational needs of the school'. In addition, the NPPF places significant importance on creating healthy communities, and recognises in paragraph 73 that access to opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to that objective. The applicant also advises that the Governments priority, following the Olympics, is to build on the legacy of the substantial investment made, and to prioritise school sports provision, including the opening of school facilities after hours to extend sporting opportunities and encourage links between schools and local sports clubs. In light of the above, it is considered that the proposed floodlighting of the existing AWP is directly in accordance with Central Governments objectives for sport, as well as the policy support for the provision of improved facilities and the development of state funded schools.
26. The applicant further advises that Knole Academy wish for the AWP to be used to provide an educational, recreational and learning environment, not only for its students, but for the wider community as well. The Academy aims to provide maximum accessibility to its facilities by the wider community, and this aim was supported in the consideration and determination of the application to redevelop the academy site (application reference SE/12/1163). A range of extended school facilities will be available on site following completion of the construction of the academy development, including the sports hall, fitness suite, climbing wall, performance studio, sports pitches, floodlit multi use games area and the AWP, all of which could be used by groups and

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individuals outside of the Academy. The provision of the Academy facilities will significantly improve the quality and range of services available in the Sevenoaks area, and the provision of the proposed floodlights would further add to the facilities available, and would enable use of the AWP in inclement weather, poor light, and later into the evenings.

27. In addition to the applicant's case of very special circumstances, it is important to consider the impact that the development would have on the openness of the Green Belt. The AWP is in situ, its location determined as part of the academy redevelopment. This application proposes the provision of floodlights to the AWP, and the impact of the lighting columns and the lighting itself on the openness of the Green Belt must be considered. With regard to the lighting columns themselves, eight 12 metre high columns are proposed, which would have a galvanised finish. Although it could be argued that a black or dark green finish would be preferable, galvanised finish columns are generally less visually intrusive and tend to be 'lost' against the sky and surrounding landscaping. The columns would also be viewed in the context of existing 3.6 metre high sports fencing, adjacent car parking with 6 metre high lighting columns, a new three storey building to the west, an existing floodlit Multi Use Games Area to the south west, and existing landscaping, including a treed embankment to the north. In considering the setting of the proposed lighting columns, I am of the opinion that the lighting columns would not have a harmful impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
28. With regard to the lighting itself, the visual influence of the floodlighting must be considered in the context of surrounding development. The floodlighting would be viewed in the context of adjacent car parking with 6 metre high lighting columns, a new three storey building to the west with external lighting, an existing floodlit multi use games area to the south west, and the A25 and the urban area of Sevenoaks to the south. It is also important to consider existing landscaping and tree planting, both to the immediate north of the AWP, and to the remaining site boundaries of the Academy, which combined with increases/changes in land levels, offer significant screening to the development. The lighting specification itself has been designed to give zero upward light, and would therefore be 'dark sky' compliant. In addition, the Lux levels would drop away sharply outside of the boundary of the AWP. The applicant also confirms that the lighting specification has been assessed against the Institution of Lighting Professionals 'Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light', and that the proposed lighting would be compliant for Zone E2 (rural area such as villages or relatively dark suburban outer edge sites). I consider that assessing the acceptability of the lighting specification against Zone E2 levels is appropriate in this instance, given the AWP's location on the edge of the urban area of Sevenoaks. The County Council's Lighting Consultant/Advisor also agrees with this approach, and confirms that the proposals in relation to lighting are acceptable.
29. In considering the above, I am of the opinion that the lighting specification has been designed to minimise the visual impact of the development, and to comply with guidance on the reduction of obtrusive light. I am of the opinion, therefore, that the lighting scheme as proposed, when considered in its setting, would not have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt, or the functioning of it. In addition, although the impact of the development on the adjacent Site of Special Scientific Interest (also a Wildlife Reserve) and its biodiversity/ecological value will be discussed later in this report, I do not consider that the floodlighting as proposed would have an adverse impact on the landscape character of the SSSI when set against the existing development on the Academy site, the A25, and the urban area of Sevenoaks to the south.

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30. This strong policy support for delivering educational and sporting development may not in itself override the requirement to protect the Green Belt. However, in view of the lack of harm to the openness of the Green Belt, the substantial support for the provision of school and sporting facilities is considered to be of significant weight. The development is inappropriate development for the purposes of Green Belt consideration and is, therefore, by definition harmful. Nevertheless, in my view, the considerations summarised above are sufficient collectively to constitute very special circumstances capable of outweighing harm, in this particular case. Furthermore, I accept that the particular siting and design of the floodlighting has been carefully considered to help mitigate and minimise the impact of the development on the functioning and openness of the Green Belt. Accordingly, I do not consider that an objection on Green Belt grounds would be warranted in this particular case.
31. The Town and County Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009 states that inappropriate developments within the Green Belt should be referred to the Secretary of State for determination if the floor space to be created is 1000 square metres or more, or if the development, by reason of its scale or nature or location, would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt. In considering this application, and taking into account the matters discussed and addressed above, I do not consider that the scale, nature or location of this development would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and the development would not create any floorspace. For these reasons, I do not consider that this application needs to be referred to the Secretary of State for determination in this instance.

**Impact of the development on the adjacent Site of Special Scientific Interest (also a Wildlife Reserve)**

32. As outlined in paragraph 4 of this report, adjacent to the northern boundary of the Academy site lies Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, which is a Kent Wildlife Trust managed reserve. The Wildlife Reserve is also a designated Site of Special Scientific (SSSI). As can be seen from the summary of consultation responses in paragraph 14 of this report, both Natural England and the County Council's Biodiversity Officer raise no objection to this application for reasons to be discussed below. However, Kent Wildlife Trust raise objection and request that the application be refused, and a copy of their detailed letter of objection is appended to this report.
33. First, the impact of the proposal on the SSSI must be considered. Natural England confirm that the interest features of the Sevenoaks Gravel Pits SSSI are as follows:
- Assemblages of breeding birds (lowland open water and their margins); &
  - Nationally rare and scarce dragonfly species (*Cordulia aenea*, Downy Emerald)

The interest features listed above are essentially the reasons that the site was designated an SSSI, they are the site's 'special scientific interest'. Natural England, have confirmed that the issue of possible impacts on the SSSI has been adequately addressed by the applicant in their supporting documentation, and are of the opinion that well designed directional floodlighting (such as proposed) would not affect, destroy or damage the features for which the SSSI is designated. The County Council's Biodiversity Officer is also satisfied that sufficient consideration has been given to the impact of the proposed lighting on the adjacent SSSI, and raise no objection to the proposal on that basis. I therefore conclude that the floodlighting as proposed would not have a detrimental impact on the SSSI in terms of affecting the interest features of the site. However, wider ecological impacts and the impact of the proposal on the Wildlife Reserve and its function need to be given further consideration as the site has ecological value beyond those recognised by its SSSI designation.

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34. As detailed within the attached letter from Kent Wildlife Trust, Sevenoaks Wildlife reserve was established in the 1960's, when Dr Jeffery Harrison began to work with Kent Sand and Ballast to work the site with the intention of a post-industrial use as a nature reserve. Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT) took over the management of the site from the Harrison family in 2002, and is currently in negotiations with the landowner (Lafarge Tarmac) to extend the lease to 99 years, and to extend the area formally under the control of the Trust. KWT state that the site has been developed and monitored as a wildlife refuge on the edge of a growing urban area, and that a half-century of conservation effort has been rewarded with a 'diversity of interest far richer than that for which the site was designated a SSSI in the 1960's'. KWT go on to state that the reserve is a refuge for birds, animals, insects and plants, found in numbers and diversity on site that is not found elsewhere locally. As seen on page 2 of the Trusts letter, the Wildlife Reserve houses a number of important wildlife communities, and it is considered by KWT that many of these communities are likely to be sensitive to increased light levels. These 'wildlife communities' include ducks, lapwings, finches, bitterns, sandmartins, solitary bees and wasps, glow-worms and bats (see page 2 of the attached letter for further detail). The Trust go on to state that published research/information about the impact of artificial lighting on nature conservation interest offers no comfort, and many researchers in the field conclude that very low levels of artificial lighting can disturb nocturnal species.
35. In the preparation of this application, the applicant instructed an Ecology Consultant to undertake an assessment of the impact of floodlighting on surrounding ecology. The concluding comments from the Ecology Consultants were submitted within the application documentation, and confirm that the 'floodlights are unlikely to have any significant impact on wildlife in the area, especially as they would be timer controlled, not on all night, and would be hooded to minimise leakage outside of the pitch'. The Ecology Consultants, and the applicant, also confirm that lux levels at the Academy site boundary would drop to 5 lux, diminishing to 0.5 lux 10 metres into Wildlife Reserve. The impact of the floodlighting on the Wildlife Reserve will be discussed in detail below, but with regard to nocturnal species, such as bats, its is considered by the Ecology Consultants that the lux levels above would not affect the existing dark corridors in the woodland close to the boundary, thereby not affecting foraging/commuting bats. It should also be noted that the floodlighting would be used most in winter, and used for much briefer periods in the summer, the time of year that bats are most active.
36. The County Council's Biodiversity Officer is satisfied that sufficient consideration has been given to the impact of the proposed lighting on commuting and foraging bats. The applicants Ecologist has detailed that the existing landscaping, the raised levels of the site boundary, and the baffles proposed to be fitted to the lighting would minimise any impact on the local bat population, and the adjacent Wildlife Reserve. It should also be noted that the applicants are proposing to use metal halide lamps, which emit a reduced amount of UV light when compared to standard lighting. It is UV light which affects bat activity. Subject to conditions requiring the lighting to be installed strictly in accordance with the lighting specification provided, and thereafter maintained as such, it can be concluded that the development as proposed would not have a significantly detrimental impact on the local bat population. However, the wider impact on the Wildlife Reserve needs further consideration.
37. It should be noted that of the species listed above by KWT, only bats are a legally protected species. Although clearly we would wish to conserve and preserve all wildlife populations, it is clear from the above that legally protected species (bats) would not be adversely affected by the floodlighting as proposed. However, KWT are concerned that

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other wildlife species within the Reserve would be affected by increased light levels. It is therefore important to consider the level of light spill that would extend into the Wildlife Reserve and beyond the boundary of the Academy site.

38. The existing AWP is approximately 18 metres from the boundary between the academy site and the adjacent Wildlife Reserve. Between the AWP and the site boundary, the land rises in height by approximately 2.5 metres, and existing landscaping and tree planting, which links with that within the adjacent Reserve, covers the embankment. The lux level diagrams first submitted with this application showed that lux levels would drop to 10 lux at the site boundary. However, that diagram did not take into account the changes in levels, existing landscaping and tree planting (to be retained), and the fact that baffles would be installed to the floodlights on the northern side of the pitch. Subsequently, amended diagrams have been produced, which demonstrate that lux levels would drop to 5 lux at the site boundary, diminishing to 0.5 lux 10 metres beyond the boundary, into the Wildlife Reserve (twilight is approximately 3.5 lux). It should be noted that this area of the reserve is wooded, and contains railway tracks associated with the sites industrial history. The lake, which attracts wildfowl to the reserve, is over 150 metres from the application site at the closest point.
39. As outlined in paragraph 11 of this report, the floodlighting has been designed to be fully flexible, in that it could illuminate the whole of the AWP, or individual 5-a-side pitches, depending on what is being used at the time. The lighting would also be timer controlled to ensure that the floodlights would not be in use beyond the proposed hours, and lighting would only be on when the AWP, in all or part, was in use. These controls would further mitigate any light spill, ensuring the lighting was on only as required, and would be extinguished when not in use, and/or upon reaching the end curfew time. For the avoidance of doubt the proposed hours of use are 07.30 to 22.30 Monday to Friday, 07.30 to 21.30 on Saturdays, and 07.30 to 20.30 on Sundays and Bank Holidays. The applicant further advises that the floodlighting would only be switched on during these hours, and only if light levels fall below an acceptable level. Both Natural England and the County Council's Biodiversity Officer are satisfied that the lighting has been designed to minimise light spill, and do not consider that the development would have a detrimental impact on the adjoining Wildlife Reserve/SSSI.
40. Although I can appreciate the concerns raised by KWT, given the low levels of light spill at the site boundary, the controls proposed by the applicant, the existing screening and level changes, and the views on Natural England and the County Council's Biodiversity Officer, I am of the opinion that the development would not increase light levels at the boundary of the Wildlife Reserve to an unacceptable level, or a level which would affect the wildlife species which the Reserve attracts. I have assessed the impact of the proposed floodlighting on the SSSI, the Wildlife Reserve, and protected species, and am of the opinion that the lighting as proposed would not have a significantly detrimental affect on the SSSI designation, the functioning and operation of the Wildlife Reserve and the species is attracts, or foraging/commuting bats. However, I consider that should permission be granted, conditions of consent should be imposed to ensure that the development is carried out in strict accordance with the submitted details and lighting specification, that the lighting be extinguished by 22.30 Monday to Friday, 21.30 on Saturdays and 20.30 on Sundays and Bank Holidays or within 15 minutes of the last use, that the lighting be installed in accordance with the submitted details and subject to ongoing maintenance, and that no other lighting be installed without the written consent of the County Planning Authority. Subject to the imposition of these conditions, I see no reason to refuse the application on the grounds of impact on the adjacent SSSI and Wildlife Reserve, and consider that the development would not have an unacceptable impact on protected species and wider ecological interests.

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Residential Amenity

41. Although I have not received any objections from local residents, it is important to consider the impact of the development on residential amenity. In assessing this application, I consider that, subject to the imposition of the conditions outlined in paragraph 40, the floodlighting as proposed would not have a detrimental impact on the amenity of properties neighbouring the academy site. Properties are a considerable distance from the proposed floodlighting, separated from it by existing tree planting and landscaping, the academy buildings and associated facilities, and in some cases a railway line and the A25. Sevenoaks Town Council requested that Planning Officers be satisfied that nearby properties would not experience 'a loss of amenity', and I can confirm that I do not consider that local residents would be adversely affected by the development. In addition, the proposed hours of use are not, in my opinion and in this case, excessive and accord in general with permitted hours of use of similar facilities across the county. However, I would suggest that hours of working for the lighting installation be controlled by condition to ensure that local residents do not experience undue disturbance. Therefore should permission be granted, I would suggest that the installation works should be undertaken only 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.

**Conclusion**

42. This proposal has given rise to a variety of issues, including the need for very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the impact of the proposed development on the openness of the Green Belt, and the impact of the development on the adjacent Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Kent Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve. I consider that very special circumstances have been demonstrated in this particular case for overriding Green Belt policy constraints. I also consider that the development has been designed to minimise the visual impact of the lighting on this part of the Green Belt, and its functioning. In addition, subject to the imposition of the conditions outlined throughout this report, I consider that the proposed development would not have a significantly detrimental impact on the adjacent SSSI, which is a Kent Wildlife Trust Wildlife Reserve, or protected species, and would accord with the principles of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF. Therefore, subject to the 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 aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies and the guidance contained in the NPPF. Therefore, I recommend that permission be granted subject to appropriate conditions

**Recommendation**

43. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO conditions, including conditions covering:

- 3 year time limit for implementation;
- the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
- hours of use restricted to 07.30 to 22.30 Monday to Friday, 07.30 to 21.30 on Saturdays, and 07.30 to 20.30 on Sundays and Bank Holidays.;
- extinguishing of lighting when pitch not in use;
- lighting to be installed in accordance with approved details, and checked on site;
- lighting levels not to exceed those specified within the application;
- no further lighting to be installed without planning permission;

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### **Provision of floodlights to the All Weather Pitch at Knole Academy – SE/13/2981 (KCC/SE/0296/2013)**

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- hours of working during the lighting installation to be restricted to between 0800 and 1800 Monday to Friday and between the hours of 0900 and 1300 on Saturdays, with no operations on Sundays and Bank Holidays;

Case officer – Mary Green
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01622 221066
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Background documents - See section heading
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**Appendix 1**

Our ref: 524568/JB JB/016  
[john.bennett@kentwildlife.org.uk](mailto:john.bennett@kentwildlife.org.uk)  
01622 357801

Your ref: SE/0296/2013

22 January 2014

For the attention of M Green  
Planning Applications Unit  
Kent County Council  
Invicta House  
Maidstone  
ME14 1XX



**Kent Wildlife Trust**

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Dear Mary

**Floodlighting all-weather pitch, Knole Academy, Sevenoaks**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the revised lighting scheme.

Kent Wildlife Trust actively supports the planning process across the county as a non-statutory consultee commenting on the likely wildlife impact of proposed development and possible mitigation. We consider that our views are actively sought by the planning authorities because our contribution is regarded as informed, objective and reasonable. On this occasion the Trust is also responding as the body with a direct institutional interest, responsible for the management of the Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, an SSSI and Nature Reserve, immediately adjacent to the proposed floodlit pitches.

**The original application**

The Trust responded to the original planning application for the redevelopment of what is now the Knole Academy and did not object to the final proposal. It is very unfortunate that the addition of floodlights to the development has been proposed so late in the process. Had the Trust had the opportunity to comment on floodlighting at an early stage we could have worked with the developers to possibly identify a less damaging location for these pitches.

**The current application**

We understand that the proposal is for a series of 12-meter high floodlight poles to be erected around the pitches. These will illuminate the three pitches and operate until 10.30 pm on week days and to 9.30 and 8.30 at weekends. The bases for some of the poles have already been installed. We recognise that current technology enables lighting of this kind to be more confined to the area of use than in the past; nevertheless, the developer's charts show

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**Appendix 1**

“leakage” on to our site. It is clear that until we sought a meeting with the developer there was no attempt to minimise the impact of light on our property. Now, the developer is considering installing baffles on the back of some fittings and is costing the installation of a control that will limit the maximum level of light on the pitch when all three pitches are in use. This may reduce but not eliminate “leakage” as is demonstrated in the recently received revised projection of light levels which will reach the reserve.

**Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve – its heritage**

The nature reserve is part of the natural and cultural heritage of the Sevenoaks area and Kent. It was established by Dr Jeffery Harrison in the ‘60s when he began to work with local firm, Mid-Kent Sand and Ballast, to work the site with the intention of a post-industrial use as a nature reserve. The process is now commonplace but this was a pioneering initiative that put Sevenoaks at the heart of conservation thinking in the UK.

Meanwhile Dr Harrison was active in international conservation diplomacy, leading in the development of several international agreements such as Ramsar. HRH the Duke of Edinburgh has visited the reserve on a number of occasions. Kent Wildlife Trust took over the management of the site from the Harrison family in 2002 and is currently negotiating with the owner, LafargeTarmac, to extend the lease to 99 years and extend the area under formal control of the Trust. The Trust hopes to celebrate the Reserve’s heritage, the role of several generations of the Harrison Family and the significance of Sevenoaks once it is in a position to improve the visitor facilities at the site.

In this context, it is unfortunate that the current application misleadingly refers to our site as “Sevenoaks Gravel Pits” rather than to the status it has had since the ‘60s of SSSI designated nature reserve.

**Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve – its wildlife**

The nature reserve is a designated SSSI. It is important as an area which has been developed and monitored as a wildlife refuge on the edge of a growing urban area. The half-century of conservation effort has been rewarded with a diversity of interest far richer than that for which the site was designated SSSI in the 1960s. The reserve is clearly a refuge for wildlife; birds, animals, insects and plants will be found in numbers and diversity that do not occur elsewhere locally. It houses a number of important wildlife communities many of which are likely to be sensitive to increased light levels:

- The lakes support wintering flocks of duck and lapwing, finches and bittern occur in good numbers, and in summer a range of species use the lakes to breed including lapwing. Many birds on spring and autumn passage pass through the reserve.
- In 2013 sandmartins returned to breed on the reserve for the first time since the ‘70s following several years and significant investment in restoration. Their breeding cliff is within yards of the proposed floodlit pitches.
- The site contains large and scarce communities of solitary bees and wasps; the habitat that supports them is scarce elsewhere. These species include the increasingly threatened natural pollinators whose declining numbers are causing national concern. They are sensitive and the impact on these communities of a bright and sustained artificial light source is unknown.

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**Appendix 1**

- The Reserve is also notable for its colonies of glow-worms, possibly the most studied colony in the UK.
- The reserve hosts large numbers of bats of diverse species. The numbers are sufficient for bat walks to be a popular public attraction.

**Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve – public access**

The reserve has free public access and receives approximately 50,000 visits a year and schools and groups of young people visit the reserve on supervised, National Curriculum level, courses. It receives visits from local families and from wildlife enthusiasts from across the South East. We hope to extend and improve the quality of such visits.

**Wildlife and Lighting**

A review of published information about the impact of artificial lighting on nature conservation interests offers no comfort. The Royal Commission Study on Artificial Light in the Environment (Jan 2008) found that “we do not know enough about the biological impacts of light pollution on plants and wildlife”. Indeed, most research has focused on the impact of street lighting which, crucially, draws from a much less intensive source of light than sports ground floodlighting. Indeed, the conclusion drawn by Lyytimaki (Nature’s Nocturnal Services: Light Pollution ..., 2013) is shared by many researchers in the field: “It appears that no safe level of artificial light can be determined since very low levels of artificial light can disturb nocturnal species”.

**To conclude:**

- The Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve is an important local resource and an iconic record of pioneering international conservation.
- The reserve is demonstrably an important site for a wide spectrum of wildlife and this stands to be compromised by the proposed a major (12m) floodlighting installation.
- The reserve and its wildlife is an increasingly valued public access resource for Sevenoaks.
- The Harrison vision and the Trust’s objectives for managing the reserve will be significantly compromised if we cannot demonstrate that wildlife will continue to prosper.
- The application has been pursued with little care for our interests as neighbours and can at best be described as an afterthought.

The original application was to provide high quality facilities to a local school and that aspiration has been achieved through the original application. This subsequent development is damaging to both the interests of the Trust and to the interest of Sevenoaks. At the very least, the precautionary principle should apply in this case. Kent Wildlife Trust objects to this proposal and requests that it be refused.

Yours sincerely,

John Bennett  
**Chief Executive**