<table>
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<tr>
<th>ITEM NO: 6</th>
<th>Location: Land South Of Tilekiln Farm, Great Ashby, Stevenage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applicant: Herts County Council</td>
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<td>Proposal: Construction of new secondary school to include: school buildings, accesses, car park, floodlit all weather pitch, floodlit multi-use games area, grass playing pitches, storm water attenuation pond, means of enclosure, new and diverted footpaths/cycleways, landscaping and related works on land to the north of New Spring Wood; access roundabout on Mendip Way; access road, car and coach set down/pick-up/parking area, means of enclosure, new and diverted footpaths/cycleways, landscaping, swales and related works on land to the east of Mendip Way; plus ecological mitigation works in New Spring Wood, the construction of a drainage ditch adjacent to Longdell Wood and the provision of replacement open space facilities on land west of Mendip Way, Stevenage</td>
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<td>Ref.No: 09/01349/ 1CC</td>
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<td>Officer: Karen Allen</td>
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**Date of expiry of statutory period:** 08 August 2009

**Reason for Delay** (if applicable)

N/A

**Reason for Referral to Committee** (if applicable)

Strategic Development by Herts County Council

### 1.0 Relevant History and Background

1.1 The original outline planning permission for development at Great Ashby in the north-eastern part of Stevenage was granted in 1993 (application reference: 1/578/88). Further development has taken place on land known as ‘Burleigh Park’ which was granted permission in 2002. The total number of dwellings within Great Ashby (including land within Stevenage) is approximately 2800 dwellings.

1.2 Stevenage has been identified as a town for significant expansion within the East of England Plan. Policy SV1 refers to sustainable urban extensions to the west and north of the town. Both Stevenage Borough Council and North Herts District Council are currently working on the Stevenage and North Herts Action Plan (SNAP) to deliver this growth. The application site is included within an area identified for possible development in the Key Issues and Options consultation on SNAP carried out in 2007/2008.

1.3 The proposals for the relocation of the Thomas Alleyne School form part of the County Council’s wider programme for reorganising secondary school provision in Stevenage agreed at the County Council’s Cabinet in October 2007 and January
2008. Prior to this, in May 2007 the County Council carried out a public consultation into the future pattern of secondary school provision in Stevenage. Amongst other things, views were sought on alternative options for the future distribution and size of schools. The reasons for the review related to anticipated future need, the County Council’s preference for larger schools, the geographical imbalance between homes and schools and the perceived problems and deficiencies in the pattern of schools.

1.4 Implementation of the strategy will be significantly funded by the Government’s Building Schools for the Future (BSF) initiative. The programme for Stevenage is in two phases. The first has been approved and relates to some of the other school sites in Stevenage. The second phase relates to the relocation and expansion of The Thomas Alleyne School and the expansion of the Barclay School adjacent to the existing school site. An Outline Business Case is intended to be submitted to the government by the end of 2010.

2.0 Policies

2.1 Planning Policy Guidance
PPS1 – Delivering Sustainable Development
PPG2 – Green Belts
PPS9 - Biodiversity and Geological Conservation
PPS13 - Transport

2.2 East of England Plan
There are many policies that are relevant to this application. The main ones are outlined below:
Policy SS1 – Achieving Sustainable Development
Policy SV1 – Stevenage Key Centre for Development Change
Policy SS7 – Green Belt
Policy H1 – Regional Housing Provision
Policies T1, T2, T3, T4, T8, T9, T13 – Relating to Transport
Policies ENV2 to ENV7, ENG1 - Environmental Policies
Policies WAT2, 4 – Water management

2.3 District Local Plan No 2 with Alterations
Policy 2 – Green Belt
Policy 4 – North-East Stevenage
Policy 14 – Nature Conservation
Policy 16 – Areas of Archaeological Significance and other Archaeological Areas
Policy 51 – Development Effects and Planning Gain
Policy 55 – Car Parking

2.4 Stevenage and North Herts Area Action Plan (SNAP)
A Key Issues and Options Consultation was carried out in late 2007/early 2008. It is intended that further consultations will be carried out in 2010/2011 and adoption is anticipated in late 2012. It is likely that a ‘Preferred Options’ Consultation will be in February/March next year.

3.0 Representations

3.1 This is a County Council application which will be determined by that Authority. As a consultee, the District Council would not normally be expected to receive representations as these would normally be sent directly to the County Council. However, I have received a copy of the following representations (16 in total), from the occupiers of 62 and 48 Grampian Place, 92 The Chilterns, 6 Mendip Way, 62 Whernside Drive, The Dell Barn at Tilekiln Farm, The Thatched Cottage in Warrens...
Green, Howells Farm, Halls Green and some properties within Weston. These have been taken into account in the main report. A summary is outlined below, they have been divided into three main areas of concern:

**Principle of Development**

- The County Council are both applicant and decision making body. Their should be an independent arbitrator or the government should call the application in for review.
- There would be an unacceptable impact on the countryside and the Green Belt.
- The proposal pre-empts any decisions on SNAP and would unduly influence it. The County Council has assumed there will be growth around the school, but no decisions on this have been made. The timetable for expansion of Stevenage is uncertain. A school in this location may not be required for many years. The East of England Plan is in dispute and the economy is slowing down house building.
- The proposal encroaches further on Weston and close to Warrens Green. It is in the wrong location. Development is better off going in the direction of Hitchin. Hitchin has better train links.
- There has been no proper consultation on alternative sites and the no alternatives approach is not true. It is on the periphery of the catchment area. The school should be in another location and other sites in Stevenage should be looked at.
- A new school in Great Ashby is not an essential element of HCC programme for schools in Stevenage. An 8 form entry is twice the size of the existing school. When the school opens it will not need to be this size.
- No mention is made of educational provision to the West of Stevenage.
- Round Diamond School has been a failure, so could this school be. The educational advantages of such a large school have been questioned.
- The existing school should be refurbished. Others schools in Stevenage are being closed, so there is no basis for a new school.
- The school should not be on the periphery of the catchment.

**Traffic Impact**

- There would be a large increase in traffic on the Western Road, the villages and congestion in Great Ashby. There will be significant traffic disturbance in Mendip Way. Residents would like to give their views on the travel plan.
- There will be pedestrian access to the school from Tilekiln Farm and Weston Road making use of an existing footpath. There is no provision made for vehicular drop off or collection that will occur here, resulting in congestion. Cycle lanes need to be considered.
- Parking is an existing problem in Mendip Way that will be made worse. It is likely that traffic will use the private shared drive at the junction with Mendip Way and Cromdale Walk.
- The access leading to 54 and 64 Grampian Place is a private road, the revised plans show pedestrian access leading from this to the proposed footpath. This is unsuitable for such an access from a private road. This entrance should be blocked off.
- The proposed access, drop off points and footpath is too close to the rear and side of properties in Grampian Place. This would have associated light and noise pollution and fumes from exhausts.
- The Chilterns and Grampian Place would become unofficial drop-off points due to the access to footpaths. The roads are too narrow for this. Residents cars would get damaged.
- The footpaths are under power lines.

**Residential Amenity**
There would be an unacceptable impact on the occupiers of the properties at Tilekiln Farm, Grampian Place Mendip Way and Cromdale Walk in relation to noise, air pollution and disturbance during construction and operation. Site construction traffic needs to be considered carefully.

Impact of light pollution on Tilekiln Farm.

The use of the playing fields should be restricted exclusively to the school and Monday to Friday only. Outdoor equipment should close to the school building.

Plant screening to Tilekiln Farm should be mature.

There is an existing footpath running through the garden with Dell Barn which should be deleted as there will be an increase in foot traffic reducing privacy and security. The footpath diversions need to be looked at in the context of this. [Footpaths outside the application site will need to be looked by the County Council Public Right of Way Unit separate to this planning application].

Some occupiers use the access land to park behind their houses. This will no longer be able to happen.

Property values will decrease [This is not a planning issue that can be considered].

Views onto the open space at the access land will be lost. The visual impact has not been considered in relation to the access land.

Environmental and Other Issues

There will be destruction of ancient woodland, the play area and the footpath through New Spring Wood will be lost. There would be an unacceptable impact on wildlife, including bats, deer, door mice and birds.

Infrastructure services need to be upgraded.

Appropriate consideration needs to be given to signage for the school in relation to existing residents. There needs to be measures in relation to litter [An informative attached to any planning permission is recommended to deal with this issue].

There will be gangs at the local centre.

A number of in-house consultation responses have been received in relation to the original proposal and the amended plans, as outlined below:

3.2 Landscape and Urban Design Officer – Concerned about the original plans as they would have had a significant impact on the amenity value of local residents. The visual and landscape impact in relation to the access land and appropriate mitigation measures have now been addressed by the amended plans and further information submitted.

Principal Conservation Officer – As a matter of principle, proposal would not directly preserve the rural setting of the listed buildings at Tilekiln Farm. However, in balancing this and other considerations the impact of the amended proposals on the setting of the listed buildings would be mitigated.

Environmental Health (Contamination) – Recommended conditions relating to a Phase II Environmental Risk Assessment for contaminated land (these are included in the recommendation).

Environmental Health (Noise and Disturbance) – Satisfied with the amended noise mitigation measures proposed, including the additional noise assessment of the access land and proposed noise attenuation around Tilekiln Farm. The noise assessment did not consider weekend use or after school use. A post completion condition is recommended relating to floodlighting surveys to remedy any unforeseen impacts floodlighting may have on nearby properties. This is set out in
the recommendation.

**Grounds Maintenance** – The amended plans indicate that the play area would be relocated on the western side of Mendip Way for a temporary period and then moved back again. This would not be acceptable as it would result in unnecessary time and expense. The existing equipment should be replaced (Verbal response only).

### 4.0 Planning Considerations

#### 4.1 Site & Surroundings

**4.1.1** The application site is located mainly within the Green Belt adjacent to the built up residential area of Great Ashby on the north-eastern edge of Stevenage. It is wholly within the administrative area of North Herts District Council. The site has a total area of 22.61 ha.

**4.1.2** The main body of the site (16.54 ha) is currently farmland and a paddock. Dell Spring is also situated within this area which is surrounded by mature trees. Most of the eastern boundary adjoins open countryside. Part of the northern boundary abuts Weston Road and Tilekiln Farm, which contains a number of converted and listed farm buildings that are in residential use. Tilekiln Wood, a County Wildlife Site, is located immediately adjacent to the western boundary and there is a recent plantation of trees to the rear of Merrick Close adjacent to this wood along the south western boundary of this part of the site.

**4.1.3** The site also incorporates New Spring Wood, which is a County Wildlife Site. There is also a strip of land underneath the overhead electricity cables and pylons between the residential properties in Grampian Place, Cromdale Walk and the rear of properties in Fairfield Crescent and the Beacons. Part of the land beneath the pylons is currently an equipped play area and a trim trail, with associated landscaping. The remainder of the land under the pylons to the west of Mendip Way is unused and overgrown.

**4.1.4** There is also a narrow strip of land running from the south eastern corner of the main site. This is included within the application site as it is proposed to provide a drainage ditch.

There are a number of public footpaths that run within and around the site.

#### 4.2 Proposal

**4.2.1** The proposal seeks outline planning permission for the construction of a new secondary school and related land uses as outlined in the site description above. This would involve the relocation of the Thomas Alleyne School in Stevenage Old Town currently 776 pupils (5 form entry) and expanding it to accommodate up to 1,600 pupils (8 form entry). It would include a sixth form for 400 pupils and would also provide a range of facilities for the community to use predominantly outside of school hours. There would be a total of around 250 staff. 205 parking places in total are proposed (185 on the main part of the site and 20 for the dropping off area).

**4.2.2** All matters are reserved except for the site access proposals which are in detail as identified on revised drawings E1678/18/Q and L400-01. The access would involve a new roundabout off Mendip Way on land beneath the overhead electricity cables.
and pylons. The existing play area would be slightly repositioned to the north and the trim trail would be relocated to the west of Mendip Way. The access area would accommodate related footpath and cycle provision and drop off points for coaches and cars. The access would then cut through New Spring Wood into the main part of the site. The schools main car park would be located on the main part of the site.

4.2.3 The application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES) which shows the results of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The proposals for the site are outlined on two revised Development Parameter drawings (drawing 4.1, North Sheet (4682/030C) and drawing 4.2, South Sheet (4682/031D)) and revised explanatory notes. These have provided the basis for the EIA.

4.2.4 The Development Parameters divide the site into the areas A to K, such as the broad location of the floodlit pitches, car parking and the school building. For example, Building Area Parameter (A) shows the broad area for the school building in the southern field to the north of New Spring Wood. It also indicates that it would have a maximum gross internal floor space of 14,500sqm and a two storey building height no more than 13.9 metres above existing site levels. It would have a 20 metre setback from the woodland.

4.2.5 There is also a revised indicative layout drawing (Landscape Masterplan Outline L100E) which shows one way in which the site may be developed based on the parameters. This is for illustrative purposes only and does not form part of the outline planning application or EIA.

4.2.6 Amended Plans and additional information

Amended plans have been received following concern expressed by a number of local residents, consultees and officers at the district and County Council. The main changes are as follows:

− An amended site boundary for the access corridor excluding an area of 0.17 hectares
− Revised access proposals. The drop off point has been moved further to the east of the site to allow for the play area to kept on the eastern side of Mendip Way. The number of car parking spaces in this area has been reduced. Additional landscaping is proposed
− Additional buffer planting between the northern playing fields and Tilekiln Farm
− The realignment of footpath 11.

4.2.7 The ES has been updated to reflect the amended plans. The following further information has also been submitted for the ES:

− A Landscape and Visual Assessment of the revised access corridor proposals
− A Noise Impact Assessment of the revised access corridor proposals
− Preliminary floodlighting details of the all weather pitch and multi-use games area
− An amended transport assessment

4.3 Key Issues

4.3.1 This proposal constitutes a major project encroaching into the countryside. The Environmental Statement covers a whole range of issues, in which the County Council will be seeking advice from a number of technical consultees. It is advised that members concentrate on a number of key issues that have been looked at by
our in-house consultees and matters that relate to the principle of development. These are:

- The impact on the Green Belt and whether there are any very special circumstances;
- Impact on the Setting and Character of the Listed Buildings at Tilekiln Farm
- The impact on residential amenity and noise relating to adjacent residential properties;
- Traffic;
- Other issues.

4.3.2 The Impact on the Green Belt and whether there are any very special circumstances

The main part of the school site is located within the green belt where there is a general assumption against inappropriate development, except in very special circumstances where the harm would outweigh other considerations. It is also located within a rural landscape setting within the Weston Plateau Parklands Character Area (Area 220). Most of the proposal would extend beyond the existing woodland that screens the current boundary of Great Ashby. The parameters of the built elements have been kept to the western part of the main site between the woodland areas to try and minimise the impact. Nevertheless, this would result in an urban encroachment into open countryside and would therefore be inappropriate in the Green Belt. However, on balance, there are a number of very special circumstances that outweigh this:

4.3.3 The Overall Programme for Transforming Secondary Schools in Stevenage and Addressing the Geographical Imbalance

The application forms part of a bigger programme for secondary school provision within Stevenage. This includes the closure of one school and the expansion of another four schools. Part of the old Thomas Alleyne School site will be used for the expanded Barclay School and relocating the temporary North Herts College’s Technical Skills Centre to a more permanent residence. Further details are outlined in section 1.0 of this report. There is currently a geographical imbalance of secondary schools in the town. The Thomas Alleyne School and Barclay School are located adjacent to each other constituting an over-provision within the Old Town and a deficiency in the north-eastern area of Stevenage serving the St Nicolas and Woodside wards and Great Ashby. The applicant has indicated that there is approximately 6,000 existing dwellings are not within a 1 mile walking distance of an existing secondary school (Refer to Plan 5 attached). Due to the distances involved it is likely that a significant number of children travel by private car.

4.3.4 The programme for schools within Stevenage is seeking to address the existing geographical imbalance by relocating the Thomas Alleyne School to Great Ashby (Attached Plan 6 illustrates this). The proposal would provide for children that are not currently well served by a secondary school in the north-east of the town. This would contribute to the wider sustainability objectives of maximising the ability of pupils to access the school by non-car modes such as walking, cycling and public transport. The proposal would also address the current oversupply in the Old Town.

4.3.5 Concern has been expressed by representations that such a large school may not be required. The strategy for schools back in 2007 considered the need and sizes
of schools and the County Council were satisfied with its conclusions. It is possible that the new school may have some spare capacity when it opens. In education planning terms, this would facilitate greater parental choice of schools and provide better facilities for the pupils. It will be for the County Council to be sure that there is sufficient flexibility and capacity within the site and the other schools within Stevenage to accommodate future needs and potential growth to 2021 and beyond to 2031. This may mean building in a modular design to allow for some parts to be built at later stages, if and when required. However, planning for schools is never an exact science and allowing a site to accommodate an element of flexibility is advisable. Particularly in view of the need for a school in this location and the substantial future growth of Stevenage.

4.3.6 The Growth of Stevenage

The programme for schools is also seeking to ensure that substantial future growth of the town is provided for. The East of England Plan (2008) sets out the regional strategy to 2021 and beyond. It identifies Stevenage as a ‘Key Centre for Development Change’, with sustainable urban extensions to the west of the A1(M) (at least 5,000 dwellings) and to the north of the town. Overall 16,000 dwellings are required of which at least 9,600 will be within North Herts.

A Stevenage and North Herts Action Plan (SNAP) is currently being jointly prepared by North Herts and Stevenage Borough Council. This will set out in more detail the location and scale of growth on the edges of the town partly within Stevenage and partly within North Herts. The Issues and Options consultation has been carried out, with further consultations expected in 2010 in view of adoption in 2012. The application site lies within the SNAP area of search where there could be potential housing. At this stage no formal decisions have been made on the location of development and the extent of the Green Belt boundary review. However, evidence to date suggest that there could be development located within and around the application site.

4.3.8 There is a concern that the application is premature in advance of the more detailed work of the SNAP, as it should ideally be considered in the context of the specific locations of the dwellings required by the East of England Plan. However, the application’s contribution to providing a more even geographical spread of schools around the town would ensure that most of the growth, wherever it is located in the SNAP, would be well served either by the relocated Thomas Alleyne School, the extended Barclay School or the school west of the A1(M). Therefore, there is little planning merit in seeking a delay. The timing of the BSF funding requirements and wider programming issues in relation to the rest of the schools in Stevenage are also practical factors in this consideration.

4.3.9 The availability of Alternative Sites

The applicant has carried out a search to establish whether there are any alternative sites in the north-eastern area of Stevenage. The availability of sites was limited and as with any application of this nature and scale there are inevitably going to be advantages and disadvantages of each.

4.3.10 Urban brownfield sites were considered first followed by Greenfield sites in the town. None were found to be suitable. Urban fringe sites were considered as a last resort. These were in the Green Belt as all the open land on the north-eastern edge of the town is located within this such a designation. The application site was considered to be the most suitable of three urban fringe sites. One was discounted because it crossed by the power lines, it was on sloping ground and the site was divided into two by Nine Springs Wood. The other was less suitable in terms of traffic impact as the application site has advantages in terms of the access being very close to the main Great Ashby Way distributor road, via Mendip Way. In addition, Tilekiln Wood and New Spring Wood would provide an extensive buffer
between some of the existing housing and the main school site.

The purpose of the applicant demonstrating a sequential approach to site selection is to ensure that the potential for brownfield development is considered first. Such development is likely to be more sustainable. In view of there only being alternative sites available in the Green Belt, which would have similar impacts in sequential terms, it would only be appropriate to look at an alternative site if the proposals are unacceptable in planning terms. There clearly are elements of the proposed scheme which would have a impacts on local residents (these are discussed in the later sections of this report). However, on balance none of which would be sufficiently harmful to justify objecting to the planning application. The County Council will need to be satisfied that an appropriate sequential site search has taken place.

**Impact on the Setting and Character of the Listed Buildings at Tilekiln Farm**

4.3.12 The Council’s Principal Conservation Officer raised a concern regarding the impact of the original proposal on the setting of the listed buildings at Tilekiln Farm, immediately adjacent to the northern boundary of the application site. The complex consists of a group of Grade II Listed Buildings. Tilekiln Farm House, The Dell Barn to the east of the farmhouse and a courtyard of converted barns consisting of three dwellings. The buildings are currently within a rural setting surrounded by open countryside. This would be completely changed by the introduction of an urban school adjacent to the boundary of this rural farmstead.

4.3.13 The amended plans seek to address this concern by proposing a substantial buffer 15 to 25 metres deep with planting to screen the fencing required for the school site and to provide a more natural immediate setting for the farmstead. In addition, the development parameters indicate that the building would be located over 200 metres from the boundary with Tilekiln Farm. As a matter of principle, the rural setting would be altered. However, in balancing this and other considerations relating to the need for the school, the Council’s Principal Conservation Officer has advised that the impact of the proposals on the setting of the listed buildings would be mitigated.

**The Impact on Residential Amenity and Noise Relating to Adjacent Residential Properties**

4.3.14

**Residential Amenity**

The Council’s Landscape and Urban Design Officer raised concerns regarding the access corridor to the east of Mendip Way in the original scheme. These concerns related to the extent of the hard surfacing; the visual impact on the neighbouring properties on Cromdale Walk, Grampian Place and Merrick Close; the relocation of the children’s play area to the other side of Mendip Way and the proximity of the parking/drop-off/turning area to the residential properties. Many of these views were also expressed by local residents.

4.3.15 Amended plans have been received which seek to address these concerns. Further information has also been submitted in relation the visual impact of the access land. The extent of hard surfacing has been significantly reduced and the proposed planting has been enhanced; the parking/drop off and turning area would be further to the east and the play area will stay on the eastern side of the road. The amended plans have sought to minimise the impact of the proposed scheme by having a more landscaped solution. This is now acceptable to the Council’s Landscape and Urban Design Officer.

4.3.16 There will be a change in the amenity of the nearby residents by the proposed access for the school. Whilst I may sympathise with the residents of the adjoining properties, a right to a view cannot be protected. In addition, the applicant has
sought to minimise the impact on amenity by positioning the play area in broadly
the same location, together with retaining some of the informal open space within a
heavily landscaped setting. It is not unusual in an urban area to have an access
road to a school in close proximity to housing. On this basis, it is recommended
that no objection is made on the grounds of visual amenity.

4.3.17 Noise and Disturbance

There will be inevitably be an increase in activity brought about by a new school,
which will be different. The change will occur particularly when people are
travelling to and from the school. A Noise Impact Assessment for the Access area
was submitted with the further information for the ES. The Council’s Environmental
Health Officer is satisfied with the mitigation measures proposed and has not raised
any concerns regarding the noise impact. The recommended conditions in relation
to noise attenuation for the access area, buildings and mechanical plant are
supported.

4.3.18 The applicant was asked to rethink the illustrative layout within the northern field as
some of the sports pitches were shown as being very close to the boundary with
Tilekiln Farm. An extensively landscaped buffer strip along the boundary with this
property and an acoustic fence are now proposed. The illustrative layout also
indicates a different configuration of the pitches. The applicant has suggested that
a condition relating to a detailed landscaping and noise attenuation scheme would
be appropriate. It is recommended that this Council should be consulted following
receipt of this reserved matter, this is reflected in the recommendation. The
proposed changes would now be sufficient to minimise potential operational noise
impacts.

4.3.19 Further information has been submitted relating to limiting construction noise. Environmental
Health are satisfied with the measures proposed to reduce the potential impact of noise and air quality. A Code of Conduct/Environmental
Management Plan is proposed to be submitted by condition to include, amongst
other things, a scheme for monitoring and control of noise and air quality. It is
recommended that this Council is consulted on any schemes received in relation to
the above.

4.3.20 Floodlights are proposed on the All Weather Pitch and the Multi-Use Games Area,
located on the main site. They would be screened from most residents by Tilekiln
Wood and New Springs Wood and at a significant distance from Tilekiln Farm as
not to cause any concern if they are positioned properly. In addition to the
suggested condition relating to details of the lighting to be approved, a further
condition is recommended to deal with any realignment or shielding that may be
required during the first nine months of their use. An hours operation condition is
also recommended restricting this to 9pm, unless otherwise agreed, in order to
safeguard against residential amenity and light spillage into the dark skies of the
countryside.

4.3.21 Traffic Impact

Concern has been expressed relating to congestion within Great Ashby and the
rural areas. The amended Transport Assessment has considered the impact of the
proposals on the local transport infrastructure. It has concluded that there would
be an increase in traffic on Mendip Way, Great Ashby Way and the surrounding
road network. However, it would be within capacity and not result in any significant
congestion, subject to a number of mitigation measures. These include a school
travel plan; improvements to bus services and facilities; pedestrian and cycle links;
provision of parking and turning facilities to reduce the likelihood of on-street
parking; and a Traffic and Parking Management Plan. These measures would
contribute to sustainable transport and would be undertaken by the County Council
in lieu of the sustainable transport contributions required by our Planning
4.3.22 The applicant has indicated that the proposals would not prejudice any possible future proposals on SNAP in relation to the access.

4.3.23 Residents have expressed concern regarding footpath links identified as pedestrian access points on the amended plans. Most notably those off Grampian Place. There is a balance to be struck between encouraging pedestrian access and restricting it due to the impact on adjoining residents. The link between properties 60 and 62 Grampian Place appears to be unnecessary and would encourage pedestrians through a private access. A condition is recommended to deal with this issue.

4.3.24 The County Council are the Highway Authority and need to assess the likely traffic impacts of the scheme and whether or not they are acceptable.

Other Issues

4.3.25 Ecology

The ecological assessment in the ES concluded that there would be impacts in terms of ecology. Most notably the proposal would result in the loss of a section of New Spring Wood (a County Wildlife Site) for the access to the school. However, Herts Biological Records Centre and Natural England raised no fundamental objections to the original proposals provided that appropriate mitigation takes place. These measures include a green bridge for dormice; relocation of bluebell; additional native planting; badger gates and the additional habitat created as a result of the buffer strip adjacent to the boundary with Tilekiln Farm. It is also proposed to submit a Biodiversity Conservation Management Plan for the site. This will aim to compensate for the loss of part of the woodland, lessen the impact of development and increase biodiversity.

4.3.26 The Herts Biological Records Centre raised a query regarding the impact of the proposed floodlighting on the adjacent ecological habitats, particularly the bat population. Further information was submitted relating to lighting details. This concluded that it would not be possible to stop all of the light spillage reaching the hedgerow and the woodland edges. This would result in some areas being unusable for bats. However, moving the pitches would need a significant redesign of the layout which would have other environmental impacts. The ES has found other bat flight paths in the vicinity and the applicant has concluded that the need for the school significantly out weighs this harm. It will be for the County Council’s ecological consultants to be satisfied with this approach. However, given that they initially raised no fundamental objections to the scheme it is unlikely that that the application will be found unacceptable on this issue.

Phasing

4.3.27 The construction is expected to take 21 months with the earliest start date in 2011. It is proposed to commence the roundabout and the access road first, then the main school site and playing fields and the landscaping last. To minimise the visual impact on the access land, it is recommended that the landscaping for this area is carried out at the earliest opportunity following the construction of the layout of the access road. This would also allow for any new landscaping to have time to mature quicker. The planting along the periphery of the main school site (including the buffer along Tilekiln Farm) should also be carried out upon commencement to minimise the impact on the landscape and open countryside. Any conditions would need to reflect this.

4.3.28 It was originally proposed to relocate the existing play area to the other side of
Mendip Way and carry this work out first. However, the amended plans now indicate that the existing play area would be moved slightly to the north to accommodate the new access road. The applicant has suggested a condition requiring the provision of a temporary play area on the western side of Mendip Way during the course of construction and permanent re-provision prior to the opening of the school. The Grounds Maintenance Service Manager has indicated that this would result in unnecessary time and expense. However, this would be entirely at the applicant's expense and would allow for the continued use of the play area by local residents. Relocating to the permanent position would need to be linked to the timing of the landscaping condition above.

Sustainability

4.3.29 The supporting planning statement contains a sustainability appraisal which is very general. The appraisal 'anticipates' that the development will incorporate measures such as the use of low and zero carbon technologies, renewable energy sources and locally sourced environmentally friendly materials etc. It concludes that the school will be built to high environmental standards as all new school building projects funded under BSF are required to achieve a 'very good' rating under the Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM).

4.3.30 BREEAM is a widely recognised assessment method for buildings which sets out standards for best practice in sustainable development. However, the BSF requirements is to achieve a minimum of 'very good'. There are two further levels to the BREEAM, these are 'excellent' and 'outstanding' Given the very special circumstances for development in this green belt location and in advance of the SNAP, perhaps the County Council should be seeking the achievement of a higher BREEAM standard.

4.3.31 The sustainability appraisal states that the applicant 'expects' to exceed policy ENG 1 of the East of England Plan (Carbon Dioxide Emissions and Renewable Energy) target of at least 10% of energy to be decentralised and renewable or low carbon sources.

4.3.32 It will be for the County Council to ensure that appropriate sustainability measures are required by condition. The County Council as education authority has a major opportunity to lead the way in sustainable development and deliver a school that is of a high standard. It should also be a source of inspiration and set an example for any further development within the SNAP area, both in terms of sustainability and design. The County Council has its own 'Building Futures: A Hertfordshire Guide to Promoting Sustainability in Development'. This is not referred to in support of the application and shows the general approach that has been taken by the applicant in terms of sustainability.

Community Use and Management Agreement

4.3.33 The proposed Community Use Management Agreement to encourage use of the school by the general public is welcomed. This would include the hours of use of the facilities for these purposes.

Environmental Statement – Development Parameters

The development parameters contained within the ES and the explanatory notes to accompany these set the limits to which the reserved matters and the eventual scheme. It is agreed that a condition is required to ensure the applicant is bound by these.

4.4 Conclusion

4.4.1
There is no doubt that this proposal would encroach into the countryside and as a result would harm the rural landscape and the Green Belt. In addition, the distinctive rural character of the grouping of listed buildings at Tilekiln Farm would be affected. However, in balancing this and the very special circumstances in relation to the need for a school in this locality; and the fact that there are no other alternative sites that would be more suitable in terms of a sequential approach; it is recommended that no objection be raised to the principle of the development subject to appropriate conditions.

In terms of residential amenity, issues such as noise and the visual impact of the scheme have been sufficiently overcome by the amended plans as to not justify an objection to the proposal. This is provided that the County Council are satisfied with the traffic impacts of the proposed scheme and other matters reliant on advice from technical consultants for which this Council cannot advise on.

5.0 Legal Implications

In responding to requests on applications submitted by the County Council under the Town and Country Planning legislation, the County Council is required to have regard to the provision of the development plan and to any other material considerations. The decision must be in accordance with the plan unless the material considerations indicate otherwise. Where the decision is to refuse or restrictive conditions are attached, the applicant has a right of appeal against the decision.

6.0 Recommendation

6.1 The Council raises no objection provided that the County Council are satisfied with the traffic impacts of the proposed scheme and other matters reliant on advice from technical consultants for which this Council cannot advise on. This is subject to the suggested conditions outlined in paragraphs 15.13 to 15.19 of the Supporting Statement (as amended by letter dated 10.11.09) and additional/amended conditions covering the following (full details of the conditions will be forwarded):

- Prior to commencement of development a detailed landscaping scheme and scheme for the repositioning the play area to be submitted and agreed in consultation with North Herts District Council and implemented in the first planting season following the laying out of the access road for the access area and the first planting season following commencement for the boundary of the rest of the site. This will enable planting to begin to mature as soon as possible rather than wait until the end of the construction process as suggested by the applicant.

- The Council would wish to be consulted on any conditions that relate to Environmental Health issues.

- Specific conditions dealing with contaminated land as set out in the advice from Environmental Health.

- An appropriate condition relating to achieving sustainability targets.

- A further condition is recommended to deal with any realignment or shielding of floodlights that may be required during the first nine months of their use, following consultation with this Council. An hours operation condition is also recommended restricting this to 9pm, unless otherwise agreed, in order to safeguard against residential amenity and light spillage into the dark skies of the countryside.
− Notwithstanding the details on the access plan (L400, rev 01), there shall be no pedestrian access between 60 and 62 Grampian Place.

− An informative relating to the position of signage and litter bins to ensure that the location has regard to the occupiers of adjoining properties.
Dear Mr Dempster

Construction of new secondary school to include: school buildings, accesses, car park, floodlit all weather pitch, floodlit multi-use games area, grass playing pitches, storm water attenuation pond, means of enclosure, new and diverted footpaths/cycleways, landscaping and related works on land to the north of New Spring Wood; access roundabout on Mendip Way; access road, car and coach set down/pick-up/parking area, means of enclosure, new and diverted footpaths/cycleways, landscaping, swales and related works on land to the east of Mendip Way; plus ecological mitigation works in New Spring Wood, the construction of a drainage ditch adjacent to Long dell Wood and the provision of replacement open space facilities on land west of Mendip Way, Stevenage.

NORTH HERTS DISTRICT COUNCIL: CONSULTEE ONLY

Land South Of Tilekiln Farm, Great Ash by, Stevenage

Members considered their response to the above application at the Planning Control Committee on the 17 December 2009 and had a number of concerns that they wish to raise. The final outcome was different to the recommendation in the enclosed original report and the specific recommendation in the minutes reads as follows:

1. The Council does not have sufficient information to support the application and in the absence of this information, has serious concerns relating to:
   1.1 traffic impact of the proposed development;
   1.2 the sequential approach to alternative schools sites to justify very special circumstances and an exception to Green Belt policy;
   1.3 the assurance that the proposed access arrangements to the school would not prevent possible future access to development around the application site from Mendip Way. This is to ensure that possible options are kept open for the North Herts and Stevenage Area Action Plan.

Without these details it is not considered at this time there is sufficient justification to make an exception to the Green Belt policy.

2. However, if the County Council are minded to grant planning permission the Committee reiterated the concern expressed in 1.3 above and requested that the following conditions should be included:
   2.1 the proposed access arrangements to the school would not prevent possible future access to development around the application site from Mendip Way. This is to ensure that possible options are kept open for the North Herts and Stevenage Area Action Plan.
additional/amended conditions to those outlined in paragraphs 15.13 to 15.19 of the Supporting Statement (as amended by letter dated 10.11.09) to cover the following:

- Prior to commencement of development a detailed landscaping scheme and scheme for the repositioning of the play area to be submitted and agreed in consultation with North Herts District Council. This should be implemented in the first planting season following the laying out of the access road for the access area and the first planting season following commencement for landscaping the boundary of the rest of the site. This will enable planting to become mature as soon as possible rather than wait until the end of the construction process as suggested by the applicant.

- The Council would wish to be consulted on any conditions that relate to Environmental Health issues.

- Specific conditions dealing with contaminated land as set out in the advice from Environmental Health.

- An appropriate condition relating to achieving sustainability targets, including a minimum standard of 'excellent' for BREEAM.

  A further condition is recommended to deal with any realignment or shielding of floodlights that may be required during the first nine months of their use, following consultation with this Council. An hours operation condition is also recommended restricting this to gpm, unless otherwise agreed, in order to safeguard against residential amenity and light spillage into the dark skies of the countryside.

  Notwithstanding the details on the access plan (L400, rev 01 ), there shall be no pedestrian access between 60 and 62 Grampian Place.

  An informative relating to the position of signage and litter bins to ensure that the location has regard to the occupiers of adjoining properties.

I trust that this response will be taken into account in reaching a decision. I will forward you the formal minutes of the meeting when they become available. You will note from the minutes that there were some verbal updates relating to letters and petitions received after the report was written. There was also an additional officer concern relating to access of the school site not preventing possible future access to SNAP. This is reflected in the final recommendation.

In relation to alternative site selections. Members were particularly concerned that the applicant had dismissed St Nicolas Park too easily without robust evidence to justify this.

It would be useful to discuss the members concerns over the telephone once you have had time to consider these.

Yours sincerely \(\sim\) Caldwell

Mary Caldwell
Planning Control & Conservation Manager