

Cabinet Member for Property & Waste Decisions

26 April 2022

PETITION: RECONSIDER THE DECISION TO RELOCATE PRIORY SCHOOL REIGATE TO WOODHATCH PLACE

We the undersigned petition Surrey County Council to halt plans to relocate Priory School in Reigate to Woodhatch Place at least until a full assessment has been carried out into: - road safety for children on routes to Woodhatch Place; - environmental impact of the several hundred cars likely to be on the road at peak times if the school is relocated to Woodhatch Place; - health impacts on children of relocation to a site with elevated levels of air pollutants; - accessibility of the site for families in the current catchment area including those without access to cars; - an alternative site or sites that are safer and easier to access from both North and South Reigate; - the impact on residents local to Woodhatch Place of increased parking and congestion.

Justification:

We are seriously concerned about road safety, especially given that the main route to the school along Cockshot Hill is a major A road, and we know of many accidents on that road, including ones involving pedestrians. It is not a suitable route for children, more so because Surrey Highways have said that it is 'inappropriate' to lower the speed limit from 30mph.

Given the safety issues, and the significantly increased distance from the catchment area in North Reigate, many parents that currently walk will choose to drive, increasing congestion and pollution at peak times, and we are concerned about how this fits with Surrey Council's plans for reducing carbon emissions and encouraging active travel.

We are supportive of finding a solution that makes years 3-6 education accessible to everyone in North and South Reigate, but believe other options would be more suitable, such as converting feeder schools in North and South Reigate into 'through' schools that provide education from reception to year 6 or finding sites for smaller schools that are easier and safer to access.

We propose that alternative options for the school's site are developed, and a full consultation is carried out with parents and residents to select the most appropriate site for the school.

Submitted by: SOPHIA MITCHELL

Signatures: 480

Response:

“The decision to relocate Reigate Priory Junior School (RPJS) is driven by the existing building condition. Issues affecting the current building include but are not limited to:

1. Undersized spaces
 - a. Teaching classrooms
 - b. Kitchen, which is unable to deliver 600 meals a day. The existing kitchen is 25m² only where a school of this size should have a circa 70m² kitchen.
 - c. Hall space. The adjacent dining hall in the existing school is only 85m², whereas this should be 150m².
2. Safeguarding
 - a. A Public Right of Way splits the site into two and previous attempts to close this have been refused.
 - b. In the absence of its own facilities, all pitch activities must take place in the public grounds of Priory Park.
3. Maintenance
 - a. The operational burden of managing the 800-year-old building creates additional challenges and disruptions to staff and pupils.

Whilst the school currently do a fantastic job in managing these risks, it requires significant effort and resourcing from the school staff.

Due to the existing building condition issues, the school was identified through the Department for Education (DfE) Priority Schools Building Programme 2 (PSBP2) as a site that required significant improvements to ensure it meets the future demands and needs of pupils. An evidence-based study undertaken as part of PSBP2 considered how to address the shortcomings of the current building. This study concluded that the current building at Priory Park does not meet the design standards required for education provision today and due to the age and various heritage designations of the building, it is not viable to undertake the works required to bring the site up to the required standards. Therefore, to ensure the future sustainability of the school, it must be relocated.

Surrey County Council (SCC) carried out a robust appraisal to compare different options to meet the educational need for a new school building. In doing so, we have balanced technical, environmental, programme and cost considerations. Woodhatch Place was the only site that met all the criteria required to deliver a 600-place junior school building as well as outdoor school spaces. It is the only site that is available within a reasonable time frame, is at least five acres in size and has the fewest planning constraints. A detailed site search document will be part of the planning submission and will include the analysis of all the identified sites.

SCC understands that providing a development that is well connected and addresses traffic and road safety concerns will be key for the local community and the school. We are in close dialogue with the SCC Highways Department as the Highway Authority and are carrying out a number of parking and traffic surveys of the local highway to inform the forthcoming Transport Assessment for planning. The proposal will be accompanied by improvements to the existing access, implementation of a separate new egress, and a package of off-site highway works including associated parking controls to mitigate inappropriate parking on the public highway.

While this is not a new school but a relocated school (thus school related traffic is present on the local highway) a range of off-site traffic surveys have been conducted in consultation

with SCC to test the impact of the relocated school on local junction capacity. Any impacts deemed unacceptable by SCC would need to be addressed by way of either junction mitigation or travel planning measures. A change in the speed limit on Cockshot Hill is also being reviewed against speed survey data, highway design standards and other potential traffic calming measures.

In addition, SCC is exploring a wide range of improvements with the Highways Department. These improvements could include increasing pavement widths, introducing new crossing points, road markings, signage, and pedestrian guard railing. We are currently gathering data and conducting catchment analysis to establish the change in mode share and travel patterns. We will use this data to identify opportunities to minimise the number of car trips. The school will also benefit from multiple pedestrian access points, with two from the west and one from the east, to help minimise the number of pedestrians on any given footway at any one time.

We are working to minimise the impact of parking on neighbouring streets. However, based on local parking standards there is a presumption against the provision of parking at schools associated with drop-off and collection as this is seen as a disincentive to travel by non-car modes. This policy has been applied to many school developments across the county, where drop-off and collection parking takes place in unrestricted roads. We are currently going through a data collection exercise in terms of school travel demand, local traffic conditions and highway safety which are informing further discussions with the highway authority regarding the interpretation of local parking standards and associated on-site parking provision. Notwithstanding this, we are working with the school and local highway authority to look at options to minimise the impact of parking demand from the school, including the number of cars needing to be parked at any one time. Furthermore, all on-street parking will be short-stay only, with all day parking associated with staff accommodated on-site. To further mitigate this, a walking bus is expected to be promoted within the forthcoming School Travel Plan from the Bell Street car park. The Bell Street car park is well used by and familiar to parents / carers, takes access from the A217 and is a reasonable walking distance to the new school site.

Whilst the building will be designed to be operationally net zero carbon, this applies only to the use and management of the building itself, once in operation. However, there will be a school Travel Plan which will encourage sustainable modes of transport to and from the school by pupils and staff. A proportion of staff parking spaces will also be equipped with electric vehicle charging points.

Air quality monitors were in place on site for four months between December 2021 and March 2022. The data captured from this will be used to inform the air quality assessment to be submitted in the planning application pack for the proposed school development.

In summary, the decision to relocate RPJS was the result of the DfE PSBP2 condition review. The PSBP2 funding is time-limited and only available for improving current provision, not changing educational provision across the area. This does not preclude any future review of education place planning provision. However, such an exercise would require sufficient time to undertake the necessary feasibility assessments and statutory consultations and does not address the current school building condition issues, which is both the DfE and SCC's priority."

Natalie Bramhall
Cabinet Member for Property & Waste
26 April 2022

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