

The application before you is an application made by SCC for a replacement school for Reigate Priory Junior School.

Under Regulation 3 of the T and C Planning General Regulations 1992, planning applications by interested planning authorities, acting by themselves or jointly with other parties, on land of that authority, fall to be determined by the authority itself.

I would like to stress particularly for the members of the public here today that the SCC Planning Officers who assess planning applications both from external bodies and from surrey county council itself are a completely separate section of surrey county council and carry out their regulatory function strictly in accordance with planning legislation and professional codes of practice and any planning application received whether from the cc itself or other applicants is dealt with in the same way.

I am not proposing to go through all the detail of the application as this is set out in the report papers and I am sure members of this committee has considered the issues of this case.

As the members of this planning committee are fully aware in considering planning applications decisions must be taken in accordance with the development plan *unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise*

In this case the proposal is assessed against policies contained within Reigate and Banstead's Development Plan document as well as against National Planning advice contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Reigate and Banstead Borough council has raised objections to this proposal on several grounds and officers have fully considered these. I would like to remind committee of the conclusion contained within the borough council's officer report on this case which states:

The proposed development sees a replacement junior school being built within designated urban open space, within a historic garden and affecting the setting of various heritage assets and the character of the wider area.

Concerns are raised with regards these impacts, especially given that it is considered that the existing school site could be adapted and extended to enable its continued use.

In light of the above identified harm the decision maker must consider the planning balance.

This must consider the benefits of providing a purpose-built, modern education facility to DfE standards and associated energy efficiencies and other environmental credentials. It would also see the construction of modern play facilities and all weather pitches.

Whilst such benefits are to be given considerable weight, they ought to be offset by the fact that the existing building (being Grade I Listed) will continue to have high energy demands in any future use and the benefits in having an occupant compatible with its form and layout.

Although there is benefit in achieving modern standards of classroom size and layout, meeting this ought not be a prerequisite in a converted building which provides its own benefits in terms of its unique learning environment.

After all, many historic buildings are used for prestigious learning environments. There are benefits in overcoming conflicting rights of way and issues associated with the co-location

with the museum but, similar to existing deficiencies relating to the layout and operation of the school, there are considered to be alternative options for adaptations and extensions, including incorporation of lifts for disabled access, which see such benefits reduced.

Chairman I would advise the committee that in considering this application in its capacity as a consultee Reigate and Banstead Council have given *considerable weight* to the benefits that would arise from this proposal but they appear to balance this against the need to maintain the existing Grade 1 listed building where the school currently resides and which is in the ownership of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council. Officers would advise the committee that it does not share the view of the District Council in this regard and although it is agreed that the availability of the existing site IS a material consideration officers consider that the future condition of Reigate Priory Grade 1 listed building is not a material factor which should be taken into account in the consideration of this planning application.

The scope of what can constitute a *material consideration* is very wide, however in general planning is concerned with land use in the public interest, so that the protection of purely private interests such as the impact of a development on the value of a neighbouring property or loss of private rights to light are not material considerations.

Officers would remind the committee that as with all planning applications particularly those of this size and nature there are many and varied material considerations which must be taken into account but the weight given to each of these considerations is for you, the decision maker, to decide.

In advising the planning committee on this application it is my duty to remind members that they must only take into account material planning considerations, which can include those views expressed in representations where they relate to relevant planning matters.

Officers acknowledge that many of the representations received on this planning applications do address themselves to material considerations however it for the planning committee as decision maker – as it is for us as planning officers advising the committee to decide the weight they wish to give to each material consideration **IN THE OVERALL PLANNING BALANCE.**

Chairman it is also relevant to advise that no development of land occurs without some degree of impact or harm, but it is the degree of harm that occurs, whether it can be mitigated and how much weight is given to the resulting impact which needs to be weighed in the planning balance. Development plan policies and government guidance generally both direct themselves to seeking to prevent *significant harm* and as such proposals giving rise to significant harm generally will not be acceptable.

Chairman in this case we are considering an application for the proposed use of land at Woodhatch place for a new school. The planning assessment must be directed to the material considerations that apply in this case and Chairman before you you have a detailed report which outlines what these are, and these will be summarised in my presentation later.

As a starting point for the assessment of this proposal though is the overarching aim of national planning guidance in respect of schools:

National planning policy guidance states that local planning authorities *should give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and*

decisions on applications; and work with school promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.

Officers would therefore advise the committee that it is appropriate in this case to give great weight to the material consideration that is the need for this new school.

On this matter officers acknowledge that many of the representations received on this proposal consider that there is no *need argument* in this case as the site of the existing school is suitable for improvement or expansion. As stated previously Officers acknowledge that the existing site is a material consideration in this case. However the application is proposed by SCC as Education Authority, and is supported by the school itself and the Department of Education who officers consider are all best placed to consider education provision.

Officers consider that the applicant has put forward a robust case on the urgent need to find another site for Reigate Priory Junior School which can enable the provision of a school fit for the future given the unsuitability of the existing site, due to significant constraints. Officers consider there is a demonstrated need for this new school considers that great weight should be given to that need in this case, and this will need to be considered in the planning balance when assessing the proposal put forward at Woodhatch Place.

Turning back to the other *material considerations* relevant to the proposed development at Woodhatch Place these are addressed in detail in the report with the main ones relating to

IMPACT ON STATUTORY AND NON-STATUTORY HERITAGE ASSETS

TREES, ECOLOGY AND BIODIVERSITY

DESIGN AND VISUAL APPEARANCE AND URBAN OPEN SPACE CONSIDERATIONS

IMPACT ON RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

DRAINAGE AND FLOOD RISK CONSIDERATIONS

HIGHWAYS CONSIDERATIONS

On each of these matters officers have assessed the proposal against development plan policy and identified any harm or impact arising from the proposal and the degree of harm or impact caused. Officers have then considered how the applicant has mitigated or compensated for any harm and in certain instances have recommended conditions to minimise that harm. Officers have then considered any resulting harm in each case within the planning balance.

On those issues officers conclude as follows:

Impact on statutory and non-statutory heritage assets

There is no harm to any heritage assets but some harm to non listed assets but this harm is *less than significant* and can be mitigated to some degree with planning conditions requiring

additional landscaping. Officers do not consider great weight should be attributed to this in the planning balance.

Trees, ecology and biodiversity

There is a degree of harm arising due to the loss of part of the site itself and existing trees but this is mitigated to a significant degree with the most significant trees being retained, measures to improve the ecological value of land to the north of the Woodhatch Site and also other planning conditions requiring replacement landscaping and planting and measures to minimise the impact on ecology during development. Officers do not consider great weight should be attributed to this in the planning balance.

Design and visual appearance and urban open space considerations

A new school of the size proposed undoubtedly will have an impact on the visual amenity of the area but officers do not consider that any significant harm on the wider area will occur. The greatest impact will be felt within Woodhatch Place itself, and from the residential development to the south (which I will address later) but officers do not consider this represents significant harm. The site lies within a developed urban area and in that context officers do not consider it would appear unduly out of place. In respect of Urban Open Land officers have carefully considered this and the relevant development plan policy and also note the comments of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council who consider this proposal is a departure to policy on this point.

Officers would advise the members of the committee that the policy recognises, however, that in some exceptional circumstances development on urban open space might be acceptable, for example where this land is no longer required or the proposal would provide community benefit which would outweigh the loss of the open space. The Development Plan also states in regard to that policy *It is proposed that the Council takes a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting the requirements of local schools: this reflects the importance which national policy places on the potential need to expand and alter schools.* Officers therefore advise the committee that it is considered that this proposal can be considered favourably having regard to this policy and the detailed arguments in support of that view are set out in the report.

Impact on residential amenity

Officers have given careful and detailed consideration to the impact of the proposals on adjacent residential dwellings and the report sets this out in detail. It is acknowledged that the proposal will have an impact on the occupiers of those dwellings in that a site currently undeveloped would, if permission is granted be occupied by a school. However it is considered that subject to appropriate conditions relating to hours of use the proposal will not give rise to significant harm to the occupiers of those dwellings. Officers have also considered the harm to nearby residential dwellings arising from the increased traffic which will occur particularly around peak school drop off and pick up times. It is accepted that this does give rise to a degree of disturbance and inconvenience within the public highways around those roads but this is only for short times throughout weekdays and as such is not considered to be a significant impact.

Highways considerations

The proposal has been considered by the County Highways Authority and a number of measures on the public highway have been suggested and agreed with the applicants to improve local highways conditions. These are set out in the report in detail. Several planning conditions are recommended on highways grounds and subject to these the proposal is not considered to give rise to harm to highway safety nor have a significant impact on traffic congestion. Highways officers are aware that there is already existing traffic congestion in the area of the application site particularly during peak school arrival and drop off times but is satisfied that the additional movements arising from the proposal can be safely accommodated within the highway network.

So in conclusion officers have had due regard to all of the material considerations in this case and consider that the significant benefits arising from this proposal providing for a long term need for a school outweighs the less than significant harm arising from the development of the site, harm which are mitigated to a significant degree by amendments secured on the scheme and controlled by planning conditions.

Officers therefore recommend that the application is permitted.

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