

Planning Application 6/2019/0085/FULL Extension of Chancellor's School

Comments from North Mymms District Green Belt Society.

The Society objects to the above planning application and makes the following comments and observations.

1. Chancellor's School is sited entirely within the Green Belt. Vehicular access is via a residential road, not within the Green Belt but which is effectively a cul-de-sac. Though the Society's concern is mainly about the Green Belt it is also concerned about the wider impact on the surrounding area.

2. The Society is of the view that the application represents inappropriate development within the Green Belt; that it is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and that the **"very special circumstances"** required by Para 87 of the NPPF for its approval have not been made out.

3. The Borough Council and individual councillors have been strong supporters of the Green Belt, most notably in connection with the application for an incinerator at New Barnfield. The Society believes that the Council should adopt a similar approach this application. It is disheartening to note that the Applicants have taken planning approval for granted: the School's Admissions Policy has already adopted the additional numbers for the school year beginning in September 2019.

4. If this were an application merely to improve and modernise the existing facilities of the school, the Society might take a different view but this application is for the extension of the school adding a complete new form of entry and taking its role from 1105 pupils to 1315 pupils, an addition of 19% over seven years. Somehow this is to be achieved without any addition of staff numbers.

5. The application acknowledges *"that the extension of an existing school does not comprise any of the forms of development that are appropriate in the Green Belt"* but goes on to assert *"we believe given the needs of HCC for additional pupil places that 'very special circumstances' do exist as the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations i.e. the urgent need for additional pupil places in Hertfordshire"*.

6. In justification of expansion within the Green Belt the application includes, on page 13, an excerpt from a report from the County Council that a) asserts a need for more secondary places for Hatfield pupils "over the short to medium term" (expressed as the school years 2018 to 2021)*, and b) concludes that Chancellor's is well placed to offer the additional places. The report makes no reference to the Green Belt or the need to demonstrate "very special circumstances".

*Background Statement para 1.

7. In the Society's view, the mere assertion, not by the County Council itself but by a planning consultant on behalf of a school is not a demonstration that the very special circumstances do in fact exist. We would expect the application to be accompanied by a detailed study by the County Council showing its plans to meet demands for school places within the Borough, what alternative

solutions it has considered and why extending a school within the Green Belt is the only solution. We think that the Borough Council should insist on such evidence as part of its consideration of this application. Only then can it take a considered view on whether the very special circumstances exist.

8. In this connection it should be noted:

- The planning statement refers to the “urgent need for additional pupil places in Hertfordshire.” It is not specifically concerned with additional places within the Borough;
- Over half the existing pupils come from outside the Borough with more than 40% from Potters Bar;
- That the school’s Admission Policy for the academic year beginning in September 2019 offers 210 places of which 25 (12%) will be reserved for Hatfield pupils. It is not clear what proportion of the current roll are from Hatfield. It is confusing that the Transport Assessment (para 6.9) states that 25 of the 30 new places will be reserved for Hatfield residents.
- in the “short to medium term” (2018 -2021) for which the “urgent need” is said to arise, it is totally unclear how many additional places are required for Hatfield residents; how many of the 30 new places will be reserved for Hatfield residents and what is the target for Hatfield residents as a percentage of the total school roll.
- It is extraordinary that the School has pre-empted planning permission by increasing its proposed year 7 intake already. Letters of acceptance to pupils/parents are due to be sent out in March.
- The school is currently consulting on proposals to join a Multi-Academy Trust with the Danes Educational Trust based in Chorleywood. The aim in part is to increase the attraction of the school to potential pupils and can be expected to increase pressure on applications for places. It will have an unknown impact on the ability of the County Council to manage secondary school places: as an academy Chancellor’s will be independent of the local authority.

9. The debate about school places in the Borough has particular relevance for the Draft Local Plan, currently under examination, where the provision or otherwise of a new secondary school within the Borough is an important factor. The Society believes that it would be wholly inappropriate for the Borough to approve this application without being able to see it in the context of the County Council’s plans for the Borough as a whole and its own Local Plan.

10. Other Green Belt issues.

- The School is on a prominent site on a crest and can be seen from a distance. This is a point raised by the North Mymms Parish Council which, in its objection to the proposal goes into considerable detail about the proposed buildings. The Society agrees with and supports the Parish Council in its objection.
- It is well recognised that there is considerable traffic congestion around Chancellor’s School particularly at peak times. The Traffic Management Assessment is largely incomprehensible to the lay person except in its conclusion that there will be no appreciable additional congestion as a result of the proposed expansion. This is a highly questionable conclusion. For example the study identifies the peak morning load as occurring between 07.00 and 09.00. This may indeed be the case, but it is totally misleading. Anyone familiar with the

area knows that peak load occurs between 07.45 and 08.35 when congestion is acute. To spread that load over two hours is to massage the statistics to provide the desired answer.

- The Traffic Assessment takes no account of the change to Academy status by the school joining a Multi-Academy Trust based in Chorleywood. This is bound to generate additional traffic at peak and other times of the day.
- The Assessment makes no comment on environmental pollution and has no suggestions as to how pollution from the additional intake might be alleviated.

North Mymms District Green Belt Society 12/2/19