



The Bearsted & Thurnham Society

The Residents Association for the Civil Parishes of Bearsted and Thurnham



% The Chairman
Bearsted & Thurnham Society
92 Ashford Road
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Richard Timms
Planning Officer
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
King Street
Maidstone
Kent ME15 6JQ

1st April 2019

Dear Mr Timms

APPLICATION 18/506656/FULL: FOR THE ERECTION OF A NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SECONDARY SCHOOL WITH FORMATION OF NEW ACCESS ON BEARSTED ROAD, TOGETHER WITH ASSOCIATED CAR PARKING AND DROP OFF AREA, PEDESTRIAN ACCESS, DRAINAGE, AREAS FOR FORMAL AND INFORMAL PLAY AND LANDSCAPING WORKS

The Society notes that details of the application have been amended to provide a sole means of access via Newnham Court Way, despite earlier claims that this would not be possible. We also welcome the removal of all means of access from Bearsted Road, but understand concerns from many local residents that it is essential that such access must not be permitted at a later date.

We confirm that notwithstanding the amendments to the proposals, few of the Society's objections, set out in our letter dated 12 January 2019, have been addressed. Accordingly, we continue to object to this Planning Application.

We draw the Planning Officer's attention to the latest objections posted by Mrs Pauline Bowdery, Clerk to Boxley Parish Council on behalf of that council and posted on the Planning Portal on 29 March 2019. We urge the Officer to examine the detailed information provided on the basis of accurate local experience when considering the planning application.

Traffic conditions

We reiterate comments made by many local residents in respect of the absurdly over-optimistic assumptions concerning traffic conditions and the likely mode of travel for pupils attending the proposed primary school. With sole access to the schools from Newnham Court Way, the walking distance from the nearest house is more than 1km.

In Table 4-4 and para.4.3.8 of the Transport Technical Note (TTN) supporting the application an average “car mode share” of 62% is determined from a sample of ten school sites within the Borough which have “minimal opportunity for sustainable travel”. All of these schools have many houses within 1km. None of them require pedestrian access across heavily congested roads with associated high levels of pollution.

At Hunton Church of England Primary School, the one from the sample with the fewest such houses, 79% of pupils travel to and from school by car. It is clear that an assumption of 80% for the proposed schools would be far more appropriate, although that would only serve to demonstrate the absurdity of the proposed location for the primary school.

The TTN provides assumed traffic movements to and from the schools in each peak. There is ample evidence that the existing primary schools nearby are able to accommodate all “local” children. It is likely that the new school will end up taking children from a much wider area, so the number walking to school is likely to be further reduced. Should more “local” children be attracted to the new school, the existing traffic problems at the established schools will be further exacerbated as their catchments are enlarged to take pupils from beyond any *reasonable* walking distance.

Until reasonable assumptions have been made in respect of the number of vehicle arrivals and departures, modelling of the operation of the adjacent traffic junctions is meaningless.

Parking management

In Chapter 5 of the TTN, reference is made to the Kent and Medway Structure Plan; Supplementary Planning Guidance 4 (SPG4), which specifies the number of parking spaces to be provided for primary and secondary schools. It also states that “Appropriate provision should be made for the setting down and picking up of children in a safe environment and in a manner that does not unduly interfere with the operation and use of the public highway.”

In para. 5.3.3 it is suggested that 45 drop-off spaces will be provided for Key Stage 1 pupils (ages 4 to 7) and the nursery. It is asserted the spaces will be required for use by 91 vehicles dropping off and collecting those children. Given the need for these children to be accompanied to and from the school door it is essential that any parking management plan addresses the accommodation of vehicles that cannot be parked in the allocated spaces.

We note from para. 5.3.4, in relation to Key Stage 2 pupils (ages 7 to 11) that “94 vehicles will be attracted to the primary school in a worst case scenario”. It is proposed to accommodate these vehicles in 18 spaces which will be required “to turn-over five times across the drop-off / collection period, which equates to once every six minutes assuming collection / drop-off occurs over a 30-minute period.” It continues by stating “Given that parents are not required to leave their vehicle in this scenario, this is considered entirely reasonable.” In para. 5.4.2. it is further stated that “Staff will be present within the car park to monitor pick-up and drop-off activities”.

Notwithstanding the underestimation of the number of vehicles likely to be entering the site, this text only serves to demonstrate that the proposal is not to prove a “community school” – it appears to be more of a business proposition with the pupils to be treated as a resource, and families to be kept under control. Any thought of parents discussing pupil’s progress or problems that they are experiencing with the school while waiting for their children to come out of school will not be possible within the school grounds. Neither will there exist an opportunity for parents to communicate with each other in the usual way at the ‘school gate’, a vital part of community life.

It is clear that parents of Key Stage 2 pupils who wish to speak to each other will park elsewhere, no doubt on the roads approaching the site. In a short time, the problems formerly predicted for Bearsted Road on the Grove Green estate near to Weaving Heath, will be experienced on Newnham Court Way.

All of these matters serve to emphasise that the proposed school is not in the right place for the children it is intending to serve. We urge the Planning Officer to recommend refusal of this proposal and to take steps to enforce existing planning conditions to ensure that the nature reserve is established on Popes Field.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Vanhecke
Chairman