

Committee Report

Item No: 2

Reference: DC/18/02398

Case Officer: Jack Wilkinson

Ward: Stowmarket Central

Ward Members: Cllr Paul Ekpenyong & Cllr Lesley Mayes

Description of Development

Planning Application - Demolition of existing school buildings and construction of new teaching building and refurbishment of current 6th Form building, together with associated landscaping.

Location

Address: Stowmarket High School, Onehouse Road, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 1QR

Parish: Stowmarket

Site Area: 9.58ha

Conservation Area: No

Listed Building: No

Received: 29.05.2018

Expiry Date: 24.09.2018

Application Type: Full Plans Planning Permission

Development Type: Small Scale Major Dwellings

Environmental Impact Assessment: N/A

Applicant: Wates Construction Ltd

Agent: Planning & Development Associates Ltd

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR CONSIDERATION

This decision refers to the Defined Red Line Site Plan drawing number 432-ALA-00-XX-DR-L-0014 S2-P01 received 09/07/2018 as the defined red line plan with the site shown edged red. Any other drawing showing land edged red whether as part of another document or as a separate plan/drawing has not been accepted or treated as the defined application site for the purposes of this decision.

The application, plans and documents submitted by the Applicant can be viewed online at www.midsuffolk.gov.uk.

PART ONE – REASON FOR REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE

The application is referred to committee for the following reason:

- The application is a Small Scale Major Application, requiring determination by Planning Committee due to the scale and nature of the proposed development.

PART TWO – APPLICATION BACKGROUND

History

- Reference 2109/05 - Covered access bridge between library and science block.
- Reference 0980/03 - demolition of lean to garage. Construction of classroom extension
- and sundry internal alterations.
- Reference 0639/01 - 2 storey extension to existing 6th form wing.
- Reference 1130/94 - erection of extensions to high school to provide new staff and library block and science block (following removal of staff block on site)
- Reference 0594/92 - stationing of single temporary classroom unit nO.187 for a limited
- period of 10 years.
- Reference 0389/92 - erection of first floor extension
- Reference 1094/90 - siting of temporary double classroom unit (no 299) (for a period
- of 10 years).

All Policies Identified as Relevant

The proposal has been assessed with regard to adopted development plan policies, the National Planning Policy Framework and all other material considerations. Highlighted local and national policies are listed below. Detailed assessment of policies in relation to the recommendation and issues highlighted in this case will be carried out within the assessment:

Summary of Policies

- CS03 – Reduce contributions to climate change
- CS06 - Services and Infrastructure
- GP01 - Design and layout of development
- HB01 - Protection of historic buildings
- HB14 - Ensuring archaeological remains are not destroyed
- H07 - Restricting housing development unrelated to needs of countryside
- H13 - Design and layout of housing development
- H14 - A range of house types to meet different accommodation needs
- H15 - Development to reflect local characteristics
- H16 - Protecting existing residential amenity
- H17 - Keeping residential development away from pollution
- T09 - Parking Standards
- T10 - Highway Considerations in Development
- RT04 - Amenity open space and play areas within residential development
- RT12 - Footpaths and Bridleways
- CL08 - Protecting wildlife habitats
- Suffolk Design Guide
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Supplementary Planning Documents

- Suffolk Adopted Parking Standards (2015)

Previous Committee / Resolutions and Any Member Site Visit

None.

Pre-Application Advice

Pre-application discussions were held between the Agent and Council Officers.

Consultations and Representations

During the course of the application consultation and representations from third parties have been received. These are summarised below.

A: Summary of Consultations

Stowmarket Parish Council

No objection be raised to the grant of planning consent, however, the Town Council wishes to record its disappointment that the number of pupils which will the new school building will cater for, has not been increased from the number of pupils which the existing building caters for.

SCC Highways

No objection.

SCC - Archaeological Service

No objection.

Environmental Health – Noise/Odour/Light/Smoke

No objection.

Environmental Health - Land Contamination

No objection.

Environmental Health – Air Quality

No objection.

SCC Travel Plan Officer

No objection.

Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service

No objection.

Place Services - Ecology

No objection.

Sport England

No objection.

Anglian Water

No objection.

Natural England

No comment.

Environment Agency

No comment.

Suffolk Police

No comment.

SCC Public Rights of Way

No comment.

Economic Development

No comment.

SCC Flood and Water

Holding objection.

The Stowmarket Society

Objection.

B: Representations

None.

PART THREE – ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATION

From an assessment of relevant planning policy and guidance, representations received, the planning designations and other material issues the main planning considerations considered relevant to this case are set out including the reason/s for the decision, any alternative options considered and rejected. Where a decision is taken under a specific express authorisation, the names of any Member of the Council or local government body who has declared a conflict of interest are recorded.

1. The Site and Surroundings

- 1.1. The application concerns an area of land extending to 9.58ha to the north-west centre of Stowmarket. Stowmarket is defined as a Core Town in the Mid Suffolk Core Strategy 2008. The site is bound to the east by Gainsborough Road, to the south by Onehouse Road, to the west by Chilton Way, and to the north by mature treelines backing onto residential dwellings within Lowry Way. The site is also adjoined to the north by Wood Ley Community Primary School, and Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre. Beyond these immediate settings are residential housing estates, with the Town Centre of Stowmarket further east providing a wide range of services, facilities and amenities.
- 1.2. The current school estate is housed in a main accommodation building, an adjoining Sixth Form block and Science block linked to the main building via a covered

walkway. The school accommodation ranges from one to three storeys, and is positioned to the south-east of the site. Car parking is located on the south-east corner, along the boundary with Onehouse Road and Gainsborough Road. Extensive playing fields and a hard games court are positioned to the north-west and west of the site.

- 1.3. Currently, one-way car parking access is provided via Onehouse Road, with the vehicular exit via Gainsborough Road. A coach park and coach turning bay fall within the site boundary and are accessed via Gainsborough Road. The main pedestrian route is accessible from Onehouse Road, with a pedestrian crossing situated opposite the school caretaker's house. There is an approximate 6m level change from the eastern boundary to the western boundary with Chiltern Way.
- 1.4. The school currently enrolls 856 students, comprising of 714 11-16 years and 142 6th form students. The proposed works will enable 1125 students aged 11-18 years, comprising a 975-place secondary school with a 150-place sixth form.
- 1.5. The site is relatively unconstrained. There are no significant visual landscape constraints, or heritage / conservation assets engaged on or near the site. The area is predominantly residential in nature, with the site forming a prominent aspect of the local street scene. The sheer scale of the site lends to a naturally domineering presence within the vicinity. The site is in the low risk Flood Zone 1 area. Officers acknowledge the limited amount of constraints engaged.

2. **The Proposal**

- 2.1. The proposal comprises of; *“Planning Application. Demolition of existing school buildings and construction of new teaching building and refurbishment of current 6th Form building, together with associated landscaping”*.
- 2.2. The works involve the construction of a new teaching building of 7,420m² (GIA) (8,417m² - GEA) containing assembly hall, library, dining hall, drama studio, activity studio, music facilities, classrooms, science laboratories, technology spaces, changing facilities and staff accommodation. The current 6th Form Building is being retained and updated with new WC provision in line with Building Regulations. New external landscaping includes extended pedestrian access routes to the new teaching building and a new route from the teaching building to the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre which the school currently uses and will continue to use for its sports provision. Additional playing fields will be provided where the existing school currently sits, following demolition.
- 2.3. An array of drawings have been provided to demonstrate how the site could develop if planning permission is granted. The purpose of the plans are to illustrate that the quantum of development, that being the demolition of existing school buildings, and the construction of a new teaching building with refurbished 6th Form building can be accommodated at the site in an acceptable form. Key elements of the layout are as follows:
 - New teaching building
 - Refurbished 6th form block
 - Development will provide a ‘campus’ feel through suitable design
 - Enhanced connectivity within site to accommodate new positioning of teaching building

- Clear and distinct segregation between pedestrian and vehicular movement through layout design
- Increase in car parking provision
- Relocation of 60 no. cycle parking spaces
- Welcome entrance plaza
- Focussed landscaping along building approach
- Retention and enhancement of green areas, and intensification of existing landscape boundary treatment
- External sports provision will be retained under the proposals, through the reallocation of playing field lost through the construction to the location of the current building footprint
- Positive orientation of the new build façade enables retention of access points off Onehouse and Gainsborough Road
- New boundary fencing with managed access gates to provide complete line of security
- Retention of majority of trees along the southern and western portions of the site

3. **National Planning Policy Framework**

3.1. The updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) dated 24th July 2018 contains the Government's planning policies for England and sets out how these are expected to be applied. Planning law continues to require that applications for planning permission are determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The policies contained within the NPPF are a material consideration and should be taken into account for decision-making purposes.

3.2. The following paragraphs of the NPPF are considered applicable:

Para 7: Achieving sustainable development

Para 8: Three dimensions to sustainable development

Para 11 – 14: The presumption in favour of sustainable development

Para 15 – 19: Plan making

Para 20 – 23: Strategic policies

Para 28 – 30: Non-strategic policies

Para 47 – 50: Determination of planning applications

Para 54 – 57: Planning conditions and obligations

Para 83 – 84: Supporting a prosperous rural economy

Para 96 – 101: Open space and recreation

Para 102 – 111: Promoting sustainable transport

Para 117 – 121: Making effective use of land

Para 124 – 132: Achieving well-designed places

Para 155 – 165: Planning and flood risk

Para 170 – 173: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Para 174 – 177: Habitats and biodiversity

Para 178 – 183: Ground conditions and pollution

Para 184 – 188: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Para 189 – 192: Proposals affecting heritage assets

Para 193 – 202: Considering potential impacts

4. **Core Strategy**

4.1. The following parts of the Core Strategy Focused Review 2012 are considered to be applicable to this scheme:

FC1 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development.
FC1.1 - Mid Suffolk's approach to delivering sustainable development
FC2 - Supply of Employment Land

- 4.2. The following parts of the Core Strategy 2008 are considered to be applicable to this scheme:

CS4 - Adapting to climate change.
CS5 - Mid Suffolk's environment
CS6 - Services and infrastructure

5. Supplementary Planning Documents

Suffolk Adopted Parking Standards (2015)

6. Saved Policies in the Local Plans

- 6.1. Summary of saved policies in the Mid-Suffolk Local Plan adopted June 1998 relevant to the proposal:

Policy GP1: Design and layout of new developments
Policy HB14: Ensuring that Archaeological remains are not destroyed
Policy H15: Development to reflect local characteristics
Policy H16: Protecting existing residential amenity
Policy H17: Keeping residential development away from pollution
Policy CL8: Protecting wildlife
Policy CL11: Retaining high quality agricultural land
Policy T9: Parking standards
Policy T10: Highway consideration in developments
Policy T11: Facilities for pedestrians and cyclists
Policy RT2: Loss of existing sports and recreation facilities
Policy RT3: Protecting recreational open space
Policy RT4: Amenity open space and play areas within residential development
Policy SC8: Siting of new school buildings

- 6.2. Summary of policies in the Stowmarket Area Action Plan relevant to the proposal:

SAAP Policy 4.1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
SAAP Policy 4.2 Providing a Landscape Setting for Stowmarket
SAAP Policy 8.1 Developer Contributions to a Sustainable Transport Network
SAAP Policy 9.1 Biodiversity Measures

7. Principle of Development

- 7.1. The determination of the planning application shall have regard to the material harm caused as a result of the proposed development. The 'tests' here are whether the material harm caused by such development are significant enough to cause adverse impact on the character and setting of the area, residential amenity enjoyed by occupants of neighbouring property as well as non-domestic uses of land and buildings nearby, highways access and parking, and finally environmental risk / harm arising (ecology, flood risk, trees, archaeology etc). Sequentially, regard shall also be had to the sustainability of the proposal. Assessment is therefore centred on the level

of adverse impact created as a result of development, but also the merits of the proposal relative to the material considerations identified.

- 7.2. Policy SC8 confirms that proposals for new school buildings, extensions or additions should be sited within or adjacent to the main built-up area of the school. The development of land currently used as school playing fields will not be permitted, unless used in connection with a specific educational need.
- 7.3. The NPPF requires that development be sustainable and that adverse impacts do not outweigh the benefits to be acceptable in principle. **Paragraph 8** of the NPPF sets out three dimensions for sustainable development, economic, social and environmental:
- “a) **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;*
- b) **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being; and*
- c) **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy”*
- 7.4. **Paragraph 94** states; *“It is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:*
- a) give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications; and*
- b) work with schools promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted”.*
- 7.5. **Paragraph 96** states; *“Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate”.*
- 7.6. **Paragraph 97** states; *“Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:*

a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or

b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or

c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

7.7. Finally, **Paragraph 121** states; “*Local planning authorities should also take a positive approach to applications for alternative uses of land which is currently developed but not allocated for a specific purpose in plans, where this would help to meet identified development needs. In particular, they should support proposals to:*

a) use retail and employment land for homes in areas of high housing demand, provided this would not undermine key economic sectors or sites or the vitality and viability of town centres, and would be compatible with other policies in this Framework; and

b) make more effective use of sites that provide community services such as schools and hospitals, provided this”.

7.8. In light of all of the above, this report will consider the proposal against the weight of the policies within the development plan, but also the engrained sustainability emphasis set out in the NPPF, taken as a whole.

8. Sustainability of the Proposal

8.1. Policy FC1 presents a presumption in favour of sustainable development contained within the NPPF and this should be applied to proposals which generate sustainable qualities. This is supported further by Policy FC1.1 which sets out the Council’s approach to delivering sustainable development in the District. Consideration should also be afforded to Policy FC2 for the supply of employment land.

8.2. Policy CS4 recognises the need for development to be responsive in adapting to climate change, including through environmentally conscious design. Policy CS5 seeks to protect and conserve landscape qualities taking into account the natural environment and the historical dimension of the landscape as a whole rather than concentrating solely on selected areas, protecting the District’s most important components and encouraging development that is consistent with conserving its overall character.

8.3. The three dimensions of sustainable development, in the context of the proposed development, are assessed in detail below.

9. Economic Dimension

9.1. The project is part of the Education & Skills Funding Agency’s Priority School Building Programme (PSBP) which is a £4.4 billion priority school building programme to rebuild and refurbish those schools in the very worst condition.

9.2. The proposal would generate a positive benefit for local trade before, during and after construction. It is acknowledged that there may be a positive benefit through support

of local amenities, facilities and services available in Stowmarket, surrounding villages and hamlets. The proposal does not attract any CIL or S106 Obligations.

10. Social Dimension

- 10.1. The provision of a new teaching building and refurbished 6th form building would provide considerable improvement in learning environments for existing and future pupils, community and other related users. New facilities would provide outstanding learning potential, which would carry uncapped social gains (potential) for years to come. Officers welcome the design ethos in a bid to provide optimum learning conditions for pupils and the community alike. Flexible and adaptable learning spaces are encouraged in order to stimulate social cohesion at a local level. Schools are an integral part of the community, and none more so than in Stowmarket as a Core Town. The social benefits arising are evident.
- 10.2. The development proposals comprise the redistribution of general secondary teaching accommodation, an activity studio, drama studio, learning resource areas, dining hall, main hall and administration area into a single new building. Consequential works comprising new toilet facilities and office space will be provided within the retained Sixth Form block. Pupils will continue to make use of sports facilities at the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in addition to the new provisions created through these proposals.
- 10.3. The proposals include a range of social and recreational uses. These include a new landscaped entrance plaza, hard and soft play areas and reallocation of playing field space lost through construction of the new building. The vision and curriculum are grounded in the School's experience of delivering high quality education, and in the specific skills identified as needed in Stowmarket. The school has a strong tradition of success in vocational areas such as Design Technology and Health and Social Care, as well as a high performing Sixth Form provision.
- 10.4. The applicant has engaged with the community from the early stages of compiling the application. A public consultation event was held on 8th May 2018 at the School, where drawings, diagrams and a video of the scheme were displayed. In excess of 50 members of the public attended the event including local residents, school governors, teachers, parents of current and future pupils, and local council members. Invites to the event were extended to local residents (in the form of an invite leaflet distributed to local residents); the Town Council and local ward, district and county councillors. All attendees had the opportunity to review the proposals and provide feedback on a pro-forma feedback form. Of the 37 written responses received from attendees on the day, all were in support of the proposals.
- 10.5. The scheme will support Stowmarket both socially and culturally, offering a significant boost to Stowmarket's community cohesion.

11. Environmental Dimension

- 11.1. The site is located in an inherently sustainable location by virtue of the established accessibility to services, facilities and amenities, located within the Settlement Boundary. The pedestrian, cycle and vehicular network leading to site is routinely established, including the provision of public transport by bus. The accessible bus network provides a viable option for the community to travel to / from site from other settlements. As such, there is a good range of sustainable transport modes available,

which the proposal utilises. The benefits accruing from utilising established sustainable transport options reflects the sustainability aims of the NPPF.

12. Impact on the Landscape

- 12.1. Policy CS5 of the Core Strategy seeks to protect and conserve landscape qualities taking into account the natural environment and the historical dimension of the landscape as a whole rather than concentrating solely on selected areas, protecting the District's most important components and encouraging development that is consistent with conserving its overall character.
- 12.2. Paragraph 170 – 173 and 184 – 188 of the NPPF respectively state that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils.
- 12.3. Policy RT2 seeks the retention of existing sports facilities and Policy RT3 seeks the protection of recreational open space and confirms that where redevelopment is permitted, an applicant will be expected to make alternative provision, of equivalent community benefit, in the form of suitably located recreation or amenity space.
- 12.4. The site is not in an area of special character designation such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or Special Landscape Area (SLA). Therefore, the determination of such application does not engage core landscape policies. With this in mind, the significance of a material change in the appearance of the locality in this area is reduced, as the area is not constrained visually. Proposals in these landscape areas are not obliged to extensively harmonise with the essence of landscape policies, which underpin the notion of protecting and preserving the landscape. Less weight is afforded to the visual appearance of the proposal in this instance. Nonetheless, this aspect is considered thoroughly.
- 12.5. The proposed building is centrally located within the site's south eastern quadrant, situating itself away from any boundary interfaces. Hard informal play areas are positioned adjacent the main building, providing direct pedestrian links to the existing sixth form block, car park and service areas. In replacement of the current school building, the design introduces a large soft informal ground to maximise opportunities for sports and outdoor play. The remaining site area to the north west quadrant is largely retained, allowing the school to maintain its current provision of sporting amenity and soft landscaping for students. The existing car park to the site's southern boundary is also retained and includes additional fencing with gated access to ensure secure zones between the main school grounds and public interface are managed appropriately.
- 12.6. The location of the proposed new teaching building does not make a significant contribution in its undeveloped form to the character and appearance of the area, or to the setting of Stowmarket, such that it should be protected from development.
- 12.7. There are no Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) on site. Officers note the presence of 43 trees, of which some will be lost through demolition. Throughout the construction phase, suitable measures for tree protection fencing are proposed to the root protection areas of trees within areas of potential impact. In doing so, the proposal aims to mitigate any loss of trees where possible, and incorporates their locations to provide visual interest and vegetation breaks across the site.

- 12.8. The site is in visual terms fairly well contained, particularly from the west and northern boundaries. Moreover, the proposed scheme will be largely screened from the public domain by virtue of the existing retained vegetation on site. Built form will be visible from adjacent property, and you would expect a degree of landscape harm given the scale and size of the building proposed. However, built form visible from a public vantage point does not necessarily result in adverse character harm. In this instance, the visual impact on the broader landscape will be limited. A comprehensive landscaping scheme would be secured to ensure landscape character impacts are further mitigated. The proposal responds positively to Policies, CS5, RT2 and RT3.

13. Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

- 13.1. Policy H15 requires development to achieve a high standard of design and layout and be of a scale and density appropriate to the site and its surroundings. Schemes should be consistent with the pattern and form of development in the area and its setting.
- 13.2. Policy GP1 states that proposals comprising of poor design and layout will be refused, requiring proposals to meet a number of design criteria including maintenance or enhancement of the surroundings and use of compatible materials.
- 13.3. Paragraph 127 of the NPPF attaches great importance to the design of the built environment, stating that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development
- 13.4. The site is not in an area of special character designation such as a Conservation Area (CA) or Article 4 Direction. Therefore, the determination of such applications does not engage core design policies. With this in mind, the significance of a material change in the appearance of the locality in this area is reduced, as the area is not constrained visually. Proposals in this locality are not obliged to extensively harmonise with the essence of core design policies, which underpin the notion of preserving and enhancing character of areas through appropriate design. Less weight is afforded to the visual appearance of the proposal in this instance. Nonetheless, this aspect is considered in detail.
- 13.5. Officers note that the design cues taken are largely bespoke given the uniqueness of the proposal. As such, the design precedent for the area is largely untested (due to the nature and extent of the scheme). Nonetheless, Officers consider the overall design of the scheme positively. It is noted that The Stowmarket Society objected to the application on design grounds.
- 13.6. The development offers respectful scale (no higher than the existing 3 storey precedent set on site), carefully considered location and orientation (set back from the highway into site thus reducing domineering harm further) and a welcome pallet of materials (a relatively modern design in a visually unconstrained area). The site will be heavily featured by its access networks, landscaping, parking areas, play areas amongst established and newly refurbished 6th form buildings, generating an appealing environment for pupils to learn.
- 13.7. The design focusses largely upon the public frontage facing Gainsborough Road. The building is to be finished in a robust red brick which runs the full perimeter at its base. To the front the entrances are clearly defined with a teal coloured rainscreen cladding. The elevations provide modern fenestration window openings. They respond to the spaces behind with generous areas of glazing to the dining and

central space. The main elevation creates a bold composition which creates a dynamic, welcoming and positive elevation. To the rear the building is straightforward and ordered. Again, it employs a robust red brick base with light grey render above. The scheme does not result in an obtrusive or overly harmful intrusion upon the immediate and surrounding character of the area. The refreshing design emphasis is a welcome response, that Officers endorse. There is nothing before Officers to suggest the development could not integrate with the identity of the area and soften over time maintaining a modern appearance.

14. Impact on Heritage Assets

- 14.1. Policy HB1 seeks to protect the character and appearance of buildings of architectural or historic interest, particularly protecting the settings of Listed Buildings.
- 14.2. Section 66 of the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Listed Building or its setting.
- 14.3. In this case there are specific NPPF policies relating to designated heritage assets that should be considered.
- 14.4. Paragraph 185 of the NPPF identifies that the impact of a proposal on the significance of a heritage asset should be taken into account, in order to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.
- 14.5. Paragraph 193 - 194 of the NPPF states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
- 14.6. The NPPF defines the setting of a heritage asset as the surroundings in which it is experienced. The extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset; may affect the ability to appreciate that significance; or may be neutral.
- 14.7. The proposal is located away from the Stowmarket Conservation Area and is not within close proximity to any Heritage Assets. Officers are satisfied that the scheme would not result in any undue harm to the character and / or setting of the historic environment. The proposal does not conflict with Policy HB1 or paragraphs 185 and 193 - 194 of the NPPF.

15. Residential Amenity (Including Non-Domestic Uses)

- 15.1. Policy H16 seeks to protect the existing amenity of residential areas, including neighbouring residents nearby.
- 15.2. Paragraph 127 of the NPPF2 sets out a number of core planning principles as to underpin decision-taking, including, seeking to secure a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.
- 15.3. The proposed layout demonstrates the site is readily capable of accommodating the development in a manner that will not unduly compromise the residential amenity of

existing neighbours, or indeed that of other non-domestic land and buildings. More specifically, suitable distances between the teaching building (set back into the plot) and neighbouring property can be achieved to ensure no unacceptable loss of daylight, sunlight, or overlooking to the existing residents would ensue. It is noted that no objections have been received in respect to potential loss of sunlight / daylight, visual bulk, overshadowing or loss of privacy. In this respect, the impact on the amenity of existing residential units will be minimal on the nearest dwellings and improved overall taking into account the benefits to the existing residents.

- 15.4. Conditions are recommended regarding a Construction Management Plan and limiting construction hours to ensure the safeguarding of neighbouring amenity.
- 15.5. The proposal accords with the aspirations of local Policies H16 and paragraph 127 of the NPPF.

16. Highway Safety, Access and Parking

- 16.1 Policy T10 requires the Local Planning Authority to consider a number of highway matters when determining planning applications, including; the provision of safe access, the safe and free flow of traffic and pedestrian safety, safe capacity of the road network and the provision of adequate parking and turning for vehicles.
- 16.2 The Policy is supplemented by Policy T9, requiring proposals to provide areas of parking and manoeuvring in accordance with the parking standards adopted by the district.
- 16.3 Paragraph 109 of the NPPF confirms that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe. This is interpreted as referring to matters of highway capacity and congestion, as opposed to matters of highway safety. The courts have held that the principle should not be interpreted to mean anything other than a severe impact on highway safety would be acceptable (*Mayowa-Emmanuel v Royal Borough of Greenwich [2015] EWHC 4076 (Admin)*).
- 16.4 The proposal facilitates a considerable improvement to the pedestrian circulation of site. The main site approach from Onehouse Road and coach-park approach from Gainsborough Road will focus site users towards the new entrance plaza, instilling a sense of arrival and enhancing the school's presence on the site.
- 16.5 The building's orientation and entrance locations address both of these approach routes. New footpaths will link the new and retained elements of the scheme, whilst establishing a hierarchy for the new building across the campus. The school admin suite is located at ground floor along the east elevation, and will provide passive supervision of the entrance approaches from Onehouse Road and Gainsborough Road.
- 16.6 New separate pupil and visitor entrances with respective adjoining reprographics and general office space will provide supervised entry points into the new building directly from the entrance plaza. Carved entrance recesses provide shelter to the new building entrances whilst accentuating the intended building approach. The entrance plaza will act as the culmination of the arrival sequence from which visitors will be directed to other buildings in the campus within the secure line.

16.7 The site is located in an inherently sustainable location by virtue of the established accessibility to services, facilities and amenities, located within the Settlement Boundary. Public transport accessibility to / from the site is routinely established. The accessible bus network provides a viable option for the community to travel to / from other settlements. As such, there is a good range of sustainable transport modes.

16.8 Officers consider the design response has paid very careful attention to the use and footfall potential, resulting in a substantial improvement upon the existing arrangement in terms of pedestrian and cyclist safety. The works reflect Policy T9 and T10, underpinned by the positive comments expressed by the LLHA (subject to conditions). There is nothing before Officers to suggest a highways compliant development could not be achieved.

17 Flood Risk

17.1 The site is located in Flood Zone 1 and outside of Flood Zone 2 and 3 areas of concern, where there is a less than a 0.1 per cent (1 in 1000) chance of flooding occurring each year. The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) which concludes that the site is vulnerable at two locations on site.

17.2 The supporting FRA has been reviewed by the LLFA who (at the time of writing this report) raise a holding objection to the proposal. It is noted that resolution can be achieved, and the LLFA have positively engaged with the agent during the consultation process. Drainage details are therefore outstanding.

17.3 However, by way of demonstrating a practical and reasonable way forward, Officers in this instance recommend that authority be delegated to satisfy the outstanding drainage matters in consultation with the LLFA.

18 Trees

18.1 The application is supported by an Arboricultural Assessment. Much of the on-site trees and hedging (mainly the boundary edges) will be retained. The naturally green appearance of the site of associated school play areas, fields and communal areas offer a breakaway for nature. Loss of trees within the close footprint of the school to be demolished carry limited landscape character. As such, the harm arising is negligible. Any loss of trees will nonetheless be offset by a comprehensive landscape planting scheme. There is nothing before Officers to suggest the development would result in unacceptable harm to trees.

19 Land Contamination

19.1 The application is supported by a Contamination Investigation Report. A further survey included additional targeted sampling of soil and a ground gas assessment. Ground Engineering have concluded that no significant possibility of significant harm is being caused from the analysis and ground gas surveys. The Environmental Health - Land Contamination consultee has reviewed the information and raises no objection.

20 Archaeology

20.1 SCC Archaeological Service raise no objection to the proposal as the works would result in no impact upon known archaeological sites or archaeological potential.

21 Biodiversity

21.1 Policy CS5 requires development to protect, manage and enhance Mid Suffolk's biodiversity.

21.2 Regulation 9(5) of the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (Implemented 1st April 2010)* requires all 'competent authorities' (public bodies) to 'have regard to the Habitats Directive in the exercise of its functions.' For a Local Planning Authority to comply with regulation 9(5) it must 'engage' with the provisions of the Habitats Directive.

21.3 An ecology report supports the application which has been reviewed by Place Services – Ecology. The Ecologist raises no objection to the proposal subject to biodiversity mitigation and enhancement measures.

PART FOUR – CONCLUSION

22 Planning Balance

22.1 The LPA are obliged to consider whether the proposal is in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The policies contained within the NPPF are a material consideration and should be taken into account for decision-making purposes. Paragraph 11 states:

“For decision takers this means where ...the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless
(i) The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed,
or,
(ii) Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole”.

22.2 The NPPF advises that the environmental aspect of sustainability includes contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment, and that socio-eco gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously with environmental improvement. The proposal will bring with it considerable economic and social benefits. The site is a sustainable location, within walking distance of a good range of local services. The uplift and betterment for the Town as a whole through a new build school with integrated learning environments will generate positive benefits for years to come.

22.3 The proposed development is visually well related, set back into site to minimise a dominating scale. Visual intrusion upon the landscape will be limited given the development is set against the backdrop of the existing site. There will be no adverse effects on the character or setting of the area. Heritage Assets and the Conservation Area will remain unaffected.

22.4 Highway safety outcomes are appropriately safeguarded, with the LLHA raising no objection to the proposed arrangements.

22.5 Flood risks can be resolved, however the impetus is on the applicant to satisfy the LLFA requirements in order to achieve the grant of planning permission, which would be secured through the recommendation to delegate authority to determine, subject to this information.

22.6 There are no compelling reasons to withhold the grant of planning permission given the broad benefits and no significant planning harm. The proposal constitutes sustainable development for which the NPPF carries a presumption in favour. In terms of balance it is concluded to recommend the application for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

1) That subject to an acceptable drainage scheme being provided to the satisfaction of the Local Lead Flood Authority, that authority be delegated to the Corporate Manager - Growth and Sustainable Planning to grant planning permission, subject to conditions including:

- Standard time limit
- Contaminated land discovery requirements
- Highways – loading / unloading
- Highways – refuse / recycling
- Highways – deliveries management plan
- Travel plan details and implementation
- Biodiversity mitigation
- Ecology enhancement measures
- Materials
- Levels
- Landscaping details and implementation
- Fire hydrant provision details
- Sustainable efficiency measures
- Secure mitigation and ecology enhancement measures
- Lighting scheme
- Construction Management Plan including hours of work
- Details of implementation, maintenance, and management of surface water drainage
- Details of foul water drainage scheme
- And any other drainage details recommended by the LLFA

2) That, in the event of drainage matters referred to in Resolution 1) are not resolved to the satisfaction of the Corporate Manager – Growth & Sustainable Planning, that authority be delegated to him to refuse planning permission, for the following reason (summarised):

- Inadequate provision of a suitable method of drainage that would give rise to an unacceptable level of flood risk, contrary to the development plan and national planning policy.