

Date: 21 November 2013
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Dear Sirs,

Proposed Saddleworth School – Former WH Shaw Pallet Works, Huddersfield Road, Diggle.

I am writing to confirm the Council's position with regard to the proposed development of the Replacement Saddleworth School, for education (Use Class D1) purposes in accordance with the initial master plan attached, (Drawing L(SK)002 Rev P4 dated 27 June 2013).

The Site and Surroundings

The site comprises 5.37 Hectares of land which is currently vacant and most recently appears to have been used for grazing purposes. The northern plot fronting Huddersfield Road (providing 1.52 ha of land) forms part of a Saddleworth Employment Area (SEA) whilst the southern plot (providing 3.85 ha of land) is Green Belt land.

Diggle Brook crosses through part of the land and the land immediately adjacent to it falls within either Flood Zone 2 or Flood Zone 3 on the Environment Agency's Flood Risk Maps. A Grade II listed building is also situated on the adjoining plot of land which is not subject to the School proposals.

A site location plan is enclosed with this correspondence.

The surrounding area consists of a mixture of traditional stone built terraced housing to the north, west and south and industrial uses to the east. The eastern plot, which is not subject to the School proposals, contains a vacant Grade II listed office building and clock-tower.

Description of Development

It is proposed to redevelop the site to provide a secondary school and associated facilities. The proposal considered locates the new school buildings on the northern part of the available site, with the frontage addressing the main Huddersfield Road.

A separate sports block is located close to the site entrance and main external sports provision, allowing easy access for community use.

Staff and visitor parking are located to the front of the site between the front elevation of the building and Huddersfield Road with provision made for drop-off and servicing. It has been proposed to use the existing access road as an in-only road to the parking and drop-off with a separate new exit-only to reduce congestion.

Bus drop-off and turning, which also doubles up as an informal hard play area, has been located at the north eastern part of the site. The bus drop-off has been proposed in this location, at the lower level, to reduce the visual impact of this area from the front of the site. It also provides a direct link to the main pupil social areas.

Multi-use games areas (MUGAs) have been located adjacent to the proposed sports block and within the secure part of the site. However, the main playing fields are accommodated on the land to the south of the public footpath, and therefore outside the main secure part of the site.

Some ground modelling would also be required to form level pitches and it may be that the land in the south-west corner of the site has limited use due to the restricted width and gradient.

The proposal, as indicated on the attached Masterplan, (Drawing L(SK)002 Rev P4 dated 27 June 2013) shows the central/communal facilities and main entrance accommodated within a two storey frontage block running parallel with Huddersfield Road, whilst the main teaching accommodation, incorporating 5 home bases, is distributed between 3no. three storey wings stepping down the site.

This arrangement creates a series of external social spaces, with separate pupil entrances provided both at the front and rear of the school relating to the upper and lower ground floor levels.

The proposal will result in a total of 10,500m² of floor space to be used for education (Use Class D1) purposes for up to 1500 pupils. The new school replaces the existing Saddleworth School which has approximately 1350 pupils located 2 km away to the south in Uppermill.

Based on the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2011 it is considered that the proposed development falls within Schedule 2 as an 'urban development project'. It is therefore considered appropriate for a Screening Opinion to be requested from the Local Planning Authority to determine whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required.

Planning Policy Review

The Joint Development Plan Document forms part of the Local Development Framework for Oldham and contains the Core Strategies and Development Management policies used to assess and determine planning application. The advice and guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework is also taken as a material planning consideration.

Key Designations

The site includes land designated as a Saddleworth Employment Area and Green Belt. As such the proposal will need assessing against the following policies within the Joint Development Plan Document:

Core Strategies:

- Policy 1 – Climate change and sustainable development;
- Policy 2 – Communities;
- Policy 5 – Promoting accessibility and sustainable transport choices;

Development Management Policies:

- Policy 9 – Local environment;
- Policy 14 – Supporting Oldham’s economy;
- Policy 17 – Gateways and corridors;
- Policy 19 – Water and flooding;
- Policy 20 – Design;
- Policy 21 – Protecting natural environmental assets;
- Policy 22 – Protecting open land;
- Policy 24 – Historic environment;
- Policy 25 – Developer contributions

The advice and guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework is also relevant and will be regarded as a material planning consideration.

Planning Policy Analysis and Planning Issues/Objectives

Having regard to the Policies listed above, and the advice within the NPPF, the main issues which need to be considered are:

1. The principle of the proposed development having regard to the green belt and SEA designations of the site;
2. The impact on the green belt and local environment;
3. Design;
4. Residential amenity;
5. Parking and highway safety;
6. Ecology issues;

Whilst the Local Planning Authority would welcome the delivery of a new school in Saddleworth the main issues to establish whether the principle is acceptable relates to the green belt and SEA designations.

The buildings proposed within the green belt are associated with sports facilities. Paragraph 89 within the NPPF states that the construction of new buildings in the green belt should be considered as ‘inappropriate’. However, it lists a number of exceptions which includes where

the building is to provide appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation as long as it does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. There may well be an argument that the changing facilities within the sports block are 'appropriate facilities' but any indoor sports facilities located within the green belt are not catered for in the exceptions criteria. Therefore elements of the proposals may comprise 'inappropriate' development within the green belt and the applicant would need to demonstrate that 'very special circumstances' are present which outweigh the harm to the green belt (Paras. 87 + 88 NPPF).

It is understood that alterations are involved to the land to provide level sports pitches/MUGAs. Engineering operations to land are not regarded as 'inappropriate' within the green belt providing that they do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it (Para. 90 NPPF). Since Para.81 states that Local Planning Authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide opportunities for outdoor sport or recreation, it is likely that these works would not be 'inappropriate' providing they do not alter the land levels significantly. However, as no existing/proposed cross sections of this part of the site have been provided no further comment can be made regarding this.

With regards to the designation of part of the site as a Saddleworth Employment Area the applicant will need to demonstrate that the site is no longer appropriate or viable as an employment site. This must be demonstrated in one of the following ways:

1. Through a marketing exercise that there is no market for the preferred uses for such sites; or
2. Through a viability exercise that the development of the site for the preferred uses is unviable; or
3. That the development of the site for alternative uses would benefit the regeneration areas identified by the Council as being in need of investment or would benefit the community of an area.

The Council accepts the benefits that the proposed school would provide but, as with any infrastructure development, there will be disadvantages. Therefore, it is suggested that you identify the community benefits associated with the development so these can be considered alongside any elements of harm that would arise.

Planning Application Scope and Timing

The applicant will need to undertake pre-application consultation with the public and will demonstrate through the application submissions how any issues have been addressed. The range and scope of the planning application submissions which will be required in support of a full planning application be found using the validation checklists on the Council's website.

Conclusion

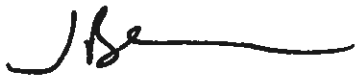
The Council is keen to support proposals that will result in improved educational facilities in Oldham and look forward to receiving a planning application submission in due course.

Whilst detailed design proposals have not been presented to the Council at this stage, issues such as scale, massing, and likely site configuration have been reviewed and notwithstanding comments made elsewhere, are considered, subject to further scope of works identified, to be acceptable in principle.

In conclusion, the views given above are at this stage informal and represent an informal officer opinion only, they cannot therefore be taken to influence or bind the Council on any future planning application. In addition the views given are made without the benefit of any consultation responses.

However, subject to the further scope of works identified in this letter; the proposals are considered to be consistent with adopted local planning policies and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Yours sincerely



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