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**FAO: Mr. Tony Brumfield**

Dear Mr. Brumfield

**Re: 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 Masterplan attached (Drawing No L(9)005 Rev P1 dated 7 April 2014).

### **The Site and Surroundings**

The site comprises 3.47 hectares of land which is currently occupied by industrial buildings, the former WH Shaw Pallet Works and 2.31 hectares of land which is currently vacant and most recently appears to have been used for grazing purposes. The northern plot (the former pallet works) forms part of a Saddleworth Employment Area (SEA) whilst the southern plot is Green Belt land.

Diggle Brook forms the western boundary of the site, the land immediately adjacent to which falls within either Flood Zone 2 or Flood Zone 3 on the Environment Agency's Flood Risk Maps. The site is bounded on the east by the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, beyond which lies the Manchester to Leeds railway line.

A Grade II listed building, containing a vacant office building and clock tower, is also situated within the curtilage of the Pallet Works site. Whilst this building is not subject to the School proposals the development is likely to have an impact on its setting. The area surrounding the site consists of a mixture of traditional stone built housing to the north, west and south.

### **Description of Development**

It is proposed to redevelop the site to provide a secondary school and associated facilities. The proposal to be considered locates the new school buildings on the former Pallet Works site and centrally within that area. A separate sports block is located close to the site entrance between the new school building and the main external sports provision, which is sited on the area currently vacant. This layout allows easy access for community use. Access to the site will be via the existing access road off Huddersfield Road which will be

improved to allow the safe use by school buses, staff and pedestrians. Staff and visitor parking is located south of the main school building adjacent to the entrance to the site. Provision is made for servicing and for a bus drop-off facility, located at the northern part of the site. This will provide a direct link to the main pupil social areas and will double as an informal hard play area during the school day. Vehicular and pedestrian links to the site will be improved with the introduction of a school safety zone, junction improvements and improved parking facilities for residents to reduce congestion caused by parked vehicles.

Two multi-use games areas (MUGAs) have been located adjacent to the new Sports Block and a third at the northern end of the site. All are within the secure part of the site. The main playing fields are located on the green belt land south of the public footpath which connects the towpath of the canal with Huddersfield Road. Some ground modelling will be required to form level pitches, which will comprise one full-size pitch plus one three-quarter size all weather flood-lit pitch.

The proposal, as indicated on the attached Masterplan (Drawing No L(9)005 Rev P1 dated 7 April 2014), shows the central/community facilities and main entrance accommodated within a three storey frontage block running in a north – south direction, with other teaching accommodation, incorporating 5 home bases, distributed between 3 no wings of two or three storey height to suit the topography of 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 10,500m<sup>2</sup> of floor space to be used for education (Use Class D1) purposes for up to 1500no. pupils. The new school would replace the existing Saddleworth School which has approximately 1350no. pupils located approximately 2km 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:*

This 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 Plan 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 the SEA designations of the site;
2. The impact on the Green Belt and the local environment;
3. Design;
4. Residential amenity;
5. Parking and highway safety;
6. Ecology issues (including relationship with the Huddersfield Narrow Canal).

Whilst the Local Planning Authority welcomes the opportunity to support the delivery of a new school in Saddleworth the main issue is to establish whether the principle is acceptable relates to the Green Belt and SEA designations.

No buildings are proposed within the green belt although the works will comprise engineering operations to provide level areas for the pitches and the erection of a fence and floodlighting around the all-weather pitch. These works are not considered 'inappropriate' within the context of the NPPF providing the engineering works do not alter land levels significantly and that they preserve the openness of the green belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. No existing / proposed cross sections of this part of the site have been provided so no further comment can be made regarding this.

With regards to the part of the site designated 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:

- Through a marketing exercise that there is no market for the preferred uses for such sites; or
- Through a viability exercise that the development of the site for the preferred uses is unviable;
- 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 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 can 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 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, as 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 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 guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Yours Sincerely



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