



## **RSRP Update – 25 January 2018**

### **Planning Hearing Imminent?**

It is our understanding that Hertfordshire County Council, the local Planning Authority for the Town Planning Application for the Katherine Warrington School, are moving towards a hearing for the determination of the application. A one-off additional meeting of the Council's Development Control Committee has been added to the Council's Calendar for 8 February 2018. No agenda has been published for the meeting but yesterday a note was circulated by Councillor David Williams that this meeting has been called to hear the application.

The schedule published by the applicants – Hertfordshire County Council and The Education and Skills Funding Agency – with the application identified the scheduled Development Control Committee meeting of 20 December 2017 as the target required to meet September 2018 full opening (and partial opening in September 2017). The application missed this and the next scheduled meeting (25 January).

Significant material has been added to the Council's planning portal in the last week, after the passing of the fifth in a series of consultation closure dates published by the Council, although RSRP are aware that many significant gaps remain in the planning material which were notified to the authority shortly after the application was published.

It is unclear how Council Officers, who are required to be independent when assessing Planning Applications, will respond to significant shortfalls in the information arising from the inability or unwillingness of the applicants to respond when producing their report to Committee Members. The report could theoretically include options to refuse, grant subject to conditions or unconditionally grant permission – anything other than mild conditions would lead to further delays in a project that it has taken the Council and its agents and partners over seven years to bring to this stage.

RSRP has made multiple representations throughout the application process and awaits the report of officers which will be based on a variety of information – published and unpublished. It is not known if the officer report (and any supporting material) will be published on the web portal or as supporting material for the meeting with the agenda. The Planning portal has yet to register the meeting date advised by Councillor Williams.

Spatial Planning Officers at HCC have verbally advised that representations can be made up to the date of any meeting, although it is likely that it will only be possible for officers to comment on last minute points verbally at the meeting. If you consider that new material requires comment, please make your representations now. At this stage RSRP would recommend making representations by e-mail to [spatialplanning@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:spatialplanning@hertfordshire.gov.uk) alternatives are via the HCC website – where a series of questions and a 3900 character box is available for comments or by post:

Spatial Planning & Economy Unit  
County Hall CHN216  
Pegs Lane  
Hertford  
SG13 8DN.

## **RSRP's Current Position**

RSRP's position is that having reviewed the evidence presented the underlying criticisms of the scheme are reinforced rather than addressed by the material presented at time of application and the additions since.

We will monitor the Council's websites for the reports from Spatial Planning Officers and post a notification in our media when this does appear. Once it appears we will review its conclusions and plan our response accordingly. In the meantime we reiterate the core areas for concern below, including where new evidence gives further cause for concern.

## **Grounds for Objection**

There are many causes for concern within the plan. In many instances the information provided in the Planning Application has heightened concerns. Key aspects are:

**Green Belt Impact:** The application requires release of Green Belt land. There is no Local Plan designation for the site that predetermines release, therefore any release has to meet 'Very Special Circumstances', under national planning policy guidelines which presume in favour of Green Belt retention. The Applicant is then required to demonstrate there is such a strong case that considerations outweigh standard Green Belt considerations including full and proper consideration of alternatives. The core objection is therefore this is inappropriate development of Green Belt on basis that better alternatives have not been properly considered.

**Traffic and lack of Mitigation:** The expected impact of traffic resulting from the school is a significant factor. Concerns have been expressed by a number of statutory consultees including strong reservations from District Town and parish councils. Concerns about the safety of suggested walk and cycle routes for children - effectively along the Lower Luton Road from Wheathampstead – do not appear to have been addressed. Instead the £6.5m identified in 2015 has been removed from HCC's budget estimates and the application contains instead a series of minor mitigations which in many instances are likely to frustrate motorists and put pedestrians at greater risk.

**Visual Impact:** The application states it has considered the impact on the area from the worst affected views – it fails to define these areas and is filled with carefully taken obscure photos that ignore high visual impacts. In practice there are no views from the main vistas from Crabtree across the fields, no views from Milford Hill or Batford estate roads that look over the fields and bizarrely the report claims the view from the Lower Luton Road will be screened by retaining the hillside, while the building elevations portray a view from the Lower Luton Road that shows the main building obliterating the entire northern skyline. The development remains one which will create large areas of dug out land, and large areas of raised platform land.

**Value for Money and associated risks:** The school project was costed at between £53-65m when HCC's consultants evaluated the project in 2015. This was about £20m more than DfE expect to fund and excluded land costs. In the supporting material the cost estimates have been reduced by between £8-10m – while a large part of this is removal of transport safety mitigation, it is also apparent that the design previously evaluated has been trimmed back – for example the parallel project in Croxley Green promoted by the council has nearly twice the on-site parking provision for same numbers of staff and pupils.

**Drainage:** Following criticism of the plans the applicants submitted further drainage proposals following the formal end of the consultation – these acknowledge the plans will see periodic overspill of water across the Lower Luton Road towards the ford but claim it is at an acceptable level.

**Archaeology:** Material published in early January includes a report from HCC's own Historic built environment department, which highlights that despite their attempts to provide an acceptable preservation of the archaeological interests found in site investigations (interests that were contrary to expectations of the applicants expressed at their exhibitions), the applicants have twice failed to make adequate plans and have since indicated that they do not wish to discuss the preservation requirements further until a planning determination is made. In essence the Applicants appear to have decided to take a chance on conditions being imposed and that there is a greater chance of further mitigating these into lesser conditions during any development. With many nationally acknowledged experts rating preliminary finds as highly significant, and the discovery of archaeological material in nearly half the trial trenches on the site, the apparently cavalier attitude of the developers is both unacceptable in the context of the Archaeology and the development as a whole.

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