
LOCAL AREAS: WHITTON AND HEATHFIELD

Para **New paragraph following paragraph 12.61**
Modification ref: **D/LA/25**

Issue

Widening of the bridge at Nelson Bridge Road will only encourage traffic to travel at higher speeds. Traffic calming or signals on the bridge approaches may help.

Inspector's appraisal and conclusion

11.251. This matter was addressed in paragraph 12.413 of the previous Inspector's Report. In the absence of any further more compelling evidence I consider the modification is an appropriate response.

RECOMMENDATION

11.252. I recommend that the UDP be modified by D/LA/25.

Proposal:	W15	Heathfield Schools and Recreation Ground
Modification refs:	D/PMAP/12	Whitton
Further modifications ref:	D/W15/1	D/PMAP/13
Further modifications ref:	D/W15/2	D/PMAP/21

Inspector's note

Proposal W15 is described in D/W15/1 as the rebuilding of the existing Heathfield Infants and Junior Schools, the building of a new secondary school, improvements to Heathfield recreation ground to become dual use with school and public playing fields, and the retention of the north-south footpath link. D/W15/2 supersedes D/W15/1, changing its title to *Heathfield Schools and Recreation Ground (part)*. The amended justification also states that the use of the Recreation Ground would not preclude public use of and access to the park.

That change also deletes the UDP Proposal Map D/PMAP/12 and restores MOL status to the whole of the existing recreation ground. Two replacements are proposed. D/PMAP/13 removes OOLTI status from a tract of land in the southern corner of the existing schools site and D/PMAP/21 removes the POS notation from an almost rectangular area of the Recreation Ground adjoining the north west boundary of the existing school site.

The secondary school element of the Proposal arises from the general issues about secondary education in the Borough to which I refer under Policy CCE8 in respect of the need for school places and buildings. I do not pursue that issue in detail here.

Issues

- (i) The proposed development is not needed; the site is not suitable to accommodate it; and in any case no detailed proposal has been produced.
- (ii) The loss of MOL is unacceptable.

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- (iii) The loss of public use of open land is unjustifiable and contradicts Policy ENV1.
 - (iv) The Proposal does not state the nature of the proposed dual use.
 - (v) Re-siting of the Powdermill Lane-Cobbett Road footpath so that a fence on the school boundary would run alongside it would be unacceptable.
 - (vi) The OOLTI on the schools site is an important green space in the urban fabric and should not be lost.
 - (vii) The capacity of the road system is inadequate to accommodate the increased traffic congestion.
 - (viii) Local residents would suffer visual intrusion and disturbance.

Inspector's appraisal and conclusions

The proposed development is not needed; the site is not suitable to accommodate it; and in any case no detailed proposal has been produced.

11.253. The proposal arises from the LEA's review of school provision and in particular the educational policy to enhance secondary education in the Borough's schools, together with the requirement to rebuild Whitton School. The current Heathfield schools site accommodates Heathfield Infant and Junior Schools with a combined capacity of about 600 pupils. I am inclined to agree with the Council that the existing range of single storey buildings on the site is not an effective use of space nor an efficient use of energy, the more so in the light of the borough-wide need to provide for changing demand in education making better use of sites on Council ownership.

11.254. Various objectors prefer any new school to be at the site of Whitton School, about 500m distant, which has a sports specialism. Buildings at that school are in poor condition. It has suffered under-subscription in recent years on account of its unattractive physical environment and outdated accommodation and now requires rebuilding to modern standards. Its catchment area is primarily Whitton with some pupils coming from Twickenham and Hounslow.

11.255. I accept that the Proposal is the result of an investigation of possible sites with regard to location, ownership, access, size, and relationship to other schools, bearing in mind that lack of resources would make the acquisition of private land prohibitive and the investigation of unavailable sites would be abortive. In my view the indicative plan for a 600 place secondary school produced by the LEA shows that this would not be a cramped site but would meet DfES space requirements. While I understand the objectors' preference to retain the present range of buildings they are not in my opinion a satisfactory use of the site in the light of a scarcity of land for schools.

11.256. The LEA's indicative plan shows that the Heathfield site is adequate to accommodate both new junior and secondary schools without involving building on MOL or POS, matters I refer to in detail below. Higher quality buildings dependent on improved infrastructure and available for community use would in my view bring a net social benefit to the locality.

11.257. Although reference is made by objectors to the undesirability of mixing all age groups on one site no professional evidence on that has been produced. It is challenged by the Council on the ground that it presents no problems. Though the Council's response rests on educational advice I draw no conclusion from this as it appears to me to concern educational theory rather than being a primarily town planning issue.

The loss of MOL is unacceptable.

11.258. D/W15/2 withdraws the de-designation of the Recreation Ground from MOL. In those circumstances I consider the LPA has met the objections relating to that issue which arose from the original Proposal W15 and D/MAP/21. However, not only does the Proposal as revised not reduce the area of MOL but also does not embrace any building upon it. As PPG 2 explains, sports and recreational activity are appropriate. I therefore support the retention of the MOL by the further

proposed modification D/W15/2 . On the matter of the proposed fencing of the footpath, which I refer to below, I am satisfied that this would not affect the MOL designation.

11.259. However, it appears to me there is a degree of confusion on the part of the public with regard to this issue. MOL is not a designation invariably coincident with public access and care is needed to avoid confusing it with public open space. Hence I treat the objections as effectively referring to POS, both in respect of the proposed transfer of part of Heathfield Recreation Ground to the schools' curtilage and the objectors' perceived implications for the public use of the remainder.

The loss of public use of open land is unjustifiable and contradicts Policy ENV1.

11.260. Part of the original area of Heathfield Recreation Ground was alienated when the schools were built in the early post-war era. It now consists of a broadly triangular level grassed area bounded by trees and overlooked by houses in Powdermill lane and Cobbett Road. Its northern boundary adjoins a cemetery and private open land. Its eastern boundary adjoins the school curtilage and the public footpath from Powdermill Lane to Cobbett Road is within its southeastern boundary.

11.2561. Multivariate analysis shows the locality to be not only the most relatively deprived area in the Borough but also deprived in terms of Greater London criteria. The fact that the community is healthier than might be expected is ascribed in part by objectors to the existence of the Recreation Ground that provides in particular a community facility for the elderly and less mobile. Objectors consider that by facilitating school use the Proposal would reduce the availability of the site for public use to an unacceptable degree.

11.262. In the objectors' view the Recreation Ground is a safe and secure play place, being well overlooked. They point out that the perception of it as a large uninterrupted open space is deceptive; it only accommodates 3 soccer pitches but the Proposal would reduce that number. It is asserted that the site is well used by the general public and the removal of even part of it from public use would, contrary to Policies ENV1 and ENV15, seriously degrade the locality's outdoor public recreational facilities.

11.263. However, as to the truncation of the Recreation Ground by including part of it in the schools curtilage I note that 2 ha would remain, constituting about 82% of the area. In terms of the standard set in Para 5.61 regarding Policy ENV12 of the deposit UDP Review Modifications I consider the proposed remaining 2 ha area does not signify deficiency of public open space in the locality. Nevertheless it does mean that public access to the POS would be restricted to the extent that pitches were in school use. In that connection, however, I bear in mind that all but the youngest children would be in school at such times and there would still be room in the remaining area for such casual users as walkers and dog exercisers. The whole of the 2 ha area would remain publicly accessible during summer evenings, at weekends, and during school holidays. Given the Council's intention to proceed with a PFI contract for both the building works and the maintenance of the schools site the public access area would enjoy a higher standard of upkeep than is currently stated to be the case.

The Proposal does not state the nature of the proposed dual use.

11.264. In identifying dual use as a source of conflict between the needs of schools and the wider public Mr Hern cites 3 scenarios. The first embraces evening and weekend use of pitches and sports halls, administered by a 'community' team. The second is the use of public pitches for school games, generally within large areas of open space. Thirdly, public pitches may be fenced off, possibly to the 2m 'permitted development' height, to be used exclusively by schools during school hours but otherwise publicly inaccessible. He instances numerous examples of approaches to dual use in the case of schools in West London, where the security of school buildings or such risks to the health of pupils playing on public open space as dog faeces or discarded drug syringes are contentious issues. However, in spite of the potential risks which could be inherent in dual use I heard no evidence borne of local experience that would support the denial of such use at Heathfield Recreation Ground. Furthermore, in

the context of the widespread prevalence of various forms of dual use in West London I do not support Mr Hern's contention that it would become inappropriate to regard the Recreation Ground as public open space.

Re-siting of the Powdermill Lane-Cobbett Road footpath so that a fence on the school boundary would run alongside it would be unacceptable.

11.265. The incorporation of a tract of the Recreation Ground into the school site as proposed would involve the displacement of the footpath to an alternative southward alignment. Mr Hern points out that the protection of the health and safety of school staff and pupils from unlawful activity is a legitimate reason for the diversion of a public right of way. In my view the diversion in itself would not unacceptably harm the openness of the MOL. However, the specification of appropriate fencing material needed to make secure the school site would require careful specification if a strong impression of visual exclusion were to be avoided.

The OOLTI on the schools site is an important green space in the urban fabric and should not be lost.

11.266. In the absence of detailed development proposals it is claimed inappropriate to delete the OOLTI designation from the site. Regarding its designation I am not convinced that the location of this tract of OOLTI is so important that its retention should prejudice consideration of the schools site as a whole. It is clearly consistent with the advice in PPG12 that it should be considered in the UDP Modifications rather than as a subsequent departure from the Plan requiring reference to ODPM and GO London when detailed proposals come forward. In any case the indicative plan shows how, notwithstanding the greater volume of building on the site, it would be possible to retain a substantial area facing Powdermill Lane free of buildings and contiguous with the open land of the extended school site that is currently part of the Recreation Ground.

The capacity of the road system is inadequate to accommodate the increased traffic congestion.

11.267. Objectors assert that peak hour vehicle queues would lengthen at major road intersections in the locality. However, I note firstly that the Proposal is supported by the Highways Department of the Council and secondly that there are relatively good bus services on routes 110 and H22. A School Travel Plan for secondary pupils would be integral with any development of the significance of the Proposal. So far as concerns immediate physical access to the site I consider traffic management measures for children crossing Powdermill Lane would be essential but that is a matter for a detailed planning application.

Local residents would suffer visual intrusion and disturbance.

11.268. On visual intrusion as claimed by objectors to multi-storey buildings I am satisfied that so far as concerns the visual impact of any new structures it would be possible to accommodate buildings up to 3 storeys in height on the site while maintaining distances from nearby dwellings that are conventionally and commonly imposed by detailed planning control in the interest of residential amenity. Indeed, well-designed 3 storey buildings could provide a modestly relieving and welcome vertical accent in a level, low-built suburban landscape.

11.269. In my view any scheme should employ the best practical means of avoiding 2 kinds of likely disturbance. In the immediate period of construction on the site building operations would need to be carefully regulated to avoid excessive disturbance to the existing schools, particularly avoiding heavy goods vehicle movements at times of peak traffic. I am not persuaded that total objection to that kind of disturbance is supportable as a reason to prevent development as it could be adduced to prevent any building activity at existing school sites. In the interests of health and safety mitigation measures clearly require close supervision.

11.270. In the longer term with new buildings in use there would be more pupils entering and leaving the site at the beginning and end of school sessions. In that respect I am concerned in the immediately neighbouring residents' interest that the LPA's indicative plan shows the secondary school access to the north of the site involving both pedestrian and vehicular traffic on 3 minor narrow residential roads to gain access to either Powdermill Lane or Hospital Bridge Road. I consider it would be preferable to avoid that arrangement.

Summary

11.271. Subject to formal development proposals having regard to the various matters I discuss above in relation to various detailed issues I support the Proposal subject to its further modification by D/W15/2, D/PMA/13, and D/PMA/21.

RECOMMENDATION

11.272. I recommend that the UDP be modified by Proposal W15, subject to its further modification by D/W15/2, D/PMA/13, and D/PMA/21.