

Following the Committee's instruction of 11 May, a meeting was held with the senior highways officer and the development management area team leader to discuss the highway consultation response for the Forest and Sandridge Primary School planning application (PL/2021/06702) – which inter alia obtained permission for four additional classrooms and associated works.

Members will recall that highway related concerns were raised against the application by the local ward member, Melksham Town Council and members of the public, related to traffic congestion created at school drop off and collection times and that there was some criticism of the highway authority in terms of their assessment of the transport assessment which had been commissioned by the school.

In order to clarify matters, the transport assessment was a piece of work undertaken by highway consultants (Faithful and Gould) on behalf of the school and to support the planning application – it was not produced by the Council. It was however appraised in detail by the highway officer and was afforded material weight in the planning balance.

As part of his review, the Council's highway engineer confirmed to me that he visited the site during the course of the application consultation on three occasions. There was also a visit undertaken as part of the pre-app process. One of the visits coincided with school holidays, but the other occasions were arranged for when the school was open, and observations were made about the noted and associated highway congestion.

It is fully accepted that last year during the COVID pandemic, the school was most likely not at full capacity through a combination of covid absence, people self-isolating and home working. However, due regard was given to previous observations and site visits and acknowledged issues relating to school drop off and collection times.

This ultimately led to waiting and parking restrictions being introduced along Cranesbill Road and the planning application opened up a discussion with the school about the need for and benefits of promoting a school travel plan to encourage parents to reduce the use of private motor vehicle.

The highway officer repeated his conclusion that the 4-classroom development to accommodate an additional 120 pupils and 6 extra car parking spaces was acceptable in highway impact terms and that there was no necessity to require any further highway works, including the provision of new pedestrian crossings.

That said, the highway officer reinforced the importance of delivering a robust school travel plan and adhere to the measures imposed by the planning permission. It also goes without saying that parents have an individual responsibility to avoid creating highway conflicts and should abide by the waiting restrictions in place along Cranesbill Road.

Around the time of the school application being considered at committee, communities gained more direct say in terms of raising requests to deliver new community highway projects through the newly formed Local Highway and Footway Improvement Groups (formerly known as Community Area Transport Groups (CATGs)).

From my discussion with the senior highways officer, and my fresh review of the material highway considerations relative to the aforementioned application, committee members can be assured that the planning team and the committee received a comprehensive and appropriate highway advice on the school application that was reported to and was approved at the May area committee

Kenny Green – Development Management Area Team Leader