

Date of Meeting	05 June 2014
Application Number	14/02863/FUL
Site Address	St John`s Marlborough, Granham Hill, Marlborough SN8 4AX
Proposal	Proposed new 2 storey sixth form study centre building
Applicant	Mrs Karen Davis, St John`s School
Town Council	MARLBOROUGH
Division	MARLBOROUGH WEST
Grid Ref	418916 168400
Type of application	Full Planning
Case Officer	Peter Horton

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

The application has been called to committee at the request of the division member, Cllr Nicholas Fogg.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the recommendation that the application be approved.

2. Report Summary

The main issues to consider are whether the building is of an appropriate design, whether it would adversely impact the amenity of the adjoining property, whether there would be adverse traffic impacts and whether there would be any impacts on the bat colonies resident in the nearby disused railway tunnel.

3. Site Description

St John`s International Academy is located on the south western edge of Marlborough. It is accessed via a long driveway off Granham Hill, and adjoins residential properties in Upper Church Fields. It is separated from the end property in Upper Church Fields, "The Bungalow", by a tall grassed bund and a line of planting. To the south (front) of the school buildings is a large flat area on which some mobile classrooms are situated and on which a future astro pitch is planned to be located. This flat area is at a much lower level (around 3.4m) than the existing school buildings.



The school is the only high performing provider of sixth form education within a 12 mile radius of Marlborough. It has a net capacity of 1620, but currently 1700 students are on roll, of which 380 are in the sixth form. The school is full and has no capacity to accommodate additional students. The school has no specifically designated classrooms for sixth form lessons. Yet sixth form numbers are growing – by 37% since 2008/09. The current capacity issues for the sixth form are such that the school is unable to accommodate the year 11s who wish to stay on and study – last year 15% of year 11 students who wished to stay at St Johns were unable to secure a place.

4. Planning History

- K/43518/O Demolition of existing buildings and construction of new School; New access onto A345 Granham Hill; associated car parking; Sports Hall and community facilities.
- K/75/0029 Full planning permission for additional mobile hatted classroom block
- K/50505/RM Construction of new school, associated car parks, access roadway and playing fields
- K/58587/F Temporary provision of mobile classrooms comprising 2 no. relocated units and 3 no. hired units providing 8 no. teaching spaces and ancillary accommodation
- K/58992/F Construction of 2 no. field accesses from school access road
- K/59634/F Construction of 2 no. field accesses from school access road
- E/10/0359/FUL Floodlighting to previously consented artificial turf pitch.

5. The Proposal

The new sixth form building is proposed to be constructed on the flat area of land to the south of the existing school buildings, to be situated between the future astro pitch and the grassed bund. It would provide for an additional 110 sixth form places (not for 200 as claimed by some of the objectors). The building would be 32m long by 12m wide by 8m high (10m high to the top of the vents). It would be of two storeys, with a ground floor and a lower ground floor. Since the site is so much

lower than the road to the front of the existing school, access into the building would be at the upper level. The proposed material finishes would comprise smooth black render for the walls and a dark grey roof. Since the application was first submitted, the applicant has submitted revised plans because of budgetary constraints. This has consequently led to the building being reduced slightly in scale, with the roof lowered in pitch to be almost flat. Furthermore, the high level windows which would face towards “The Bungalow” are now proposed to be obscurely glazed.

Another change is that, following negotiations, the school is now proposing to provide 15 extra car parking spaces. In addition, 15 existing car parking spaces will be made available for car share only.



Front Elevation (far right) in the context of the existing school buildings



Rear Elevation (far left) in the context of the existing school buildings



Side Elevation as viewed from the existing school

6. Planning Policy

Kennet Local Plan - The sites lies just outside the Marlborough Limits of Development in the countryside. It lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB. Relevant local plan policies are PD1 and NR7.

National planning policy is set out in the NPPF. Paragraph 72 states that local planning authorities should “give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools”. Government policy is also set out in the 2011 DCLG Policy Statement ‘Planning for Schools Development’. This states that “the planning system should operate in a positive manner when dealing with proposals for the creation, expansion and alteration of state-funded schools”.

7. Consultations

Marlborough Town Council: Original plans - Whilst welcoming the principle of the development, the Council strongly objects to the application for the following reasons: (a) inadequacy of parking provision and the ensuing parking issues it will create in the surrounding residential area; (b) overlooking of neighbouring properties; (c) will add to the already present traffic flow problems for nearby residents, and; (d) highway safety issues.

Comments on the amended plans showing additional parking spaces are awaited

Savernake Parish Council: No objection.

North Wessex Downs AONB unit: No comments in respect of impact from this development on the wider AONB landscape. Should the Council be minded to approve this application normal planning conditions should be applied in respect of agreeing external materials, landscaping and details of any external lighting (if required).

Wiltshire Council Highways: No objection subject to conditions stating that no occupation shall take place until an approved Travel Plan is accepted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and that the extra parking spaces now proposed to be created shall be provided.

The proposal will bring the total number of sixth form pupils to around 490 and possibly increase the staff numbers by up to an additional 5. To meet current parking standards the proposal should be looking to meet a maximum number of around 126 spaces for staff and pupils for the sixth form requirement of 1 space per 4 students and 2 spaces per 3 staff. However, these are maximum numbers and the parking requirement can be mitigated by a well formed and monitored/enforced Travel Plan. The Council's School Travel Plan advisor is currently in conversation with the school to update the lapsed Travel Plan. Furthermore, it is appreciated that the site is able to accommodate a level of off street parking. However officers do not anticipate seeing a full allocation of off street parking spaces, but would instead ideally be looking to see around 30-40 spaces to be used in conjunction with a car share scheme. If accepted, this will also need to be in conjunction with an active promotion of the use of public transport/cycling and walking for staff and pupils. It is acknowledged that there is a current issue with overspill parking and that the increase in pupil numbers may add to the existing problems, however appropriate mitigation can be provided with an appropriately worded Travel Plan and the provision of the additional 15 parking spaces plus 15 car share spaces that have been proposed.

Wiltshire Council Ecologist: (a) To the south of the application site lies a disused railway line and Marlborough Tunnel, which is an important hibernation site for many species of bat. Although the application will not impact directly on the tunnel and the bats that it supports, it is worth noting that the line of trees flanking the disused railway line, leading to the tunnel, offers a key flight line to a number of bat species commuting to and from the site for hibernation and for mating. It is therefore imperative that no barriers to commuting bats should be introduced into the area,

including light spill onto the tree line along the disused railway line. This would seem improbable given the location and moderate size of the proposed new building, however it is requested that no exterior lighting should be introduced along the south eastern boundary of the access road or of the wider school site to prevent unnecessary impact.

(b) As the new building will be located on the site of existing temporary classrooms, no habitat survey is required. However the developers should be aware that there are several records of slow worms and grass snakes in close proximity to the school site and it would therefore be prudent to engage an ecological clerk of works during the construction phase to ensure that reptiles are not at risk from construction processes.

(c) To further buffer the natural environment from additional building on this site, some habitat enhancement for the benefit of biodiversity should be included in the proposal. An area along the south eastern boundary of the school site could be planted with native trees or shrubs. This would contribute to additional commuting corridors for a range of wildlife species, including birds, bats and other small mammals, and could also provide additional secluded refugia (or refuge) for reptiles, ultimately reducing the indirect impacts of increasing the density of the built environment at this location. The applicant should engage a suitably qualified consultant ecologist to assist with the design and layout of habitat enhancements, to ensure its likely effectiveness and appropriateness within the site.

Wiltshire Council Drainage Engineer: (a) The location is located in flood zone 1 (as shown on the Environment Agency flood maps. (b) The geology of the site is in the area of Nodular Chalk, Seaford Chalk and Newhaven Chalk Formations which could be suitable for surface water infiltration techniques to be used. If the developer were to propose infiltration techniques then this would need to be confirmed by carrying out on site permeability testing to BRE Digest 365. These results would provide confirmation of the infiltration rate and should be agreed by the Council. (c) Wessex Water would advise on the location and capacity of their existing foul and surface water systems in the area for appropriate connection.

8. Publicity

Two representations of support have been received. Their main points can be summarised as follows:

- The proposed facility is badly needed as the school is overcrowded and it would really benefit the sixth form.
- Students who previously had to travel to Swindon or Trowbridge because the courses they wanted to do were not available will now be able to come to St John's.

Individual objections have been received from three local residents. Objections have also been received from the Duck's Meadow Residents Association as well as a 48 signature petition from residents of Ducks Meadow. The main concerns can be summarised as follows:

- No provision has been made for the increased traffic or car parking for a possible further 200 students; if the proposal is approved, there should be a

requirement to provide car parking spaces on the school site for at least 30 vehicles;

- Many sixth formers park their cars in the local roads; and this proposal will result in more doing so;
- Many parents take their children to school via the adjoining residential roads rather than use the main entrance off Granham Hill; the local roads cannot cope with the level of traffic;
- The proposed building will overbear “The Bungalow” and its garden. The first floor windows may be high level ones, but they still overlook the garden and represent a loss of privacy. With large school buildings, a car park and a road already placed to the front of the property, the front garden is unusable – the proposed overbearing two storey structure and associated noise would remove the last area of solace to the rear;
- To preserve the amenity of “The Bungalow”, the building should be single storey only. If a two storey building is essential, it should be placed end-on.

9. Planning Considerations

National planning policy, as expressed in the NPPF, is “*to give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools*”. The important role of St John’s within the local community is acknowledged. Furthermore, the school cannot meet existing and future demand for sixth form places, and hence the principle of expanding sixth form provision in a new building is supported. However the proposal raises a number of key planning issues, particularly in relation to design, neighbour amenity, parking and ecology.

9.1 Design

Overall, the design of the proposed building is acceptable. Whilst officers acknowledge that this is a two-storey form of development, because the building would be set at a lower level than the school and be accessed at the upper level, it would appear as a single storey structure as viewed from the front side elevation. The building is not considered excessive in size and by having virtually a flat roof, the new building would not be visually dominant; and instead, would appear subservient to the existing main school buildings. The materials would match the existing buildings and officers submit that it would not have an adverse impact on the scenic quality of the AONB as it does not encroach into the open countryside and would be read against the backdrop of the existing school buildings.

9.2 Neighbour Amenity

The proposed building would be situated 19m from the garden boundary of “The Bungalow” and 23m from the side elevation of the property itself. In between the respective buildings is a grassed bund with mature planting beyond. It is acknowledged that the setting of the property has already been affected by the presence of the existing school building to the front of it, and that the proposed sixth form building would be present to the side of it. However the separation distance is such that the proposed 8m high building would not overbear the rear garden of “The Bungalow”. Furthermore, the proposed first floor facing windows are to be both high level and obscurely glazed, and therefore, there would be no overlooking. Officers appreciate that in approving the proposal it would result in school buildings being present on two sides of the property, but as reported, there would not actually be any

material harm to the amenities of its occupiers in terms of overbearing impact or overlooking to warrant a refusal.

9.3 Highway Impacts

It is firstly important to recognise that sixth form students can potentially drive themselves to school if they pass their driving test and acquire a car. The school has no jurisdiction to ban students from having a car – this is an individual or family decision. However, the school does actually discourage the use of personal transport and has had up until now a policy of no sixth form parking within the school site. Officers have been advised that of the current 380 sixth form students only 25 students regularly drive to school. A further 15 students drive 1-2 days per week. If the same proportion of the proposed extra 110 students were to drive, the new building would generate around an additional 7 regular and 4 occasional drivers.

Students are presumed to be parking within the surrounding residential streets. Whilst this is not illegal, it is less than satisfactory. However the Council's highway officers have looked into the matter and have concluded that although some on-street parking emanates from the school, the incidence of parking is not much lower at weekends, which suggests that the majority of the parking is either from the town centre or local residents. If on-street parking on residential roads becomes a problem in terms of accessibility for service and emergency vehicles, it could be addressed (outside of the planning system) by means of waiting restrictions.

The school's current Travel Plan is out of date. However the Council's school Travel Plan advisor is currently in active discussions with the school to update it. Staff and student surveys will be undertaken in September 2014 when years 11 and 13 will next be in school. It is planned for the Travel Plan to be agreed by March 2015.

The Council's highway officers raise no objection to the proposal to expand sixth form places provided that a condition is attached to any planning permission stating that no occupation takes place until an approved Travel Plan is accepted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Furthermore, a condition is required to ensure that the additional 15 parking spaces plus 15 car share spaces have been provided.

Highway officers acknowledge that there is a current issue with overspill parking and that the increase in pupil numbers may add to existing problems but they feel that with an appropriately worded monitored and enforced Travel Plan and the provision of the additional off street parking, the issues can be mitigated.

9.4 Ecology

To the south of the application site lies the disused railway line and Marlborough Tunnel, which is an important hibernation site for many species of bat. Although the proposal would not impact directly on the tunnel and the bats that it supports, it is imperative that no barriers to commuting bats should be introduced into the area, including light spill onto the tree line along the disused railway line. This would seem improbable given the location and moderate size of the proposed new building. However a condition is required to ensure no exterior lighting is introduced, to prevent any unnecessary impact.

The NPPF states that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity and should encourage opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments. Hence to further buffer the natural environment from additional building on this site, some habitat enhancement for the benefit of biodiversity should be included in the proposal and should be required by an appropriate condition. For instance, an area along the south eastern boundary of the school site could be planted with native trees or shrubs. This would contribute to additional commuting corridors for a range of wildlife species, including birds, bats and other small mammals, and could also provide additional secluded refugia (refuge) for reptiles, ultimately reducing the indirect impacts of increasing the density of the built environment at this location.

10. Conclusion

Officers consider that the design of the proposed building is acceptable and it would have no adverse visual impact within the AONB. The distance of the building from “The Bungalow”, in combination with the lack of overlooking windows, is such that there would be no material harm to the amenities of that property. Whilst the proposal would inevitably result in more sixth formers driving to the school, no objection is raised to the proposal provided that a condition is attached to any planning permission stating that no occupation takes place until an approved Travel Plan is accepted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and until the proposed additional parking spaces are provided. The proposal is unlikely to directly impact local wildlife. However some habitat enhancement for the benefit of biodiversity should be included in the proposal and should be secured by an appropriate condition.

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be granted, subject to the following conditions:

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

REASON: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2 No development shall commence on site until details of the materials to be used for the external walls and roofs have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity and the character and appearance of the area.

- 3 No part of the development hereby approved shall be first brought into use until a Green Travel Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Travel Plan shall include details of implementation and monitoring and shall be implemented in accordance with these agreed details. The results of the implementation and monitoring shall be made available to the Local Planning Authority on request,

together with any changes to the plan arising from those results.

REASON: In the interests of road safety and reducing vehicular traffic to the development.

- 4 No part of the development hereby approved shall be first brought into use until the additional parking areas shown on the approved plans have been laid out in accordance with the approved details. These areas shall be maintained and remain available for this use at all times thereafter.

REASON: To ensure that adequate provision is made for parking within the site in the interests of highway safety.

- 5 Before the development hereby permitted is first occupied the first floor high level windows in the rear elevation shall be glazed with obscure glass only and the windows shall be permanently maintained with obscure glazing in perpetuity.

REASON: In the interests of residential amenity and privacy.

- 6 No development shall commence on site until a drawing showing proposed habitat enhancements within the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The approved enhancements shall be carried out in the first planting season following the first occupation of the new building.

REASON: In the interest of conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of the site.

- 7 No exterior lighting shall be introduced to light the building.

REASON: In order not to interfere with the bat populations which use the tree line along the adjacent disused railway line.

- 8 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 3749/102A, 3749/103B, 3749/104B, 3749/105A and 3749/106B, received 28/04/14 and 3749/101C, 3749/303A, 3749/304A and 3749/305B received 16/05/14

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

- 9 **INFORMATIVE TO THE APPLICANT:**
The applicant should be aware that there are several records of slow worms and grass snakes in close proximity to the school site and it would therefore be prudent to engage an ecological clerk of works during the construction phase to ensure that reptiles are not at risk from construction processes.

- 10 **INFORMATIVE TO THE APPLICANT:**
The applicant should engage a suitably qualified consultant ecologist to assist with the design and layout of the habitat enhancements required by condition no. 6, to ensure its likely effectiveness and appropriateness within the site.

Appendices:

Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report: