

Thames Valley School Reading First Floor Extension for The National Autistic Society Planning Statement

Planning Statement for the proposed full planning application for **Ground and first floor extensions to Thames Valley School, revised drop off parking and additional parking spaces for cars and motor bikes. ("the application")**

On Behalf of The National Autistic Society Academies Trust

DOCUMENT 117 01 10

Job No: 117 01

Prepared by

Simul Consultants Ltd and Mark Ellerby Architects

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01 INTRODUCTION

01.1 Simul Consultants Ltd has been appointed by The The National Autistic Society Academies Trust (NAS) to prepare a supporting Planning Statement for the proposed full planning application for **Ground and first floor extensions to Thames Valley School, revised drop off parking and additional parking spaces for cars and motor bikes. ("the Application")**.

Address: Thames Valley School Conwy Close Tilehurst RG30 4BZ

NGR: 467613 173076

Application Site Area: 0.7533 Ha. Additional building floorspace 733 sm

Local Authority: Reading Borough Council

01.2 The Site Location Plan **drawing 117 01 01** is included with the application supporting documents along with additional site plans and supporting documents.

01.3 Pre-application discussions in relation to the proposed development have taken place between the NAS, the school and Reading Borough Council Planning and Transportation Departments. In additional community consultation has taken place. This is explained at **Section 6**.

01.4 The application is submitted by the National Autistic Society (NAS) as joint sponsor in association with Thames Valley School. The proposals are related to additional school facilities to improve and expand the teaching blocks and staff areas.

01.5 In addition to this Planning Statement the application is also accompanied by the documents and drawings. The complete submission includes:

Documents:

- Application Form
- Community Infrastructure Levy questionnaire (A4 document)
- 117 01 10 Planning Statement (A4 document)
- 2016 16 PL08 Design and Access Statement (A4 document) with
- 2016 16 PL09 Sustainability and Energy Statement (A4 document)
- IT 1288TA Transport Statement and Travel Plan (A4 document)
- 117 01 11 Arboricultural Impact & Method Statement (A4 document)
- CIL Questions

Drawings:

- 2016 16PL 01 Ground Floor Layout as Existing (1:100 @ A1; 1:200 @ A3)
- 2016 16PL 02 First Floor Layout as Existing (1:100 @ A1; 1:200 @ A3)
- 2016 16PL 03 Elevations as Existing (1:100 @ A1; 1:200 @ A3)
- 2016 16PL 04A Elevations as Proposed (1:100 @ A1; 1:200 @ A3)
- 2016 16PL 05A Sections as Proposed (1:100 @ A1; 1:200 @ A3)
- 2016 16PL 06A Ground Floor Layout as Proposed (1:100 @ A1; 1:200 @ A3)
- 2016 16PL 07A First Floor Layout as Proposed (1:100 @ A1; 1:200 @ A3)
- 2016 16PL 07A First Floor Layout as Proposed (1:100 @ A1; 1:200 @ A3)
- 2016 16PL 10A Roof Plan Layout as Proposed (1:100 @ A1; 1:200 @ A3)
- 117 01 20 rev04 Site Layout Phase 1 (1: 200 @ A1; 1:400 @ A3)
- 117 01 01 Location Plan (1:1250 @ A4)

All of these documents must be read together.

02 A SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSALS

02.1 Thames Valley School is a special school for students with an autistic spectrum condition. Pupils are often high functioning with a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome.

02.2 The school opened as a free school in September 2013, following a successful application by The National Autistic Society Academies Trust (NAS). The school is sponsored by the National Autistic Society Academies Trust. The trust oversees two special free schools, including Thames Valley, as well as a number of independent special schools. The school is now well established catering for a mixed 5-16 age range.

02.3 The school currently has an internal area of approximately 1,649m² and accommodates around 50 pupils aged 5 – 16 years and 43.5 full time equivalent members of staff, excluding visiting therapists, education psychologists and volunteers. The proposed 750 m² first floor extension to the existing school would accommodate an additional 30 students and 15 members of staff.

02.4 The school has an excellent reputation and attracts a high number of pupil applicants and has therefore embarked on this Phase 1 project to increase classrooms and student numbers by extending the first floor.

02.5 The NAS have also explored the feasibility and concepts relating to two future phases of expansion. Phase 1 being subject of this planning application for the construction of 752 sm gross internal area on the first floor. This would expect to add capacity for 30 new students and 15 new staff members. A second future phase for a the 6th form vocational skills block was looked at for 30 students and 20 staff. The work on phase 2 has not been advanced and does not form part of this application. However, both the transport assessment and scoping of the internal arrangements has taken into account the possible future phase 2 concept in the design and site layout.

02.6 The planning proposals have been subject to internal consultant with staff Governors, parents and students and the internal layout and facilities respond to observations and needs. External public consultation has also taken place during July and August 2017. In addition a pre-planning consultation took place with Reading Borough Council including the Highway Department. (see **Section 6**)

02.7 A transport assessment has been undertaken and on site staff parking numbers increased by 16 and visitor and drop off capacity increased. Due to site constraints 8 staff parking spaces are created on the west side with access off Dunsford Road.

02.8 The buildings are constructed from a specialist very low energy, sustainable, timber frame system and the external appearance and materials reflect the original construction. The building is largely clad in an external timber cladding and part white render as existing. That part of the roof visible above the flat roof parapet will be finished in a mid grey zinc "Alkorplan" or similar standing seam finish. The roof cladding material enables low profile and lower height; clean lines and simplicity.

02.9 The design philosophy is to provide a distinctive, but in time muted building and connections with the existing previous cladding and white rendered first floor. See the **Design and Access Statement 2016 16 PL08** provides the detailed lists of materials, explanation and design justification.

02.10 As far as possible energy saving and sustainability are taken account of; but within the constraints of the existing energy systems incorporated in the construction in 2013. The mechanical and electricity systems will be placed within the existing plant room . For further details see the **Sustainability Statement** (document ref **2016 16 PL09**)

02.11 As this is a first floor construction and ground infill there is no landscaping treatment. There is an area of existing trees to the west side which are protected by

tree preservation order (**Council ref 33/13**). The additional parking off Dunsford Road will be sited close to these trees but on existing hard bitmac surface which was formerly the car park of the earlier school. The construction access proposed off Dunsford Road will also be through some of these trees (see drawing **117 01 20 rev04** Site Layout Phase 1). A Tree Survey has been undertaken which specifies the tree works required and the root protection areas. See **Tree Survey and Plans**.

02.12 The NAS has approached local residents and other interested groups regarding the proposals and there is on-going consultation with the Reading Borough Council Education Department and local ward Councillors. See **Section 6** for details of the consultation work carried out.

02.13 The proposal to expand the existing school and to meet the needs of the community and the wider geographical catchment area is considered to comply with both national and local core planning policies.

02.14 Thames Valley School is not within any conservation area nor special landscape or biodiversity designation. The transport assessment also demonstrates that the slight increase in traffic generation is within the acceptable limits of the local road capacity.

03 PLANNING HISTORY

03.1 Thames Valley School was granted full permission (ref **13/00254/FUL**) on 26th April 2013.

The application site formed part of the former Meadway School site which closed in 2001. The application was submitted with a comprehensive range of supporting documents including a transport assessment, energy report, landscaping, ecology and environmental assessment. The construction work commenced in May 2013 and the school opened in September 2013.

The application was considered to be acceptable with regards to both environmental and highway matters and met the Council's planning policy constraints.

04 LOCAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

04.1 The school campus is situated within the existing built up settlement limits of Reading as defined in the **Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy** (RBCS) 2008 Alteration Adopted 2015. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to the proposal:

04.2 **Policy CS1 Sustainable Construction and Design** in the RBCS requires:

Proposals for new development, including the construction of new buildings and the redevelopment and refurbishment of existing building stock, will be acceptable where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources appropriately, efficiently and with care and take account of the effects of climate change.

The existing school was pre-assessed to be built to BREEAM “very good” rating. The current proposals intend to use a bespoke assessment to achieve comparable rating to the existing school and to comply with Policy CS1, the Councils Sustainable Design and Construction SPD and CS2 (waste minimization). The details are contained in the supporting document **2016 16 PL09 Sustainability and Energy Statement**.

04.3 **Policy CS4 Accessibility and the Intensity of Development**. This states (inter alia) that:

The scale and density of development within the Borough will be related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities. Sites will be assessed in terms of their level of accessibility.....

The proposal adds a small quantum of pupils totaling 30 students and up to 15 staff. A detailed Transport Assessment and a Travel Plan have been prepared to support the proposals and these evaluate the opportunities for choice of transport modes and accessibility of the site. The conclusion reached is that the proposal to expand the NAS Thames Valley school off Conwy Close should be regarded as acceptable from a highways and transportation perspective. The proposals contain cycle and motor bike facilities as well as meeting the Council's parking requirements.

04.4 The proposed building is considered an “extension” to the school in both its function and uses. The school extension responds to expansion to meet increasing pupil and parent demands within the area.

04.5 The other RBCS policies which are relevant to the proposal are:

- CS 3 Social Inclusion and Diversity
- CS 5 Inclusive Access
- CS 6 Settlement Boundary
- CS 7 Design and the Public Realm
- CS 9 Infrastructure, Services, Resources and Amenities
- CS 22 Transport Assessments
- CS 23 Sustainable Travel and Travel Plans
- CS 24 Car/Cycle Parking
- CS 31 Additional and Existing Community Facilities
- CS 34 Pollution and Water Resources
- CS 38 Trees, Hedges and Woodlands

04.6 **Policy CS 3 Social Inclusion and Diversity**. This states :

Development should recognise and take account of the social and cultural diversity of the area in which it is located, and contribute to the enhancement of local distinctiveness. All members of the population should be provided with access to good quality health, education and other social facilities...

Policy CS 5 Inclusive Access states:

All buildings should be located, sited and designed to provide suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily.

Policy CS 31 *Additional and Existing Community Facilities* requires:

Proposals for new, extended or improved community facilities will be acceptable, particularly where this will involve co-location of facilities on a single site. Community facilities should be located where there is a choice of means of travel (including walking and cycling), and in existing centres where possible.

The proposals are directly related to improving appropriate access to specialist education and the building is designed to take account of the needs of pupils and means of access to the site and to the new extension. The extension to the existing school will improve the quality of facilities on the site without adversely impacting on local infrastructure.

There is also a high demand need for this form of educational facility in the local geographical area and it will help meet some of the numerous pressures that Reading currently experiences meeting local educational needs in parts of the Borough.

04.7 **Policy CS 6** *Settlement Boundary*

Policy CS 9 *Infrastructure, Services, Resources and Amenities*

The application proposal relates to a long standing existing school site which was allocated for education and community use during Reading's residential expansion into Tilehurst. The Meadway site contains other educational and leisure facilities including three schools and leisure centre. These form part of the established built up area where development would normally be allowed. The local infrastructure is demonstrated to have sufficient capacity for increased traffic to and from the site using Conwy Close and Dunsfold Road. The development is designed to meet good standards of sustainability.

04.8 Other Policy responses to **CS 1** and **CS 7** *Design and the Public Realm* and considerations regarding siting and design are included in the submitted document **2016 16 PL08 Design and Access Statement** and include:

- High quality sustainable design; and
- No adverse impact on the openness or views into the site.
- Both designer and selected contractor are fully committed to constructing buildings of very low energy and high sustainability and have a proven track record of working with the NAS.

04.9 **Policy CS 22, 23 and 24** *Transport, Travel and Parking* are addressed in the separate Transport Assessment Report and Travel Plan. Which demonstrate suitability of the site to accommodate parking and drop off to meet the highway guidance. A new travel plan is submitted with the application.

04.10 **Policy CS 34** *Pollution and Water Resources*. Along Meadway the northern most section of the application site lies within an Air Quality Management Area. The north boundary trees have some positive benefit on the air quality, but the proposal for a first floor extension is outside the Air Quality Management Area and no special mitigation is required for the building

04.11 **Policy 38** *Trees, Hedges and Woodlands*. An Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) is submitted with the application proposals. Although the development proposal has no direct impact of the existing trees the presence of a TPO and the potential construction process and access may affect the setting of the trees and therefore the health and vitality of the trees have been assessed. Some minor works and construction management are proposed by the Arborist in the AMS in order to protect existing trees including their root systems prior to, during and after the construction process.

In terms of noise and disturbance, this is an extension to an established school. The addition of 30 pupils and up to 15 teachers is not considered a significant increase in activities which would have any appreciable impact arising from the noise of the activity. The design of the building will meet criteria set out in DE Building Bulletin 93 which deals with acoustics and internal qualities. When designing for Special Educational Needs noise is even a greater issue than with normal educational buildings and low reverberation periods and noise attenuation are required.

The application is not accompanied with a construction method statement. However a construction compound is indicated with access from the south of Dunsford Road. It is impractical to mix the school pupil and teacher access at Conwy Close with construction traffic due to potential conflicts and health and safety risk. It is envisaged that construction work will commence during the school summer vacation period in 2019. Details for a construction method statement will be proposed and submitted to the Council following a full working up of the construction design and procurement process.

04.12 **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**. The CIL charging rates and the guidance states that it is not applicable for education development. However, as required by the validation requirements the CIL questionnaire form has been completed and submitted as part of the supporting documents.

05 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

05.1 The National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') was published by the government on 27th March 2012. The NPPF sets a positive role for planning to be a "creative exercise in finding ways to enhance ... the places in which we live." There is an emphasis on enhancing rather than just protecting or maintaining the assets that contribute to sustainability. Whilst there is a clear wish to achieve much-needed growth, all growth is expected to be sustainable.

The Framework confirms that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. (NPPF paragraphs 2 and 11).

The NPPF largely carries forward existing planning policies and protections in a significantly more streamlined and accessible form. It also introduces the presumption in favour of sustainable development and makes adjustments to some specific policies. Paragraph 7 of the NPPF explains the three dimensions to sustainable development – an economic role, a social role and an environmental role. Paragraph 17 sets out 12 principles that planning should achieve.

05.2 Paragraph 72 states that the Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of communities; and local planning authorities should:

- give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools; and
- work with schools promoters to resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.

05.3 In accordance with the above fore mentioned criteria, it is considered that the proposed expansion of Thames Valley School for special educational needs is justified as meeting education requirements in the area and therefore meets the need to expand and alter the school. The design of the extensions has incorporated a sustainable approach and its siting makes best use of existing spaces and areas; and without impacting on adversely residential amenities or the local character.

05.4 The proposal is therefore compliant with the core local planning policies and the requirements of the NPPF in respect of all the relevant topic areas included above. The proposals will bring a range of clear social and environmental benefits, and therefore the proposals represent sustainable development.

06 POSITIVE AND PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

06.1 The NAS and Thames Valley School support its development to meets part of a geographical identified need in the local area.

06.2 The concept schemes were presented to an open event at the school on the afternoon/evening of 18th July 2017.

Flyers were distributed to around 500 dwellings around the school site advising of the drop in displays and mentioning that feedback comments could be received until the end of August 2017. The display and comments form were also uploaded to the TVS web site on 20th July 2017.

4 people dropped into the school to view the display. No written consultation replies were received.

As part of the ongoing consultation there are meetings with the local education officers and Ward Councillors.

06.3 A formal pre-application submission was submitted to Reading Borough Council in January 2017. There have been 2 meetings with the planning case officer and a Design Review presentation in June 2017 to a panel of local Architects. The case officer advice was robust and gave some clear guidance on both the national and local policy guidance and the documentation requirements that must be provided before a formal planning application can be validated and registered.

The main responses received to the pre-application process is as follows:

- The principle to expand the existing school is considered acceptable in policy terms
- Confirmed that the 1st floor extension fits with institutional expansion and the planning Core Strategy Policy 1 supports this as does the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- The freestanding 6th form vocational unit would provide a positive visual presence on Meadway and would meet the policy objectives of the Core Strategy
- To support the planning application the following documentation is required :
 - Stage 1 contamination
 - Desk top heritage assessment
 - BREEAM or equivalent sustainability assessments
 - Noise and disturbance evaluation for impact on Dunsford Road
 - Air pollution- as building is within corridor of poor air quality
 - Transport assessment/travel plan
 - Landscaping and tree report
 - Ecology Stage 1 site assessment
 - Design Statement
- We need to see a clearly set out site appraisal, with constraints so the Council can understand the proposed design and siting

NOTE: At this pre-application stage the concept scheme also included a sixth form vocational unit and which does not now form part of this application for reasons of site acquisition and later phasing. However, the potential for a phase 2 has been taken into account in working through the Transport Assessment to ensure there is capacity within the site should Phase 2 proceed in the future.

07 CONCLUSIONS

07.1 The applicant has carried out a detailed appraisal of the site and has worked through a more detailed concept and phasing of the school expansion.

07.2 The detailed circumstances detailed in section 4 above provide the policy justification for permitting the proposal at Thames Valley School.

07.3 The degree of harm that would occur as a result of the proposal is minimal. Due to the building being set back from the road side it is located away from any traffic air pollution along Meadway. The traffic generation arising from the development will not impact adversely on the local highway network.

07.4 The site is well screened from local public and private viewpoints and would have a negligible or neutral affect on the wider character of the local area.

07.5 The existing the protected trees near the application site are not adversely affected by the proposed construction; and will be protected during the construction phase.

07.6 There are three dimensions to sustainable development as set out in paragraph 7 of the Framework - these roles should be taken as mutually dependent and being afforded equal weight.

An economic role - it is considered that the construction of the classrooms, support offices are required for the school's expansion and educational improvement; and has been identified through the collaborate approach recognised in paragraph 72 of the NPPF. The unit will support the local school economy and deliver necessary school infrastructure,

A social role - it is considered that the proposed development could provide a high quality environment and help meet some of the special education needs and social inclusion for autism in the local area,

An environmental role - the proposal, by delivering a quality designed building would enhance the built and natural environment without creating adverse traffic issues.

As the proposal accords with all of the above roles; the proposal constitutes sustainable development .

07.7 It is considered that the proposal would enable the delivery of a facility which is in demand and meet local educational need. The proposal is within a school of high standards and educational achievement. The location has been identified through a thorough assessment of available schools and has been carefully planned and designed to ensure that it will enhance the quality of education and allow integration within the school. The overall public benefits to widen the choice in education far outweigh any negligible impact.

08 REFERENCE SOURCES

The following resources have been used to inform this report and the analysis:

- The National Autistic Society schools and services
- Ordnance Survey map;
- Vertical Aerial photography;
- Thames Valley School Travel Plan and Community Consultation
- Thames Valley School Ofsted Report 2016
- Thames Valley School as built drawings

Current Planning Policy:

- RBS Local Development Framework, supporting policies and guidance
- Department of Transport Guidance on Transport Assessment, 2007
- Children and Families Act 2014

Design and Project Team for NAS:

- Architect – Mark Ellerby MEA
- Planning- David Stirling Simul Consultants Ltd
- Transport- Justin Bass Intermodal Transportation
- Engineer- Mark Mitchell Structural Solutions
- Arborist- Steve Russell Woodland and Countryside Management
- Fire Consultant- George Wills Accensus Fire Consulting
- Quantity Surveyor –Barrie Marbrow Barlow & Associates