

**Report to District Development Control
Committee**



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report Reference: DEV-024-2015/16

Date of meeting: 20 April 2016

**Subject: Planning Application re: EPF/0144/16 – Land to south east of
Fyfield Road and north of Ongar Leisure Centre, Fyfield Road,
Ongar.**

Responsible Officer: Nigel Richardson (01992 564110)

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Recommendation(s):

**(1) Subject to a referral to the National Planning Casework Unit, this
Council resolves to grant planning permission, subject to the following
conditions:**

**1 The development hereby permitted must be begun not later
than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of
this notice.**

**Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the
Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).**

**2 The development hereby permitted will be completed strictly in
accordance with the approved drawings nos: 01001revP1,
01004revP3, 01005revP6, 01006revP5, 01008revP3, 02001revP6-
Ground floor plan, 02001revP6-First floor plan, 02001revP6-
Roof plan, 02001revP6-Second floor plan, 03001revP6,
03002revP6, 04001revP2, 04001revP6, 07501revP3, 100revP05,
SK-001revP01, 09101-09107 inclusive and specified external
brickwork materials: Ibstock Surrey Cream and Edenhall
Sapphire Blue.**

**Reason: To ensure the proposal is built in accordance with the
approved drawings.**

**3 All ground works, deliveries and/or demolition shall be in
accordance with the submitted Construction Management Plan
(CMP). The CMP shall be adhered to throughout the
construction period.**

**Reason: To ensure that on-street parking of these vehicles in
the adjoining streets does not occur and to ensure that loose
materials and spoil are not brought out onto the highway in the
interests of highway safety.**

4 Prior to the first occupation of the development, the access at

its centre line shall be provided with clear to ground visibility splays with dimensions of 2.4 metres by 50 metres to the north and south, as measured from and along the nearside edge of the carriageway. Such vehicular visibility splays shall be provided before the access is first used by vehicular traffic and retained free of any obstruction in perpetuity.

Reason: To provide adequate inter-visibility between vehicles using the access and those in the existing public highway in the interest of highway safety.

- 5 Prior to first occupation of the development the access and highway works, as shown in principle on Robert West drawing no.100 Rev P05, shall be fully implemented and maintained as such in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety, efficiency and accessibility.

- 6 Prior to the first occupation of the development details of the Cycle parking shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved facility shall be secure, convenient, covered and provided prior to occupation and retained as such in perpetuity.

Reason: To ensure appropriate cycle parking is provided in the interest of highway safety.

- 7 The submitted and revised School Travel Plan shall be adhered to and should be continued to be updated as necessary throughout the life of the school.

Reason: To ensure the proposal is accessible by more sustainable modes of transport such as public transport, cycling and walking.

- 8 There shall be no discharge of surface water onto the Highway.

Reason: To prevent hazards caused by water flowing onto the highway and to avoid the formation of ice on the highway in the interest of highway safety.

- 9 If the gas sub-station will be affected by the development the features with potential for roosting bats should be removed by hand under supervision of a suitably licensed ecologist. The ecologist shall provide written confirmation to EFDC that no bats will be harmed and/or that there are appropriate measures in place to protect bat interest on site.

Reason: In the interests of habitat protection.

- 10 Prior to the commencement of any works to moderate or high bat roost potential trees, dusk and dawn surveys for bats should be undertaken in accordance with guidelines from Natural England (or other relevant body). These should be

submitted to EFDC for approval.

Should the surveys reveal the presence of bats, or their breeding sites or resting places then an appropriate and proportionate detailed mitigation and compensation strategy must be written in accordance with any guidelines available from Natural England (or other relevant body) and submitted to EFDC for approval.

Should a Natural England European Protected Species licence (EPS) be required then this should also be submitted to EFDC. All works shall then proceed in accordance with the approved strategy with any amendments agreed in writing.

Reason: In the interests of habitat protection.

- 11 **Any trees with low bat roost potential, which are scheduled to be impacted by the development, should be soft-felled after inspection of potential roost features under supervision of a suitably licensed ecologist during the active bat season (May to September). If any bats or evidence of bats are found during soft-felling, works should cease until a Natural England (NE) European Protected Species (EPS) Mitigation License can be obtained and submitted to EFDC. If no evidence of bats is found the ecologist will provide written confirmation to EFDC that no bats will be harmed and/or that there are appropriate measures in place to protect bat interest on site.**

Reason: In the interests of habitat protection.

- 12 **A lighting design strategy for bats shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority prior to commencement of development.**
It is recommended that to minimise risk of disturbance to foraging and commuting bats on site, that the development should follow lighting minimisation precautions, including the following;
No works on site should be conducted after sunset and if security lighting is required then this should be kept to a minimal level (as necessary for safety and security)
Post development lighting should be directed away from site boundary vegetation, and in particular, away from the on-site trees with bat roost potential
Installation of lighting columns at the lowest practical height level with box shield fittings will minimise glare and light spillage
Lux level of lamps should be as low as possible and be high pressure sodium (rather than metal halide, or other) with covers made from glass rather than plastic as this minimises the amount of UV light, reducing the attraction effects of lights on insects
Security lights should be set on short timers, and be sensitive to large moving objects only.

Reason: In the interests of habitat protection.

- 13 **The removal of limited amounts of hedgerows, scrub or trees**

or limited groundworks within the wooded area shall be undertaken under supervision of a suitably qualified ecologist, during the active season (April to September). This precautionary method will minimise the risk of harm to any reptiles using these areas for commuting or sheltering. The ecologist will provide written confirmation that no reptiles will be harmed and/or that there are appropriate measures in place to protect reptile interest on site.

Reason: In the interests of habitat protection.

- 14 **No removal of hedgerows, trees or shrubs shall take place between 1st March and 31st August inclusive, unless a competent ecologist has undertaken a careful, detailed check of vegetation for active birds' nests immediately before the vegetation is cleared and provided written confirmation to EFDC that no birds will be harmed and/or that there are appropriate measures in place to protect nesting bird interest on site.**

Reason: In the interests of habitat protection.

- 15 **A great crested newt (GCN) survey shall be undertaken to determine the presence or likely absence of this species in the surrounding area following guidelines from Natural England. If GCNs are found to be present in the surveys pond, a NE EPS Mitigation License will be required prior to any groundwork at the site. The report, and the licence, must be submitted to EFDC for approval prior to works commencing.**

Reason: In the interests of habitat protection.

- 16 **A landscaping enhancement plan should be submitted and approved by EFDC prior to commencement of works. This should include enhancement for wildlife, corridors, foraging areas, native planting, wildflower areas, hibernacula, bat boxes, bird and house martin boxes as detailed in the Phase 1 Habitat survey submitted by James Blake Associates in November 2015.**

Reason: In the interests of habitat promotion.

- 17 **The development permitted by this planning permission shall be carried out in accordance with the approved Flood Risk Assessment 150455/AW/TG Rev 2, the surface water drainage strategy 150455/TG/JB Rev 2, the drainage construction details C163 and the following mitigation measures detailed within the FRA:**

**Limiting the discharge from the school development to 12.1l/s and the discharge from the external car park to 5l/s
Provide attenuation storage for all storm events up to and including the 1:100 year storm event inclusive of climate change.
Provide treatment in line with the approved FRA**

The mitigation measures shall be fully implemented prior to occupation and subsequently in accordance with the timing / phasing arrangements embodied within the scheme, or within any other period as may subsequently be agreed, in writing, by the local planning authority.

Reason: To prevent flooding by ensuring the satisfactory storage of/disposal of surface water from the site and to ensure the effective treatment of surface water runoff to prevent pollution

- 18 **No works shall take place until a scheme to minimise the risk of offsite flooding caused by surface water run-off and groundwater during construction works has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The scheme shall be implemented as approved.**

Reason: The National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 103 states that local planning authorities should ensure flood risk is not increased elsewhere by development. Construction may lead to excess water being discharged from the site. If dewatering takes place to allow for construction to take place below groundwater level, this will cause additional water to be discharged. Furthermore the removal of topsoils during construction may limit the ability of the site to intercept rainfall and may lead to increased runoff rates. To mitigate increased flood risk to the surrounding area during construction there needs to be satisfactory storage of/disposal of surface water and groundwater which needs to be agreed before commencement of the development.

- 19 **No works shall take place until a Maintenance Plan detailing the maintenance arrangements including who is responsible for different elements of the surface water drainage system and the maintenance activities/frequencies, has been submitted to and agreed, in writing, by the Local Planning Authority.**

Reason: To ensure appropriate maintenance arrangements are put in place to enable the surface water drainage system to function as intended to ensure mitigation against flood risk.

- 20 **The applicant or any successor in title must maintain yearly logs of maintenance which should be carried out in accordance with any approved Maintenance Plan. These must be available for inspection upon a request by the Local Planning Authority.**

Reason: To ensure the SuDS are maintained for the lifetime of the development as outlined in any approved Maintenance Plan so that they continue to function as intended to ensure mitigation against flood risk.

- 21 **No development shall take place, including site clearance or other preparatory work, until full details of both hard and soft landscape works (including tree planting) and implementation programme (linked to the development schedule) have been**

submitted to an approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These works shall be carried out as approved. The hard landscaping details shall include, as appropriate, and in addition to details of existing features to be retained: proposed finished levels or contours; means of enclosure; car parking layouts; other minor artefacts and structures, including signs and lighting and functional services above and below ground. The details of soft landscape works shall include plans for planting or establishment by any means and full written specifications and schedules of plants, including species, plant sizes and proposed numbers /densities where appropriate. If within a period of five years from the date of the planting or establishment of any tree, or shrub or plant, that tree, shrub, or plant or any replacement is removed, uprooted or destroyed or dies or becomes seriously damaged or defective another tree or shrub, or plant of the same species and size as that originally planted shall be planted at the same place, unless the Local Planning Authority gives its written consent to any variation.

Reason:- To comply with the duties indicated in Section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 so as to ensure that the details of the development of the landscaping are complementary, and to ensure a satisfactory appearance to the development, in accordance with the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and policies CP2 and LL11 of the adopted Local Plan and Alterations.

22

The development shall be carried out only in accordance with the James Blake Associates Tree Protection Plan, Arboricultural Method Statement and site monitoring schedule unless the Local Planning Authority gives its written consent to any variation.

Reason:- To comply with the duties indicated in Section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and to enable full and proper consideration be given to the impact of the proposed development on existing trees / hedges, so as to safeguard and enhance the visual amenities of the area and to ensure a satisfactory appearance to the development in accordance with the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and policy LL10 of the adopted Local Plan and Alterations.

23

No development shall take place until a Phase 1 Land Contamination investigation has been carried out. A protocol for the investigation shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority before commencement of the Phase 1 investigation. The completed Phase 1 report shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of any necessary Phase 2 investigation. The report shall assess potential risks to present and proposed humans, property including buildings, crops, livestock, pets, woodland and service lines and pipes, adjoining land, groundwaters and

surface waters, ecological systems, archaeological sites and ancient monuments and the investigation must be conducted in accordance with DEFRA and the Environment Agency's "Model Procedures for the Management of Land Contamination, CLR 11", or any subsequent version or additional regulatory guidance.

[Note: This condition must be formally discharged by the Local Planning Authority before the submission of details pursuant to the Phase 2 site investigation condition that follows]

Reason:- To ensure the risks from land contamination to the future users of the land and neighbouring land are minimised, together with those to controlled waters, property and ecological systems, and to ensure that the development can be carried out safely without unacceptable risks to workers, neighbours and other offsite receptors, in accordance with the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and policy RP4 of the adopted Local Plan and Alterations.

24

Should the Phase 1 Land Contamination preliminary risk assessment carried out under the above condition identify the presence of potentially unacceptable risks, no development shall take place until a Phase 2 site investigation has been carried out. A protocol for the investigation shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority before commencement of the Phase 2 investigation. The completed Phase 2 investigation report, together with any necessary outline remediation options, shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to any redevelopment or remediation works being carried out. The report shall assess potential risks to present and proposed humans, property including buildings, crops, livestock, pets, woodland and service lines and pipes, adjoining land, groundwaters and surface waters, ecological systems, archaeological sites and ancient monuments and the investigation must be conducted in accordance with DEFRA and the Environment Agency's "Model Procedures for the Management of Land Contamination, CLR 11", or any subsequent version or additional regulatory guidance.
[Note: This condition must be formally discharged by the Local Planning Authority before the submission of details pursuant to the remediation scheme condition that follows]

Reason:- To ensure the risks from land contamination to the future users of the land and neighbouring land are minimised, together with those to controlled waters, property and ecological systems, and to ensure that the development can be carried out safely without unacceptable risks to workers, neighbours and other offsite receptors, in accordance with the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and policy RP4 of the adopted Local Plan and Alterations.

25

Should Land Contamination Remediation Works be identified

as necessary under the above condition, no development shall take place until a detailed remediation scheme to bring the site to a condition suitable for the intended use has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved remediation scheme unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The remediation scheme must include all works to be undertaken, proposed remediation objectives and remediation criteria, timetable of works and site management procedures and any necessary long term maintenance and monitoring programme. The scheme must ensure that the site will not qualify as contaminated land under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 or any subsequent version, in relation to the intended use of the land after remediation.
[Note: This condition must be formally discharged by the Local Planning Authority before the submission of details pursuant to the verification report condition that follows]

Reason:- To ensure the risks from land contamination to the future users of the land and neighbouring land are minimised, together with those to controlled waters, property and ecological systems, and to ensure that the development can be carried out safely without unacceptable risks to workers, neighbours and other offsite receptors, in accordance with the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and policy RP4 of the adopted Local Plan and Alterations.

26

Following completion of measures identified in the approved remediation scheme and prior to the first use or occupation of the development, a verification report that demonstrates the effectiveness of the remediation carried out must be produced together with any necessary monitoring and maintenance programme and copies of any waste transfer notes relating to exported and imported soils shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval. The approved monitoring and maintenance programme shall be implemented.

Reason:- To ensure the risks from land contamination to the future users of the land and neighbouring land are minimised, together with those to controlled waters, property and ecological systems, and to ensure that the development can be carried out safely without unacceptable risks to workers, neighbours and other offsite receptors, in accordance with the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and policy RP4 of the adopted Local Plan and Alterations.

27

In the event that any evidence of potential contamination is found at any time when carrying out the approved development that was not previously identified in the approved Phase 2 report, it must be reported in writing immediately to the Local Planning Authority. An investigation and risk assessment must be undertaken in accordance with a methodology previously

approved by the Local Planning Authority. Following completion of measures identified in the approved remediation scheme, a verification report must be prepared, which is subject to the approval in writing of the Local Planning Authority in accordance with the immediately above condition.

Reason:- To ensure the risks from land contamination to the future users of the land and neighbouring land are minimised, together with those to controlled waters, property and ecological systems, and to ensure that the development can be carried out safely without unacceptable risks to workers, neighbours and other offsite receptors, in accordance with the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and policy RP4 of the adopted Local Plan and Alterations.

- 28 No preliminary groundwork's of any kind shall take place until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the local planning authority.

Reason: The development has the potential to impact on historic environment assets.

- 29 Prior to the occupation of the development, a scheme for lighting the MUGA pitch shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and carried out as approved thereafter.

Reason: To safeguard the visual amenities of the locality and this part of the Green Belt from visual harm.

- 30 All car parks proposed as part of the development shall be completed and made available for the uses stated on drawing no. 01006 Rev. P5, prior to the first occupation of the school.

Reason: To ensure that there will be no highway safety issues as a result of the parking not being made available.

REPORT DETAIL:

1. *This application is before this Committee since it is "large scale major" application as defined within guidance issued by the DCLG (Pursuant to The Constitution, Part Two, Article 10 (b))*

Description of Site:

Most of this 8.9 hectare site consists of existing playing fields that lie to the north and east of the Ongar Leisure centre. The site also includes a car park adjoining Fyfield Road that is used currently as an overspill car park for the Leisure Centre/Medical Centre. The site lies in the Green Belt but adjoins the north east boundary of the

urban settlement of Ongar. It lies some 400metres north of the Four Wantz roundabout.

Description of proposal:

The school will have 4 forms of entry accommodating up to 800 students and will include a sixth form. It is proposed to erect the school buildings (mainly 3 storey but also one and two stories) on the existing smaller playing pitch (some 1.42 ha) that lies to the north of the leisure centre, and which is separated from the larger playing fields to the east and south by a significant tree line and hedgerow. A sports hall is proposed close to the visitor entrance.

The existing playing fields to the east and south will be retained in open use but will be adapted in part, for example, to provide a floodlit all weather multi use sports pitch.

A new vehicular access for the school will be provided from Fyfield Road into the 'overspill' car park referred to above. This car park will be shared between 26 spaces for the Medical Centre, with the remaining area being used as a parent drop off area and parking for visitors to the school. From this car park a vehicular access, to be barrier controlled, will be provided to a 54 space car park to be used by staff in the school.

Relevant History:

Following a grant of two year planning permission temporary school buildings (for the years 2105 and 2016) have been erected on land next to the leisure centre pending the building of the Academy now applied for. 98 children were initially admitted to this temporary school.

Representations Received:

ONGAR TOWN COUNCIL: - the Council have discussed this application at two meetings and at its second meeting agreed to *'make no objection – but did register concerns about the safety aspect with regard to the associated vehicular access and exit but agreed that in the light of additional information it would withdraw its objection - subject to assurance that Ongar Academy will address those concerns further in the detailed technical design stage which will be shared with members at the appropriate time.'*

NEIGHBOURS – A total of 168 neighbouring properties were notified. 5 letters of objection have been received, but one of these letters states that the objection is made on behalf of 12 properties lying on the opposite side of Fyfield Road. In terms of support some 65 letters/emails have been received from a range of addresses with many stating that there is a need for this facility for children in Ongar and a wider area.

A summary of the objection letters received are as follows: -

38, FYFIELD ROAD – object – the new vehicular access will exacerbate existing safety problems caused by traffic entering and exiting the Medical Centre, and there have been near misses on the zebra crossing outside the centre; protected trees are at risk from the new access; there will be increased noise and light pollution which do not appear to have been addressed; the leisure centre car park is already full with medical staff, patients, leisure centre uses, and a new school will lead to more

congestion; no consideration has been given to buses turning, and vehicles parked in the car park next to Fyfield Road will cause exhaust emissions into our garden

56, THE GABLES – traffic into the Gables has increased recently eg from the temporary school, and the junction with the Fyfield Road can be dangerous. Is it proposed to provide a signalled junction or roundabout to the north to provide access to the school?

59, FYFIELD ROAD ‘and residents of (12 houses at) 57 Fyfield Road to Shelley Lodge’ – object on grounds including the following – vehicles turning right into the school will cause queues on busy road; these queues will block the exit of residents cars from their drives, and these issues will give rise to more accidents; this is a dangerous road, with a blind bend and with other junctions nearby, and many vehicles go faster than the limit of 30mph. A roundabout should instead be provided. Residents of nos. 59 to 63 will have headlights shining into their houses from vehicles leaving the school, especially in winter. Opening up this old access to the former school would be a recipe for traffic chaos and a very poor start to the schools relationships with its neighbours. If the school access has to be on to Fyfield Road it should be 150m to the north. There is no advantage in repositioning an existing crossing further north to outside number 67 Fyfield Road. *This detailed letter of objection was passed to the applicants Highway Consultants who have replied to the points raised – please see below under ‘Access and parking issues’.*

12, FYFIELD ROAD car parking is already an issue in Fyfield Road. While there is parking provided by the school I am concerned it will be insufficient particularly for events such as parents evenings.

ESSEX CC HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY –

The Highway Authority has assessed the above proposal and is satisfied that it is not contrary to National/Local policy and current safety criteria.

The applicant has submitted a robust Transport Assessment of the proposal and the Highway Authority is satisfied with the conclusions. There is a minimal impact on the Four Wantz roundabout to a couple of the arms but they are already, or will be, operating over capacity and any improvements needed at this roundabout would be outside the scope of this planning application. The capacity issues associated with the development will not cause any detriment to highway safety.

The new access has been assessed and subject to a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit and the developer has satisfactorily answered/amended any issues that were raised as a part of this audit. The access was discussed at length before the current application was submitted and all parties, the Highway Authority, EFDC and the applicant, all agreed that a new access was the best approach to avoid issues associated with the use of The Gables as the sole access. The new access has appropriate visibility and geometry for the use and it has been demonstrated that there will be no capacity issues associated with it.

The current overflow car park has been surveyed by the applicant and the results show that again there will be no detriment to highway safety with the loss of spaces from this location.

The Highway Authority has concluded that the impact of the access and the proposed impact of the development on the local and strategic highway network is acceptable and will not be detrimental to highway safety, efficiency or capacity.

From a Highway and Transportation therefore the impact of the proposal is acceptable subject to conditions being applied.

SPORT ENGLAND – have issued a HOLDING OBJECTION since the proposed building of the school and new sports facilities will involve the loss of existing playing fields. Detailed discussions have taken place between Sport England and the applicants, for instance about the nature and use of new sports pitches to be provided, and although an objection may be maintained, Sport England are likely to suggest a number of conditions that should be attached to any consent. If appropriate these conditions will be presented to the Committee.

ESSEX CC SUSTAINABLE DRAINAGE TEAM – Having reviewed the Flood Risk assessment and associated documents which accompanied the planning application, we do not object to the granting of planning permission, subject to the imposition of 4 appropriate conditions.

ESSEX CC HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT OFFICER – the application has the potential to impact on historic environment assets. We therefore recommend that if consent is granted an appropriate condition be added requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological work.

EFDC TREES AND LANDSCAPE SECTION – No objections – subject to conditions being imposed requiring a tree protection plan, and details of hard and soft landscaping, to be submitted and approved. In terms of tree protection satisfactory details have been supplied with the application and hence the normal tree protection condition can be amended. In terms of proposed landscaping a masterplan has been drawn up but details are required of the specie and size of tree/shrub to be planted. The development will necessitate the removal of a relatively small TPO tree at the proposed new entrance to the site. However, compensatory planting has been discussed with the applicants, and a specimen tree (Dawn Redwood) is to be planted as part of the planting plan for the new entrance area.

EFDC COUNTRYCARE – No objections - subject to imposition of conditions requiring details to be submitted of suitable measures to safeguard protected species and their habitats.

EFDC LAND DRAINAGE SECTION - No objections subject to a condition requiring implementation of the submitted flood risk assessment and drainage strategy.

EFDC LAND CONTAMINATION OFFICER – a school is a ‘sensitive’ development and it is recommended that the standard and phased land contamination conditions are imposed.

Policies Applied:

National Planning Policy:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Local Planning Policies of the Adopted Local Plan and Alterations in conformity to the NPPF

- CP1 – Achieving sustainable development objectives
- CP2 – Protecting the Quality of the Rural and Built Environment
- GB2A – Development in the Green Belt
- DBE1 - New buildings
- DBE2 - Neighbouring Amenity
- DBE4 – Design in the Green Belt

RST1 – Recreational, Sporting and Tourist facilities
RST14 – Playing fields
ST1 – Location of development
ST4 – Road Safety
ST6 – Vehicle parking
ST3 – Transport assessments
ST5 – Travel Plans
LL9 – Felling of preserved trees
LL10 – Adequacy of provision for landscape retention
LL11 – Landscaping Schemes
LL3 – Edge of Settlement
NC4 – Protection of Established Habitat

Issues and Considerations:

Background and need for a new secondary school

The proposed site for this Ongar Academy was in fact previously the playing fields and car parking for the former Ongar Comprehensive school which was closed in 1989 - with existing pupils being obliged to travel to schools in towns nearby eg Epping and Brentwood). The original school buildings were converted into the leisure centre that now stands on the adjoining site. The original access to the former school (to what is now the 'overspill car park') was stopped up for pedestrian use only with vehicles coming into the centre complex and overspill car park via The Gables.

In September 2014 approval was given by the Department of Education for the Ongar Academy Trust to set up a free school in Ongar. The school will have a STEM focus (ie Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and it is planned that the new school would be built ready for occupation in September 2017.

Green Belt issues

The proposed site for the school lies on the edge of Ongar in a Green Belt position. The proposal therefore constitutes inappropriate development which can only be granted in 'very special circumstances'. The application is accompanied by an Education Justification, and an Alternative Sites Assessment, so as to illustrate that very special circumstances do exist.

The Education Justification sets out the need for a secondary school in Ongar and some of the main points are:

- 1) Currently children have to take bus journeys of between 20 to 50 minutes duration to other towns at least 10km away. Irrespective of the potential for aggressive behaviour and bullying it is commonly acknowledged that long bus or car journeys on a daily basis can have a detrimental effect on the well being and health of children.
- 2) From September 2016 school bus journeys, principally provided by Essex CC, will no longer be free - other than for the nearest destination school
- 3) The admission of 98 pupils in the first year (2015-2016) to the temporary school provided next to the Leisure Centre confirms that there is a local demand for secondary school places. The Ongar Academy Trust has had interest registered from parents for the period 2016-21 which shows that the Academy will be oversubscribed.
- 4) The population of Essex and Epping Forest is rising and beyond 2019 potential housing allocations in the Local Plan will increase the demand for secondary school places.

- 5) Schools in Epping Forest and Loughton mainly have a deficit of places, and the provision of a 4FE capacity school in Ongar will relieve pressure on these schools as well as offering more local choice to the people of Ongar and its rural hinterland
- 6) The new school buildings and grounds will provide sports and leisure facilities which are lacking in the local area – and these facilities would be used not just by the students of the Academy but will also be available to the local community.

The Alternative Sites assessment report initially looked at sites within the urban area of Ongar. Six vacant properties were identified but they were not sufficiently large enough to accommodate the 7.500 sq m floor space requirement for a 4FE secondary school. Then 8 other sites outside the Ongar urban area were identified but each of these had problems such as poor accessibility, inadequate pedestrian links, loss of good agricultural land, and land availability constraints. Consequently site 9, the application site, on the edge of Ongar, was the most sequentially preferred. It is clearly a difficult task to find a suitable site for a secondary school, particularly with regard to access and parking issues. It is also the case that St Johns School in Epping, which opened in 2013, and Debden Park High School in Loughton, which opened in 2000, were also approved on Green Belt land but which adjoined the built up area - where the availability of less constrained land made it easier, for example, to provide satisfactory vehicular access and parking facilities without too much impact on local roads and residential amenity. For instance, both these schools have dedicated vehicular drop off areas positioned away from the principal vehicular route serving the schools, and this will also be the case for this proposed Academy school in Ongar.

Taking the above factors into account officers agree that there is a demand for a secondary school in Ongar, that the application site represents the best option in terms of impact on the Green belt, and that 'very special circumstances' exist to make the proposal an acceptable development in the Green Belt.

In terms of visual impact the proposed site also benefits from tree lines and hedgerows which will partly screen and soften the impact of the school buildings. A line of mature trees, between 5m and 16m in height will screen views from east and south east, and a tree line along the east side of Fyfield road will reduce the impact of the buildings when viewed from the west.

Access and Parking provision.

Vehicle access to the proposed school will be provided through the formation of a new vehicular access on to Fyfield Road – to be located where the current pedestrian access to the overspill car park is currently located. The design of this new junction has been carefully planned by the applicant's highway consultants, and, as mentioned above the highways authority raise no objections to the layout and design of this new junction. This new vehicular access leads into the 'overspill' car park which will be used as a vehicle and coach drop off point. It will also provide 26 appropriately marked car spaces for the nearby Ongar Medical Centre – 6 more than the current arrangements allow for. From this car park a vehicular access (along with a separate pedestrian access to the proposed school) will be provided to a 54 space car park for use by staff at the school, and this vehicle access will have a barrier control.

Residents living on the opposite side of the road have submitted a detailed letter of objection to the proposed access and associated carriageway works. This letter was

passed to the applicant's highways consultant, and each point of concern has been answered, and Essex County Council, as Highway Authority, has agreed with the responses made.

Clearly the proposed school and access will give rise to increased vehicular movements that will have some impact on conditions on Fyfield Road, and residents naturally are concerned. However, Fyfield Road is a classified route. The increase in traffic will be mostly occur during two forty minutes peak periods in the day, and the school will not be open for a third of any year. Traffic flows will therefore not be constant and for this reason the provision of a roundabout would not be expedient. It is also the case that the vehicular access to the former school was at this same position – and the design of the new access will be an improved one providing for better driver visibility and an easier right turn from the south. Lastly, an uncontrolled crossing point, with central refuge has been moved further north, and apart from providing a pedestrian facility it will also serve to slow the speed of vehicles driving southwards from Fyfield as they approach the new school entrance and the Ongar built up area.

Sports and leisure facilities

The Leisure Centre in Ongar currently hires out the use of the existing sports and football pitches on the site of the proposed school. Clearly there has been a lot of discussion between the centre and the Ongar Academy Trust on how the facilities in the new school will be used. Also the Trust has carried out a survey of local sports and leisure clubs to determine what their needs are. A key objective is that sports and leisure facilities in the new school will be made available for use by local sports teams, and the community generally, in the evenings and at weekends when the school is not in use. To this end a joint booking system will be operated with priority given to the leisure centre 'client' in order that bookings are not 'diminished'. Conversely, some facilities in the Leisure Centre, namely the swimming pool, gym, and dance studio, will be used by children attending the new school – indeed, children currently attending the temporary school are already using these facilities which provides a source of revenue to the Leisure Centre.

The sports and leisure facilities proposed in the new school are a) a sports hall close to the visitor entrance to be used for sports such as badminton, basketball, 5 a side football, indoor cricket, gymnastics, and the wooden floor will allow for more flexibility for different sports to be played compared to the existing concrete floor in the Leisure Centre hall, b) an activity studio, c) accessible changing rooms d) an outside floodlit all-weather multi use sports pitch (MUGA) to be used for netball but which also can be used for soccer, basketball, tennis and mini tennis, and e) 1 rugby and 2 football pitches in winter, and a 400m running track, cricket pitch, and softball pitch in summer.

The building of the new school will entail the loss of one outside playing pitch, and the new outside sports pitches will replace the current playing fields that amounts to some 6.80 ha in area and will be subject to more intensive use.

Sport England has lodged a 'holding objection' pending the provision of more details about the existing and proposed pitches and facilities. It would appear that they recognise some of the net benefits that could accrue from the proposed school, and it is expected that they will request that conditions are attached to any planning consent. These conditions, if appropriate, will be referred to verbally at Committee.

Finally, the applicants state that it is Trust's vision to create a leisure and sports hub for Ongar providing a wider range of facilities, and to conduct joint working with the Leisure centre to maximise the viability of both the Leisure Centre and the new Academy facilities. Clearly the Academy has the potential to significantly improve local leisure and sports facilities and this factor also weighs heavily towards an approval of this application.

Design and Appearance

From the pedestrian path to the new development, the main elevation of the Academy will be a 2 storey building on the left, with 2 floors of glazing to provide prominence to the entrance, and on the right will be the timber clad sports hall at more than two stories in height. The buildings will mainly be a 3 storey flat roofed building to a maximum height of 12m. While the buildings will have of necessity a somewhat functional appearance, the use of a buff colour facing brick, interspersed with insulated render panels, timber, and charcoal brick cladding, will provide for an appropriate courtyard design and appearance. In addition the buildings are positioned in a recessed position a minimum of 90m away from Fyfield Road, and as mentioned above an existing tree line and hedgerow will help screen and reduce the impact of the new buildings. The submitted landscape master plan is acceptable in principle subject to further details being provided of the type and specie of tree/shrub to be planted.

Impact on Residential amenity

There are no dwellings nearby that are directly affected by the proposed buildings, and the nearest buildings to the south are the non residential Leisure Centre building and youth centre. However a neighbour at 38, Fyfield Road has expressed concern about cars parked in the spaces allocated for the medical centre which would emit exhaust fumes into his garden. However, these spaces are some 4m away from the boundary and this boundary treatment will be subject of a condition so that it is a solid fence. An objection has also been received on grounds that vehicles leaving the site will have their headlights shining into houses at numbers 59 to 56 on the other side of Fyfield Road. It is acknowledged that this could give rise to a loss of amenity but this could be mitigated by the provision of by planting and or /fences on the front boundaries.

Conclusion:

This is a significant development that will provide a much needed secondary school for Ongar and its hinterland. It will also improve the range of leisure and sports activities available to local people. Although the site is in the Green Belt, it lies next to the built up area and important agricultural land will not be lost. Very special circumstances therefore do exist to support the approval of this Academy. For these reasons, and those outlined in the report, it is recommended that conditional planning permission be granted.