

**Hadlow (Hadlow)**                      **562446 149512**    **5 July 2013**                      **TM/13/01482/FL**  
Hadlow, Mereworth And  
West Peckham

Proposal:                                      Relocation of existing lambing shed and erection of two storey school building together with car parking, vehicle circulation area and landscaping  
Location:                                      Faulkners Farm Ashes Lane Hadlow Tonbridge Kent TN11 9QU  
Applicant:                                      Hadlow College

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**1. Description:**

- 1.1 Planning permission is sought for the construction of a two storey building with a footprint of 3,364 sq. m to accommodate facilities for up to 330 pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. The building is to be set over two floors and is proposed to comprise of a series of teaching classrooms, science labs, an assembly/sports hall (3 courts), a learning resource centre, a multi-use dining/breakout area and ancillary facilities. A mixture of brick, buff concrete blocks and cedar cladding are shown to be used in the construction of the building.
- 1.2 Additionally, a number of outdoor teaching areas are proposed to be provided adjacent to the science labs, along with a vegetable garden adjacent to the food tech room, hard and soft play area and a habitat area which is intended to be planted with a wide variety of plants/trees to promote local wildlife species.
- 1.3 The submission explains that the applicant's Brief for the school requires the building to be based around a central outdoor courtyard which is intended to provide the pivotal hub for the school. The proposed building would wrap around three sides of this external courtyard. The sports/assembly hall is to be located within the southern wing of the building with the western and northern sides of the courtyard being enclosed by administration and teaching blocks.
- 1.4 A new car park with 33 no. car parking spaces is proposed to be provided to the west of the new school building. A hard and soft playground is proposed to be located to the east of the school building.
- 1.5 It is also proposed to create a fenced footpath link through the car parking area currently serving the Animal Management Unit (AMU), across grazing land, to a new pedestrian gate on the A26 at the north-eastern end of this field.
- 1.6 In addition, the existing lambing shed is proposed to be relocated into the field to the north of its current location with the existing site then used to provide a dedicated drop off/pick up circulation area for the new school. This area is proposed to be fenced with metal railings (1.8m high) between the proposed school site and the retained college facilities. The site boundary to the adjacent

fields is proposed to be enclosed by a 1.4m high hedge with 1.1m high post and wire sheep fence to the outside and a 1.8m high chain link fence to the inside.

- 1.7 A Members' Site Inspection has been arranged to take place on 6 September, the outcomes of which will be reported as a supplementary matter.

**2. Reason for reporting to Committee:**

- 2.1 Significant local interest and Departure from the Development Plan.

**3. The Site:**

- 3.1 Faulkners Farm currently accommodates the Hadlow College Animal Management Unit (AMU), a lambing shed, various outdoor animal enclosures, an atrium and other outbuildings in addition to additional teaching accommodation.
- 3.2 Faulkners Farmhouse belongs to Hadlow College but is privately let for office use.
- 3.3 Immediately adjacent to Faulkners Farm are four maisonettes (let to Hadlow College staff) and two privately owned semi-detached cottages (3 and 4 Faulkners Farm Cottages).
- 3.4 The Hadlow Grill restaurant (previously known as the Spice Lounge and before that the Rose Revived Public House) is located on the opposite side of Ashes Lane (to the west of the application site) and is a Grade II listed building. Old Chegs (also Grade II Listed) is a detached dwelling located some distance to the north of Faulkners Farm. To the south lies The Ashes, a detached private dwellinghouse.
- 3.5 Access to the site is taken from Ashes Lane via the A26. The site currently has a separate 'in/out' access.
- 3.6 Hadlow College facilities are provided, in addition to Faulkners Farm itself, within the main campus to the north-east and Blackmans Dairy to the south-east. The area for the proposed secondary school is to the immediate north of the AMU at Faulkners Farm and currently forms a grassed area of land that is bounded by hedgerow and fencing.

**4. Planning History (most recent):**

TM/03/02954/FL      Grant With Conditions      20 October 2003

Extension to existing agricultural building

TM/06/02180/FL      Grant With Conditions      4 September 2006

Single storey aviary to provide enhanced educational amenities for animal management students

TM/06/03047/RD Grant 1 November 2006

Details of waste disposal and vermin control submitted pursuant to condition 3 of planning permission TM/06/02180/FL: New aviary

TM/07/00482/FL Approved 2 May 2007

Consolidation of existing farm/agricultural buildings, new purpose built animal care, dog grooming and teaching block to replace temporary facilities

TM/07/01960/ORM Approved 8 August 2007

Amendments to the design of the teaching and dog grooming buildings, phasing and layout of planning permission TM/07/00482/FL: Consolidation of existing farm/agricultural buildings, new purpose built animal care, dog grooming and teaching block to replace temporary facilities

TM/08/01235/RD Approved 28 May 2008

Details of materials submitted pursuant to condition 2 of planning permission TM/07/00482/FL: Consolidation of existing farm/agricultural buildings, new purpose built animal care, dog grooming and teaching block to replace temporary facilities

TM/08/03765/RD Approved 19 February 2009

Details of materials being European Redwood submitted pursuant to condition 2 of planning permission TM/07/00482/FL (Consolidation of existing farm/agricultural buildings, new purpose built animal care, dog grooming and teaching block to replace temporary facilities) as an alternative to permission TM/08/01235/RD

TM/11/02861/FL Approved 6 December 2011

Installation of solar photo voltaic panels

## 5. Consultees:

5.1 PC: Whilst Hadlow Parish Council supports the principle of a free school with a rural ethos in Hadlow, we object to the application by Hadlow College for the following reasons:

5.1.1 Inappropriate development in the Green Belt – The proposed site for Hadlow Rural Community School would adversely impact the openness of the green belt. The applicant accepts that the application constitutes inappropriate development, but it fails to demonstrate adequately the very special circumstances that would outweigh its harmful effect in the green belt.

- 5.1.2 We are disappointed that Hadlow College has not given sufficient consideration to alternative sites – particularly on the main campus, a major developed site as designated by TMBC where infill development or redevelopment may be permitted provided certain criteria are met. A site on or closer to the main campus would be less conspicuous in the landscape and therefore less harmful to the openness of the green belt. There would also be fewer issues regarding privacy, noise and impaired amenity for neighbouring residents. Moreover, a site on the campus, which is closer to the village centre, would be more likely to encourage local pupils to walk to school rather than be transported by car.
- 5.1.3 Inappropriate location due to concerns about highway issues – We are concerned that the proposed location of the school would adversely affect the safety of pupils and road users, and cause traffic congestion.
- 5.1.4 Safety – The Faulkners Farm site poses an unacceptably high risk of injury to pupils who may attempt to access or alight at the bus stops nearby where there is no safe place to cross the busy A26. It is unrealistic to expect all pupils to walk along the proposed footpath on College land to the proposed new crossing to the bus stops nearer the village, particularly on a dark wet winter's evening, when there are bus stops much closer.
- 5.1.5 The location also poses a risk to pupils cycling to the site, whether along the A26 or in the narrow lanes where visibility is poor.
- 5.1.6 The site poses an unacceptably high risk of accidents at the junction of Ashes Lane and the A26 given current speeds and volume of traffic.
- 5.1.7 We are concerned about the safety of pedestrians and car-users in Ashes Lane. The road, which is narrow and has poor visibility due to the blind bends, is not suitable for the increased traffic in both directions likely to be generated by the development.
- 5.1.8 Congestion – The development would create an unacceptably high level of congestion at peak times on the A26 at the approach to the junction with Ashes Lane and on Ashes Lane approaching the A26.
- 5.1.9 Transport Assessment – We have concerns that the number and timing of the traffic counts on just two days in winter 2012/13 that formed the basis for the Transport Assessment's alleged existing traffic flows were not representative of the actual levels of traffic at peak times near the entrance and exit of the application site. A greater number of traffic counts in different months would give a more accurate picture.
- 5.1.10 In addition to the above reasons for Hadlow Parish Council's recommendation to refuse this application, we would like to express our concern at the insufficient level of consultation conducted by Hadlow College with the population of Hadlow and, in particular, the neighbouring residents.

5.2 KCC(H&T): The applicant's strategy to encourage and direct school pupils to use the bus stops and a proposed formal pedestrian crossing centrally located near to the main Hadlow College entrance is understood and broadly welcomed. It needs to be recognised, however, that not all pupils would adopt this strategy at all times and that there may be occasions when pupils would utilise the bus stops adjacent, and opposite, to Ashes Lane. It is considered that enhancements to the A26 in this area would therefore be necessary. I consider that the provision of a further formal pedestrian crossing of the A26 at this location would be inappropriate. The Department for Transport document Local Transport Note 1/95 - The Assessment of Pedestrian Crossings is clear that caution should be exercised where pedestrian flows are generally light or light for long periods of the day and I consider that outside of school times the pedestrian crossing demand at this location would not warrant a formal crossing. I do consider, however, that the following improvements to the A26 would be appropriate in form and scale to mitigate the impact of the development proposals:-

- construction of a full depth bus stop and forward visibility improvements on the eastern side of the A26;
- installation of a pedestrian central island and right turning lane; and
- provision of school warning signs with flashing amber beacons on all approaches to the A26/Ashes Lane junction and the main Hadlow College entrance.

5.2.2 I would also request that the applicant gives consideration to the provision of a school crossing patrol at this location. The applicant should submit an outline design depicting these proposals in support of the application. Provision of a formal pedestrian crossing towards the centre of Hadlow as proposed near to the main Hadlow college entrance is supported and should be a condition of any planning approval.

5.2.3 The distance that warning signs should be placed from the corresponding hazard is dependent on the speed of traffic (Traffic Signs Manual, Chapter 4 – Appendix A) and it is noted that the southern boundary of the 40mph speed limit is approximately 80m from Ashes Lane. It is considered that further studies should be undertaken regarding traffic speeds on the A26 in this area. Whilst it is possible to coincide regulatory and warnings signs such as at the Hadlow southern 40mph gateway, it is preferable to separate messages to make them clearer to motorists. The relocation of the 40mph speed limit further south may therefore be necessary, subject to the outcome of the speed surveys and consultation with Kent Police. It is considered that flashing beacon school warning signs on the northbound approach to the main college entrance should be placed prior to Blackman's Lane, so that the section of roadside footway identified in the applicant's Transport Assessment is encompassed.

5.2.4 Turning to the independent Transport Assessment undertaken on behalf of one of the residents of Ashes Lane, I can advise that study of data from nearby permanent automatic traffic counters indicates that traffic flows in March are similar to annual average daily traffic flows for this area. Figures for December are consistently around 90% of annual average daily traffic flows. With regard to congestion on Ashes Lane itself, I am satisfied that the applicant's consultant has demonstrated that the A26/Ashes Lane junction would operate satisfactorily and well within capacity with the proposed development in place. From a study of the width of Ashes Lane in this area I consider it unlikely that dropping off or picking up of children in Ashes Lane would occur to any significant degree. This is based on observations that motorists are averse to causing an obstruction. It is critically important, however, that the proposed picking up and dropping off area is provided so that congestion and conflict with the adjacent college car park here does not occur, causing backing up onto Ashes Lane. I do not consider that there is any scope for picking up or dropping off to occur in the college car park under any initial or interim arrangement. It is further considered that refurbishment and formalising of the existing college car park as proposed in paragraph 3.4.3 of the applicant's Transport Assessment needs to be included as a condition of any planning approval.

5.2.5 Transport Assessment Addendum received 9 August 2013: I cannot accept that pupils will not use the bus stops on the A26 at Ashes Lane. Whilst it may be possible for staff to direct pupils to the bus stops at the main College entrance at the end of the school day, there will be no controls in place to prevent pupils from alighting at these stops at the start of the day. The proposed minibus services may well carry the majority of pupils; however there will inevitably be occasions where pupils will choose to use the public bus services that pass the site. In view of this, I would reiterate KCC's previous request for the construction of a full depth bus stop on the eastern side of the A26 and the installation of a pedestrian central island. This should be conditioned on the main school application, in view of the small additional number of pupils expected to use the school during its first year of operation.

5.2.6 Having considered the 85th percentile wet weather speeds on the A26, I accept that the relocation of the 40mph speed limit is not required.

5.2.7 I am prepared to accept that the provision of the controlled pedestrian crossing adjacent to the main College entrance could be conditioned on the main school application, rather than the temporary use.

5.3 NE: Under section 40(1) of the *Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006* a duty is placed on public authorities, including local planning authorities, to have regard to biodiversity in exercising their functions. This duty covers the protection, enhancement and restoration of habitats and species.

- 5.3.1 The NPPF expects local authorities to prevent harm to biodiversity and geological interests. Paragraph 118 makes clear how the government expects the council to consider planning decisions that could lead to harm to biodiversity and geological interests. Paragraph 109 identifies the importance of establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures. Protection for ancient woodland is included in Paragraph 118 of the NPPF and states that “planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss”.
- 5.3.2 The ecological survey submitted with this application has not identified that there will be any significant impacts on statutorily protected sites, species or on priority Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats as a result of this proposal. However when considering this application the council should encourage opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around the development (Paragraph 118 of the NPPF).
- 5.3.3 The Town and Country Planning Association’s publication ‘*Biodiversity By Design*’ provides further information on this issue and the publication can be downloaded from <http://www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/biodiversity-by-design.html>
- 5.3.4 Examples of biodiversity enhancements that can be widely incorporated into development proposals include:
- 5.3.5 Green/brown roofs – The use of alternative roofing (turf, aggregate, brown and green roofs) can make a significant contribution to biodiversity, attenuation of rainfall, and energy efficiency as they can provide a high degree of insulation.
- 5.3.6 Landscaping – Native species of plant should be used in landscaping proposals associated with development, unless there are over-riding reasons why particular non-native species need to be used. The nature conservation value of trees, shrubs and other plants includes their intrinsic place in the ecosystem; their direct role as food or shelter for species; and in the case of trees and shrubs, their influence through the creation of woodland conditions that are required by other species, e.g. the ground flora.
- 5.3.7 Nesting and roosting sites – Modern buildings tend to reduce the amount of potential nesting and roosting sites. Artificial sites may therefore need to be provided for bats and birds. There is a range of ways in which these can be incorporated into buildings, or built in courtyard habitats. Their location should provide protection from the elements, preferably facing an easterly direction, out of the direct heat of the sun and prevailing wind and rain.
- 5.3.8 Sustainable urban drainage systems – Many existing urban drainage systems are damaging the environment and are not, therefore, sustainable in the long term. Techniques to reduce these effects have been developed and are collectively

referred to as Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). SUDS are physical structures built to receive surface water runoff. They typically include ponds, wetland, swales and porous surfaces. They should be located as close as possible to where the rainwater falls, providing attenuation for the runoff. They may also provide treatment for water prior to discharge, using the natural processes of sedimentation, filtration, adsorption and biological degradation.

- 5.3.9 Local wildlife sites – If the proposal site is on or adjacent to a local wildlife site, e.g. Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) or Local Nature Reserve (LNR) the authority should ensure it has sufficient information to fully understand the impact of the proposal on the local wildlife site before it determines the application.
- 5.4 UMIDB: The site of the above planning application, whilst being located outside of the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board's district, drains to an existing ordinary watercourse within it. The applicant should therefore be informed that any works within, under or over this watercourse will require the Board's formal written consent.
- 5.4.1 The applicant proposes to restrict off site drainage to 2l/s with on-site storage provided to accommodate the 1 in 100 year storm (+30% to accommodate the predicted effects of Climate Change), which is considered appropriate for this location. Whilst the provision of storage under permeable paving (as proposed) is technically feasible, the applicant should be urged to consider the use of open storage (such as ponds and swales) due to the additional benefits these provide to biodiversity and amenity. The future maintenance of these open systems is also more easily managed.
- 5.5 Ramblers Association: No objection in principle to the proposed development per se. However, I would like to make the following observations.
- 5.5.1 In 2007 and over a few years following I was involved in a proposal to divert Public Footpath MT114 which runs through Hadlow College's campus. One of the arguments for the diversion put forward at the time was based on the College's perceived 'duty of care to its younger students'. The matter was initially taken up under the Town and Country Planning Act and subsequently moved to the Highways Act. The KCC's Regulation Committee of five knowledgeable Councillors eventually rejected it and the matter was not pursued any further. In this current matter of the proposed new school, I note that the hard and soft areas are going to be relatively close to footpath MT127 which runs from the first bend in Ashes Lane to join up with MT114. With the experience of MT114 in mind I would request that the College is asked to confirm that the construction of the school would definitely not lead on to a proposal to divert MT127 on the same 'duty of care' basis.
- 5.5.2 Footpath MT127 links across Ashes Lane to Footpath MT140. Anyone walking from one to the other has to negotiate a short length of the lane between the two bends which can potentially be dangerous if two vehicles coming in opposite



directions hit the same short stretch at the same time as the walkers. I cannot quote any instances of actual accidents at this spot but clearly the potential danger would be enhanced by the increased number of vehicle movements which will result from the construction of the new school, both in the construction and the ultimate day to day use. In this regard, I would propose the following two alternative possible ways for reducing the potential for accidents on this length:

- Pedestrian warning signs placed before the two bends and/or;
- The extension of MT140 from its current termination at the Ashes Lane kissing gate to a point opposite the termination of MT127.

5.6 Kent Fire & Rescue Services: No objections.

5.7 Police Architectural Liaison Officer: No objections.

5.8 CPRE: CPRE Protect Kent's ethos is to preserve the Kentish countryside, to encourage tranquillity and to discourage light pollution in the countryside.

5.8.1 CPRE is very aware that Hadlow College is a valuable asset in our community that promotes excellence in the teaching of land husbandry and the importance of land based teaching. It is also acknowledged that the ability to deliver a broad spectrum of levels of horticultural teaching from school GCSE's through to degree level is advantageous to young people seeking a career in this field.

5.8.2 CPRE Tonbridge and Malling District Committee have given much consideration to the various reports prepared on behalf of the applicant and some reports prepared for local residents and contrasted with planning policy. A school has unique challenges when compared with other forms of built development. The size of the site in which pupils work and play is many times larger than the proposed built development hence the requirement for hard and soft play areas and the impact of the greater area needs to be considered. Also the capacity for noise generation is considerable, as anyone who has collected children from school will testify.

5.8.3 Access and egress is also challenging and the capacity for poor parking and traffic jams is considerable.

5.8.4 The capacity for noise, light pollution, traffic problems and urban sprawl make the siting of a school in the MGB by necessity a last resort and only if a well founded need has been established and there are no practical alternative sites available in the greater area.

5.8.5 The applicant conducted a search for alternative sites and then dismissed those options found within their ownership as impractical for various reasons. Sites outside of the applicant's ownership were not exhaustively considered and the applicant states that transporting pupils is impractical and expensive.

- 5.8.6 It is noted that the Hadlow College campus has been identified within the Development Land Allocations DPD as a Major Developed Site in the Green Belt where both infill development and redevelopment is encouraged. A proposal in this area, which could involve a measure of redevelopment, would seem a more logical way forward. In any event the alternative site search was not rigorous enough and the reasons for dismissing sites, not supported by evidence within the report.
- 5.8.7 The report from Ibbett Mosely challenges the established need for the school within Tonbridge and Malling, citing two new schools that were not considered in the case for need. CPRE considers that the need for the proposal should be fully established at the outset of consideration of the proposal.
- 5.8.8 The Technical Appraisal of the Transport Assessment (TA) raises issues around the original methodology of the surveys undertaken and questions the safety of pupils attending by bus, citing that they are unlikely to alight early and walk half a kilometre in order to be on safe footways. The numbers of pupils attending by car, bus and walking is in part apparently based on Wrotham School, being of a similar size in a rural setting. However Wrotham School traffic regularly causes traffic jams at the beginning and end of the school day and we note that the A277 has considerable more traffic capacity than Ashes Lane. Many parents will visit the school at various times to discuss education matters with staff and the parking bay visitor numbers appear inadequate. Parking on the relatively narrow Ashes Lane could cause serious disruption at certain times.
- 5.8.9 In conclusion the siting of a school in the MGB considerably affects the openness of the area, the noise and activity within the greater site and will cause light pollution even with the “best designed” lighting possible.
- 5.8.10 CPRE considers that at present Hadlow College has not presented a sufficient case for the need, the absence of an alternative site and compelling special circumstances to overcome the harm the proposal will inevitably cause and therefore object to the proposal.

5.9 EA: No comments to make.

5.9.1 Private Reps: 81+site + press notice/0X/43R/0S. Objections made on the following grounds:

- Impact on the road infrastructure – already congestion at peak times and this development will only add to this;
- Potential accident blackspot – there have already been numerous accidents in the immediate vicinity;
- Fears for children’s safety;

- Increased traffic would cause a further deterioration in the condition of Ashes Lane;
- Loss of Green Belt land and significant harm to the Green Belt;
- Loss of important agricultural land;
- Question why a more suitable location could not be found closer to the main college campus;
- Need for such a school has not been adequately demonstrated;
- Negative impact on the landscape;
- Neither of the bus stops at this junction on the A26 have adequate provision to safely pull in;
- 40mph limit is not enforced and signage is poorly sited;
- Increase in noise and disturbance to neighbouring dwellings;
- Loss of privacy arising from two storey building and location of the bus drop off and turning area;
- Air pollution and disturbance to nearest neighbours arising from the bus drop off area;
- Adverse impact on outlook;
- Increased dilution in rural tranquillity in the area;
- Increased light pollution;
- Lane is already used as a rat-run, this would be made worse;
- Building will block views of the Tower;
- Modern design is out of keeping with the rural character of the area;
- Ecological survey is dismissive of wildlife value of the site – bats have regularly been seen flying in the area and a professional bat survey should be conducted;
- Ashes Lane has no pavements or street lighting, which is in character with the lane, but this can make it hazardous particularly for pedestrians;

- Question how school will manage parking during school events such as parents evenings, sports days etc – parking within the site is inadequate for such events;
- Ashes Lane already suffers from water drainage problems – increased use of the drainage system will only serve to exacerbate this situation;
- No-one would disagree with the importance of keeping children safe but unable to find any legislation which demands a physical separation from the rest of the College – only a general directive that children should be safeguarded;
- Amount of information on the website already is misleading to parents and premature;
- Entrance is already congested due to the AMU and dog grooming facility – the school would only make this problem worse;
- College has breached conditions imposed on the AMU planning permission;
- Lack of local consultation by the College;
- Impact on the setting of listed buildings in Ashes Lane;
- Question need for a secondary school – there is a surplus of non-grammar school spaces in the district;
- Conflicting information within the submission regarding the employment opportunities the school will create;
- No proof that connection with Hadlow College is a vital part of the new school;
- Traffic surveys were undertaken in December and March – outside of normally considered neutral months and no indication of the weather on those days – surveys therefore cannot be relied upon;
- Unlikely that pupils would use the footpath to the bus stops at the main College entrance, using those close to Ashes Lane is a more likely scenario and these are dangerous;
- College has not analysed other sites that are not best and most versatile agricultural land;
- The case for proximity to the AMU and sharing access and other areas seems to be at odds with the desire to keep pupils separate from the main College.

5.9.2 Petition also received which contains a total of 51 signatures and the accompanying letter of objection itself is signed by a total of 45 residents.

5.9.3 Additional information received 5 July 2013. 19 further representations received maintaining previous objections and stating that the supporting information provided is flawed and does not adequately demonstrate very special circumstances. Amendments to the footpath would further urbanise the rural area.

5.9.4 Amended plans [relating to design] received on 31 July 2013: 21 further representations received maintaining previous objections and making the following further objections:

- Changes to the design would exacerbate loss of privacy which formed previous ground of objection;
- Members should note that the field in question is usually grazed by sheep – the sheep may have been moved by the time of the Members' Site Inspection thus not giving a true picture of the situation;
- Amendments in no way overcome the fundamental concerns about the proposed Green Belt location;
- Question why the footpath does not follow the desire line across the field rather than around its perimeter as proposed – more likely to be used by children and less impact on neighbours;
- Planting the route of the footpath with a line of Poplars would improve the view of the AMU when viewed from the A26;

These letters in part also made reference to the Transport Assessment Addendum subsequently received but not formally consulted on. These are summarised below:

- Disputes contents of Transport Assessment Addendum as being unrealistic and suggests that this has been submitted in an attempt to salvage an application that is *'fundamentally flawed'*;
- Submission of the TA Addendum seems to suggest that highways and transport matters are the only remaining obstacles – no further information regarding very special circumstances have been provided;
- Management strategy to ensure pupils use the designated footpath is inadequate;
- Disagree with the conclusions of the TA Addendum that there is no need for the speed limit to be reduced;
- Sceptical about the data provided in respect of school travel patterns;

- DfE cites a 'small school' as being an establishment with 100 or fewer children of statutory school age. Applicant states that this would be a small school but with 330 children it would not comply with the DfE definition;
- Nothing has been put forward that would address traffic backing up along Ashes Lane as vehicles attempt to turn right onto the A26;
- College has not passed the first stage at EOI to be considered for funding for their Sports Centre project so this site should not have been discounted;

One letter also made reference to the fact that consultation on this one document had not taken place.

## 6. Determining Issues:

- 6.1 The application site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt, outside the defined settlement confines of Hadlow, and is part of a wider landholding associated with Hadlow College, a further/higher education college, specialising in land-based studies. Within the wider land extent of the College and its farms, the core of the built College provision lies within an area defined in MDEDPD as "a Major Developed Site" (MDS) subject to policy M1 – this policy allows for infill development or new development subject to a number of criteria being met. Interlocked with the geographical extent of the MDS is an area of land immediately to the south west which is identified as "Open space to be protected", subject to policy OS1A - Hadlow College playing field.
- 6.2 The NPPF sets out the national planning policy for Green Belt land. It also sets out its planning policy in respect of school facilities as part of the role of NPPF in "promoting healthy communities". It reads:
- "72. The Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:*
- *give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools; and*
  - *work with schools promoters to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted."*
- 6.3 NPPF also indicates that new buildings within the Green Belt are considered to be inappropriate development which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. There are however specific exceptions to this position *which include:*
- *The replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces; or*

- *Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.*

6.4 What is quite clear is that the development of a new school *per se* would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Additionally, the proposed school building would not fall within any of the specific exceptions cited within the NPPF where inappropriate development would be agreeable in its own right. Therefore the project can be granted planning permission *only* if it is demonstrated that very special circumstances exist to justify that permission. NPPF Green Belt policy is supported by policy CP3 of the TMBCS.

6.5 The NPPF states that “*inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt*” and such development should not be approved, except in very special circumstances. In view of the presumption against inappropriate development, substantial weight is attached to the harm to the Green Belt when considering any planning application concerning such inappropriate development. NPPF reads, at paragraph 88, “*When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to the harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.*” It is therefore necessary to consider whether the development causes any other harm beyond that caused by virtue of its inappropriateness and, having done so, whether there are other considerations relevant to the overall balance that demonstrates very special circumstances.

6.6 The Planning for Schools Development Policy Statement (DCLG - August 2011) is also an important material national policy consideration, stating that:

*“...We expect all parties to work together proactively from an early stage to help plan for state-school development and to shape strong planning applications. This collaborative working would help to ensure that the answer to proposals for the development of state-funded schools should be, wherever possible, “yes”.*

*The Government believes that the planning system should operate in a positive manner when dealing with proposals for the creation, expansion and alteration of state-funded schools, and that the following principles should apply with immediate effect:*

- ***There should be a presumption in favour of the development of state-funded schools, as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework.***

- ***Local authorities should give full and thorough consideration to the importance of enabling the development of state-funded schools in their planning decisions. The Secretary of State will attach significant weight to the***

*need to establish and develop state-funded schools when determining applications and appeals that come before him for decision.*

**• Local authorities should make full use of their planning powers to support state-funded schools applications.** *This should include engaging in pre-application discussions with promoters to foster a collaborative approach to applications and, where necessary, the use of planning obligations to help to mitigate adverse impacts and help deliver development that has a positive impact on the community.*

**• Local authorities should only impose conditions that clearly and demonstrably meet the tests set out in Circular 11/95.** *Planning conditions should only be those absolutely necessary to making the development acceptable in planning terms.*

**• Local authorities should ensure that the process for submitting and determining state-funded schools' applications is as streamlined as possible,** *and in particular be proportionate in the information sought from applicants. For instance, in the case of free schools, authorities may choose to use the information already contained in the free school provider's application to the Department for Education to help limit additional information requirements.*

**• A refusal of any application for a state-funded school, or the imposition of conditions, will have to be clearly justified by the local planning authority.** *Given the strong policy support for improving state education, the Secretary of State will be minded to consider such a refusal or imposition of conditions to be unreasonable conduct, unless it is supported by clear and cogent evidence.*

**• Appeals against any refusals of planning permission for state-funded schools should be treated as a priority.** *Where permission is refused and an appeal made, the Secretary of State will prioritise the resolution of such appeals as a matter of urgency in line with the priority the Government places on state education.*

**• Where a local planning authority refuses planning permission for a state-funded school, the Secretary of State will consider carefully whether to recover for his own determination appeals against the refusal of planning permission.**

*This statement applies to both change of use development and operational development necessary to the operational needs of the school..."*

6.7 There is clearly a strong Government impetus in favour of new state school development as a matter of principle. The analysis below recognises the relevance of all of these statements of Government policy – it should be noted that the Schools Policy Statement predates the publication of the NPPF by just a few months. I can also confirm that, in accordance with the Government's



expectations, pre-submission discussions took place. Further clarification on matters emerging from analysis of the submitted case and third party comments has also been sought, in an endeavour to make the proposal as readily understood as possible.

- 6.8 In light of the policy situation described above relative to the *principle* of development in the Green Belt, to which I will return, I now turn to the question as to whether any other harm would be caused, including to the Green Belt, as a result of this development in addition to the harm that is caused by virtue of the fact that it is inappropriate by definition. In terms of the built form that is being proposed, the building would have an overall footprint of 3,364 sq. m, with a height ranging from 7.9m to 10m. It would therefore be a significant building on currently undeveloped land. The building design sections provided indicate that the school building would be somewhat taller and bulkier than the lambing shed that is to be to be relocated to the west and which would be the building the school would most readily be seen in context with as its backdrop. The difference in height between the school and the nearby AMU (which is to the east of school site – between the school site and A26) is more marginal but the proposed school would nevertheless be slightly higher than the main body of the AMU. It is undeniable that the footprint, massing and height of the building are substantial both in themselves and in combination with the relocated lambing shed. The existence of the existing buildings at Faulkners Farm, including the most recent structures approved by the Council to form the AMU, provide some degree of context in terms of building location, but nevertheless the proposed school represents a significant additional physical presence in this rural area. Although the lambing shed alone is an agricultural building that could reasonably be expected within a Green Belt location, its proposed re-siting to allow for the arrangements for the school to be accommodated would place it in a more open and exposed area of land. As such, it is considered that the proposed development of the application site would have a demonstrably harmful visual impact on the open nature and function of the Green Belt.
- 6.9 The playing fields proposed to serve the new school would be located behind the school itself, in the north-east end of the site. The NPPF indicates that the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport is *not* considered to be inappropriate development provided it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. I am satisfied that this particular element of the scheme alone does not constitute inappropriate development.
- 6.10 Having identified that the proposed school building constitutes harm by virtue of inappropriateness and the impact on the openness of the greenbelt, it is necessary to also establish whether any other harm would arise as a result of the proposed development.

- 6.11 Turning to transport impact, paragraph 32 of the NPPF states that: *“All developments that generate significant amounts of movement should be supported by a Transport Statement or Transport Assessment. [Plans and] decisions should take account of whether:*
- *the opportunities for sustainable transport modes have been taken up depending on the nature and location of the site, to reduce the need for major transport infrastructure;*
  - *safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people; and*
  - *improvements can be undertaken within the transport network that cost effectively limits the significant impacts of the development. Development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe.”*
- 6.12 Paragraph 34 of the NPPF goes on to state that planning *“decisions should ensure developments that generate significant movement are located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximise. However this needs to take into account of policies set out elsewhere in this Framework, particularly in rural areas.”*
- 6.13 Policy SQ8 of the MDE DPD states that before proposals for development are permitted they will need to demonstrate that any necessary transport infrastructure, the need for which wholly or substantially arises from the development, is in place or is certain to be provided. Development proposals will only be permitted where they will not significantly harm highway safety.
- 6.14 With regard to the matter of traffic and transport the proposal shows provision for 33 parking spaces. The proposal also identifies that pupils will be transported in a number of ways.
- 6.15 The School intends to set up and run a bespoke bus service. I am advised that of the pupils at the school in the first year of operation, it is anticipated that 55 will be on the school run mini-bus service, 9 have expressed that they will come by car and 5 have indicated they will walk. This appears to be based on returns from the parents who are intending to send their children to the school in September 2013. I understand that the College will be running minibuses for the first two years before engagement of coaches to support the transport policy that has been put in place for the school. No information has been provided that explains the likely use of such a service in the longer term.
- 6.16 Adequate provision therefore needs to be made for pupils and staff to be transported by various means in a safe fashion with adequate facilities to access these modes of travel safely. If this is not achieved and the adverse impact of traffic assessed as severe (the test set in NPPF) then this would amount to an

indication of unmitigated harm arising from the proposal. This project has been the subject of intense discussion between KCC highways and the applicants, the outcome of which is explained below.

- 6.17 The planning application makes passing reference to wider intentions, in the mind of the Highway Authority, to facilitate a controlled crossing on the A26 close to the main College entrance, serving the bus stops on either side of the road at this point. It is the view of KCC that such a crossing would need to be in place *prior* to the school opening in order to ensure an acceptable degree of pupil safety. I support that view. However, it should be stressed that at this time there is no definitive timetable for the provision of such a crossing as a standalone piece of provision. It cannot therefore be relied upon in assessing the project's capability for demonstrating that pupils will be able to safely use the bus stops closest to the main College entrance. To allow this provision to be part of the suite of measures to mitigate the harm, from a traffic/transport point of view, the applicants would have to guarantee the provision of such a crossing if it is to play a positive part in the consideration of this planning application. I deal below with mechanisms that could bring about the necessary level of legal control.
- 6.18 KCC has suggested that if the school were to be located as proposed then the arrangements around the Ashes Lane junction and the nearby bus stops should be enhanced. The applicant argues that the provision of a second controlled crossing in the vicinity of Ashes Lane and the associated bus stops would represent a safety risk because drivers would become complacent to the use of these stops and drivers would therefore tend to ignore them. This assessment, with regard to the provision of a further controlled crossing, is broadly accepted by KCC.
- 6.19 There is a consensus that the bus stops closest to Ashes Lane are not ideally suited to serve pupils of the proposed secondary school, given the general local traffic speeds of this stretch of road, with no crossing points and inadequate waiting space at the bus stops. The application therefore proposes the provision of a fenced footpath, routed through the car park serving the AMU and along the southern boundary of Faulkners Farm, running parallel to Ashes Lane, leading to a gate after which pupils are required to use the public footway to access the bus stops by the main College entrance.
- 6.20 The applicant has explained that pupils who will use public transport will be 'managed and overseen' by the school to ensure that the bus stops close to Ashes Lane are not used. Instead, pupils would be required to use the new footpath and crossing closest to the main College entrance, the future provision of which has already been established as being undefined at the time of writing.

6.21 The applicant maintains that pupils will be '*unlikely*' to use public transport, but in the event that this does occur, duty staff at the end of the day will be placed in the front of AMU to direct pupils away from Ashes Lane, and ensure that bus stop is not used, while directing pupils to use the safer route through the college (also with staff on duty to direct and guide pupils the right way).

6.22 It is, however, unclear as to how robust these plans are and how they will operate in practice. It seems inevitable that some pupils using public transport will seek to use the bus stops closest to Ashes Lane given their proximity to the chosen site and the associated convenience that these bus stops would offer. This factor represents a considerable risk to the safety of pupils and road users alike. Paragraph 203 of the NPPF recognises that local planning authorities should consider whether otherwise unacceptable development could be made acceptable through the use of conditions or planning obligations. In this respect, KCC (H&T) has suggested that it would be appropriate to require the College to undertake, or provide funding for the provision of, improvements to the A26 to mitigate the impact of the development proposals, at the Ashes Lane bus stops as follows:

- construction of a full depth bus stop and forward visibility improvements on the eastern side of the A26;
- installation of a pedestrian central island and right turning lane; and
- provision of school warning signs all approaches to the A26 / Ashes Lane junction and the main Hadlow College entrance.

The applicant has now agreed to these measures being put in place should planning permission be granted and, in association, KCC has requested that the applicant gives consideration to the provision of a school crossing patrol at this location.

#### Very Special Circumstances

6.23 It is now necessary to establish whether very special circumstances exist which outweigh the degree of harm caused by the proposed development by virtue of both its inappropriate nature and its physical impact on openness and the other harm identified in respect of highway safety.

6.24 On the basis of my assessment of impacts of traffic and pedestrian safety, with the assistance of the advice of KCC Highways, I consider that significant adverse harm would arise unless the improvements identified above at Ashes Lane and outside the main College entrance are provided as part of the proposed development. These matters may be secured by the application of relevant planning conditions in the event that the proposal is found acceptable in all other respects.

*Need for a local secondary school:*

- 6.25 The applicant puts forward the case that there is a shortfall of local secondary school places based upon forecasts by KCC for this area of West Kent. With regard to secondary school provision in Tonbridge and Malling, KCC's Commissioning Plan for Education Report (2012 – 2017) states that:

*"There is forecast to be a deficit of up to 80 places from 2016/17 to 2019/20. 180 places would be required at the peak if a 5% surplus is to be maintained." "The larger Year 7 cohorts will cause the total school numbers to rise, leading to an overall shortfall of places from 2018/19." "Post 16 numbers are forecast to increase throughout the forecast period reaching 2174 by 2021. There is a deficit of places throughout the period, although surplus accommodation in schools is sufficient to offset this until 2018.*

*At the time of writing, the Hadlow Rural Community School, a free school based at Hadlow College is being supported, and moving to the development stage. If this proceeds, it will provide 40 places per year group in Years 7 to 11. It is anticipated the school will open in September 2013, initially with intakes into Years 7 and 10."*

- 6.26 The applicant goes on to state that "KCC suggest that school provision in Maidstone, Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells should also be taken into account when considering the need for schools in Tonbridge and Malling. The document states that Maidstone and the northern part of the Sevenoaks District have pupil capacity, although predicted sustained growth in the southern parts of Sevenoaks District is not catered for. In Tunbridge Wells, KCC predicts that demand for non-selective schools can be managed through existing capacity at the High Weald Academy and Skinners Kent Academy."
- 6.27 The above information is of interest in providing a context for the proposal in terms of identified need. However, it does not follow that any general shortfall identified must, of necessity, be met in a new standalone school in the Green Belt at Hadlow. Clearly all options including expansion of existing schools, especially those within urban areas, need to be investigated before it could be accepted in principle that any such new facilities should be located in the Green Belt.

*Need for local education in land based and food sectors:*

- 6.28 The applicant emphasises that the South-East is a leading agricultural region and is expected to play a growing role in the supply of food and non-food products in the years to come. This sector makes a significant economic contribution to the sub-region and there are around 5,500 land based and food businesses in Kent and Medway (accounting for around 8% of the local business base in the area).
- 6.29 The submission explains that there are currently six other secondary schools in Kent with a 'rural ethos' but the rural facilities at these schools are of a far smaller scale than those at Hadlow College, which is a County specialist for land based

provision. As part of the Hadlow College group, the new school will have access to the 'excellent' outdoor and educational facilities of the College for both their vocational, practical and academic studies. The applicant argues that *'this gives an outstanding opportunity to contextualise studies within the classroom and to enrich and engage through the use of outdoor environment, leading to higher levels of motivation, better lessons and higher outcomes.'* The Department for Education, in approving the College's bid for the new school, clearly accepts the logic and educational advantages of co-locating new land based secondary school with the Hadlow College facilities.

- 6.30 The existing six schools with a rural ethos are Brockhill Park, Hythe; The North School, Ashford; Kent College, Canterbury; New Line Learning, Maidstone; High Weald Academy, Cranbrook; and Homewood School, Tenterden. The applicant points out that these are located in Central and East Kent, leaving a lack of provision within West Kent. On this basis the proposal would respond to the need for additional secondary school places in the local area (to address KCC predictions) as well as the lack of rural specialist schools in West Kent.
- 6.31 It also seems that there are no other secondary schools co-located with a rural studies based FE/HE College to give a unique and direct relationship between secondary education and the FE/HE sector in a recognised specialist field.
- 6.32 In terms of investment in education facilities of this kind, at this general location, and in the context of the general needs assessment and the policy context outlined above, the case for the proposal and its benefit to the community can be given significant weight.
- 6.33 I am satisfied therefore that in this respect the case in principle made for a secondary school co-located with Hadlow College amounts to very special circumstances sufficient to accept the proposed development.

*Need for a Green Belt location at Faulkner's Farm and alternative sites:*

- 6.34 While not part of any expressed requirement set out in NPPF, the applicant has sensibly and appropriately sought to establish whether there are other sites around the College estate that might perform better in terms of harm to the Green Belt than the proposal site. The alternative sites have been identified and assessed and further detail is set out in 6.42 *et al* below.
- 6.35 Having accepted that there is a case to link the new school facility to Hadlow College it is helpful to consider how the operation would work in practice. It is intended that the use of the College facilities for frequent practical lessons in arable farming, horticulture, animal management, fisheries and retail will take place within the College in order to reinforce lessons within the school itself. There is also, although less frequently as the applicant has explained, the opportunity and need for pupils to visit the dairy, lambing unit and animal management

facilities. The applicant suggests that the AMU will be one of the main resources used in this respect. The applicant argues that the application site offers the most suitable location for the school for the following reasons:

- It has the necessary capacity to accommodate the proposed development;
- It has an existing and suitable vehicular access;
- It contains substantial existing development meaning that the school, sited adjacent to this existing development, would have a less significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt than if it were to be located in isolation;
- Close proximity of the site to the facilities at Faulkner's Farm – sheep farming and Animal Management Unit (AMU) will have educational benefits;
- It is within close proximity to Broadview Garden Centre and other facilities at the College and within walking distance of Blackmans Dairy;
- It is available for use and will not affect the existing operations at Faulkner's Farm;
- There would be a limited impact on neighbouring amenity as only a few properties are located close by and some of those are owned by the College.

#### *Pupil Safeguarding*

6.36 In the various documents submitted, the applicant has placed considerable emphasis on the need to develop the Faulkner's Farm site due to the advantages it offers in providing safeguard standards for pupils of the new secondary school. A crucial element of this is the need for the site to be served by a separate access, independent of the main College campus, whilst still maintaining the close links to the College for educational reasons. The original submission, in discounting alternative sites including immediately adjoining the Major Developed Site (for instance in the OS1 open space to be protected), indicates that a separate and secure access is a funding requirement of the Department for Education. It later goes on to state that:

*'Each aspect of the proposed development has been carefully considered to ensure that no opportunities to share the existing facilities of Hadlow College are missed. However, in reality many of the facilities must remain separate due to the need to safeguard the secondary school pupils, maintaining separation from the College students.'*

6.37 This requirement is strongly asserted with reference to guidance and advice, although there is no forthright statement with this application which demonstrates that there would be an absolute prohibition on a site adjoining the MDS (for instance the OS1 site) in regard to safeguarding. Nevertheless, I do accept that in

terms of pupil safeguarding the site at Faulkner's Farm can be considered to be significantly preferred to the OS1 site for the simple, but important, expedient that it clearly does not suffer the same levels of nearby public access as the OS1 site, which by contrast lies close to a PROW and the General college areas which are often open to the public including the Garden Centre and sports/equine facilities. In a practical sense there is also a case to say that a new school on the application site would provide better opportunities for management, supervision and control of the new and existing facilities nearby in safeguarding terms.

- 6.38 Turning to other sites assessed by the applicant, while they all suffer the fundamental Green Belt concerns set out above, if not necessarily the highways considerations, Officers have made an assessment of them. In many ways it seems entirely illogical to seek to establish such a facility on the south east side of A26 as, in practical terms, getting pupils to the main College facilities and the AMU and other facilities at Faulkner's Farm would either require heavily managed pedestrian movements or minibus trips. Notwithstanding how such sites perform in other respects, I think that is not desirable to encourage movement across the A26 from the sites at Blackman's Dairy or Court Lane.
- 6.39 While the Blackmans Dairy site may, in other respects, have some similar characteristics when compared with the application site there would be impacts on residential amenity and, on the basis of past experience, I consider site access and access to A26 are less acceptable than the proposal access if the highways provisions set out above are provided.
- 6.40 In terms of visual assessment, the agent contends that *"the institutional buildings of Hadlow College with their landscaped setting create a visual barrier between Faulkner's Farm and the settlement of Hadlow. Being situated to the west of Hadlow Village and with intervening development between, Faulkner's Farm is considered to have a limited impact on the setting of the settlement."*
- 6.41 In contrast, the agent argues that the Blackmans Dairy site *"without any form of development between land to the north-east of Blackmans Dairy and the edge of the settlement of Hadlow, it is considered that location of the school at this site would have a visual impact on the setting of Hadlow."* Reference is also made to the proximity of the site to Hadlow Tower and the impact on its setting that would arise from the school building here due to its proximity and the lack of any intervening development or screening.
- 6.42 I do not agree with the approach taken by the applicant in this respect. The foundation for this argument centres on the assessment that development exists between Faulkner's Farm and Hadlow Village whereas there is a lack of such development in the case of the Dairy. No consideration has been given to the landscape characteristics of the Faulkner's Farm site in its own right and the fact that the school building would appear as a prominent feature within this landscape when viewed from the A26, notwithstanding the significant impact on the rural area



that the Blackmans Dairy would also have. I am not satisfied that significant weight should be given to the argument that the setting of the Tower would be adversely affected by the location of the school on/at the Dairy site location.

- 6.43 While the Court Lane glass houses have been included in the analysis, the reality is that the land is not available in light of commercial contracts that requires the College to utilise the greenhouses (as well as their teaching worth).
- 6.44 Overall, when considered in light of the alternative assessments in respect of these sites, I do not consider that these sites represent practical alternative locations.
- 6.45 Three further sites have been tested within the College complex and the MDS and are used for car parking and/or associated with the retail/teaching garden centre. I believe that these should be discounted as the reduction of car parking would exacerbate an already well known and complex problem at the site and almost inevitably would lead to pressure on the Green Belt outside the MDS. Clearly for a land based College it would not make sense to lose the Garden Centre facility and again the use of this site for the new school would only, in the long run, be likely to lead to pressure on the Green Belt. I think that is also appropriate to discount these three sites. This also demonstrates that there are no sites wholly within the MDS that could accommodate the current proposal.
- 6.46 The final alternative sites are part of the OS1 site which adjoins the MDS. It is apparent that *in purely locational terms* the only site within the College Campus would be the existing sports fields as this is identified by the applicant as having the necessary capacity to accommodate the development (albeit the applicant argues that the drop off and circulation areas would cause conflicts). In discounting this site, the College submits that this site is not available as it is reserved for its Sports and Applied Therapy centre which is intended to consist of a sports hall, gymnasium and sports therapy centre, currently undergoing negotiation for funding. The College intend to submit a planning application soon and this scheme is contained within the College Capital Strategy Plan. While this point is of interest, the College "master plan" has not been considered by the Council and it cannot be assumed that such provision is automatically acceptable in principle or detail in this location.
- 6.47 I recognise that this potential alternative site is subject to policy OS1 of the MDE DPD. This policy states that development that would result in the loss of, or reduce the recreational value of, existing open spaces will not be permitted unless a replacement site is provided which is equivalent or better in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility. Relocating that open space, for example into the rural area outside of the Campus, would be acceptable in planning policy terms as open space is policy compliant, in principle, with the Green Belt status of the surrounding land (the protected open space is itself in the Green Belt). It does need to be borne in mind however that replacement pitches, fully drained and fit to play, might well require between 1 and 2 years before the OS1 site became

available. It is also noted that the College has invested considerably to bring the playing fields to a high quality and that there is a good level of community use as well as facilities for College students.

6.48 I consider that the only real choice in siting for the new school is between the application proposal and the OS1 land. If it is assumed that traffic and transportation matter can be resolved by planning conditions, then I consider that there are two key factors where the two sites may be compared:

- visual impact; and
- opportunities to ensure the best option for safeguarding and the most practical operational approach to the proposed school and college facilities taken as a whole.

6.49 Earlier in this report I described the application site, the proposal and its visual impact. I consider that the application site is more exposed than the OS1 site from the A26 and Ashes Lane. The OS1 site is itself open in nature at present and exposed to views from across the wider College campus and from the PROW that runs immediately north of the OS1 land. Views from this area would see a new school against the wider background of open countryside. These factors of visual impact of the alternative sites must be positioned in the context of matters of pupil safeguarding and the practical operation of the whole landholding for education and ancillary purposes. In the overall balance of all the factors that determine whether a justifiable claim for very special circumstances has been made in support of the proposal site, I conclude that a case has been made.

6.50 Notwithstanding the above, it is also necessary to assess the proposed development in all other respects, particularly its detailed design and impact on residential amenities. In these respects, the NPPF attaches great importance to the design of the built environment, stating that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and is indivisible from good planning (paragraph 56). It also stresses the need for development to respond positively to local character, reflecting the identity of local surroundings whilst not discouraging appropriate innovation (paragraph 58).

6.51 Furthermore, policy CP24 of the TMBCS requires that development must respect the site and its surroundings and that it will not be permitted where it would be detrimental to the built environment and amenity of a locality. This is supported by policy SQ1 of the MDE DPD (2010) which states that all new development proposals should protect, conserve and where possible enhance:

- the character and local distinctiveness of the area including any historical and architectural interest and the prevailing level of tranquillity;
- the distinctive setting of, and relationship between, the pattern of settlement, roads and the landscape, urban form and important views.

- 6.52 If it were to be accepted that, after due consideration, this proposal were acceptable then I am of the view that the proposed school is of an agreeable design in itself, suitably mitigated by appropriate landscaping. It is far enough removed from the nearest listed buildings to ensure no harm to their particular settings. I am satisfied that the school design in itself and in combination with the other buildings in this complex, meets the tests of NPPF, CP24 and SQ1 in respect of design.
- 6.53 I also appreciate the representations made by the nearest neighbours in connection with their residential amenities given the proximity of the proposed bus drop-off point to their boundaries. This area of the site would only be used twice a day for a limited period and this could be reasonably controlled via planning condition. This, when also considering that the use by the College could intensify agricultural operations on this part of the site without any approval from the local planning authority, means that I cannot identify any justifiable ground for refusal linked to the impact of the proposal on residential amenity arising from the increased levels of activity arising from the proposed school use. Equally, the building itself at its closest corner would be located approximately 35m from the boundary with 4 Faulkner's Farm Cottages. This is a greater degree of separation than currently experienced from the existing lambing shed and, although I appreciate the school is a more significant structure, I am satisfied that the distance and angles views involved would ensure the building would not create any adverse impacts in terms of residential amenity.
- 6.54 Local residents have also raised concern regarding how the site might be managed during special school events such as parents evenings and sports days, given the limited opportunities for parking within the school grounds. The applicant has since explained that these events will take place after College hours and, as such, the parking at the AMU and the surrounding fields would be used. This as a stand-alone procedure appears to be a reasonable one and the issue is one that any secondary school, often located in much more intensively built up urban areas, has to deal with.
- 6.55 I appreciate the remaining concerns of local residents regarding the amount of parking and access arrangements to serve the site having implications for Ashes Lane. However, the technical advice provided by KCC indicates that these arrangements are appropriate and acceptable and would not cause undue harm to the safe and free flow of traffic along Ashes Lane and its junction with the A26 and this will be dealt with by conditions.

### *Conclusions*

- 6.56 In considering applications in the Green Belt, and particularly in larger scale proposals such as this, the Council is required to address three key factors; whether inappropriate development is involved, whether there are very special

circumstances to be taken into account and whether these very special circumstances are of sufficient weight to overcome the harm arising from the proposal.

- 6.57 I have explained in some detail above that I consider that the school is inappropriate development but that aspects of national Policy, both in the NPPF and the Planning for Schools Development Policy Statement, identify considerable policy in favour of the building of new state schools. The latter document does not focus on matters related to the Green Belt, but must be seen as a material consideration in the overall decision. This is especially so if the specialist nature of the school provision requires a rural location, as would be the case for a new secondary school co-located with other land based educational facilities simply because those other land based teaching facilities already exist very successfully in the countryside and in the Green Belt.
- 6.58 So the question arises as to whether the detail of the proposal in terms of specific site location and design (including any transportation related improvements/requirements) are sufficiently well developed themselves to override aspects of harm such that the Green Belt location may be accepted. From the above analysis it should be clear that I consider that, on balance, this case is made and the harm may be adequately mitigated, albeit that in some instances (such as the provision of adequate transportation/traffic related infrastructure and detail of materials/landscaping) this will require further details to be submitted, in due course, pursuant to conditions.
- 6.59 Bearing in mind all of the above factors and the community benefits that would arise from the significant new educational opportunity, I am satisfied that a case of very special circumstances exists to justify the grant of permission for this school on the submitted site. (Note: the intention to grant such a permission in the Green Belt must be referred to the Secretary of State under the relevant Direction and such permission cannot be issued without the SoS acceptance.)

## **7. Recommendation:**

- 7.1 **Grant Planning Permission** subject to:
- 7.2 Referral of the application to the Secretary of State in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009 and;
- 7.3 The following conditions:
- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: In pursuance of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

- 2 The development hereby approved shall be used solely as a Secondary School providing a land-based curriculum in association with the facilities available at Hadlow College.

Reason: To enable the Local Planning Authority to regulate and control the future use of the site in the interests of preserving the open nature and function of the Metropolitan Green Belt and in the interests of highway safety.

- 3 The development hereby approved, other than the demolition of the existing lambing shed, shall not commence until details of all materials to be used externally have been approved by the Local Planning Authority. In order to seek such approval, written details and photographs of the materials (preferably in digital format) shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority and samples of the materials shall be made available at the site for inspection by Officers of the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the visual amenity of the rural locality.

- 4 All materials used externally in the construction of the replacement lambing shed shall match those of the existing lambing shed.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the visual amenity of the rural locality.

- 5 The development shall be constructed at the level indicated on the approved drawing.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the visual amenity of the rural locality.

- 6 Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order amending, revoking and re-enacting that Order) no development shall be carried out within Class A of Part 32 of Schedule 2 to that Order unless planning permission has been granted on an application relating thereto.

Reason: To enable the Local Planning Authority to regulate and control any such future development in the interests of preserving the function and character of the Metropolitan Green Belt.

- 7 The scheme of hard and soft landscaping and means of boundary treatments shown on the approved plans shall be carried out in the first planting season following occupation of the buildings or the completion of the development, whichever is the earlier. Any trees or plants which within 10 years of planting are

removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the visual amenity of the rural locality.

- 8 The number of pupils attending the school at any time shall not exceed that set out in the Design and Access Statement.

Reason: In the interest of pedestrian and traffic safety.

- 9 No external lighting shall be installed in connection with the buildings or the footpath until such details have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority, and the work shall be carried out in strict accordance with those details.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the character and or visual amenity of the locality and in the interests of residential amenity.

- 10 The footpath shown on plan number A620-PL-001 G shall be provided before any of the buildings hereby approved (other than the lambing shed) are brought into use and shall be retained and maintained at all times thereafter.

Reason: In the interests of highway and pupil safety.

- 11 No development, other than the demolition and relocation of the existing lambing shed, shall be commenced until a programme for the provision of the following works, including a timetable for implementation prior to the opening of the school to pupils, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority:

- a controlled pedestrian crossing across the A26 at the Hadlow College entrance
- improvement works to the bus stops on the A26 in the vicinity of the Ashes Lane junction
- provision of a central road island in the A26 at the junction with Ashes Lane, along with any other associated highway improvements
- provision of school warning signs all approaches to the A26 / Ashes Lane junction and the main Hadlow College entrance

The works shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved programme and timetable.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

- 12 Prior to the commencement of development, other than the demolition and relocation of the existing lambing shed, a scheme for the management of traffic within the site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The use shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved scheme at all times thereafter.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

- 13 The use shall not be commenced, nor the premises occupied, until the area shown on the submitted layout as vehicle parking space has been provided, surfaced and drained. Thereafter it shall be kept available for such use and no permanent development, whether or not permitted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order amending, revoking or re-enacting that Order) shall be carried out on the land so shown or in such a position as to preclude vehicular access to this reserved parking space.

Reason: Development without provision of adequate accommodation for the parking of vehicles is likely to lead to hazardous on-street parking.

- 14 No building shall be occupied until the area shown on the submitted plan as turning area has been provided, surfaced and drained. Thereafter it shall be kept available for such use and no permanent development, whether or not permitted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order amending, revoking and re-enacting that Order), shall be carried out on the land so shown or in such a position as to preclude vehicular access to this reserved turning area.

Reason: Development without provision of adequate turning facilities is likely to give rise to hazardous conditions in the public highway.

- 15 No development shall be commenced until:

(a) a site investigation has been undertaken to determine the nature and extent of any contamination, and

(b) the results of the investigation, together with an assessment by a competent person and details of a scheme to contain, treat or remove any contamination, as appropriate, have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The assessment and scheme shall have regard to the need to ensure that contaminants do not escape from the site to cause air and water pollution or pollution of adjoining land.

The scheme submitted pursuant to (b) shall include details of arrangements for responding to any discovery of unforeseen contamination during the undertaking of the development hereby permitted. Such arrangements shall include a requirement to notify the Local Planning Authority of the presence of any such unforeseen contamination.

Prior to the first occupation of the development or any part of the development hereby permitted

(c) the approved remediation scheme shall be fully implemented insofar as it relates to that part of the development which is to be occupied, and

(d) a Certificate shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority by a responsible person stating that remediation has been completed and the site is suitable for the permitted end use.

Thereafter, no works shall take place within the site such as to prejudice the effectiveness of the approved scheme of remediation.

Reason: In the interests of amenity and public safety.

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