

Dear Sir

In my many years living next to the school I have found the pupils always well behaved, a source of no concerns, and I would not wish to object to plans genuinely for the benefit of most pupils. However, this application appears to be very much focussed on commercialisation of an educational play area to the detriment of the wellbeing of pupils most in need of that area to relax and unwind.

In coming to your decision, I ask you to consider the impact of the past developments on the site, particularly the progressive loss of Green Belt and failure to tackle travel issues. Figure 1 indicates the available grassed area after loss from construction of the drop off/pick up car park. Figure 3 shows the reduced area after the new school build with additional paved areas. Figure 2 highlights the further loss of 70% of the remaining grassed areas and the very small area remaining if the all-weather-pitch is installed. I also ask you to recognise the unenforceable promises and conditions associated with past planning approvals.

**Conversion of the grassed area in front of the school to a car park with a footpath introduced against the fence of 43 Highfield.**

- Planning permission was limited to a parking area for pupil drop off and pick up to reduce road chaos. It is now used as a dedicated car park for staff, with pupil **drop off and pick up places** limited to just **6 for a school with around 1000 pupils**.

**New Sports Hall Application 2008**

- Loss of Green Belt was reasonably justified by the limited facilities for indoor sport previously available and Ofsted concerns for pupil wellbeing.
- The Sports Hall was specifically designed, according the planning application at the time, for 'multi sports use **including football**'.

**School Rebuild Application 2014**

- A number of options were considered. The one chosen for the application was closest to Highfield residents' gardens hence most oppressive
- Parking, artificial turfed areas and tennis and basketball hard courts further reduced on site grassed area

**School Rebuild Approval APP/X1925/A/14/2221199 8<sup>th</sup> December 2014**

- Para 28 quoted a planned increase in marked parking places from 103 to 147. This apparently was not implemented. The current application indicates only 124 exist today. It appears that the planning condition was never adhered to.
- Para 37 required the "implementation and management of a sustainable drainage scheme". School claims of waterlogging of the area where the all-weather pitch is now proposed suggests that this has not been done.
- Para 41 required conditions controlling external lighting. This has never been adequately done, with 24 approximately 4m high lights frequently unnecessarily illuminating an empty locked car park.

- Para 44 recognised the loss of Green Belt at that stage with “In order to protect the openness of the green belt it is necessary to remove permitted development rights which relate to extensions to the school”. The series of planning applications by the school is resulting in cumulative unacceptable loss of open Green Belt area in the school.

#### **School Rebuild**

- The first rebuild action was to fell a number of trees which would have partly hidden the new school from residents’ gardens. Councillor Needham attempted to intervene but was too late.
- Note that I can find no record of approval of 1m of rebuild foundation waste being dumped on the grass play area although raising the ground level by 1metre surely risked water run off to surrounding gardens. This area is now subject to waterlogging.

#### **The school’s November 2013 Travel Plan**

- neighbours were not considered to be stakeholders and not consulted
- The greatest problem, road congestion due to legal and illegal parking/waiting in Highfield during pupil pick up, was completely ignored
- “There is no parking on Highfield by parents dropping students off” was judged as success although those displaced from the car park would be parking in the road
- The drop off and pick up car park remains dedicated to staff with just 6 set down places.

#### **Planning Application 25/01830/FP**

- Again, there was no neighbour consultation. Travel documents delivered 6 weeks after the Planning Authority’s insistence ignore neighbour concerns raised in their objections. Plans are far from robust.
- Alternative site options are available. That chosen is closest to residents’ gardens hence most oppressive
- It reduces the already inadequate grassed area available for recreation for 1000 pupils by another 70% (see figure 2)
- The land is designated as Green Belt, meaning that there is a presumption against inappropriate development **unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. No such ‘very special circumstances’ have been offered and none appear to exist.**
  - The need for wet weather provisions in addition to that provided by the sports hall is unsubstantiated. The sports hall planning application (2008) stated " Our fields are adequate for providing the facilities we require to teach outdoor Physical Education. With the exception of extreme weather outdoor lessons are rarely disrupted". The sports hall caters for weather extremes.
  - There is no obvious need for day-to-day pupil use of the area for sports. Whilst the school rebuild plan showed the area marked out for football (figure 3) it has apparently not been necessary to do so for pupil sport for the past 10 years
  - Whereas the Sports Hall was justified in the Design and Access statement of 2008 for the personal development and well-being of students, the reverse is true here. The loss of green open space available for pupils in this current proposal is obviously detrimental to pupils’ well-being and mental health.

- With no specific need identified by Sport England for this pitch and excellent football facilities elsewhere in Letchworth the more than 70% planned commercial community use clearly cannot be considered as “very special circumstances”.

In conclusion, in making your judgement, I ask you protect the remaining Green Belt, avoid traffic chaos and to recognise that previous planning approval conditions have not been adhered to or enforced. This and the lack of any consideration for neighbouring properties demonstrates that even a restricted version of this planning application would be unacceptable. Whilst past loss of Green Belt has been justified for educational needs there are no ‘very special circumstances’ to locate this commercial pitch in a Green Belt residential area.

Yours faithfully

Karen Emery

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## Figures



Fig 1 School layout 2014 with substantial grassed recreation area



Fig 2 Proposed pitch area (red) and remaining grass recreation area (black)

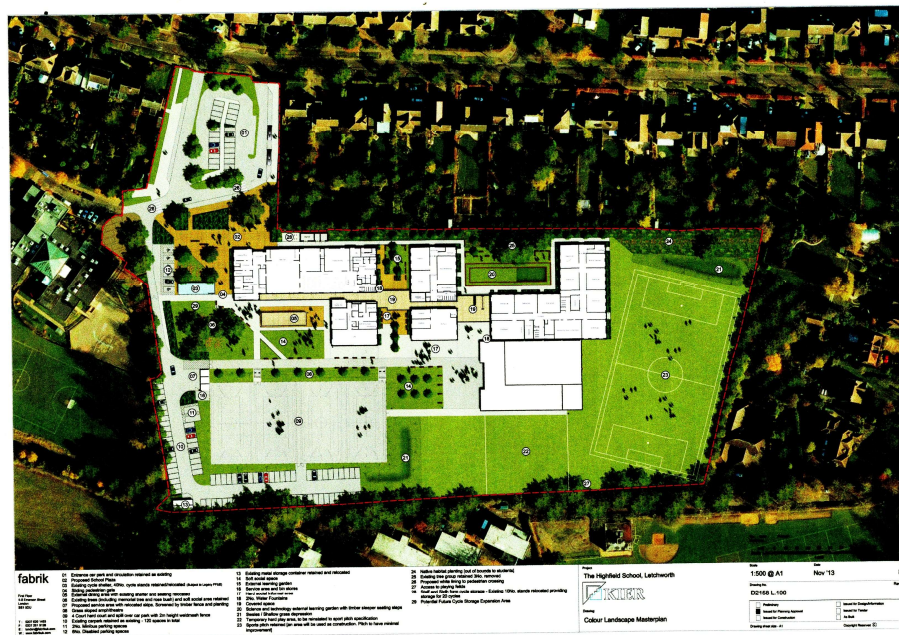


Fig 3 School Rebuild Plan 2014 with football pitch layout (not subsequently introduced)