

1. DETAILS OF THE DEVELOPMENT

Ref: 22/01580/PRE
Location: Royal Russell School, Coombe Lane, Croydon, CR9 5BX
Ward: South Croydon
Description: Demolition of the existing Junior School and replacement on the same site with a new Junior School, associated outdoor areas and landscaping.
Applicant: Royal Russell School
Agent: Alexandra Martin, LUC
Case Officer: Samantha Dixon

2. PROCEDURAL NOTE

- 2.1 This proposed development is being reported to Planning Committee to enable Members to view it at pre-application stage and to comment upon it. The development does not constitute an application for planning permission and any comments made upon it are provisional, and subject to full consideration of any subsequent applications, including any comments received as a result of consultation, publicity and notification.
- 2.2 It should be noted that this report represents a snapshot in time, with negotiations and dialogue on-going. The plans and information provided to date are indicative only and as such the depth of analysis provided corresponds with the scope of information that has been made available to Council officers. Other issues may arise as more detail is provided and the depth of analysis expanded upon.
- 2.3 The report covers the following points:
- a. Executive summary
 - b. Site briefing
 - c. Design Review Panel feedback
 - d. Matters for consideration and officers' preliminary conclusions
 - e. Specific feedback requests
 - f. Procedural matters

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 3.1 The scheme has so far been developed through a number of pre-application meetings with officers. It was considered by the Design Review Panel (DRP) on 4th May 2023 and at the time of writing their written comments are yet to be provided. However, a brief summary of points captured by officers at the DRP meeting have been provided and should the written comments be received prior to the Planning Committee meeting, a summary will be provided as an addendum.
- 3.2 Main discussions so far have focused on the principle of the development in the Metropolitan Green Belt, the scale/massing/form of the proposed building, and the design approach. Discussions are ongoing in relation to these matters and with regards to other technical matters such as sustainability, flood risk, ecological and transport impacts. Due to the scale of development proposed in the Green Belt, it is referable to the Greater

London Authority (GLA). The applicants have a pre-application meeting scheduled with officers of the GLA on the 16 May 2023 (with the LBC case officer in attendance). A brief summary of the outcome of that meeting will be provided in the addendum to the Planning Committee meeting.

4. SITE BRIEFING

- The Royal Russell School site is around 24 hectares in area and contains a large independent school (providing both secondary and primary education) comprising a series of individual buildings of one to three storeys in height, alongside large areas of parking, playing pitches and courts, staff accommodation and large areas of woodland. The school was established on the site in the 1920s. The school accommodates girls and boys from age 3 to 18 with both day and boarding pupils. The school provides education for approximately 910 pupils, of which 135 are boarders.
- The application relates only to the Junior School element of the site which is outlined in red in Figure 1 below. The junior school sits to the north of the main school campus and is the most visible part of the school from the entrance gates. The Junior school building was erected in the 1960s constructed of Laingspan. As well as the Junior School facilities, the buildings also comprise the nursery, medical wing and boarding accommodation. The boarding accommodation has been relocated into new build accommodation to the south and this element of the building is currently unoccupied. The buildings range in height from one to three storeys. There are outside play areas mainly to the rear and the complex is surrounded by woodland.

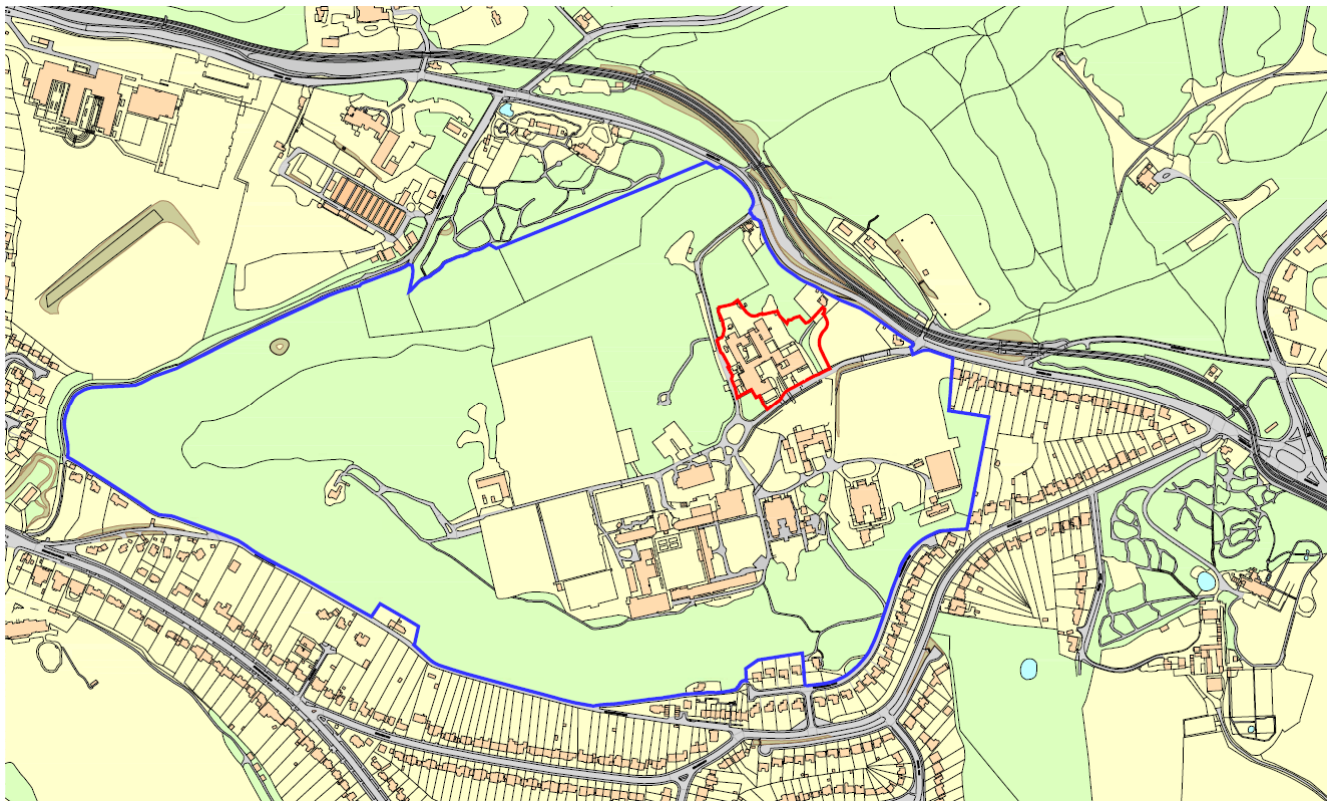


Figure 1: Site location plan



Figure 2: Aerial view of the Royal Russell School campus



Figure 3: Existing Junior School building when viewed from vehicular access into the site

- Access to the school campus is entirely from the Coombe Lane (A212) entrance point. A historic access is located to the western side of the junior school site, however is no longer in use. The existing car parking is located to the front/south of the junior school site and serves the whole campus.
- The surrounding area is predominantly residential and occupied by two storey detached and semi-detached dwellings. The tramline runs past the site to the opposite side of

Coombe Lane to the north east. The north eastern part of the site slopes gently downwards towards Coombe Lane. However, due to the topography and presence of mature trees, views into the site are limited.

Designations

- The site is located within the designated Metropolitan Green Belt
- Much of the site is within a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (the junior school site itself is not within this designation however the land surrounding the site is)
- The site is within an Archaeological Priority Zone
- The entire school site is a locally listed Historic Park and Garden
- The Main Lodge of the school (to the north of the junior school site) and the part of the main school building (within the main school complex to the south west of the junior school site) are on the Council's Local List of buildings of Architectural or Historic Value.
- Old Ballards Cottage to the far south of the school campus is a Grade II statutorily listed building.
- A small part of the site to the north-west adjoining Coombe Wood lies on the edge of a designated Croydon Panorama (viewed from Addington Hills).
- Some trees within the site are protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPO). There are two TPO's that affect the site TPO No.27, 1970 and No.27, 2014. Neither of these are located in close proximity to the junior school site.
- The site (at its entrance point) has a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) of 2, Coombe Lane tram stop is approximately 160m from the school entrance (3 minute walk). This tram runs to new Addington and Wimbledon (via Croydon).
- The site is largely at low risk of surface water flooding, however there are areas around the junior school (including the area where the new building is proposed) that are at 1 in 1000 year risk. The site has limited potential for ground water flooding to occur.

Relevant Planning History

There is extensive planning history at the site. The following most recent planning decisions are:

Reference No.	Description	Decision
07/03765/P	Erection of two/three storey link extension to provide performing arts centre; enhanced kitchen and dining facilities and ancillary office accommodation.	Approved [and implemented]
11/03345/P	Erection of single storey detached building for use by gymnastics club.	Refused due to impact on greenbelt and unsatisfactory design and layout.
13/01357/P	Two all-weather pitches; multi use games area; floodlights; new grass playing pitches; improvements of internal access road.	Approved [and implemented]
14/03633/DT	Proposed boarding houses and pavilion, to be the first applications within merging	Environmental Impact Assessment Not Required.

	<p>master plan proposals for boarding houses, academic and sports facilities, car parking and landscaping.</p>	
<p>15/01323/P</p>	<p>Construction of two three-storey buildings to provide replacement residential student accommodation and associated landscaping and ecological enhancement works, and demolition of the existing Cambridge House residential student accommodation.</p>	<p>Permission granted 30.07.2015</p> <p>Within the assessment of this application it was concluded that the development was inappropriate in the Green Belt however very special circumstances existed to outweigh the harm. To mitigate the harm the applicant committed to demolition of other buildings within the site to offset the development, the Officer report commented as follows:</p> <p><i>'Following the completion and occupation of Building 1, the existing Cambridge House boarding accommodation would be demolished, releasing 633m2 of Green Belt land. Following the completion and occupation of Building 2, the existing Queens House boarding accommodation would be demolished, releasing a further 950m2 of land. This is a significant mitigating factor to be weighed against the harm to the Green Belt in this case. The applicant has confirmed that they would be prepared to commit to the demolition of the existing buildings in this sequence and the detailed wording of a planning condition (Planning Condition 8) is recommended to reflect this approach'.</i></p> <p>Subsequently, Condition 8 of 15/01323/P reads as follows:</p> <p>The demolition of Cambridge House, shown on plan ref. 2715 A004 8 shall be commenced no later than 6 months after the first occupation of Building I shown on plan ref. 2715 A499. The demolition of Queens House, hatched in red on plan ref. 2715 A499, shall be commenced no later than 6 months after the first occupation of Building II shown on plan ref. 2715 A499. The demolition works shall be completed no later than 6 months following their commencement.</p> <p>Reason: To preserve the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt in accordance with Policies RO1 of the Croydon Replacement Unitary Development Plan (The Croydon Plan 2006) Saved</p>

		Policies 2013, Policy 7.16 of the London Plan (Consolidated with alterations since 2011) and Chapter 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
16/04999/CONR	Construction of two three-storey buildings to provide replacement residential student accommodation and associated landscaping and ecological enhancement works, and demolition of the existing Cambridge House residential student accommodation (without compliance with condition 7 -sustainability- and 17- built in accordance with plans- attached to planning permission 15/1323/P).	Permission granted 07.02.2017
17/00682/CONR	Construction of two three-storey buildings to provide replacement residential student accommodation and associated landscaping and ecological enhancement works, and demolition of the existing Cambridge House residential student accommodation (without compliance with condition 8 - time period for demolition of Cambridge House- attached to planning permission 15/01323/P).	<p>Permission granted 14.07.2017.</p> <p>Wording of Condition 8 amended to read as follows:</p> <p>The demolition of Cambridge House, shown on plan ref. 2715 A004 8 shall be commenced no later than <u>1 year</u> after the first occupation of Building I shown on plan ref. 2715 A499. The demolition of Queens House, hatched in red on plan ref. 2715 A499, shall be commenced no later than 6 months after the first occupation of Building II shown on plan ref. 2715 A499. The demolition works shall be completed no later than 6 months following their commencement.</p> <p>Reason: To preserve the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt in accordance with Policies RO1 of the Croydon Replacement Unitary Development Plan (The Croydon Plan 2006) Saved Policies 2013, Policy 7.16 of the London Plan (Consolidated with alterations since 2011) and Chapter 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).</p>
18/02909/FUL	Science block extension	Permission granted 11.09.2018
20/02463/CONR	Variation of condition 8 (time for demolition in respect of Queens House extended to 12 months) subject to previous planning	<p>Permission granted 30.10.2020.</p> <p>In considering the application, the Officer report commented as follows:</p>

consent ref.
19/02112/CONR.

It is not considered appropriate or necessary to extend the time allowed for demolition by 2.5 years. The main consideration is the impact of the variation to the condition on the openness and visual amenity of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The impact of the change would mean Queens House would be retained on the site for an additional 2.5 years (maximum) than was originally required by the condition. One of the main justifications for allowing the original redevelopment of the school in the Green Belt was the ability to control the phasing of development to ensure that works continue and Green Belt land is released as planned to minimise the long term impact on openness. It is considered that three years is an excessive length of time to extend the demolition requirement by, and would effectively mean works would cease for a significant length of time with the existing situation (and harm to the Green Belt) becoming established on site. The varied wording of the condition originally proposed by the applicant therefore cannot be supported.

On balance it is considered an extension of time of a further 6 months (total of 1 year) to the demolition of Queens House can be accepted, to allow the applicant some flexibility given the arguments they have raised but ensuring the phased works continue to minimise the impact on the Green Belt. It is not considered appropriate or necessary to extend the other timescales secured by the condition, for example it is not considered unreasonable for demolition to be completed within 6 months of its commencement to allow development to move forward.

Subsequently the wording of Condition 8 was amended as follows:

The demolition of Cambridge House, shown on plan ref. 2715 A004 8 shall be commenced no later than 1 year after the first occupation of Building I shown on plan ref. 2715 A499. The demolition of Queens House, hatched in red on plan ref. 2715 A499, shall be commenced no later than 1 year after the first occupation of Building II shown on plan ref. 2715 A499. The demolition works shall be

		<p><i>completed no later than 6 months following their commencement.</i></p> <p><i>Reason: To preserve the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt.</i></p>
22/02544/CONR	<p>Variation of Condition 8 (time for demolition in respect of Queens House) attached to planning permission ref. 15/01323/P (as amended by 19/02112/CONR and 20/02463/CONR)</p> <p>(Construction of two three-storey buildings to provide replacement residential student accommodation and associated landscaping and ecological enhancement works, and demolition of the existing Cambridge House residential student accommodation)</p>	<p>Granted 30.03.2023</p> <p>By reason of the ongoing extensive pre-application discussions with regard to the replacement of the junior school building, the wording Condition 8 was amended as follows:</p> <p><i>The demolition of Cambridge House, shown on plan ref. 2715 A004 8 shall be commenced no later than 1 year after the first occupation of Building I shown on plan ref. 2715 A499. The demolition of Queens House, hatched in red on plan ref. 2715 A499, shall be commenced no later than 2 years 6 months after the first occupation of Building II shown on plan ref. 2715 A499. The demolition works shall be completed no later than 2 years following their commencement.</i></p> <p><i>Reason: To preserve the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt.</i></p>

Proposal

4.1 The proposal has been amended during the course of on-going discussions. The current proposal is for the following:

- Partial demolition of some existing buildings on site to enable the construction of the new junior school and to accord as far as possible with Condition 8 of planning permission ref. 15/01323/P.
- Erection of new junior school building
- Increase in number of classrooms from 19 to 20 (enabling a capacity of pupils from 380 – 400)
- Installation of MUGA and outside play areas
- Installation of extensive soft landscaping and tree planting
- No alteration proposed to existing access or parking arrangement
- Provision of refuse storage area
- Full demolition of existing junior school building on site once the new building is ready for occupation.

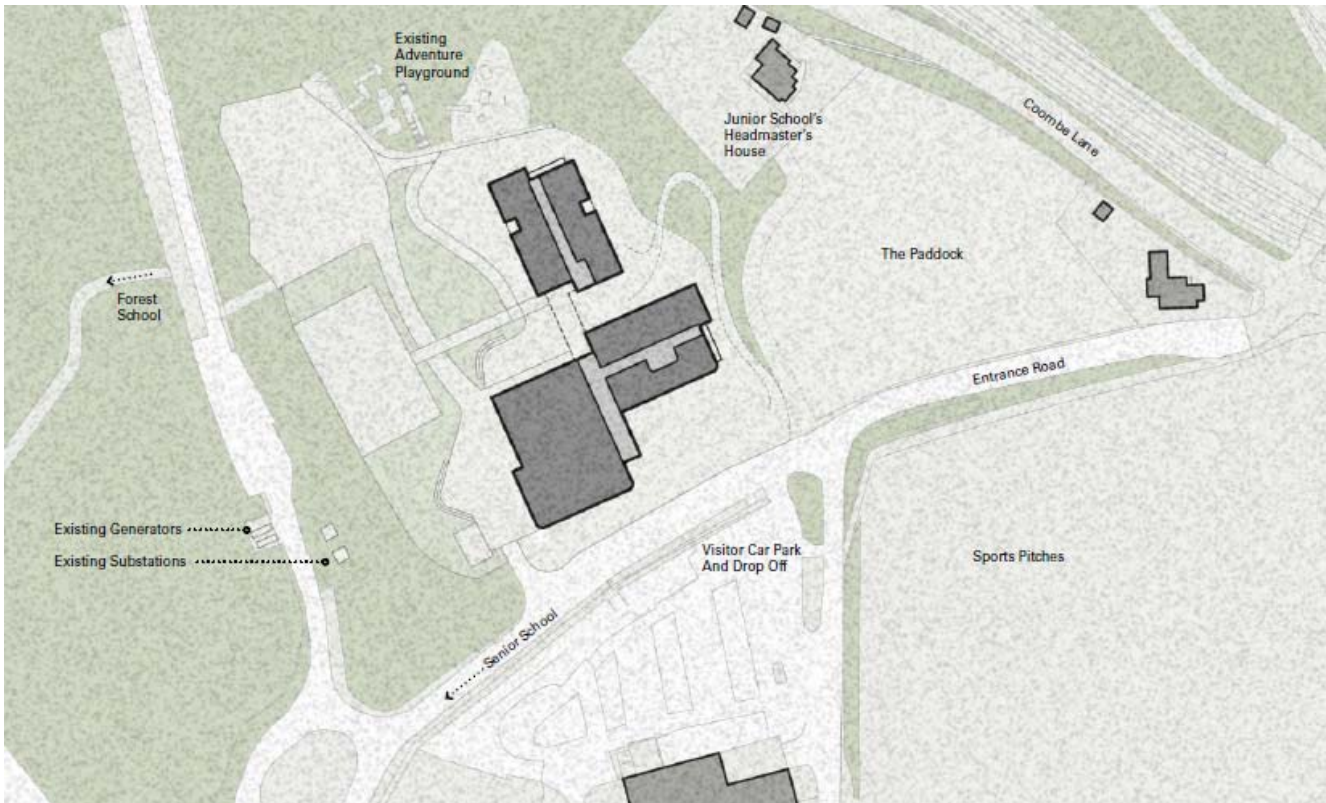


Figure 4. Proposed site plan

5. DESIGN REVIEW PANEL FEEDBACK

5.1 The scheme was presented to the Council's Design Review Panel (DRP) on 4th May 2023, see images and plans below in this report for the scheme that was presented to DRP.

5.2 Massing

- The Panel consider that the massing and way the building sits with the site is positive.
- The Panel liked the way the building has been broken into three parts.
- They consider that the two rear blocks work well, however the frontage block is not so successful. The curve and the blank corner don't work. The building should be more outward facing. The elevations should be brought more in harmony with one another.

5.3 Architectural Expression

- The Panel questioned the relationship of the proposed building to the rest of the school site. How does it speak to the adjacent buildings? The connection is not balanced right at the moment.
- The building doesn't need to be so 'hidden'
- The Panel would like to see more boldness in the material palette. The original buildings on site are not shy and this should be celebrated.
- The Panel liked the use of timber and felt that there could be more timber within the material palette.
- The Panel like the concept of the spine however felt that its appearance has been watered down too much in the latest iterations.
- The entrance is key and needs to be more dominant.
- Public art at the entrance is encouraged.

5.4 Landscape and Amenity

- The Panel like the access approach
- The landscape approach responds well to the setting
- The Panel noted that the teaching environment will be amazing thanks to the landscaping opportunities e.g. rain gardens, network of routes, planting
- The Panel suggested the applicant think more flexibly about the MUGA and what it could be e.g. outdoor performance area, rain water attenuation area.
- Outdoor covered spaces for teaching will be really valuable.
- Connectively to the rest of the site should be better achieved by use of landscaping. The applicant should look beyond the red line e.g. planting within car park, connection to the forest school.
- If trees are removed, they should be reused on site e.g. for biodiversity, for education.
- The scheme should promote the use of extensive green roofs alongside the PV panels.

5.5 Summary

- The Panel are supportive of the siting and massing of the building
- The Panel felt that the architectural expression is lacking and should better connect with the more historic buildings at the Senior School site.
- The landscaping creates a fantastic opportunity to provide a fantastic teaching facility.

6 SUMMARY OF MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 The main matters for consideration in a future submission are as follows:

- Principle of development in the Metropolitan Green Belt
- Design and Heritage
- Quality of Accommodation Provided
- Impact on Adjoining Occupiers Living Conditions
- Highways impacts
- Environment
- Other matters

Principle of Development in the Metropolitan Green Belt

Policy context

6.2 Section 13 of the NPPF (2021) refers to the protection of Green Belt land. Paragraph 147 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 148 says that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

6.3 Paragraph 149 outlines that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;

- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
 - c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
 - d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
 - g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would: – not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or – not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.
- 6.4 Policy G2 of the London Plan (2021) refers to London’s Green Belt and says that the Green Belt should be protected from inappropriate development. Development proposals that would harm the Green Belt should be refused except where very special circumstances exist.
- 6.5 Croydon Local Plan (2018) Policy DM26 refers to the Metropolitan Green Belt. The Council will protect and safeguard the extent of the borough’s Metropolitan Green Belt by applying the same level of protection as national planning policy. In considering whether extensions to existing buildings are disproportionate or if any proposed structure harms the openness of Metropolitan Green Belt the Council will have regard to:
- a. Changes in the floor space and volume of buildings;
 - b. The floor space and volume of all previous extensions (since 1948), alterations and developments within the curtilage of the dwelling;
 - c. Use of basements and roof spaces as living areas;
 - d. Whether there is an increase in the spread of buildings across the site, in particular where visible from public vantage points;
 - e. The size of the curtilage and character of the surrounding area; and
 - f. Whether ancillary structures have an urbanising effect.

Whether the proposals constitute inappropriate development

- 6.7 As noted above, Paragraph 149 of the NPPF outlines exceptions within the Green Belt that could be considered as appropriate. This includes the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces.
- 6.8 Officers do not consider that the proposal constitutes development that is captured by any of the relevant exceptions and this is because, as a result of the site planning history, the proposal would introduce development in the Green Belt that would be

significantly greater in floor space and volume than the existing structures and is therefore inappropriate development.

Relevant planning history

6.9 Planning permission was granted in 2015 (reference 15/01323/P) for the construction of two three-storey buildings to provide replacement residential student accommodation. In order to justify the development of these buildings in terms of the impact on the openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt, Condition 8 of that permission required partial demolition of some of the buildings on the Junior School site. Figure 5 below shows the extent of the existing structures to be demolished (shaded in red), which amounts to a total footprint of 1792sqm (referred to as Queens House).

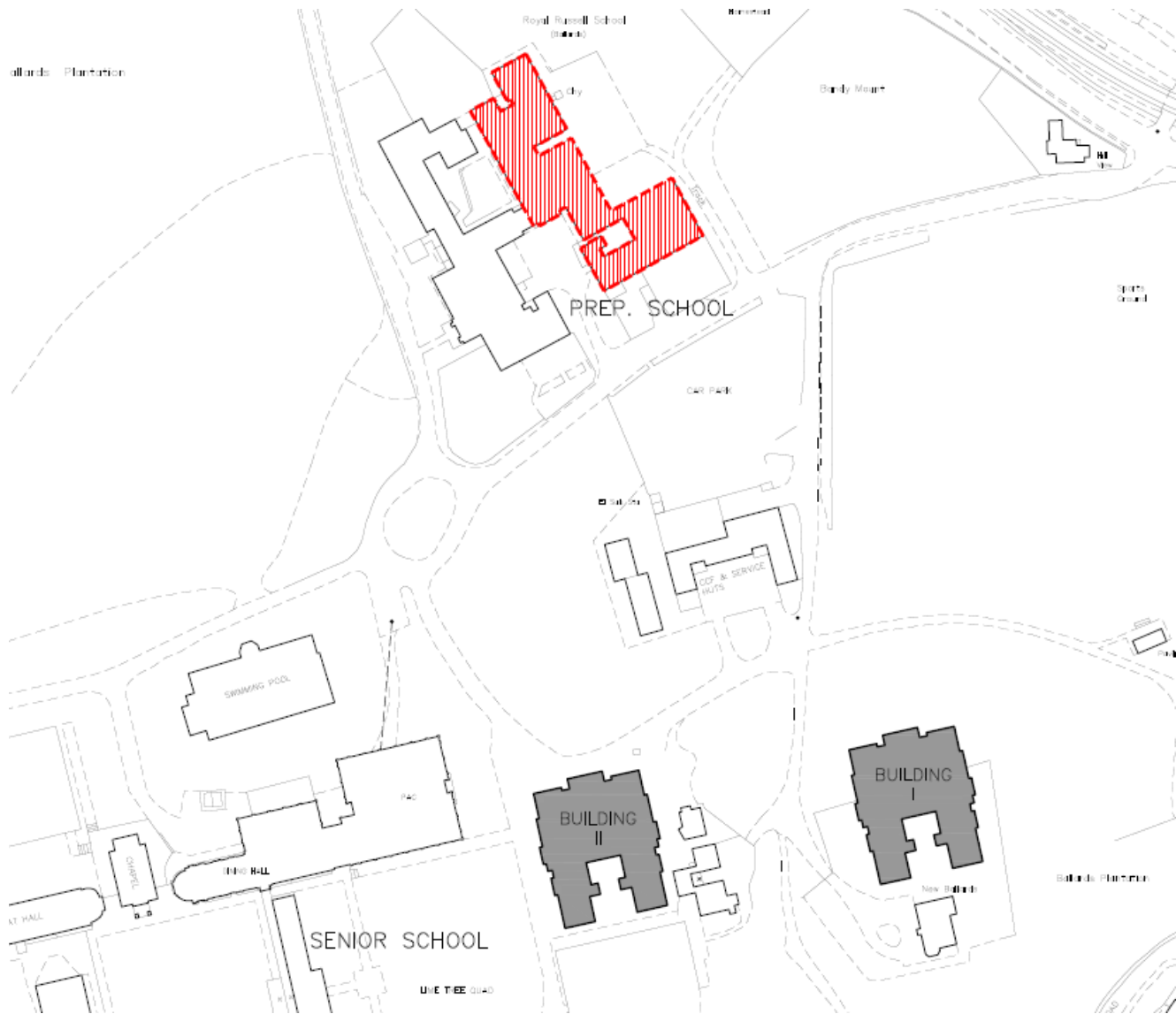


Figure 5. Demolition required by planning permission 15/01323/P

6.10 The development permitted under 15/01323/P has been completed to site, however the demolition required to mitigate the development has not been implemented. The reasoning for this is because the boiler and main heating system for the Junior school is located with Queens House. This sits at the base of a three-storey element of the building and it is evident that this portion of the building cannot be demolished if the junior school is to function. This appears to be a significant oversight of the assessment of application 15/01323/P. Subsequently, planning permission has been granted to extend the time allowed for the demolition, the aim of which is to allow the junior school to continue to

function, and align with the wider redevelopment aspirations for the Junior School building (22/02544/CONR).

- 6.11 The consequences of this previous permission, and required demolition, are that the resultant volume of building that is retained as the existing junior school is considerably less than existing.
- 6.12 Now as proposed, the increased mass, when taking into account the volume of the new building, plus that of the boarding houses approved under 15/01323/P (as the volume to be demolished by condition is made negligible as a result of the proposed new mass), would have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than that of the existing development (as granted by the restrictions of the planning permission). Therefore, the proposal would introduce development in the Green Belt that would be significantly greater in floor space and volume than the existing structures and is therefore inappropriate development.

Footprint analysis

Existing gross external footprint = 2,886sqm
Amount left after removal of floor space by Condition 8 of 15/01323/P = 1,698sqm
Proposed gross external footprint = 1,939sqm
= Increase in footprint = **+241sqm**

Floor area analysis

Total gross external floor area of existing school = 5,735sqm
Amount to be demolished by Condition 8 = 3,231sqm
Remaining space = 2,504sqm
Proposed external floor area of new school = 4,019sqm
= Increase in floor area of = **+1,515sqm**

The scheme proposes 20 classrooms (which is 1 more than the current school).

- 6.8 The applicant has made the argument that, for the following reasons, the proposed school would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development:
- Regardless of exact timings of when buildings are demolished and why, at the end of the process this area of previously developed Green Belt land will be more open than it is currently.
 - The proposed school will have a more compact form than the existing Junior School, making best use of land, and improving the physical openness of this part of the Green Belt. The current school contains areas of enclosed courtyard space which, while not contributing to the built footprint, also do not contribute to the visual openness of the site as they cannot be seen other than from above. The result is that visually, the existing school appears to use much more of the site. The proposed Junior School is located solely on the eastern part of the site and does not include enclosed courtyards or other hidden open spaces. Instead the entire central and western portion of the site will be kept open and used for outdoor play and landscaping. Therefore, the site will be much more open.

- With the demolition required by Condition 8 being taken into consideration, the actual 'built area' of the site (the footprint) will only be increased by 241sqm.
- The form of the building makes best use of the natural slope, seeking to ground the building in the topography, siting it down into the natural northward sloping site and presenting a single storey to the east and views from the entrance to the school grounds.
- The massing has been broken up into three distinct building forms allowing the building to sit more comfortably in the Green Belt context. A connecting bridge is proposed which allows for views through the proposed school and allows the landscaping to flow through and around the building.
- The materials of the building will be more complementary to the surrounding Green Belt setting, reducing visual impact. Materials will use muted tones but will complement the character of the existing buildings on site which are constructed predominantly of brick and stone. The existing buildings are of unattractive 1960s construction which is considered to detract from the Green Belt woodland and parkland setting of the school. The current areas of hardstanding contrast with the surrounding landscape. The proposed Junior School includes external areas designed to work in harmony with the existing woodland Green Belt setting.
- There will be additional planting along the eastern boundary of the proposed Junior School which will soften views of the building from both within the site and the entrance to the school.
- Existing and proposed views of the Junior School are included in the submitted design document (see images further below in this report) and illustrate the positive impact the new school will have on the setting of this area of the campus. The proposals sit much more comfortably within the topography and thus appear lower than the existing school from the main entrance. The surrounding woodland will be visible above and provide a backdrop to the proposed building. The materials also work to soften the visual impact. Furthermore, the proposals will include a significant amount of planting that will help to soften the view of the new building from this road. From other areas of the campus, in particular the western side, the new building is less visible as it is contained within the eastern portion of the site, with the western half dedicated to outdoor play and landscaped areas. It is noted that the land beyond the main the School campus is very well wooded so views of the new building from outside the campus are restricted to limited views at the entrance off Coombe Lane.
- Provided floor plans of existing junior school provision which evidences that the proposal is replacing (and improving) facilities that the school already has.
- The increase in floor space in comparison to the existing junior school provision is as a result of the one additional classroom and the thickness of the external walls which is required to provide a high level of thermal insulation.
- The applicant has explored all possibilities to undertake other demolition on the school campus, however all of the remaining buildings are in constant use and are all essential to the schools function.

6.9 Whilst the positive design and landscaping moves listed above are noted by the local planning authority, and will be discussed in the sections below, impact on the openness

of the Green Belt needs to be measured in terms of building mass (floorspace and volume) not just footprint and with regard to the site history. As such, officers maintain that the development amounts to inappropriate development in the Metropolitan Green Belt, and as such should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

The very special circumstances

- 6.10 Paragraph 147 of the NPPF states that: *“Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.”* Paragraph 148 states that: *“Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.”*
- 6.11 The applicant has identified a number of ‘very special circumstances’ which they consider would cumulatively outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and to justify the development:
- 6.12 Planning Policy - There is planning policy support for providing adequate school facilities. Paragraph 95 of the NPPF states that it is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities and that great weight should be given to the need to create, expand or alter schools. Policy S3 of the London Plan states that development proposals should ensure that there is no net loss of education or childcare facilities. Boroughs should ensure the location and provision of a range of childcare services in different types of settings to meet the needs of local communities. Croydon Local Plan Policy SP5 says that the Council will support investment in the improvement and expansion of primary and secondary schools and special schools to meet the needs of the community and its growing population. Pre-school facilities will be provided, enhanced and updated in alignment with the growing population. Paragraph 7.15: The quality of educational facilities needs continual renewal and improvement to meet modern standards. Additionally, the educational estate needs to be expanded to meet the requirements arising from housing and demographic growth and to fulfil the objectives of Croydon’s Sustainable Community Strategy. This will require both the expansion of existing schools and the provision of new schools.
- 6.13 There is clear national and local policy support the provision and improvement of schools and their facilities, which should be given weight in planning decisions.
- 6.14 Quality of existing buildings - The new Junior School is proposed out of necessity rather than desire. The existing Junior School is one of a collection of buildings at Royal Russell School that were built in the 1960s of ‘Laingspan’ construction, a method which has a limited structural lifespan. The Laingspan buildings are of prefabricated concrete construction held in place by tensioned steel cables. However, these steel elements are vulnerable to rust and consequently Laingspan buildings have a limited life. A number of these buildings, such as Cambridge Boarding House, have already been demolished and replaced. Those that remain, including the Junior School, now require more regular engineering checks and urgently need to be replaced. A recent structural survey noted that there is little time left for the current Junior School buildings.
- 6.15 Regardless of the Laingspan issues, the existing Junior School is now aging. The existing spaces are no longer fit for purpose and do not meet the requirements and standards of the school for teaching and learning. The new Junior School will be of a much higher quality with spaces specifically designed both for the school’s needs and to accord with modern day teaching standards.

- 6.16 The existing Junior School has a capacity for 380 pupils (based on the provision of 19 classrooms each able to accommodate 20 pupils). However actual pupil numbers are lower than this as the school does not have sufficient supporting spaces in terms of quantity and quality e.g. insufficient space for gatherings and dining space. The proposed building is significantly more efficient than the current building.
- 6.17 Building Bulletin 103 (a Department for Education guidance document that aims to assist those involved in creating design briefs for new schools) has been used in parallel with an analysis of the curriculum being offered by Royal Russell to determine and develop the areas required for the various spaces within the proposed school. The range and number of specialist teaching spaces in the proposed new Junior School is equivalent to the current provision, in order to meet the needs of the school's successful curriculum.
- 6.18 The existing Junior School is inefficient in terms of its circulation space and built fabric, resulting in high energy use. The proposed school is much more efficiently planned than the existing school, which will have significant operational and sustainability benefits (see further detail below).
- 6.19 Implications of Condition 8 demolition – As outlined above, some of the spaces that are required to be demolished by Condition 8 are integral to the functioning of the Junior School (e.g. plant space, gym, classrooms). Therefore this demolition cannot commence and allow the existing Junior School to operate.
- 6.20 The calculation to determine the area of the Junior School to be demolished in order to balance out the area of built development in the Green Belt was based purely on footprint at the time of determining application 15/01323/P. It is noted that the footprint of the proposed Junior School exceeds the footprint of the existing Junior School (which is left once the required demolition has taken place), by 241 sqm, which the applicant considers could be viewed as not being materially larger than the existing building.
- 6.21 When all of the floorspace to be demolished by Condition 8 is removed from the existing school floor space, there is not adequate space left to provide a replacement Junior School which is fit for purpose. Building within the parameters of the remaining floor space would not enable the school to reprovide current provision, nor improve necessary assembly or dining/support spaces to current standards and guidance.
- 6.22 Demonstration of educational need
- 6.23 There are no sites in this part of the borough that are allocated for educational use in the local plan. All sites allocated for education use within the current Local Plan have either been developed or granted planning permission.
- 6.24 The Royal Russell School campus lies entirely within the Green Belt. The school does not own any land outside of the existing Green Belt campus. The applicant ascertains that the replacement Junior School is required to be located on the Royal Russell School campus. The 'through school' provision is an intrinsic part of the Royal Russell business model, and is important to pupils and parents. Feedback shows that parents hold the 'through provision' near the top of their agenda when considering Royal Russell Junior School. Furthermore, year 5 and 6 are always at capacity as parents see this as an entry point to the senior school at year 7. More than 90% of year 6 pupils will progress on to the Senior School.
- 6.25 The loss of the Junior School from the site would cause irreparable damage to the school from an education perspective, and as a business, with the need for up to 380 pupils to

find alternative school places, and 50+ staff to find alternative employment, and a loss of income in excess of £5m per annum.

6.26 Royal Russell School is an extremely popular option for parents in the area seeking an independent education for their children. There is clear demand, and therefore an educational need, for the replacement Junior School to be provided. This is evidenced by:

- The current pupil roll and high demand.
- Current un-met demand due to insufficient facilities (capacity is 380).
- The nursery is over-subscribed.
- Royal Russell School receives 7 applications for every place.

6.27 Primary school provision and capacity within LB Croydon – In LB Croydon's 2023 Education Estates Strategy Report (2022 – 2025), the council noted that there were more places than pupils at both primary and secondary levels, but the balance between the two varied across the borough, within educational planning areas and particularly school-by school: shortages of places at popular schools can exist alongside surplus places at others. While demand for state primary school places has reduced in LB Croydon as a whole, due to falling birth rates and changes in immigration, this has mainly been experienced in the north west and east of the borough. Over the next three years, the expected growth in pupil numbers varies widely: in some places, particularly in the central and south of the borough, demand for school places is expected to increase due to pupil yield from planned housing developments. For example, there has been a higher than expected increase in demand for school places in the south-west due to pupil yield from the Cane Hill housing development in Coulsdon, as well as in the centre of the borough. In summary, while there are currently sufficient primary school places in LB Croydon, there is a shortfall of places at popular schools, and additional need is linked to new housing development in central and southern parts of the borough. Royal Russell School lies within the South East primary school planning area of the borough.

6.28 The applicant has provided data for each of the nine closest state primary schools to Royal Russell, including their 2022 admissions number, the number of applications received for 2022 and the furthest straight line distance for 2022 intake. It can be seen that each was oversubscribed, most by a significant amount, and that generally, the furthest distance for intake is very small (less than a mile for six of the nine schools listed). This suggests that primary school pupils in the area may not have received their first choice school place.

Primary School (and straight line distance from Royal Russell)	2022 admissions number	Applications received for 2022	Furthest straight line distance for 2022 intake
Park Hill Infants (1.3 miles from Royal Russell)	90	325	0.374
St Johns C of E Primary School (1.05 miles from Royal Russell)	60	206	N/A
Harris Primary Academy Benson (1.28 miles from Royal Russell)	30	109	0.717
Courtwood Primary School (1.56 miles from Royal Russell)	30	119	0.363
Forestdale Primary School (1.3 miles from Royal Russell)	60	183	0.438
Gilbert Scott Primary School (0.92 miles from Royal Russell)	30	44	4.187
Selsdon Primary and Nursery (0.93 miles from Royal Russell)	90	102	2.266
Ridgeway Primary School (1.29 miles from Royal Russell)	90	317	0.649
St Peters Primary School (1.06 miles from Royal Russell)	60	220	0.683

- 6.29 Another good indicator of local demand for state school places is Coombe Wood School, located in close proximity to Royal Russell School. When it opened in 2018, Coombe Wood School received 530 applications for 180 places. While this is a secondary school, the school notes that this level of applications demonstrates the strength of demographic demand in the area. Coombe Wood School also provides a precedent of education development on a Green Belt site (although the site was removed from the Green Belt in the local plan) for the provision of school places in the local area.
- 6.30 The applicant contends that, whether or not there is an overall surplus in the state sector, it remains the case that there is an existing Junior School at Royal Russell, an essential need to replace the current building for current pupils, and a clear demand for places. National and local planning policy strongly supports a choice in education provision (as set out in NPPF paragraph 95, and Croydon Local Plan Policy SP5.9 and SP5.11), and Royal Russell makes an important contribution to this.
- 6.31 Alternative Independent School Provision in LB Croydon – The applicant has provided an analysis of alternative independent school provision in the borough. There are no other schools in the area which cater for children from 3 years to sixth form of mixed gender. The closest independent school is Oakwood School (mixed school for ages 3-11) which is due to close and be relocated to Crystal Palace, This may result in additional demand in the local area. Oakwood School is relocating in order to expand capacity, which highlights demand for private school places in the area. At the date of writing, there are more than 12 students who have made the choice to move from Oakwood School to Royal Russell Junior School as a close and convenient alternative. All the independent schools in close proximity are oversubscribed and have a waiting list of pupils.
- 6.32 Royal Russell caters for both mixed gender and offers the opportunity to progress from the nursery, through the Junior School to the Senior School. No other school in the area provides a comparable opportunity.

6.33 If the Junior School at Royal Russell did not exist, this would result in approximately 380 pupils returning to the state system, or, more likely, seeking alternative private education. The applicant states that there is a clear demand and educational need for the replacement Junior School at Royal Russell School. The proposed replacement Junior School would therefore make an important contribution to meeting the planning policy objective of paragraph 95 of the NPPF which stipulates that it is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. The proposed replacement school would accommodate an educational requirement within LB Croydon, and align with Local Plan Policies SP5.9 and SP5.11 which support investment in the improvement and expansion of primary and secondary schools, and the provision, enhancement and updating of pre-school facilities.

6.34 Other special circumstances

6.35 Educational support - The School provides support for disadvantaged pupils setting aside around £3.1m annually to provide pupil fee reductions such as academic scholarships and bursaries for disadvantaged pupils from Croydon, South London and beyond. The reduction allows 72 pupils whose families would have otherwise been unable to afford school fees to access Royal Russell, and their contribution greatly enriches the school community.

6.36 Royal Russell also provides significant support to enhance the education experience of children in other local schools. The school's outreach work with the local community supports and provides additional opportunities to a significant number of local children through knowledge sharing with local and international schools and the sharing of facilities such as their indoor swimming pool.

6.37 Community use - Royal Russell School plays a big part in supporting key initiatives within the Borough. This includes sharing its facilities with, and providing spaces for community organisations, fundraising events, neighbouring schools, other organisations and businesses, foundations and sports teams. The new Junior School building will provide additional facilities to share for community use, such as a drama studio, better quality classrooms for the holiday club, sports facilities and an all-weather pitch. The addition of the new Junior School will therefore enhance what is already offered by the wider School, making a significant contribution. Provision of the new Junior School will enable the School to maintain its estate and facilities, and continue its shared use of facilities with other schools and the wider community.

6.38 Employment provision and economic benefits - The School employs over 350 staff, the majority of whom live within a 10 mile commuting radius of the School, with a large number living within the London Borough of Croydon. Approximately 40 staff live permanently at the school to provide support for the 185 pupils who live as boarding pupils on the campus. The school also acts as a purchaser of goods and services from the local economy. Junior School staff numbers total 62. The improved educational offer of the replacement Junior School, and the modest increase in capacity, will help the school to fund the new Junior School building. It is important to safeguard the economic resilience and continuation of the School to help ensure that these jobs, pupil places, pupil support and support of the local economy remains, and indeed, provides for further jobs and economic growth. The provision of a new Junior School offering enhanced teaching facilities and a small number of additional pupil places is very important in ensuring the future success of the school as a whole.

- 6.39 Environmental benefits - Due to the layout, age and materials of the existing Junior School it is highly inefficient and unsustainable. The new Junior School will be significantly more sustainable, applying a whole life carbon approach and fabric first approach. The building will be constructed for longevity and durability.
- 6.40 The scheme will exceed Urban Greening Factor (UGF) requirements and will achieve biodiversity net gain. The strategy includes extensive tree planting, amenity grass, ornamental planting and native wildflower planting.
- 6.41 The proposed building will manage surface water runoff through SuDS strategies that include detention basins, filter drains, a soakaway, permeable block paving and porous asphalt.

Assessment and Conclusion

- 6.42 Condition 8 attached to planning permission 15/01323/P required a large part of the existing junior school to be demolished to enable development of boarding houses associated with the senior school on site. Whilst the reasoning for the condition was/is sound, its imposition was significantly flawed as the result is that it proposes significant limitations on the redevelopment the junior school site. The junior school cannot function if the floor area to be removed is as significant as required by the condition. It can be assumed that it was not the purpose of Condition 8 to hamper or harm the functioning of the junior school.
- 6.43 The proposal now before us seeks to re-provide an existing use. It is not proposed to significantly increase educational provision at the school. Evidence has been provided to show the existing capacity of the school. One additional classroom is proposed which will future proof and help to fund the redevelopment.
- 6.44 It is clear that the existing buildings have come to the end of their lifespan and that redevelopment needs to happen. It is also clear that the existing building does not function in a sustainable way. Evidence has been provided to show how the replacement building has been designed to current required standards for school provision and to accord with current Building Regulations and sustainability objectives. Officers therefore consider that the size of the replacement building in the Metropolitan Green Belt has been justified. Officers would welcome members views on this point.
- 6.45 The proposed development would have a significantly more compact form than the existing Junior School and layout and design has evolved via pre-application discussions to ensure the development has the least possible impact on the openness of the Green Belt as possible (further detail in this regard in the section below). The proposed layout provides excellent opportunity to improve the relationship of the Junior School with its woodland setting and to implement a comprehensive landscaping strategy which will increase urban greening, biodiversity and sustainable drainage.
- 6.46 In terms of educational need, the applicant has outlined the importance of retaining the Junior School on the established Royal Russell campus for the business and functional needs of the school. There are no other sites within the Local Plan allocated for a school use. Whilst overall there appears to be space within the state school system to accommodate the 380 pupils were the school to be lost, demand for school places in the area surrounding the school is greater. No other independent schools in the area provide educational provision for the same demographic as Royal Russell School and it is clear that demand for placements at the school are high.

- 6.47 The school has been through a rigorous pre-application process with the local planning authority. Officers have pushed the applicant hard to provide evidence of 'Very Special Circumstances'. The applicant has listened to the local planning authority and have made significant amendments to the layout and scale of the development in light of Green Belt concerns. The number of proposed classrooms have been reduced (by 4) and the massing and layout has evolved to work far more successfully with the existing topography and woodland setting (full details below).
- 6.48 Given all of the above, officers are minded, on balance, to accept the applicants justification. Officers request members views on this point.

Design, Townscape and Heritage

General

- 6.49 London Plan Policy D3 states that a design-led approach should be pursued and that proposals should enhance local context by delivering buildings and spaces that positively respond to local distinctiveness. Policies SP4.1 and DM10.1 of the Local Plan state that the Council will require development of a high quality, which respects and enhances Croydon's varied local character and contributes positively to public realm, landscape and townscape.
- 6.50 In the assessment of this proposal, officers and the applicant have always been very mindful of the Green Belt and woodland setting of the site. The Junior School is surrounded on three sides by extensive woodland and greenery which has driven the design evolution of the development.

Layout

- 6.51 The position of the proposed new building has been driven by:
1. The necessity to preserve the openness of the Green Belt – The applicant has undertaken an assessment of other locations within the campus that could potentially accommodate the Junior School. Officers considered that siting the building on other undeveloped areas within the campus would have a more detrimental impact on the setting and openness of the Green Belt than redevelopment of this existing brownfield site.
 2. In order to enable the existing Junior School to be able to function whilst the new school is being constructed, the positioning and layout of the new building has been largely dictated by the remaining already developed brownfield area. The building is proposed to be largely located over existing hard surfaced playground areas and in place of the existing medical centre which will be demolished this summer.
- 6.52 Whilst this restricted location presents a challenge and in many ways inhibits the redevelopment of the site, it has also resulted in a building that has a significantly more compact form than the existing structures on site. A significant benefit of this is the landscape enhancements that can be made around the building. This is considered to be beneficial in terms of impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
- 6.53 The smaller available footprint has however also presented the challenge of creating a building that does not have a more dominant and visible presence within the Green Belt

setting in terms of height and presence. Whilst the siting of the proposed building has largely remained in a similar position throughout the pre-application process, its massing and form have been significantly altered, to reduce the height of the structure and to create a building that responds to the nature topography of the site.

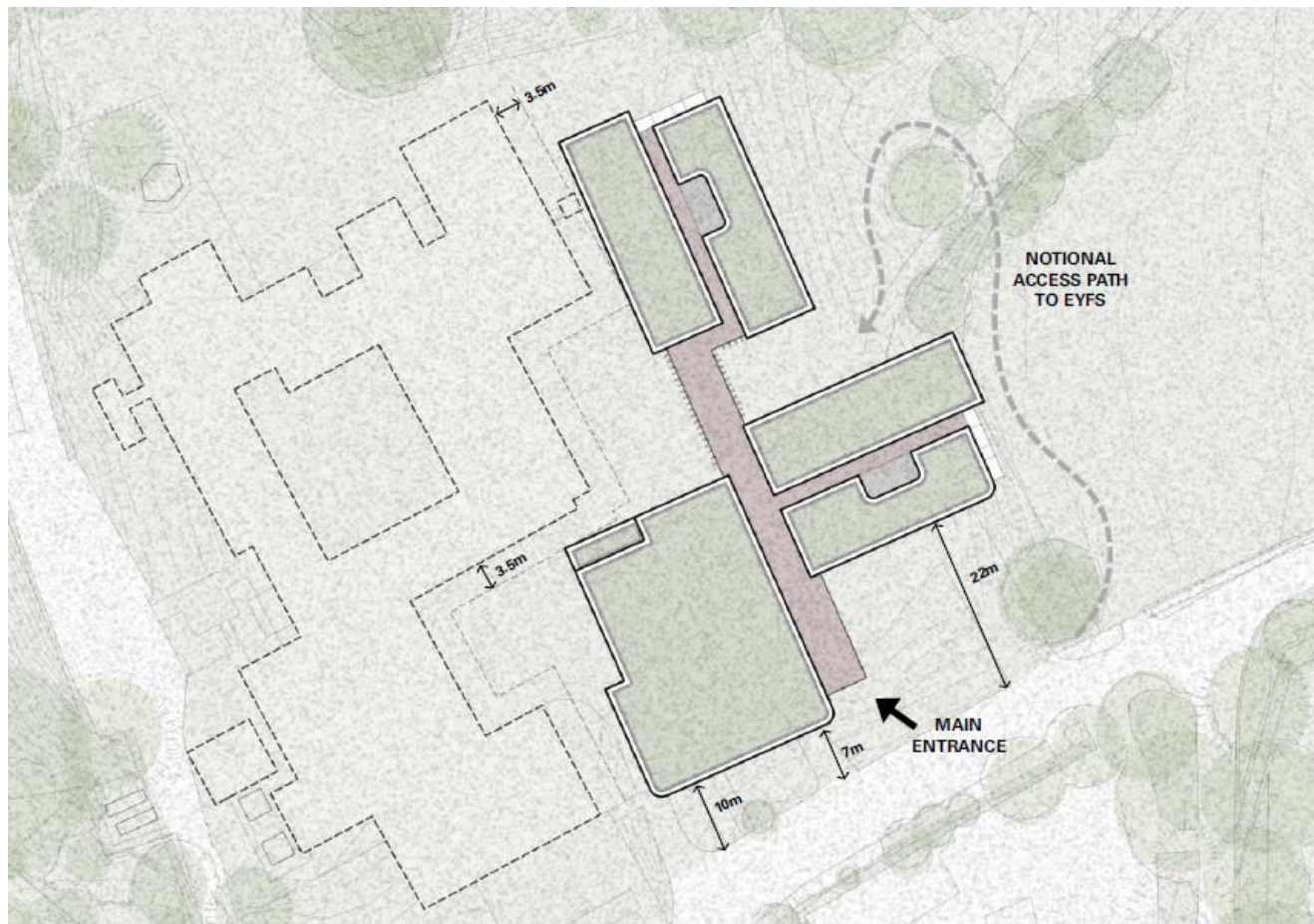


Figure 6: Proposed site layout

6.54 The drawing above shows how constructing the new building towards the eastern portion of the Junior School site will enable the current school to remain operational during the construction phase. Once built and operational, all of the existing structures on the Junior School site will be demolished (the dashed buildings on the drawing). The western part of the site will then become a larger landscaped playground, which will present a huge improvement over the current fragmented hardstanding play areas of the Junior School (landscaping discussed below).

6.55 The relationship of the proposed Junior School to the approach road is similar in scale and distance to the existing built form. There is a distance of over 120m from the development to the school access point, which provides the only view of the building from within the public realm.

6.56 The proposed built form has been broken down into 3 distinct blocks which are interconnected through a main spinal circulation route, and these blocks work with the topography of the site. Officers consider that breaking the building mass up has helped to limit to visual presence of the building from the site access.

6.57 The layout means that the Junior Schools relationship with the rest of the school campus is not altered. The access road and parking area is unaffected.

Massing

6.58 As noted above, the proposed built form has been broken down into 3 distinct blocks which are interconnected through a main spinal circulation route. The northern block hosts the nursery and reception groups (Early Years) at ground floor level, with Year 3 and 4 (Key Stage 2) classrooms above. The more central block hosts Key Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2) classrooms at ground floor level with Years 5 and 6 above (Key Stage 2). The southern most block along the access road offers the administrative function, and shared educational spaces (gym, dining hall, library, science and art rooms, staff areas, kitchen, plant etc).

6.59 Building heights across the school campus are generally two to three-storey. The proposed building is part two/part three storey and therefore the proposed building is entirely consistent with the rest of the site in terms of height. The massing form has been arranged to align towards the topography, positively using the level change and stepping down in height to the rear of the site. The main building frontage appears as a two storey mass, the lower level concealed by the change in level. The additional blocks then fall with the ground level, appearing as lower and more subservient elements of the overall built form.

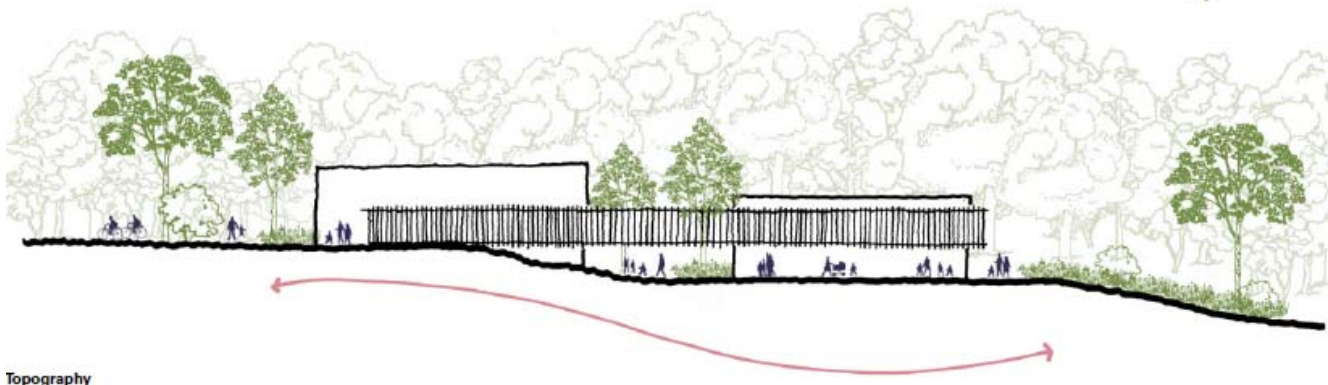
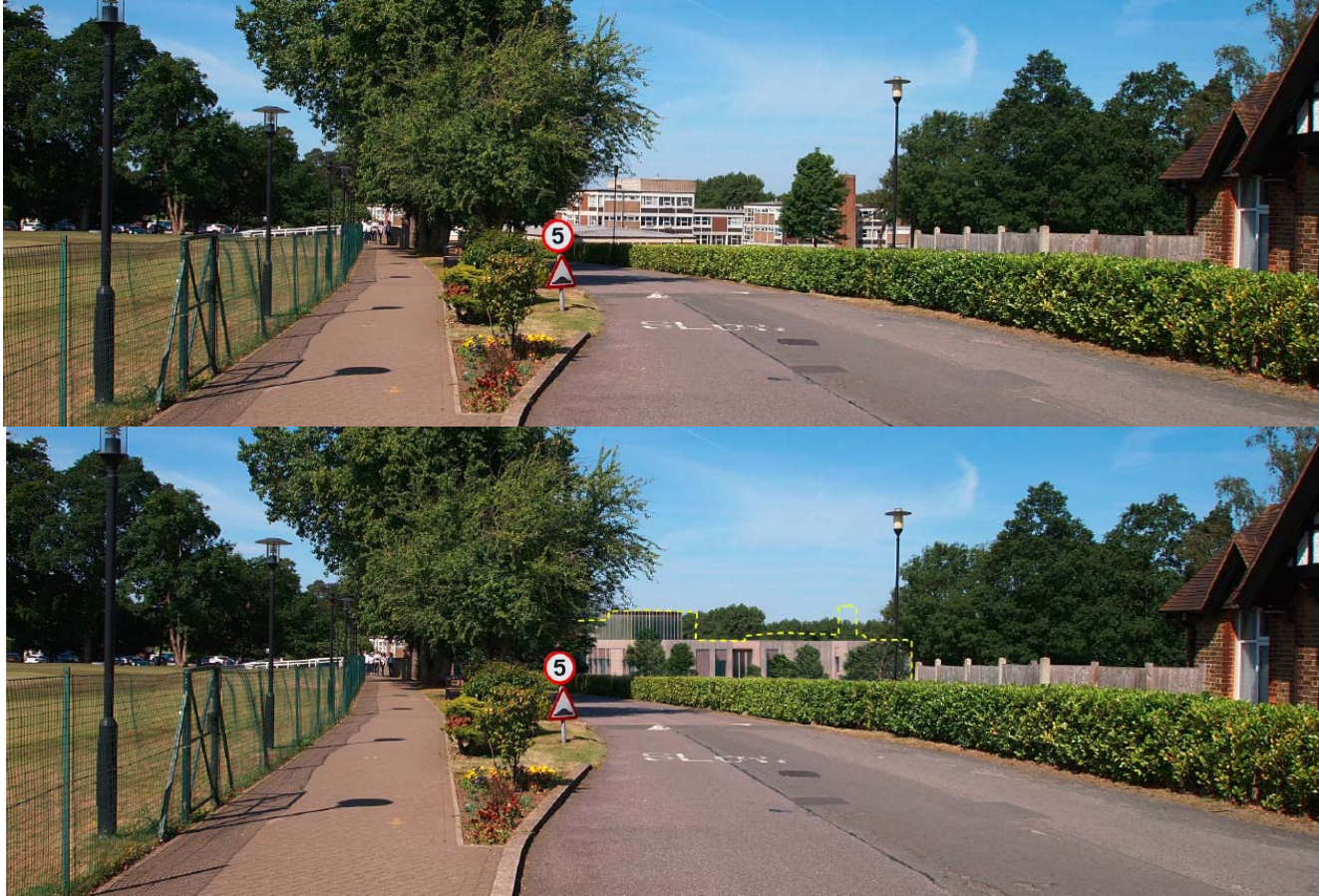


Figure 7: Topography

6.60 Officers are of the opinion that breaking the massing down into the 3 blocks, and effectively utilising the level change of the site, reduces the impact of the massing when read from the entrance gate and from views from the north. The massing strategy prevents the building from appearing monolithic in mass which is felt to lessen the impact on the natural Green Belt setting. The overall height allows views of the woodland to be seen behind the built form which helps the building to nestle into the green setting of the campus.

6.61 It is noted that there will be some excavation required to achieve the level changes as indicated. Officers have asked for the level of excavation to be quantified and evidenced through drawings, and an excavation strategy.



*Figure 8: Comparative Photomontage - Approach Road View.
Top image: Existing. Bottom image: Proposed*

6.62 When viewed from the playground area to the west of the site (see Figure 9 below), it can be seen how the building steps down in level towards the woodland to the rear.



Figure 9: Proposed view from main playground (to the west of the site)

6.63 The central spinal circulation bridge along with the step back of the eastern block, serves well to provide a legible and notable building entrance, which is welcomed. The entrance also provides a linear contrast from the main blocks, which works well to separate the massing.



Figure 10: proposed view of school entrance

6.64 Further back within the site, the central spinal circulation bridge offers a break at ground floor level which, again breaks up the massing, and provides a connection between the east and west playgrounds (see Figures 7 and 9 above).

6.65 The existing buildings on the school campus comprise a series of connected rectilinear forms composed to an orthogonal geometry (see Figure 11 below). The proposed new buildings follow this strategy. There are also examples of historic buildings that comprise rounded building corners to soften their appearance, for example the Chapel as shown in Figure 12 below. This approach has been utilised to soften the appearance of the built form. Given the woodland setting, and the fact that the building is for younger children, officers consider this approach is successful. The buildings appearance is softened and welcoming, and provides a gentle edge against the landscape setting beyond.



Figure 11: Main school campus built form



Figure 12: Rounded features to Chapel, with Great Hall to the left and Dining Hall to the right

Architectural Expression

- 6.67 The current buildings on the school site are limited in materiality. They are typically two-tone using red brick with ashlar stone facings (as can be seen in Figures 11 and 12 above). This strategy is used for the proposed Junior School. The external materials predominantly comprise brick and timber.
- 6.68 The three main blocks are defined by brickwork comprising of two tones. The blocks are divided by the horizontal datum point, with a darker hue represented along the lower portions which are designated to show the split in ground level and topography. The scheme has taken a tonal shift from the red brick seen on the existing buildings on site, to more desaturated tones to reflect the natural woodland setting of the Junior School. It is considered that these more nature tones are successful in reducing massing elements and also compliment the natural backdrop.
- 6.69 Accents of timber have been used to form the circulation spine and some cladding. The use of the material is considered to be very successful, resonating with the woodland surrounding the new building. The material is an effective tool which softens the façades and complements the Green Belt setting. The timber along the building entrance point and canopy over indicate a clear and warm entry point to the building. The green roof over the canopy would further enhance this entrance and is encouraged. Officers have also encouraged the applicant to explore the potential of this entrance area to provide opportunities for artwork installations.
- 6.70 Recessed features around the windows and openings align with features present in other buildings within the campus. These features break up the mass of the built form and add visual interest. Timber treatment is also provided to some fenestration and timber brise soleil provided to create shade for the internal areas. Officers have requested additional information in this regard, to ensure the brise soleil are integrated with the main built form.



Flemish bond brickwork in warm and light tone as the primary external material



Vertical stack bond brickwork to parapet, above and below windows, and special areas of interest



Warm timber treatment to the central spine, rear of the front block and window details



Timber fins in front of glazing to provide operable vents and solar shading



Architectural masonry in pink tone to the lower ground floor areas



Biodiverse green roof



Brise soleil to teaching space external glazing

Figure 13: Proposed materiality

6.71 At this point, there are some features that officers consider work less successfully and have asked the applicant to progress. The main front block, when viewed from the south west (from the main school campus) should also have a strong visual presence, and read as a main building frontage. The building from this view (as can be seen in Figure 14 below) has a more 'back of house' appearance, e.g. a partly blank façade, faux window brick detailing, less uniformity to fenestration. This is a key view of the building for all users of the site and as such should be treated as such. The rationale of this elevation needs to be improved.



Figure 14: Proposed view from south west (from main school buildings)

6.72 It is also felt that greater attention needs to be paid to the transition between the front block and the timber clad elements, from linear form to curved form (i.e. as can be seen in Figure 9 of the proposed view from main playground (to the west of the site). The relationship between forms will be integral to the success of the cohesiveness of the overall building.

Summary

6.73 In summary, the layout, massing and architectural expression has seen ongoing development and officers have been working extensively with the applicants in design workshops/pre-application meetings. Officers are satisfied with the layout and massing approach to the proposed development and the general approach to form and appearance. There are some areas that need further progression and refinement. Officers would welcome Members views on the massing and architectural approach so far.

Public Art

6.74 In order to enhance and express local character, Local Plan Policy DM14 requires all major schemes to include public art that creates local distinctiveness and reinforces a sense of place, responds to local character, makes a positive contribution to the public realm and engages the local community in its creation.

6.75 The applicant has expressed that there are several ways that this could be achieved e.g. school motif/create on the new building, use of stained glass windows (as can be found in some historic buildings on site), a new sculpture representing history of the site.

6.76 Officers note that there is an exciting opportunity to incorporate something successful and unique into the submission that would enhance the scheme. A public art strategy should accompany any submission and the earlier that this is considered the more successful it will be.

Heritage

- 6.77 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires (at section 66) with respect to listed buildings, that special regard is paid to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Local Plan Policy SP4 requires developments to respect and enhance heritage assets. Policy DM18 of the Local Plan permits development affecting heritage assets where the significance of the asset is preserved or enhanced. Policy DM18.7 states that substantial weight will be given to conserving and enhancing landscape features or planting that makes a positive contribution to the special historic character and original layout of Registered and Locally Listed Historic Parks and Gardens.
- 6.78 The entire school site is a Locally Listed Historic Park and Garden. The Main Lodge of the school (approximately 100m to the north of the junior school site separated by woodland) and part of the main school building (within the main school complex, almost 200m to the south west of the junior school site) are on the Council's Local List of buildings of Architectural or Historic Value. Old Ballards Cottage to the far south of the school campus is a Grade II statutorily listed building (over 300m from the Junior School site). The existing Junior School complex itself contains no buildings of historic significance.
- 6.79 Given that the closest buildings of historic merit are well separated from the proposed development site, in terms of distances and by woodland and existing built form, it is considered that the significance of the surrounding heritage assets would be preserved by the proposed development.
- 6.80 In terms of impact on the Locally Listed Historic Park and Garden, the majority of the proposed development will be situated over existing brownfield land. The proposal may lead to the removal of 3 trees however will also see extensive new planting provided. Further details with regard to landscaping and trees are fully discussed in the section below.
- 6.81 Officers require a Heritage Assessment to be submitted as part of the formal planning submission. This assessment must demonstrate how the proposal accords with the requirements of the above-mentioned policies.
- 6.82 The site is within an Archaeological Priority Zone. An Archaeological Assessment must be submitted as part of any formal application and Historic England will be consulted.

Trees, Landscaping and biodiversity

Trees

- 6.83 The whole of the Royal Russell Campus is a Locally Listed Historic Park and Garden. The site largely comprises woodland, and extensive areas of woodland are located directly to the north and west of the Junior School area. The site is subject to 2no. Tree Preservation Orders (TPO 27, 1970 and 27, 2014), however neither relate to trees which are close to the Junior School site.
- 6.84 In order to facilitate the development, 3no. trees have been identified for removal – Trees T1 (C.2), T10 & T11 (B.2). The category B trees are self-seeded sycamores. T11 is required to be removed to create a compliant access to the school building in terms of

gradient (i.e. as a result of required level changes). Officers share concerns over the removal of mature trees, and whilst the applicant intends to plant new trees across the development, officers expect that retention or relocating of the trees should be explored in the first instance, which is currently not evidenced.



Figure 15: Potential tree Removals

Landscaping

6.85 A notable positive of the proposal is that there is scope to provide significant enhanced landscaping in and around the Junior School site. This is aided by the more compact form of the proposed building in comparison to the existing built form.

6.86 Key landscaping goals as set out by the applicant are:

- The retention of the existing woodland
- To stitch the buildings into their context – repairing the green infrastructure connections
- To weave nature between and around the new buildings - proposals will bring landscape up to the edge and between the buildings.
- The creation of learning environments set within nature
- To create an environment where the buildings disappear into the landscape
- Buildings, landscape and topography working together

- Inclusion of SuDS where levels allow
- Tree planting – a net gain in trees is proposed.

6.87 The landscape design strategy is currently reflected through concept design strategies and illustrated through precedent studies and initial plan layouts. The key principles driving the concepts are the repairing of green infrastructure through landscaped routes woven through the building forms, the maximising of opportunities for play and natural surveillance, creation of external nature-based learning environments etc

6.88 It is felt that whilst the initial scheme concept principles appear to initially correlate appropriately to the site context, harbouring nature-based SUDS, nature-based play and education etc, the application relies critically on the details being developed successfully and in synchronisation with the remainder of the architecture strategy, and primarily topographical approaches. This is yet to be evidenced and a holistic design developed for appropriate review accordingly. From initial review, the plan and precedents appear to have defined routes and boundaries, and it is felt it should be as integrated as possible.

6.89 London Plan Policy G5 states that major development proposals should contribute to the greening of London by including urban greening as a fundamental element of site. This scheme should achieve a target score of 0.3. The applicant has commented that the scheme will achieve an urban Greening factor (UGF) of around 0.5, significantly exceeding the minimum value of 0.3. The UGF of the existing school is 0.16. The proposed urban greening strategy includes extensive tree planting, amenity grass, ornamental planting and native wildflower planting.

6.89 Challenges will be in providing a landscaping strategy that is suitable for the school use, addressing the functionality of the building and maintenance issues. A Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) is proposed to the western side of the site and it will be important for this area to be suitably screened/softened within the wider woodland and Green Belt setting.



Figure 16: Illustrative landscaping masterplan

Biodiversity

6.90 Much of the school campus is within a Site of Nature Conservation Importance. The junior school site itself is not within this designation however the land surrounding the site is. The site immediately abuts woodland and the site itself contains mature trees. The applicant undertook a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the Site in 2022 which summarised the following:

Habitat:

The site is comprised of hardstanding, buildings, amenity grassland, broadleaved woodland, and scattered trees. All the habitats except woodland and scattered trees are of low to negligible ecological value. The woodland habitat is priority habitat and as such is of high value. Any loss of this habitat would be required to deliver mitigation that goes above and beyond like-for-like replacement.

Protected species:

- Bats – The Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) identified that one of the existing school buildings had low bat roost potential. A bat emergence survey was undertaken in June 2022 of the building, no roosts were identified during the survey and no bat activity was noted throughout the survey. Two trees were identified as having low bat

roost potential, should these trees be affected by the proposals and need to be felled, then this will need to be undertaken using soft felling.

- Badger - Little suitable habitat for badger was identified within the site. Signs of badger were located adjacent to the site. Due to the mobile nature of this species and that they can readily establish new setts, an updated badger survey would be required no more than three months prior to construction.
- Great Crested Newts (GCN) - Within the wider School grounds a low population GCN have been recorded in a pond 100m to the west of the Junior School building, during surveys in 2018. The pond is separated from the site by hardstanding, buildings, fencing and amenity grassland. The proposals will result in the loss of hardstanding, buildings, amenity grassland and scattered trees, and therefore would not be affecting any suitable habitat for the species. The pond and surrounding suitable habitat are not to be affected within the current proposals, thus it is thought that development of the Junior School building would be unlikely to cause an offense and no license or further surveys would be required. Following a precautionary approach, any ground features such as log piles that are to be disturbed during the works should undergo, in line with best practice guidelines, a destructive search by an ecologist.
- Reptiles - Proposals will result in the disturbance of habitats with limited suitable for reptile's habitat, including long sward amenity grassland and a log piles. Precautionary mitigation measures will be implemented, including habitat manipulation of grassland and destructive search of any features suitable for reptiles to shelter to ensure that reptiles are safely removed from the Site.

6.91 The survey work has not yet been shared with the local planning authority. It is expected that the surveys alongside an updated badger survey and Biodiversity Net Gain report (see below) will be submitted as part of the formal application. The Council's Ecological Consultant will assess the submitted information against legislative and policy requirements.

6.92 The NPPF and London Plan Policy G6 require that any development seeks to provide biodiversity net gain. Such details will need to be worked through as the scheme progresses and must be integrated into the scheme. Full details will be required at application stage.

6.93 At this stage the applicant has stated that Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) will also be achieved and a BNG Report will be submitted with the planning application. The proposed playground, while providing age-appropriate play space for pupils, will also offer a positive increase in biodiversity through the addition of new woodland with wildflower understory, new ornamental planting to benefit wildlife species and new trees.

Functionality of the new building

6.95 The applicants design team have worked closely with the school to develop a building that meets their functional needs and adhere to current required standards and regulations.

6.96 The proposed lower ground floor plan of the Junior School is divided into two distinct volumes. The northernmost block is sited amongst the woodland and accommodates the Nursery and Reception classrooms with dedicated external areas and entrance. The

landscape is intended to flow around the building to provide a fluid teaching environment with direct access from the classrooms to the external play areas. The main circulation spine takes the form of a bridge above, providing covered access to the remainder of the school.

- 6.97 To the south, the years 1 and 2 classrooms are arranged as a Key Stage 1 cluster and also have direct access to dedicated KS1 outdoor play areas. The music classroom and gymnasium are also located on this level where it benefits from direct external access to exterior play space and sport court.
- 6.98 The ground floor is accessed from a clearly defined single-story entrance which leads to the school's main circulation spine, following the topography of the site and flowing down to the lower ground floor and exterior play space via a gathering staircase. Views down into the gymnasium on the level below and breaks between the building volumes along the bridge offer glimpses of the surrounding landscape. The main visitor reception, administration offices and meeting room are located to the front of the school, in close proximity to the main entrance, while Key Stage 2 teaching clusters (years 3-4 and years 5-6) to the east and north benefit from having an outlook into the surrounding woodland. To the west, the dining hall opens out into an exterior dining space and the playground beyond.
- 6.99 An open stair flows up and over the gathering stair and provides access from the main circulation spine up to the first floor, which has been significantly reduced in area from previous proposals. The library is located at the heart of this upper level, with expansive views towards the east. Also located on this floor are the specialist science lab and art / design technology studio, as well as the staff common room with a secluded roof terrace overlooking the playground.
- 6.100 Externally, whilst full details are to be provided, playspaces for the nursery, reception and KS1 year groups are located directly outside of the classrooms. Level changes, low level fencing and planting will separate early years provision from the older year groups. Spaces will be provided to enable external dining, teaching areas and amphitheatres. A MUGA is proposed which will provide required facilities for formal sports. The site will maintain its existing good links to the existing forest school to the west and adventure play area to the north.
- 6.101 In terms of access, direct visitor and staff access will be provided via the main entrance to the front. Segregated access is provided for deliveries and servicing to the western end of the frontage. A new footpath via a ramped woodland walk is proposed to be provided to the nursery and reception area.
- 6.102 Inclusive design – London Plan Policy S3 seeks to ensure that education facilities are accessible and inclusive for a range of users, including disabled people, by adopting an inclusive design approach, this includes internal and outdoor space. This should be demonstrated as part of the submission going forward.

Impact on Adjoining Occupiers Living Conditions

- 6.103 Given the significant separation distances to adjacent neighbours properties, it is not considered that the proposals will cause any harm to the amenity of any residential property way of causing any loss of light, outlook or privacy. No additional environmental impacts are expected to be created e.g. noise or light pollution. The scheme proposes the potential for 20 more pupils to be accommodated at the school and when considering

the current 910 pupil capacity across the whole school, the increase is not expected to create any undue cumulative impacts.

- 6.104 Third party comments received on any formal application will need to be considered as part of any future scheme assessment.

Highways and Transportation Matters

- 6.105 The site is entirely accessed from Coombe Lane. At the entrance point, the site has a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) of 2, Coombe Lane tram stop is approximately 160m from the school entrance (3 minute walk). This tram runs to new Addington and Wimbledon (via Croydon).
- 6.106 The proposal will increase capacity from 380 pupils to 400 pupils. At this stage, no alteration to the access (at the highway junction or within the site) or parking arrangements are proposed as part of the works.
- 6.107 As part of the submission the applicant will submit a Transport Statement, Travel Plan, Delivery & Servicing Plan and an Outline Construction Logistics Plan. Discussions in terms of transport impacts are ongoing with officers.
- 6.108 To date, the applicants transport consultant has undertaken a review of existing travel habits of junior school children. The results of the travel survey demonstrate that around 72% of junior school children are brought to school by car. This would equate to 14-15 additional cars as a result of the uplift in capacity. Given that a high percentage of pupils do arrive by car, the Council has requested that a survey of the junction is undertaken to show current junction movements and an assessment of movements with the increased car movements. This assessment is in progress.
- 6.109 A Travel Plan will be prepared and submitted to encourage sustainable travel. The school already operates a comprehensive Travel Plan which applies to the junior and senior schools and travel surveys are undertaken regularly.
- 6.110 Cycle parking will be provided for the junior school albeit the nature of the local road network means that cycling by junior school children is not particularly common. It will be required that cycle parking provision is to London Plan policy requirements/standards. Details will be required to be provided as part of the formal submission.
- 6.111 Deliveries and servicing details will be provided. Waste is collected from the junior school each day, and transferred to a central location for the whole site. There will be no change proposed to this strategy. All deliveries are received centrally, there will be no material change in the number of deliveries received as a result of the development. The Delivery & Servicing Plan will include initiatives to encourage consolidation of deliveries to minimise the number of journeys made to the school.
- 6.112 The Outline CLP will include a plan illustrating the location construction vehicles will stop to serve the site, swept path analysis for construction vehicles, regional and local routing plans, and an estimation of numbers of vehicles. This will be reviewed by the Council's Highways Team, and the applicant is encouraged to discuss this with the team at the earlier possibility.

6.113 Transport for London may have further requirements. They will be involved as part of the pre-application discussion with the GLA which is due to take place on 16th May 2023.

Environment

Building performance

6.114 All major development, such as this, should be net zero-carbon in accordance with the London Plan energy hierarchy of Be Lean; Be Clean; Be Green and Be Seen. A minimum on-site reduction of at least 35 per cent beyond Building Regulations is required and if zero carbon is not met a cash in lieu contribution is required. Major development proposals should calculate and minimise carbon emissions from any other part of the development, including plant or equipment, that are not covered by Building Regulations, i.e. unregulated emissions. The applicant will need to submit an Energy Strategy to demonstrate how the zero-carbon target will be met within the framework of the energy hierarchy.

6.115 As this scheme will be referable to the Mayor of London, the whole life-cycle carbon emissions should be calculated through a nationally recognised Whole Life-Cycle Carbon Assessment and demonstrate action taken to reduce life-cycle carbon emissions. As a GLA referable scheme it will also need to include a Circular Economy Statement that aims to be net zero-waste. Heat Risk needs to be managed and water consumption restricted. How this will be done will need to be demonstrated at application stage.

6.116 The applicant has commented that the compact form of the proposed building is not only organisationally more efficient, but will also be more efficient from an environmental perspective. The proposed Junior School will apply a whole life carbon approach, reducing both operational and embodied carbon. The principles of Passivhaus design will be applied with a fabric first approach. Best practice measures with regards to embodied carbon will be integrated. The proposed Junior School will be combustion free with an all-electric system providing both space heating and hot water demand. The roof space will be maximised for onsite renewable energy generation via PV panels. The building will be constructed for longevity and durability to minimise the potential of future demolition.

6.117 These elements are still being developed and further detail will be known when the scheme is advanced. The scheme should be able to meet the policy requirements.

Flooding

6.118 The site is largely at low risk of surface water flooding, however there are areas around the junior school (including the area where the new building is proposed) that are at 1 in 1000 year risk. The site has limited potential for ground water flooding to occur.

6.119 London Plan Policy SI 13 requires development proposals to aim to achieve greenfield run-off rates and ensure that surface water run-off is managed as close to its source as possible. There should also be a preference for green over grey features, in line with the drainage hierarchy. Drainage should be designed and implemented in ways that promote multiple benefits including increased water use efficiency, improved water quality, and enhanced biodiversity, urban greening, amenity and recreation.

6.120 To date, the applicant has commented that surface water run-off will be managed through SuDS strategies such as filter drains, a soak-away, permeable block paving and

porous asphalt. As noted in the landscaping proposals, there are opportunities for SuDs features to provide educational opportunities and play, such as use of planting beds as rain gardens.

- 6.121 A site-specific Flood Risk Assessment proportionate with the degree of flood risk posed to and by the development, taking account of the advice and recommendations within the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Management Plan, is required. This will be assessed by the Lead Local Flood Authority.

Air Quality

- 6.122 The whole of Croydon Borough has been designated as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). To accord with Policy SI 1 of the London Plan, an Air Quality Assessment will need to be submitted with any application. This will need to demonstrate that the proposal will not lead to further deterioration of existing poor air quality. Development proposals must be at least air quality neutral and should use design solutions to address local problems of air quality.

Other Matters

- 6.123 Fire Safety - In the interests of fire safety and to ensure the safety of all building users, all development proposals must achieve the highest standards of fire safety. London Plan Policy D12 requires all major development proposal to be submitted with a Fire Statement, produced by a third party, suitably qualified assessor, to demonstrate how the development will function in terms a number of fire safety criteria.
- 6.124 Both the NPPF and London Plan Policy seeks to create safe, secure and appropriately accessible environments where crime, disorder and fear of crime do not undermine the quality of environment. Any future application should be mindful of Secured by Design principles and improve natural surveillance / lighting of the area. It is recommended that the applicant instigate discussions with the Metropolitan Police Designing Out Crime Officer for Croydon.
- 6.125 In line with Policy DM16 of the Croydon Local Plan (2018) a Health Impact Assessment will need to be submitted with the planning application.

Mitigation

- 6.126 At this stage it is envisaged that planning obligations will be required to mitigate the impacts. Discussions are progressing in relation to the Heads of Terms, but it is anticipated that these would include the following (this is not an exhaustive list):
- Employment and training contributions and obligations (construction/operational)
 - Air Quality contribution
 - Zero carbon offset (if required)
 - Sustainable transport contributions (if required)
 - Travel Plan
 - Transport for London contributions (if required)
 - Retention of scheme architects
 - Public Art
 - Relevant monitoring fees

7 SPECIFIC FEEDBACK REQUESTED

7.1 In view of the above, it is suggested Members focus on the following issues:

1. The principle of the scale of the proposed development in the Green Belt, with specific consideration of the implications of Condition 8 imposed on planning permission 15/01323/P.
2. The location of development and the massing across the site.
3. The design, appearance and materiality of the building
4. Landscaping and ecological gain

8 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

8.1 The applicant has submitted a pre-application to the GLA for an initial opinion on the proposals. The meeting is due to take place on the 16th May 2023 and Officers will be present at this meeting. The comments made by the GLA will be noted by officers and summarised in an addendum in advance of the committee meeting.