

Interim South Marston Parish Council
Response to Department for Education consultation
for South Marston School ahead of the Virtual Meeting scheduled
for 5.30pm on Thursday 22 April 2021:

1. Concept Design

We regret that the initial brief for the design of the expanded school failed to reflect the strategic housing development context which created the need to triple the size of the current school. The proposal has therefore retained the current roadside frontage and wrongly assumed vehicle and pedestrian traffic to the school would all approach the site via Old Vicarage Lane.

This ignores the transformational plans for the new roads, footpaths and cycleway networks that will be achieved through the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan policies, various outline permissions for major housing developments and the DLA Village Centre Brief. These plans aim to disperse road traffic on new road accesses and provide safe routes for walking and cycling for pupils accessing the school so that the major hazards of Old Vicarage Lane and Pound Corner can be avoided. At this very late stage, there is a limited amount that can be achieved by 'retro-fitting' sustainable transport approaches to the school design. Nevertheless, we have worked hard in recent months with SBC, the Academy and the School to try to ensure as many aspects as possible of this are put in place.

2. Travel Plan and traffic impact assessment.

We have been told a 'Traffic Report' is being prepared for the forthcoming planning application which will, for the first time in the development of this project, show how the design of the school expansion relates to the surrounding context of new roads and off-road cycleways and footpaths to the western boundary of the school site. The SBC Supplementary Planning Document requires submission of a Travel Plan that reflects the traffic assessment accompanying the planning application. Whereas the SPD notes that all schools should already have a Travel Plan, it assumes that the Travel Plan submitted as part of the planning application dovetails with the Traffic Report/traffic assessment it accompanies. We therefore eventually expect to see a Travel Plan which adequately addresses the use of the existing as well as the expanded school, the phases of construction and the changing context of how pupils and parents arrive at the school site without having to park on Old Vicarage Lane.

SMPC has finally secured, through DBAT, a copy of the Travel Plan that accompanies the DfE consultation– we could not find a copy on any website as originally stated. To be of use, even in the DfE consultation, we maintain it needs to address how the proposed expansion will deliver safe access for pupils to the school. At the moment, it contains a few additional paragraphs basically saying the school will adapt the Plan as circumstances change and mentioning the creation of the temporary car park. The Travel Plan should cover how it will adapt, and specify the crucial detail of how the school will manage entrances and safe access to every part of the building in each of the build phases – construction, interim and final. Without this, a statutory authority or consultee could not currently be satisfied that the proposed project will not involve danger to children accessing the school buildings.

The current Travel Plan contains inconsistencies and inaccuracies. The issues/ initiatives are not those that are relevant to the expansion project for which DfE approval is sought. For instance, despite the statement that cycling is to be discouraged on road safety grounds, a target for increasing cycling has been set. Because the phases are not covered in detail, there is no plan for safe access from the temporary car park to the existing school building during the construction phase. No parents or residents have been involved in the development of the Travel Plan. Whether the Travel Plan passes a required standard for general use in the current situation would appear immaterial to whether it is adequate for this DfE consultation.

We therefore dispute The Travel Plan's validity, but understand that it is likely to be revised in the near future – this is an opportunity to create a document that addresses appropriately the phases of development, and recognises the new opportunities for promoting cycling and walking that have been created by the community, the Local and Neighbourhood Plans and the work put in with and by SBC NEV planners.

3. Entrance gates and bike storage

We repeat the requirement that the western gates in the school fence must be used for safe access from the Recreation Ground through each phase of the project – this is not a matter that can just be 'parked' for the school to deal with.

To promote cycling along the new safe cycle routes that are being provided by surrounding developments, a strategy of dispersed bike storage for an adequate number of bicycles, balance bikes, scooters will be required rather than a single shed in the worst possible location i.e. the staff car park. Given the transformational provision of safe routes to be provided within the village development, a take-up of over 50% should be achievable. When pre-school is included, this suggests 170 storage spaces. It is not purely a matter for the school to manage. It needs to be an integral part of the design.

4. Village School for Village Children

The purpose of the school is to provide places for children who will live in the new developments, particularly those of HHT, who are funding the build.

The School Travel Plan notes that a large portion of current pupils arrive from outside of the village by car, contrary to planning policies on promoting health and sustainability.

A clear commitment to an appropriate admission policy throughout period of the expansion of the village is required from the Academy. This is absent from the Consultation Document, which stresses the need to balance pupil numbers against overheads, with no reference to a catchment element to the admissions policy. An intake projection is given, but this needs to be backed up by a policy commitment to cover the eventuality that the HHT build might not deliver the anticipated numbers to this timetable. An acceptable admissions policy should also militate against the allocated places all being filled at the start of an academic year, leaving no places for children from the 200 houses anticipated to arrive from new housing completions in the subsequent 12 months.

This requirement is in line with the Borough's Ed. Dept's position in our recent meeting. Given the timings and the concerns in the community, we hope that DBAT can consult and provide a suitable commitment.

5. Hard Surface Play/Sport Area

The 2014 proposals had additional hard surface play/sport area and a multi-use games area "MUGA". The current scheme triples the size of the school but provides little additional hard surface. We are told that it complies with regulations, but the Borough has steadfastly refused to provide us with the figures. DBAT and the Borough have also disregarded our reference to the Government's guidance Build Bulletin 103:

"In new schools, the total area of hard surfaced outdoor PE (zone X - W) should include:
 a porous macadam multi-use games area (MUGA), with three netball courts overlaid, with critical dimensions of 22m x 33m plus margins for primary pupils..... In existing schools, a similar amount of hard surfaced area should be laid out for games."

Please justify the absence of at least a second netball court.