

04 December 2024



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	PLANNING APPLICATION UPDATE REPORT
Ward	Caversham Heights
Planning Application Reference:	PL/23/1023 (FUL)
Site Address:	The Heights Primary School, 129 Upper Woodcote Road, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7LB
Proposed Development	Use of existing 2FE primary school for up to 420 pupils
Recommendations	As per main report
S106 Terms	As per main report
Conditions	As per main report
Informatives	As per main report

1. Further Representations

1.1 Since publication of the main agenda report the following further representations have been received:

1 x letter of support for the following reasons:

- Parents should have wide and free choice to send their children to their best local school based on location, facilities, academic excellence and caring ethos
- If other schools have spare places, it is their responsibility to improve performance and attract more pupils
- A few spare places give parents more choice and healthy local competition can only drive up standards
- The school should be allowed to grow to serve local demand from parents

1 x letter of objection from the North Reading Schools Partnership which states that it is written on behalf of the headteachers of the following schools :

- Caversham Park Primary School
- Caversham Primary School
- Emmer Green Primary School

- Micklands Primary School
- St Annes Primary School
- St Martins Primary School
- Thameside Primary School
- The Hill Primary School

The letter of objection states the following:

- Reiterates serious concerns about the proposed expansion of The Heights Primary School
 - For a number of years, many Caversham schools have been struggling with the impact of falling pupil numbers in the area and not just in Reception, but across all year groups. Every Caversham school has spaces therefore an expansion of pupil places at The Heights Primary School will only make matters worse for all of the schools in the Caversham area. At the last count the schools above collectively had 381 pupil spaces.
 - Expanding The Heights Primary School will hugely impact our individual school budgets and the ability to sufficiently resource the running of and maintenance of a school: including a shortage of funds for IT services and energy costs.
 - Falling pupil numbers in a school also affects how a school is structured. A decreased budget in a school can lead to staff redundancies and having to organise the remaining number of children in a school into mixed age classes. Such a structure is not ideal with regards to teaching and learning and it is not regarded as an attractive option for prospective parents: a scenario that also can lead to a school being seen as less attractive to send a child to, so further exacerbating the situation.
 - Falling pupil numbers ultimately might result in the closure of one of our primary schools all of which have their own unique character and are loved by the children and their families. The closure of a school would cause an immense disruption and stress to families currently attending. This can be avoided if we work together as a community of schools.
 - Therefore, for all the reasons outlined above, as a group of Headteachers of primary schools in Caversham, we therefore strongly object to the expansion of The Heights Primary School.
- 1.2 The above matters raised in both support and objection to the application are not considered to raise any additional points that are not already addressed within the main agenda report.

2. Transport Matters

- 2.1 Paragraphs 7.54 and 7.55 of the main agenda report refer to a 'hands up' travel survey undertaken to inform the school Travel Plan as well as the projected future travel habits and patterns for the school should the proposed increase in pupil admission number at the school be granted. In addition to the 'hands up' survey the agent has also asked that it is noted that the school's transport

consultant also undertook a video survey analysis of travel modes of pupils arriving and leaving the school site and the beginning and end of the school day.

2.2 The results of the video survey are referred to within the submitted Transport Assessment as part of the planning application and broadly align with the findings of the 'hands up' survey referred to within the main agenda report in respect of travel patterns and the overall conclusion that non-car journeys account for the majority of trips to and from the school. RBC Transport Officers note the findings of the video survey analysis but highlight that this is based on an assessment period of one day and therefore the 'hands up' survey results, which have been used before to inform the school Travel Plan, are considered a more appropriate measure of travel habits associated with the school and are what the assessment of the proposals has been based on.

2.3 The above does not change the conclusions in respect of transport matters set out within the main agenda report, which are that the proposals would not have a detrimental impact in respect of transport related matters.

Case Officer: Matt Burns