

PLANNING REF : 210693
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Council Office
: Pearson Road, Sonning, Reading
: RG4 6UL
SUBMITTED BY : Sonning Parish Council
DATE SUBMITTED : 01/04/2021

COMMENTS:

Sonning Parish Council has carefully considered this application and has the following comments.

There have been numerous applications on this site and the ambitious plan to extend the school and its facilities has led to the number of pupils increasing.

Approval F20101641 limited the numbers of pupils to 750 for highway reasons. In 4.3 of the introduction, in the Planning Statement supporting that application, the applicant categorically stated that the proposal will not result in any increase in the number of pupils attending the school. The officer confirmed that There is no intention of increasing pupil capacity or staff numbers as a result of the proposed replacement classrooms. However, the proposed planning condition limiting pupil numbers to 750 provides an important allowance for a small degree of natural fluctuation.

Condition 13 of that approval states, The total number of pupils enrolled shall not exceed 750 at any time and the reason for the condition is given as In the interests of highway safety.

In 2017, under

application 170118, permission was granted to increase the number of pupils enrolled at the school to 825.

Application 210693 seeks to increase the number of pupils from 825 to 1100.

This is an

extraordinary increase and indicates a lack of consideration as to the existing and potential effect the school has on the local community. 40% increase in pupil numbers equals a 40% increase in cars disruption in the Sonning Conservation Area.

The fact is that there has been no consultation with interested parties within the parish such as Sonning Parish Council, and the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society. This despite working closely together over the improved highways works in Sonning Lane and the fact that Sonning Parish Council is an adjoining landowner, makes this most surprising.

The fundamental flaw that the applicant fails to address is that access to the school is along the narrow roads in Sonning, which are further restricted by on street parking, effectively creating a one way route to the school. The school also fails to recognise the effect that a potential 100 additional cars will have on Sonning village and as many pupils are transported from outside the Wokingham area parents and older pupils will choose to drive.

The applicants congratulate

themselves on the well managed system at opening and closing times but an onsite visit between 4.00 pm and 4.30 pm shows that it is managed chaos. Vehicles queue to exit the school premises onto Sonning Lane, at the same time vehicles (cars and busses) queue to exit the lane opposite the school from the Berkshire car park. In addition, pupils and other pedestrians, queue to cross the road to access the vehicles in Berkshire Sports Club. Cars are also queuing from the right to enter the school premises and impatient drivers on their way to the A4 undertake them by driving on the verge. This is a no go area during these hectic times and is a hazard for regular traffic. The exit from Sonning Lane is equally hazardous with long queues including numerous cars and coaches from the school. Typically, it can take ½ hour to drive from the school either to the A4 or to cross Sonning Bridge. This has to be seen to be believed.

The proposed increase in pupil numbers (plus staff) will increase traffic in Sonning Village. With the best car parking arrangements in place those accessing and leaving the school have to drive through the village itself along Pearson Road, Sonning Lane, the High Street and Thames Street Grid lock ensues at the junction of Pearson Road and the High Street, further hindering progress.

Despite the best travel plans parents still insist on delivering and collecting their children and are invariably parked with their engines running, for heating in winter and air conditioning in the summer. This is adding to the pollution in the area, which Sonning Parish Council are working to reduce in line with Wokingham Borough Councils Climate Emergency Plan.

All this in the heart of the Sonning Conservation Area.

The applicant also has not taken into consideration the extra demand the everincreasing

development of the School and subsequent increase in pupil and staff numbers, has on the infrastructure.

In particular, the increase in sewage into the very poor, substandard drainage in Sonning Lane and throughout Sonning. It has been noted that the school drains already block on a regular basis.

Increased wear and tear on Sonning roads.

Pollution and deterioration of Sonnings historic buildings

The demand on the electricity supply has resulted in the installation of an onsite electricity substation.

Sonning is a

beautiful village, much of which has been, quite rightly, classed as a Conservation Area. The definition of a Conservation Area is:

Conservation areas exist to manage and protect the special architectural and historic interest of a place in other words, the features that make it unique.

If Sonning is to retain its special architectural and historic features that make it unique then it has to be protected from the potential pollution and destructive effect that the everincreasing volumes of traffic are creating. This proposal will only add to the problem that is spoiling Sonning.

L A Bates (Clerk to the Council)