

PLANNING AND HERITAGE STATEMENT

Former Wheathill Riding Centre,
Naylors Road, Knowsley,
L27 2YA

The Witherslack Group

Job No: 1919K000

DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING | LEEDS

May 2021



**CUSHMAN &
WAKEFIELD**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Cushman & Wakefield (C&W) has been instructed by the Witherslack Group to prepare a planning application for a new secondary school building for 60 pupils at the former Wheathill Riding Centre, Naylors Road, Knowsley. The site is adjacent to the existing Lakeside School (also run by the Witherslack Group). Lakeside School is a successful primary school catering for children with special educational needs (SEN).
- 1.2 The site is within the Green Belt, however it is a previously developed site (former Riding School). Planning permission for residential development was secured at the site (on appeal)¹. The principle of development of the site for an alternative use is therefore established.
- 1.3 This Planning and Heritage Statement will consider the planning context for this site (including the planning policy context), provide details of the very special circumstances case for development in the Green Belt, provide details of the non-designated heritage assets at the site and provide analysis of the proposals.
- 1.4 Accordingly, this report is structured as follows:
- Background: Section 2;
 - Site and Surroundings (including planning history): Section 3;
 - Pre Application Engagement: Section 4;
 - Development Proposals: Section 5;
 - Planning Policy Context: Section 6;
 - Very Special Circumstances: Section 7;
 - Heritage: Section 8;
 - Analysis: Section 9, and;
 - Summary and Planning Balance: Section 10.

¹ Appeal Ref: APP/V4305/W/17/3171169

2. Background

- 2.1 The Witherslack Group is the UK's leading provider of specialist education and care for children and young people with a range of special needs including, communication difficulties (autistic spectrum conditions, Asperger's Syndrome, speech, language and communication needs) and complex learning needs.
- 2.2 The Witherslack Group operates specialist schools, children's homes, and vocational training centres. The Group currently operates 18 schools, 19 children's homes, 4 vocational training centres and 7 integrated children's homes and learning centre facilities. The Group has expanded significantly and successfully over a number of years and now provides care and education for over 1,150 young people, employing more than 1,900 staff at its establishments in the north west, Oxfordshire, Yorkshire, the Midlands and the north east.
- 2.3 This 'team around the child' approach has led to the Witherslack Group being the highest rated independent provider by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).
- 2.4 Lakeside School opened in January 2001. Lakeside School is a day school providing education for children with complex educational needs² aged 5 to 13. The school is registered for 34 pupils. The school has 32 full time and 17 part time staff members. The focus is on small class sizes with generous staff ratios to help children realise their full potential. The school has consistently been rated Outstanding by Ofsted³. In the Inspection Report the Ofsted Inspector noted that, *'Pupils love coming to Lakeside School. Their attendance is excellent and they are proud to be Lakeside pupils.'* The Inspector also noted that *'the curriculum is broad and meets pupils needs exceptionally well. Pupils health, safety and welfare are of great importance'*⁴. The school continues to be successful and has remained open throughout the pandemic⁵.
- 2.5 'Lakeside School currently has 12 pupils from Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (KMBC) out of a total 30 pupils (40%). Lakeside School has a very good, strong relationship with KMBC and other neighbouring local authorities, having a 20 year history of providing excellent education for some very complex young people. The Lakeside School headteacher has advised that, time and again the school has had parents/carers request that they provide secondary education for their children, and the expansion into secondary age provision would provide continuity and stability for the pupils who have often seen many changes in their lives prior to coming to Lakeside (with some pupils having attended several different provisions prior to their admittance).
- 2.6 Lakeside School provides a nurturing therapeutic environment for pupils with complex communication and learning difficulties with associated anxieties and behaviours. The school is highly specialist, with staff who have a wealth of experience and expertise. The school offers pupils a bespoke curriculum, therapeutic intervention and enrichment activities to support their engagement in school and their development in all areas.
- 2.7 Whilst it is understood that the serving local authorities have their own provision for pupils with special educational needs, Lakeside School provides an alternative option for local authorities

² The school caters for children with special educational needs including ADHD, autism, speech, language & communication difficulties and social & emotional difficulties.

³ Lakeside School has been rated Outstanding by Ofsted in every inspection for the last 10 years. The most recent inspection was 3rd December 2019.

⁴ Ofsted Report – Lakeside School – Reporting on Inspection which took place 3-5th December 2019.

⁵ With COVID Secure measures in place.

to consider when they are looking to place their most difficult to place pupils, those who often have a number of complex needs which need to be met in order for them to succeed within a school setting, be they emotional, educational, physical, sensory or social communication needs.

- 2.8 The Witherslack Group would like to build on the success of this school to provide a secondary education facility (for ages up to 18) adjacent to the primary school site. This would enable pupils to continue their secondary education at Lakeside and continue to thrive.

3. Site and Surrounding Area

- 3.1 The application site comprises the former Wheathill Riding Centre, Naylors Road, Knowsley (see figure 1, below). The site is characterised by a number of barns and outbuildings (related to its former use as a riding centre) and a two storey detached property⁶. Despite the best efforts of the Witherslack Group to secure the site, the buildings have been the subject of anti-social behaviour including fire damage (suspected arson) and fly tipping. The detached property and barn have both been damaged by fire. The majority of the site is hardstanding however, the site also includes some land which is currently in agricultural use (which will be used for a multi-use games area (MUGA) and car parking). There are some mature trees on the boundary with Naylor Road and some scrub and hedgerows on the eastern boundary.
- 3.2 The site is not within an area at risk of flooding, however, a Flood Risk Assessment has been undertaken and is included in the application pack as the site area is larger than one hectare.
- 3.3 The site is not within a conservation area. Some of the existing buildings on the site were identified as having local historical significance as part of the planning appeal for the residential development. It was confirmed in the appeal decision that the historical value of the buildings was not sufficient for them to be required to be retained on site. This issue is considered in more detail at Section 8 of this statement.



Figure 1: Site Location (copyright Bing Maps 2021).

Lakeside School

- 3.4 Immediately adjacent to the site (to the east) is Lakeside School. Lakeside School is a primary school (for ages 5-13) for children with complex educational needs and is run by the Witherslack Group. The school comprises a mix of one and two storey buildings (see figure 2, p8) and was formerly a private dwelling. The school has an (electronic) gated access onto Naylors Road.

⁶ A breakdown of the sizes and volumes of the existing buildings is included in section 7 of this report.



Figure 2: Lakeside School

Surrounding Area

- 3.5 The application site is in the Green Belt and within the Knowsley district. To the north are buildings connected to the former riding centre use (a ménage and farm building) with agricultural land beyond this and the M62 motorway beyond. To the east is a farm track with farmland beyond. To the west is Lakeside School with farmland beyond and with former New Heights High School beyond this and to the south is Naylor's Road with private dwellings and The Childwall Golf Club beyond this. Naylor's Road and the area to the south are within Liverpool City Council's administrative area.
- 3.6 The nature of the pupils attending the school means that all pupils will arrive at the school by private transport i.e. by mini bus (as shown in figure 2, above) or by taxi. Notwithstanding this, there is a regular bus service on Naylor's Road providing services into St Helen's Bus Station and Knowsley Town Centre (further detail on bus services is provided within the Transport Statement which accompanies this application).

Planning History

- 3.7 An outline planning application was submitted for the demolition of the existing buildings and residential development comprising up to 18 dwellings and associated works in 2016. The application was refused by Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (KMBC) and was granted on appeal on 18th October 2017 (ref: APP/V4305/W/17/3171169).
- 3.8 Other planning permissions relevant to the site are listed below:

Reference	Description	Decision
Application Site		
16/00082/OUT (Appeal ref: APP/V4305/W/17/3171169)	Outline application for demolition of existing buildings and erection of residential development comprising 18no dwellings and associated works (existing farmhouse to be retained) - all matters reserved for future approval	Approved on appeal 18/10/17

Reference	Description	Decision
Application Site		
08/00564/NMA	Application for non-material amendment following grant of planning permission 08/00564/Ful (conversion of existing buildings to form 4 no. residential dwellings and associated detached garage block, together with construction of detached garage in association with existing dwelling, alterations to vehicular access and associated works) to allow for alterations to the approved windows, removal of a rooflight & the installation of an additional velux.	Approved 9/9/11
09/00056/FUL	Application for removal of condition no. 2 attached to planning permission k/app/14024 which restricted occupancy of dwelling.	Approved 26/2/2009
08/00622/FUL	Erection of stable block to provide accommodation for 14 horses together with tackroom and feedstore (existing stables to be demolished).	Approved 18/12/08
08/00564/FUL	Conversion of existing buildings to form 4 no. residential dwellings and associated detached garage block, together with construction of detached garage in association with existing dwelling, alterations to vehicular access and associated works.	Approved 24/11/08
08/00344/FUL	Application for the removal of condition 3 attached to planning permission k/app/14024 that restricts the operation of the riding school to the original applicant only.	Approved 10/07/2008
74/14015/HIST	Change of use of existing stables to provide a riding school and erection of 1 no. detached dwelling to be occupied by riding school manager.	Approved 11/6/92
Lakeside School		
00/00024/FUL	Change of use from dwelling and residential curtilage to primary day school for 32 Children's with special needs, operating Monday to Friday 8:30am -5pm. Erection of single storey extension to south side of building to provide additional space.	18/01/00

Table 1 – Planning History Record.

4. Pre-Application Engagement

- 4.1 The development proposals have been the subject of pre-application discussions with KMBC, details of the discussions and feedback received is summarised below:

Initial Pre-Application Meeting - 31st July 2019

- 4.2 An initial meeting with held with KMBC⁷ at the application site on 31st July 2019. KMBC advised that in principle the development of the site for a school building (in connection with the neighbouring Lakeside School) would be acceptable as the site is a previously developed site in the Green Belt and had been granted planning permission for residential development, which would have involved the demolition of the majority of the buildings at the site. KMBC stressed the need for any application to demonstrate very special circumstances to justify development within the Green Belt (see section 7 of this report).

Pre-Application Meeting - 26th November 2019

- 4.3 A meeting was held at KMBC's offices with Lee Osborne and Dorothy Bradwell to discuss potential options for the site (3 layout options were provided). At this meeting KMBC provided useful feedback in respect of the type of building likely to be acceptable (i.e. simple design, agricultural style) to ensure the development would blend into the surrounding area. KMBC also advised that the proposals should be set back in line with the existing barn (and broadly in line with the current Lakeside School building) to comply with comments identified by the Planning Inspector in the appeal decision for the residential development at the site. It was also recommended that parking should be located away from the front of the site and that existing landscaping (in particular mature trees) should be retained where possible.

Pre-Application Meeting – 23rd January 2020

- 4.4 A meeting was held at KMBC's offices with Lee Osborne and Mark Cawood (Head of Service) to discuss the forthcoming application. The Council confirmed that the application would automatically go to planning committee (as it is in the Green Belt), The Council also confirmed that the application would be passed to the Secretary of State for possible referral to the Planning Casework Unit. The Council reiterated their comments that a simple design would be best. The Council confirmed that a Section 106 contribution related to social values would be required.

Pre-Application Response – 15th April 2020

- 4.5 Following the pre-application meetings held KMBC issued a comprehensive written pre-application response. This can be summarised as follows:

Principle of Development and Amenity

- The comments of the Inspector in the appeal decision letter should form the basis of any proposed scheme.

⁷ Lee Osborne (Senior Planner) and Dorothy Bradwell (Conservation Officer)

- A larger scale single building can be viewed as appropriate in principle (given that large farm/equestrian structures are typical in this context).
- A case for the proposal would need to be made including why it would not impact upon the openness of the Green Belt (see Section 7 of this report).
- The principle of the car park siting is a significant issue.
- The proposals should include existing and proposed volume calculations.

Layout, Design and Scale

- The building should be designed to take into account its location within the Green Belt and sit well within the surrounding area.
- The proposed link between the existing Lakeside School building and new school building should be glazed to ensure the clear distinction of the two buildings.
- Given the scale of the proposed building, careful attention to the detailed design and materials is essential, preferably drawing inspiration from the farmyard context. Whilst a simple pitched roof would be appropriate, particular attention should be given the scale, design and material of the roof to ensure it relates well to the broader rural context.
- Given the Inspector's comments, the frontage of the site onto Naylors Road should remain substantially free of development. The building should be set back and whilst there is potential to incorporate some parking on the frontage, this would need to be very limited and obscured/mitigated by suitable landscaping (i.e. post and rail fencing, native hedges, trees and meadow planting).
- The accompanying Design and Access Statement should clearly detail the design ethos of the scheme.

Impact on Amenity

- The proposal would involve a building of significant size and mass which would be visible across fields and could impact on visual amenity. A high quality design which considers the wider context of the site could address this.
- However, notwithstanding this, there are no residential properties adjoining the site and therefore noise or privacy are unlikely to be significant issues.

Highways

- Ensure that sufficient parking and manoeuvring space is provided in accordance with the Ensuring a Choice of Travel SPD.
- A Transport Statement and Travel Plan is likely to be required.
- A speed survey may be required to ascertain 85th percentile speeds.
- The relevant visibility splays should be demonstrated within the Transport Statement.

- Provision should be made on site for the disposal of surface water so that no water runs down onto any highway.

Heritage

- Demolition of the historic farm buildings (non-designated heritage assets) was accepted by the Inspector previously in the context of the residential development. Therefore demolition could be supported.
- Heritage (including recording the existing heritage assets) needs to be addressed within the planning application (see section 8 of this report).

Flood Risk and Drainage

- A Flood Risk Assessment should be submitted with any planning application together with a drainage strategy.

Trees and Ecology

- A Tree Survey, impact study and method statement would be required to be submitted with any planning application.
- A Phase 1 Habitat Survey (and other detailed surveys as appropriate) would also need to be undertaken.

Contaminated Land

- A Phase 1 Contaminated Land Study will be required to be submitted with the planning application.

Pre-Submission Briefing – 15th March 2021

- 4.6 A further meeting was held with Lee Osborne and Alan Kilroe (KMBC) to present the preferred proposals for the site. At this meeting KMBC reiterated the need for the planning application to demonstrate the very special circumstances to justify the development of a previously developed site in the Green Belt. One of the key aspects of the case for very special circumstances will be the need for expansion of the existing school, building on its success (see Section 7 of this report). KMBC also stressed the importance of screening to the east, west and south of the site using landscaping appropriate to the wider rural area (i.e. shrubs and hedges). KMBC reiterated the need for a simple materials palette, i.e. timber cladding, slate or similar on the roof. KMBC confirmed that they are open to use of sustainable features to generate energy.

5. Development Proposals

- 5.1 This planning permission seeks permission for the demolition of existing buildings and the erection of a new secondary school building, Multi use games area (MUGA), and associated car parking and landscaping on land at the Former Wheathill Riding School, Naylors Road, Knowsley, L27 2YA.
- 5.2 The proposals will involve the demolition of all buildings within the red line boundary. The principle of the demolition of these buildings has been established through the appeal decision for residential development at the site.
- 5.3 The new secondary school will be for 60 pupils aged between 11-18. The new secondary school will complement the neighbouring existing Lakeside Primary School which has places for 34 children aged between 5-13 years. The primary and secondary schools will operate as one complete school overseen by one headteacher with a separate senior deputy teachers for the primary and secondary elements.
- 5.4 The MUGA will be situated on agricultural land adjacent to the hardstanding/buildings which comprise the former Wheathill Riding Centre. The MUGA will be for the sole use of the school. The MUGA will not be floodlit and will be used within school hours (8:30am -5pm only).
- 5.5 85 parking spaces will be provided at the site (including 3 disabled spaces and 4 spaces with charging points for electric vehicles). This parking will be for both the primary and secondary schools with the (informal) parking area within the primary school to be used for informal play space. Part of the parking area will be within agricultural land, however this will be landscaped and screened to the north, south and west to reduce any visual impact.
- 5.6 The new school building will utilise the existing former Wheathill Riding School access from Naylor's Road. There will be no through vehicular route between the two school buildings.

6. Planning Policy Context

6.1 This section considers the national, regional and local planning policy context for this site.

Development Plan

6.2 The development proposals for the site will be assessed against the Statutory Development Plan which comprises the Knowsley Core Strategy (adopted January 2016) and saved policies of the Knowsley Replacement Unitary Development Plan (adopted June 2006). The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's) are also of relevance.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

6.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides details of national planning policy for England and Wales.

6.4 The NPPF advocates a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision taking, this presumption means:

- the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed, or;
- any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

6.5 **Paragraph 8** of the NPPF states that there are three objectives to achieve sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

6.6 **Paragraph 92** of the NPPF states that to provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should (inter-alia) ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

6.7 **Paragraph 109** of the NPPF states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

6.8 **Paragraph 133** of the NPPF states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

6.9 **Paragraph 134** of the NPPF states that the Green Belt serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

6.10 **Paragraph 144** states 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.

- 6.11 **Paragraph 145** identifies the exceptions to allow new buildings in the Green belt. These are (inter-alia):
- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport... as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
 - 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.
- 6.12 **Paragraph 170** of the NPPF states that to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity plans should (inter alia) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.
- 6.13 **Paragraph 180** of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so they should (inter-alia) mitigate and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impacts resulting from noise from new development – and avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and the quality of life.
- 6.14 **Paragraph 189** states that in determining applications applicants should describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail provided should be proportionate to the assets importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

Knowsley Core Strategy 2016

- 6.15 The application site is situated within the Green Belt as detailed in the Local Plan Proposals Map (see extract at Figure 3, below).

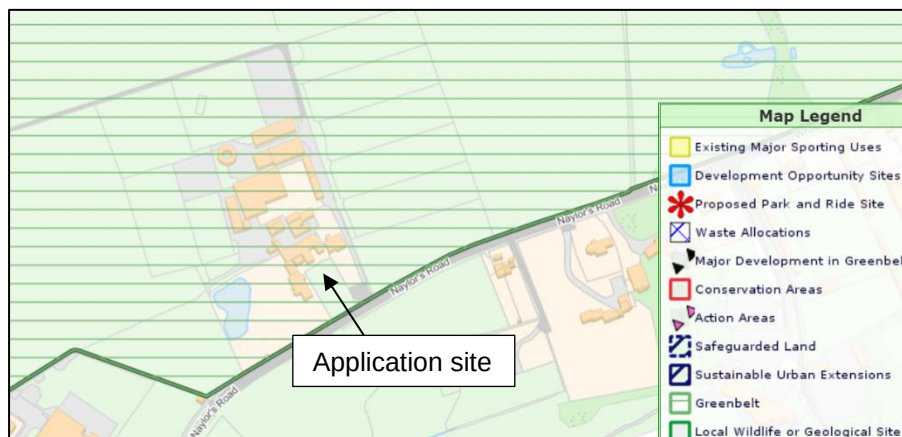


Figure 3 – Extract of Local Plan Proposals Map

- 6.16 **Core Strategy Policy CS2** identifies development principles. Of most relevance to this application is Development Principle 4: Recognise environmental limits, protect and enhance environmental assets, enhance local character and promote quality of place by (inter alia):
- a) Understanding and respecting the character and distinctiveness of places and landscapes;
 - c) Promoting good quality design and ensuring that development respects its setting taking into account relevant design requirements, and best practice;
 - d) Maximising opportunities for the regeneration of previously developed land, including derelict or unsightly areas to improve the image of Knowsley and use land resources efficiently;
 - e) Mitigating potential negative impacts of traffic growth and road traffic on highway safety, air quality, noise and health;
 - h) Maintaining or enhancing the quantity and quality of biodiversity and habitats, including potential impacts on nationally and internationally important sites for biodiversity;
 - j) Minimising negative impact upon flood risk, air quality, water quality, land quality, soil quality, and noise or vibration levels and ensuring any negative impacts are appropriately mitigated.
- 6.17 **Core Strategy Policy CS5** states that inappropriate development will not be permitted in the Green Belt except in very special circumstances in which it has been demonstrated that the harm to the Green Belt (including any harm to its openness, purposes or to its visual and recreational amenities) would be clearly outweighed by other considerations. The accompanying policy text (**paragraph 5.43**) states that the Council wishes to allow appropriate future development within previously developed sites in the Green Belt provided the openness of the Green Belt is preserved. The text acknowledges that such sites vary widely in size and type and that smaller sites (such as the application site) will not be identified specifically on the proposals map.
- 6.18 **Core Strategy Policy CS7** states that new development will be required prioritise accessibility and sustainable modes of travel through a choice of transport modes. The policy also states that planning applications should include a Transport Assessment (or Statement) and Travel Plan
- 6.19 **Core Strategy Policy CS8** states that (inter-alia) the Council will promote effective movement of wildlife through a network of strategic green links, by protecting, maintaining and improving existing and new open spaces, water courses (including water quality) and biodiversity assets.
- 6.20 **Core Strategy Policy CS19** identifies design criteria for new development to enhance the local distinctiveness, identity and accessibility of Knowsley. Of particular relevance for this site, is the need to respond to the immediate surroundings (1a), provide safe, secure and convenient routes for movement (1e), avoid unacceptable impacts on the amenity of existing residents (2a) and minimise crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour including good levels of natural surveillance and security (2b).
- 6.21 **Core Strategy Policy CS20** relates to the historic environment. Section 4 of the policy states that locally important historic assets which are not subject to statutory designation will be identified in a local list and will be afforded consideration in the decision making process.
- 6.22 **Core Strategy Policy CS21** section 10 of this policy states that the Council will encourage new development to incorporate the retention of existing trees, woodland, vegetation and other habitat features together with the appropriate planting to create habitat features for the benefit of biodiversity. The policy states that 2 additional trees should be planted for every tree lost taking account of species and size.

- 6.23 **Core Strategy Policy CS22** states that new development will be required to meet high standards of sustainable design and construction and minimise carbon emissions. This should be achieved by: (inter alia), designing new buildings for flexible uses throughout their lifetime (a), limiting energy use by incorporating high standards of insulation, heat retention, natural ventilation and passive solar techniques (e), using sustainable materials from local suppliers where possible (g) supplying energy efficiency and incorporating decentralised energy systems using renewable and low carbon energy where feasible (h) and managing flood risk including through the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) (i).
- 6.24 **Core Strategy Policy CS24** states that new development should preferably be located in areas of low probability of flooding. All development within an area of larger than 1 hectare in size will require a Flood Risk Assessment.

Knowsley UDP Saved Policies (2006)

- 6.25 **Saved UDP Policy DQ4** states that proposals for new development should include appropriate planting of trees or other soft landscaping, the location and details of which should be determined as an integral part of the development, and which shall have regard to the character of the surrounding area.
- 6.26 **Saved UDP Policy ENV5** states that new development will not be permitted if there is existing contamination on the site which could, as a result of the proposed development, place the occupiers or users of the development, ecological systems, the water environment or surrounding land uses at unacceptable risk.

Knowsley Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's)

- 6.27 The following SPD documents are of relevance to the site:
- Design Quality in New Development SPD – The proposals have been prepared cognisant of this SPD and in accordance with the pre-application advice received.
 - Ensuring a Choice of Travel SPD – The Transport Statement and Travel Plan has been prepared cognisant of this SPD.
 - Trees and Development SPD – The Tree Survey, Method Statement and Landscape Strategy for the site have been prepared cognisant of this SPD.
 - Adding Social Benefit to Development: Employment and Skills SPD – The Social Value Developer Contribution will form part of a Legal Agreement for the development proposals.

7. Very Special Circumstances

- 7.1 The application site is a previously developed site within the Green Belt. This section explains the Very Special Circumstances (paragraph 144 of the NPPF) why this site should be developed for a secondary school to complement the existing neighbouring Lakeside School.

Openness of the Greenbelt

- 7.2 As stated, the development proposals comprise the development of a previously developed site, the Former Wheathill Riding Centre. The site comprises 7 buildings related to the previous use (including the Farmhouse). The majority of the application site is hard standing with a small area of greenfield land identified for a MUGA (which is a permitted use in the Green Belt).
- 7.3 In determining the appeal for the residential development⁸ the Inspector (Mr Roy Merrett) acknowledged that the proposal would involve the demolition of a variety of buildings connected with the former riding centre. In terms of the scale of redevelopment it was undisputed by the parties that the maximum amount of development proposed would result in a significant reduction in both the volume and the footprint of the new buildings at the site. The Inspector stated that, *“Taking the above into account I consider that the relative scale and mass of the existing and proposed buildings means that the proposal would not cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt in purely spatial terms.”*
- 7.4 Whilst the scale of the proposed building is different to the permitted residential development (and will be addressed later in this section) the volumetric element of the proposals is similar to the appeal proposal in that there will be a significant reduction in the amount of buildings and footprint at the site. Table 2 (below) provides the volume details of the buildings to be demolished at the site whilst Table 3 demonstrates the reduction in volume of the new proposals. The proposals will result in a reduction of 5,487.13m³. Tables 1 and 3 should be read in conjunction with plan ref: 20034-C4P-AV-ZZ-DR-A-0401 rev P2.

Building no	Gross Volume m3
B1A	104.31
F3	6,116.98
F3A	331.8
F4	1065
F5	902.49
F6	548.57
F7	359.71
F8A	2,341.72
F8B	242.06
F8C	89.44
F8D	173.36
F9	1,215.64
F9A	238.95
Total	13,730.03

Table 2 – Volume details of buildings to be demolished.

⁸ Ref: APP/V4305/W/17/3171169

Volumes	Gross Volume m3
Volume of buildings to be demolished	13,730.03
New secondary School Building	8,242.9
Total volume reduction	5,487.13

Table 3 – Volume Calculation

- 7.5 However, as the Inspector states in the appeal decision, the volumetric calculation is not the only matter to consider in respect of the impact of the proposals on the openness of the Green Belt. The scale and massing of the proposed development and its visual impact must also be considered. Extensive pre-application discussions were held with KMBC and it was agreed that a linear building of a simple form would be most appropriate at the site to blend with the existing Lakeside School building and other agricultural buildings in the area. It was also agreed that the building would be set back from the road in line with the existing barn nearest to Naylor Road (which is to be demolished). Accordingly, the building has been carefully designed as a linear form which graduates in height from south to north. The south elevation of the building (facing Naylor's Road) is 1 storey in height, rising to 1.5 storeys and then 2 storeys. The graduation in height broadly mirrors the adjacent Lakeside School building (see Figure 4, p20). The materials and detailing (including fenestration) have been carefully considered to ensure the building does not have a significant visual impact when viewed from the wider countryside. KMBC expressed a need for a muted palette and this has been incorporated into the plans. KMBC also asked for slate to be considered as a roofing material. The section of the building facing Naylor's Road will have a slate roof. A glazed link will connect the existing Lakeside Primary School and the secondary school building, this will ensure that the buildings are connected but are read as separate entities in the wider context (as requested by KMBC in the pre-application discussions).
- 7.6 The Inspector noted in his report that the frontage area of the site would remain substantially free of development and the substantial mass of the brick barn would be replaced with a narrower building. Similarly, in the case of the proposed development the mass of the brick barn will be replaced with a narrower building. It is therefore considered that the proposed development would also result in the site being perceived as less developed from a close range perspective.
- 7.7 To the west the site would be substantially screened by a tall hedge. This will be augmented by further landscaping in keeping with the existing landscaping (i.e. hedging and scrub). To the east and north the building is likely to be visible, however as the Inspector states in his report *“visibility would be at a distance, with the height of new (dwellings) viewed against a backdrop of mature trees to the east and a rise in landform to the west.”* In addition further landscaping is also proposed to the east and west to screen the building and the proposed car parking.
- 7.8 It is considered that a combination of distance, landscape setting (and additional screening) and the sensitive siting of the building with the highest part of the building focussed on the less visible northern boundary should ensure that the building will not have a significant visual impact.
- 7.9 It is therefore considered that the above factors when also taking into consideration the cumulative mass of the existing buildings on the site would mitigate against the impact of the increased height of the buildings on the openness of the Green Belt. The proposals are largely contained within the previously developed site. The MUGA and part of the car parking area is outwith this area, however, the MUGA is a permitted use within Green Belt land and the car parking will be screened and landscaped to minimise its visual impact. The proposed application boundary is in line with the current primary school boundary (see Figure 2 p8). It is

therefore considered that the proposals will not unduly encroach into the countryside or cause any sense of merging between the communities of Huyton and Netherley.

- 7.10 It is considered that the proposals accord with the conclusions of the Inspector that the proposals *'would not result in a greater overall impact on the openness of the Green Belt in either spatial or visual terms or the purposes of including land within it.'* Accordingly the proposals are considered to be in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS5 and paragraph 144 of the NPPF.



Figure 4 – Extract of 3D Model of Proposed Development

The Need for a School in this Location

- 7.11 Lakeside Primary School opened in January 2001. It has been a successful school for over 20 years consistently receiving an outstanding rating from Ofsted. Lakeside School is situated adjacent to the application site. The location of the school has been instrumental in its success as it provides learning in a nurturing therapeutic environment. The peaceful, tranquil nature of the site and the opportunities for outdoor learning and play have been of great benefit to the children and staff at the school.
- 7.12 The school has places for 34 pupils aged between 5-13 years. The headteacher at the school has advised that time and time again the school has had requests from parents and carers to provide secondary education for their children. Secondary education at this location would provide continuity of provision and stability for children who have often seen many changes in their lives prior to attending Lakeside School (with some pupils having attended many schools prior to their admittance).
- 7.13 Lakeside Primary School provides small class sizes (a maximum of 8 children) which combined with generous staffing ratios ensures that the children are able to progress and reach their full potential. The quality of teaching was recognised in the latest Ofsted report which stated that *'the curriculum is broad and meets pupils needs exceptionally well.'* The Secondary school would provide similarly small class sizes and generous staff ratios.
- 7.14 The primary and secondary schools would operate as one school with one headteacher and separate senior deputy teachers. It would be a fully integrated facility.
- 7.15 In seeking planning permission for a new secondary school at the neighbouring site, the Witherslack Group is seeking to build on the success of the existing primary school and provide greater choice and continuity for the children who attend the school. There is also the

opportunity to provide some vocational training to allow children to stay on to seek further qualifications (i.e. to age 18).

- 7.16 40% of children in the school are from the Knowsley area (KMBC area) and the school has good relationships with all neighbouring local authorities, it is considered that there is demand for the secondary school and that it would be of great benefit to the children and the wider area.

Conclusion

- 7.17 In conclusion, it is considered that the need for a secondary school in this location (primarily due to its proximity to the neighbouring primary school) and the significant social benefits such a school would bring are very special circumstances in the context of paragraph 144 and 145 of the NPPF and together with the case made at paragraphs 7.2-7.10 would outweigh any perceived harm to the Green Belt in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS5.

8. Heritage

- 8.1 The Inspectors Report for the appeal for residential development at the site addresses the issue of historic significance of the existing farm buildings. It was agreed the the large brick barn adjacent to the farmhouse is the oldest at the site. The Council confirmed that they considered the building and the wider site to be a non-designated heritage asset and worthy of retention. However, the Inspector advised that he considered that a compelling case had '*not been made for the retention of historic features on site*' but requested that condition be added to the planning permission granting consent to demolish the buildings that prior to their demolition a Level 2 record of historic buildings shall be made and submitted to KMBC.
- 8.2 The principle of the demolition of the existing farm buildings is therefore established through the planning permission for residential development at the site.
- 8.3 A photographic survey of the buildings and recording details has been produced and is included as part of this submission. It is therefore considered that the proposals accord with Core Strategy Policy CS20 and paragraph 189 of the NPPF.

9. Analysis

9.1 This planning application seeks the provision of a new secondary school building, MUGA, and associated car parking and landscaping at the Former Wheathill Riding Centre adjacent to Lakeside Primary School. The site is within the Green Belt and the Very Special Circumstances related to this project are addressed within Section 7 of this report. Heritage matters are addressed within Section 8 of this report. This section will seek to demonstrate the benefits of the proposed scheme and its compliance with national and local planning policy (not addressed in Sections 7 and 8). Accordingly, this section is structured as follows:

- Character and Appearance;
- Anti Social Behaviour;
- Highways;
- Noise;
- Flood Risk;
- Ecology and Trees;
- Sustainability, and;
- Refuse Collection.

Character and Appearance

9.2 The Planning Inspector noted that the site is within an urban fringe location between the M62 motorway which forms a definitive south edge of the main settlement area of Huyton and Netherley to the south. The Inspector noted that *‘although in a countryside setting, the site does not have the feel of being in an isolated rural location and would be seen from the...rights of way in the context of built development further to the west.’*

9.3 As stated within Section 7 of this report views of the site from close range would be substantially mitigated due to the set back of the building from the highway and the presence of mature planting at Naylor's Road. Moreover the building is at its lowest point when viewed from Naylor's Road.

9.4 The retention of the existing Lakeside School building to the west and the former riding school buildings to the north (i.e. the ménage and other building which do not form part of this application), will also help to visually absorb and assimilate the development into its surroundings (as noted by the Inspector in his report).

9.5 In addition as discussed in section 7 open views of the site tend to be from a distance against a background of landscape features. Further landscaping is also proposed for the east and west boundaries to provide further screening of the building and car parking area.

9.6 The Inspector concluded that the proposals for residential development would not result in harm to the character and appearance of the area. It is considered that the current proposals will similarly not result in harm to the character and appearance of the wider area and are in accordance with policies CS2 and CS19 of the Core Strategy.

Anti-Social Behaviour

- 9.7 The application site has been the target of some anti-social behaviour and despite the best efforts of the Witherslack Group to (repeatedly) secure the property, some of the buildings (including the farmhouse) have been badly damaged by fire (suspected arson attacks). The proposals involve the demolition of these buildings and the creation of a new secondary school which would in turn increase natural surveillance. This would likely remove the anti-social behaviour from this site which would be of benefit to the wider area also in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS19.

Highways

- 9.8 The site is within an urban fringe location that has easy access to public transport via bus stops on Naylor's Road. The proposals will utilise the existing former Wheathill Riding School access which will be modified slightly to achieve the visibility splays necessary for the proposed development. The access will be used for both the primary and secondary schools with the existing primary school access to be limited to a few essential vehicles only. A Transport Statement has been prepared for the site and as part of this a traffic survey has been undertaken. The level of car parking to be provided has been assessed against the relevant parking standards and the Ensuring a Choice of Travel SPD. The parking for staff and visitors reflects the high staff ratio for teaching within the Special Educational Needs setting. Pupil to staff ratios are 2:1 with other specialist staff providing sensory, language, therapy and pastoral care all supported by administrative, welfare, maintenance and driver staff who are integral to the success of the school. Teaching within a special educational needs setting requires specialised training, and as such the labour pool is incomparably smaller than that of mainstream teachers and staff members as it is unlikely that a high proportion of staff members can be sourced from the local area when more opportunity for travel by other modes would be available. Geographically, the location of special educational needs schools is also sparse, when compared with the provision of mainstream educational schools requiring teachers and support staff to travel longer distances. Notwithstanding this there are options for staff to use public transport if they wish and a Travel Plan has also been prepared and accompanies the planning application. All children attending the school will arrive via private transport (i.e. taxi or mini bus), there will be a dedicated pick up and drop off area within the site. The Transport Statement concluded that there will be no unacceptable impact on highway safety and no severe impact on the highway network in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS2,

Noise

- 9.9 There are no immediate neighbours adjacent to the site (aside from the primary school). A Noise Assessment has been undertaken for the site which confirmed that noise should not be a prohibitive factor in the determination of this planning application in accordance with paragraph 180 of the NPPF and Core Strategy Policy CS2.

Flood Risk

- 9.10 The site is within an area at low risk of flooding (Flood Zone 1). A Flood Risk Assessment has been undertaken (as the site is larger than one hectare in size). The report concluded that the site is at low risk of flooding. The proposals are therefore in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS24. A Drainage Strategy is currently being prepared for the site.

Ecology and Trees

- 9.11 A Phase 1 Habitat Survey has been undertaken together with the following detailed technical surveys:
- Bats – evidence of small numbers of common species roosting in association with two buildings and one tree on the site. Given the small size and low status of the roost sites licencing should comprise registration of the site through a low impact mitigation class licence to allow low impact work on bat roost.
 - Birds – several birds nests were observed in buildings and in scrub. The ecologist has recommended work takes place outside of the breeding birds season (March to August).
 - Barn Owls – No evidence of nesting barn owls found.
 - Great Crested Newts – no evidence found through surveys and eDNA sampling.
- 9.12 Details of all surveys and results are included in the Ecological Report which accompanies the planning application.
- 9.13 A Tree Survey and Method Statement has been prepared and is included in the application documents. The majority of trees at the site will be retained including the one tree subject to a Preservation Order (adjacent to Naylors Road).

Sustainability

- 9.14 The proposed school building has been designed to be both sustainable and energy efficient. The building will have an energy EPC B Rating. 4 charging points for electric vehicles will be included within the car park. In addition to this, surface applied Solar PV panels will be included on the standing seam section of the roof. These panels have a reduced visual impact but will generate sustainable energy in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS22.

Refuse and Recycling Collections

- 9.15 In the pre-application discussions KMBC asked if the arrangements for refuse and recycling collections could be confirmed. These collections will be as per the current arrangements for the primary school (i.e. refuse collected once a week and recycling collections fortnightly).

10. Summary

- 10.1 This report can be summarised as follows:
- 10.2 This planning application is made on behalf of the Witherslack Group for a new secondary school building, MUGA, car parking and landscaping at the former Wheathill Riding Centre, adjacent to Lakeside Primary School, Naylors Road, Knowsley.
- 10.3 The site comprises a previously developed site within the Green Belt. The proposals are largely contained within the former riding centre site, however the MUGA and part of the car parking area will be situated on greenfield land. The MUGA is a permitted use within the Green Belt (outdoor recreation) and the car parking will be landscaped and screened to reduce any visual impact.
- 10.4 The site is characterised by agricultural buildings related to its former use (as a Riding School). The buildings have been the subject of anti-social behaviour and have significant fire damage (suspected arson).
- 10.5 The riding centre site was the subject of a planning appeal (for residential development) which established the principle of the demolition of the existing farm buildings and the development of the site for an alternative use.
- 10.6 The project has been the subject of extensive pre-application engagement with KMBC.

Overall Planning Balance

- 10.7 Planning decisions should be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan in this case is the Knowsley Core Strategy adopted 2016 and Saved Policies within the Knowsley UDP (2006).

Very Special Circumstances

- 10.8 The proposals will result in a reduction in the overall volume of the buildings on site (by 5,487.13m³). The visual impact of the proposed development will be mitigated through existing landscaping, and further landscaping to provide additional screening to the east and west. It is therefore considered that the proposals will not result in an overall impact on the openness of the Green Belt in either spatial or visual terms.
- 10.9 The proposals are largely driven by the proximity of the site to the existing highly successful Lakeside Primary School. The proposals would provide continuity and stability for children attending the school and allow them to continue their education to up to age 18.
- 10.10 It is therefore considered that the spatial and visual case combined with the need of a secondary school in this location and the significant social benefits such a school would bring are very special circumstances in the context of paragraph 144 and 145 of the NPPF and together with the case made at paragraphs 7.2-7.10 would outweigh any perceived harm to the Green Belt in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS5 (and paragraph 5.43 of the Core Strategy).

Other Matters

- 10.11 The proposals will result in the loss of the agricultural buildings at the site which have been identified by the Council as having local historical significance. The Planning Inspector confirmed that the buildings were not significant enough to be retained (as part of the planning

appeal for the residential scheme at the site). A survey of the buildings and photographic record is included in the application pack. It is therefore considered that the proposals accord with Core Strategy Policy CS20 and paragraph 189 of the NPPF.

- 10.12 The proposals have been carefully designed to blend into the wider area and will not result in harm to the character and appearance of the wider area and are in accordance with policies CS2 and CS19 of the Core Strategy.
- 10.13 The development proposals would likely remove the anti-social behaviour from this site which would be of benefit to the wider area also in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS19.
- 10.14 A Transport Statement has been prepared for this site. The Transport Statement concluded that there will be no unacceptable impact on highway safety and no severe impact on the highway network in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS2.
- 10.15 A Noise Assessment has been undertaken for the site which confirmed that noise should not be a prohibitive factor in the determination of this planning application in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS2 and paragraph 180 of the NPPF.
- 10.16 The site is within an area at low risk of flooding (Flood Zone 1). A Flood Risk Assessment has been undertaken (as the site is larger than one hectare in size). The report concluded that the site is at low risk of flooding. The proposals are therefore in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS24.
- 10.17 Detailed ecology surveys have been prepared for the site and are included in the application pack. The surveys advised that there are no ecological issues with the development proposals subject to receiving the relevant low impact licences for demolition of the buildings in respect of bats and barn owls⁹. A Tree Survey and Impact Assessment have also been produced. The majority of existing trees will be retained within the site. The proposals are therefore in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS21.
- 10.18 The building has been designed to be energy efficient and will incorporate solar panels on part of the standing seem section of the roof. These panels have a reduced visual impact but will generate sustainable energy. In addition 4 charging points will be provided for electric vehicles. The proposals are therefore considered to be in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS22.
- 10.19 It is therefore respectfully requested that this planning application be considered favourably and approved without delay.

⁹ These licences cannot be applied for until the planning application is determined.

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