

 Havering LONDON BOROUGH	Strategic Planning Committee – Developer Presentation 10 July 2025
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Pre-Application Reference: W0291.24

Location: PLAYING FIELD AT BALGORES LANE,
ROMFORD

Ward: SQUIRRELS HEATH

Description: CONSTRUCTION OF A 300 PUPIL
SCHOOL FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL
EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) WITH
ASSOCIATED ACCESS, PUPIL PICK UP
AND DROP OFF, PARKING AND
OUTDOOR PLAY/AMENITY SPACES.

Case Officer: RAPHAEL ADENEGAN

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This proposed development is being presented to enable Members of the committee to view it before a planning application is submitted 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 application and the comments received as a result of consultation, publicity and notification.
- 1.2 The proposed planning application has been the subject of pre-application meetings with Officers. There have been five (5) pre-application meetings including one workshop with officers and the scheme has evolved over the months. The proposal was presented to the Council's Quality Review Panel on the 6th May 2025. Pre-application discussions with the applicants have included the principle of the development proposed including quantum of development, massing, height layout, access, parking arrangement and landscaping planning that have been undertaken by the applicants subject to a masterplan being

developed for the site. The proposal is being brought to Committee at this stage.

2 PROPOSAL AND LOCATION DETAILS

2.1 Proposal

Full planning application for a special school (SEND) catering to the needs of

- 300 no. students with complex autism,
- aged between 4 and 19 years old,
- building height up to 2 storeys with a ground floor footprint = 4075sqm;
- GIFA = 6,350sqm
- Site area = 23,208sqm
- Associated landscaping, parking spaces and cycle stores;
- Access is from the Balgore Lane as existing albeit widened.

Facilities to include:

- General and specialist teaching spaces
- A suite of therapy spaces
- A therapy pool and associated changing facilities
- Assembly halls for both upper and lower school cohorts
- Enterprise hub with specialist life skills focus
- Electricity Substation

Providing some use of external formal games facilities to Squirrels Heath School, as well as an ambition to provide use of both building and landscape to the community, out of school hours including weekends, evenings and out of term time.

Parking to include:

- 41 staff, 10 visitor/parent drop off and 5 minibus spaces.
- 12 (20%) to be active charge spaces, and all the rest (44) to be passive.
- 4 of the parking spaces are currently shown as accessible.
- Total of 28 long stay cycle spaces, 4 (14%) of which will be suitable for enlarged bicycles.
- Currently showing 14 short stay cycle spaces.
- All long and short stay cycle spaces are in the form of Sheffield stands.

Landscape to include:

- Individual outdoor landscaped areas for early years, primary, secondary and post 16 students
- A MUGA (multi use games area) and a natural grass pitch suitable for children's 5 a side football.
- A forest school area
- An additional grassed recreational area

2.2 The proposed pre-application enquiry subject to review is detailed application. The information provided as part of this enquiry includes proposed quantum, layout and community use space areas.

- 2.3 The key objective will be to create high quality public school building(s) catering for pupils and students with special needs and disability, within the London Borough of Havering.

Site and Surroundings

- 2.4 The site measures approximately 2.33hectares in area and comprises an open playing field located west of the road, which according to the applicant is used for informal sport and amenity by Squirrels Heath Infant School which is located close by to the south. It abuts a public library and allotment gardens to the north and gardens of residential properties to the east, west and south. Access to the site is from Balgores Lane but this is a short frontage which forms part of the site's northeast boundary.
- 2.5 The immediate area around the site is predominantly residential in character but local parades of shops in Brentwood Road and Heath Park Road are within 230m. Gidea Park (Elizabeth Line) Station is within 250m from the site, and as such a building of a high architecture would be preferred in this semi-open location
- 2.6 In terms of its local context, the site does not fall within a conservation area and there are no listed buildings on site. But Gidea Park Conservation Area is within approximately 160 away including Gidea Park train station.
- 2.7 The application site also has a PTAL rating of 3 (Moderate).

Planning History

- 2.7 None

3 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 At this stage, it is intended that the following will be consulted regarding any subsequent planning application:
- Secretary of State (SoS)
 - GLA
 - Transport for London (Statutory Consultee)
 - Sport England (Statutory Consultee)
 - Historic England -Archaeology
 - Thames Water
 - Essex and Suffolk Water
 - EDF Energy
 - LFEPA – Water

- Fire Brigade
- Natural England
- Metropolitan Police – Design Out Crime

The following consultees have commented as part of the pre-application process:

- 3.2 Sport England – Raised fundamental objection to the proposal as a result of the loss of the playing field. This is notwithstanding the inclusion of a MUGA pitch and an indoor sensory pool as part of the proposal. As such, an approval of the proposal would constitute a departure requiring the approval of the Secretary of State to date.
- 3.3 TfL – Expressed concern about the level of proposed parking; that it is on a high side and should be reduced or a robust justification has to be put forward.
- 3.4 Highways Authority – No fundamental objection raised but issue regarding loss of 3 to 4 existing marked on-street parking spaces needs to be justified including the carrying out of parking audit in the immediate surrounding.
- 3.5 GLA – A pre-application meeting was also held with the GLA on 11th June, however, a written response has not yet been received.

4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 In accordance with planning legislation, the developer will consult the local community on these proposals as part of the pre-application process

Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024
 London Plan 2021
 London Borough of Havering Local Plan 2016 – 2031

5 MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 The main planning issues raised by the application that the Committee must consider are:
 - Principle of development
 - Appearance, scale and site layout
 - Impact on amenities of residential properties and occupiers

- Parking/Traffic
- Quality Review Panel (QRP) Comments
- Other issues

5.2 Principal of Development

- London Plan Policy S3 Education Facilities sets out that the Mayor will support the provision of education facilities to meet the demands of a growing and changing population to enable greater educational choice, and that the establishment of new schools, including academy and free schools, is strongly supported in this context. The policy identifies that development proposals which enhance education and skills provision will be supported, including new build, expansion of existing schools and changes of use to educational purposes. The policy confirms that proposals for new schools should be given positive consideration and should only be refused where there are demonstrable negative local impacts which substantially outweigh the desirability of establishing a new school and which cannot be addressed through the use of appropriate planning conditions or obligations

Loss of Playing field

- The application site lies entirely within a playing field as identified in the Local Plan.
- NPPF paragraph 104b states that existing open space and playing fields should not be built on unless the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location. Sport England has advised in the course of the pre-application process that the proposal will not meet any of the exceptions for the loss of a designated playing field to overcome the potential detriment caused by the loss, or prejudice to the use, of the area of playing field.
- London Plan Policy G4 and Local Plan policy 29 identifies that proposals that increase or enhance the provision of sports and recreation facilities will be supported; whereas those that result in a net loss of sports and recreation facilities, including playing fields should be resisted.
- The applicant has put forward the use of an area of the building of the new school for community use including a new MUGA pitch to allow for use by members of the public outside school hours.
- The applicant is the Council; the proposal would lead to loss of a playing field and Sport England have raised fundamental objection to the proposal as a result. This is notwithstanding the inclusion of a MUGA pitch and an indoor sensory pool as part of the proposal. As such, an approval of the

proposal would constitute a departure requiring the approval of the Secretary of State.

- The neighbouring Squirrels Heath Infant School have a shortage of on-site playground space, and there is a longstanding agreement that the existing playing field on the proposed site can be used by the existing school. However, it is understood this currently only happens on an occasional basis. The applicant is still in discussions with the Squirrels Heath School as to the extent to which they would get access to the new recreation pitch and the MUGA.
- Whilst officers, GLA and Sports England have advised that there has to be a meaningful community use benefit for the loss of the playing field, it is still not clear as to how accessible the proposed community use aspect of the development will be to members of the public. It should be stressed that for the proposal to be acceptable, there has to be a meaningful community benefit. Members may wish to comment on this.

5.3 Appearance, scale and site layout

- Scale, design, appearance and layout of the scheme have evolved over the preapplication process. Officers have advised that the site layout and massing should continue to be tested and reviewed in response to comments raised including consideration of how it may be appropriate to redistribute some of the accommodation.
- A two-storey school building would not appear unduly out of character. However, the design has been evolving in response to the officers and QRP comments.
- Any height and bulk should be justified through a thorough streetscape and contextual approach including identifying important viewpoints, in accordance with policies 7 and 10 of the Local Plan. Members may wish to comment on this part of the proposal.

5.4 Impact on amenities of residential properties and occupiers

- There is merit in an approach as demonstrated which gives high priority to the quality of materials and which can demonstrate a coherent design led approach to the development of the site.
- It is important that any potential overshadowing, overlooking and noise issues relating to neighbouring must be adequately addressed. Officers have been working with the applicant to ensure that the layout and scale of the building would be sufficiently distant from nearby residential properties not to have a detrimental impact on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers.

5.5 Parking/Traffic

- Transport requirements will affect the strategic site layout, and therefore need to be explored in more detail to understand the suitability of current proposals. The intake of 300 pupils, with a high staff ratio (stated to be around 1:1 in the meeting) will create a very significant demand.
- However, as stated above, GLA and TfL have raised concern about the level of on-site parking space advising further reduction in the number of parking spaces to promote the Mayor's objectives in promoting modal shift towards active travel away from use of private car journeys.

5.6 Quality Review Panel (QRP) Comments

- The proposal has been presented to the Havering Quality Review Panel 6th May 2025. Members should note that the proposal as presented to them may have changed to reflect the QRP. The applicant has provided the Table 1 below to demonstrate how the scheme has evolved in response to QRP comments. The following comments were made by the QRP:

Table 1

QRP Comment	Response
1. The panel suggests that the sport and leisure hall should be aligned with the houses on Balgores Lane, to form a boundary to control site access and to give a public face to the school.	1. Moving sport and leisure block - to be explored.
2.It is unclear how and when the public square will be used. The panel feels that the space will be of greater value within the school's secure line.	2.. The public square will now function as a semi public square which will be fenced and gated when the school is not in use. The space will provide a feature entrance into the school with seating and future opportunities for flexible use. School branding, paving and planting will be used to define the space and create a sense of welcome.
3.Further consideration should be given to the strategic position and the footprint of the school building to ensure that large areas of useable outdoor space are prioritized and a heart is created for the scheme.	3.Communal spaces have been developed to provide passive play and social opportunities closer to the building with more active play placed further away. Outdoor areas have been carefully distributed between early years + primary and secondary + post 16 to ensure all BB104 areas are met.

4. Boundaries between public and private space should be designed to be dissolved outside of school hours. For example, gates that are designed to swing back and/or fold away.	4. Fences and boundaries have been kept to a minimum and screened with planting or timber infill where possible.
5. A relationship with the allotment gardens should be created, to provide an opportunity for the pupils to engage with the allotment owners who typically like to share their knowledge and skill of growing produce.	5. Building a relationship with the school and the adjacent allotments is being explored.
6. Consideration could also be given to relocating the MUGA adjacent to the sport and leisure hall, to facilitate the control of community access for these two facilities.	<p>6. Consideration could also be given to relocating the MUGA adjacent to the sport and leisure hall, to facilitate the control of community access for these two facilities.</p> <p>An additional grass recreation area has been provided and both pitch and MUGA locations adjusted to improve layout and access to and around the facilities.</p> <p>Relocating the MUGA has also been explored. However, it is considered preferential to retain in its current position to facilitate access for Squirrels Heath and the school and MUGA locations adjusted to improve layout and access to and around the facilities.</p>

Landscape Design

QRP Comment	Response
7. A welcoming environment should be provided that affords the children a pleasant everyday arrival and departure experience. Further thought should be given to the layout of the car park, to provide additional trees, planting and seating around each of the entrances to the building.	7. The redesign focuses on improving a welcoming arrival and departure experience for the students using surface materials to define routes and providing a greener aesthetic to key areas such as the car park.
8. Additional trees should also be planted in the grassed area between the central courtyard and the MUGA.	8. Additional tree planting has been added to the area between the central courtyard and the MUGA.
9. The thin strips of greening in the central courtyard and to the north of the vehicle entrance are too narrow to be useable. Green space should be consolidated across the site to maximize the area of useable space. Circulation space should be tightened.	9. Planting beds have been reconfigured across the scheme to maximize the planting offer and provide the best growing conditions for planting. Narrow beds are allocated for hedge planting only.

10. Details on biodiversity net gain should be provided. The panel recommends preserving some of the brambles around the boundary of the site, additional tree planting and the greening of roofs and vertical surfaces.	10. Biodiversity net gain has been carefully considered to meet the required targets with habitat retained and enhanced where possible. The retention of existing vegetation will need to be carefully balanced with the health and safety requirements of the students. Where it is not possible to accommodate, off site provision will be required.
11. Information should be provided on the number of existing trees to be retained and the number and species of additional trees to be planted.	11. A BNG plan and report will be provided by the ecologist with detail of proposed trees in the landscape planting information.

The Car Park

QRP Comment	Response
12. The car park has the potential to provide an opportunity for children to learn key skills, including traffic safety and how to catch a bus. However, green parking with permeable surfaces to support the growth of short grass or moss should be used to reduce the amount of hard surface.	12. The car park provides safe and secure defined pedestrian routes for both staff students and visitors. Areas of surfacing will be permeable in line with SUDs requirements for the scheme.
13. Additional trees should be planted and pergolas provided, to maximize greening and to increase shade for people and cars. The pergolas could also support photovoltaic panels.	13. Swathes of shrub and groundcover planting create a green aesthetic across the space to create a welcoming environment. Tree planting will provide structure and seasonal interest and a green frontage to the school.

The MUGA, the Forest School and the Pitch

QRP Comment	Response
14. The forest school, MUGA and grass pitch should be designed as one large space to minimize the length of secure fencing required. Lower, child-friendly partitions could be used to define each area, to allow for flexible use of the spaces.	14. The MUGA, 'forest school' and sports pitch has been rationalized into one large space with controlled access for Squirrels Health. Woodland planting has also been extended to provide a buffer between each area enhancing the native planting to the perimeter of the site. An additional grass area for recreation has been provided and the pitch and MUGA locations adjusted to improve layout and access to and around the facilities.
15. A well-used sports facility could help to build a strong case to present to Sport England. Further thought should be given to the location of the MUGA and the pitch, to ensure that they will be easily accessible by the community outside of school hours.	15. Care has been taken to ensure full circulation in this area with segregation provided through the use of appropriate fencing and gates.

16. Toilet facilities should be available for the Squirrels Heath Junior School pupils when they use the MUGA and the pitch during school hours. They will also need to be available to the wider community when the sports facilities are in use outside of school hours.	16. Provision of toilet facilities within southern area of the site - to be explored.
<p>17. The surface of the MUGA should be upgraded to a material that is more forgiving than tarmac for the children to play on. An appropriate all-weather surface will also ensure that the MUGA is well-used by the wider community.</p> <p>Consideration should also be given to an all-weather surface for the pitch, to ensure its wider use year-round.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to the design of an attractive, fun enclosure for the MUGA in place of the usual green wire mesh.</p> <p>The panel supports the use of mounds in the landscape. Additional mounds and berms could be designed to enclose the pitch, in place of a fence, and would provide welcome additional landscape features for play.</p>	17. The MUGA will have a polymeric surface and 3m high fencing. Mounds have been rationalized to maximize areas for sports use.

Internal Layout of the school Building

QRP Comment	Response
18. The entrances should be given greater prominence. Further thought should also be given to the experience of the children as they enter the school building.	18. The prominence of the two main entrances has been developed through design of the landscape and its relationship with the building. In addition, the colonnaded design at both the primary and secondary school entrances highlight the entrances, as well as providing shelter and shade to those arriving and leaving the building.
19. Natural or borrowed light should be introduced to improve the experience of the long double-loaded corridors.	19. Natural light within the building - to be developed in tandem with daylight analysis. There are glazed screens in each classroom onto the circulation spaces. There is also a requirement, to align with Dept. of Education guidance, for all office and staff spaces to have glazed screens onto corridors. While the requirement is driven for the need for passive supervision, it also benefits in providing natural light.

20.The dining rooms will be key communal spaces. They should have high levels of natural light and a good relationship with the adjacent exterior space.	20. The primary dining hall has been redesigned following comments, making it both larger (from 42sqm to 51sqm) and increasing the amount of available glazing (from 3.8 linear meters to 4.8m). The relationship to external dining has also been improved. Natural light is also being provided via a large lightwell over the adjacent primary library space.
21.Further thought is needed to address the outlook and acoustics of the secondary pupil's dining area which overlooks the carpark. The primary pupil's dining area also needs further consideration as the crank in the building limits the amount of daylight that it receives.	21.The secondary dining hall remains in its location, with a large aspect of glazing overlooking the Entrance and Car Park space. This room is positioned so that when large numbers of secondary students are arriving and leaving the school, they may congregate here and gain direct access to the car park.
22.The group spaces, located in the quads between classrooms, should have high levels of natural daylight.	22.Group spaces - presuming here it refers to internal quad space at center of classroom arrangement. Refer also to response no. 19.
23.The quality of the group spaces is currently compromised by a narrow plan and the noise that is likely to result from the through-access to the classrooms on either side.	23.The design of the group spaces, which occur between classrooms within the secondary school, has been tested with the required furniture and space planning. In addition, and in tandem with the client and trust, who have experience of similar spaces within other schools they operate, noise and distraction between classrooms is not seen as a risk.

Environmental Sustainability

QRP Comment	Response
24. Daylight / sunlight analysis should be undertaken to determine if external solar shading will be needed.	24..An initial daylight analysis has been conducted across various teaching spaces in accordance with DfE Climate- Based Daylight Modelling (CBDM) criteria. The design aims to maximize the use of natural daylight in teaching and general learning areas to enhance occupant comfort and reduce energy consumption, with artificial lighting serving as a supplementary source when daylight levels are insufficient. Further daylight assessments will be carried out during the design development stage. One key consideration is the potential impact of larger windows, which, while improving daylight access, will increase solar heat gains and contribute to overheating. This could necessitate requirements for local cooling, therefore increasing project costs.

25. External decking could be used to provide solar shading for the ground level, as well as outdoor amenity for the upper level of the building.	25. The provision of external amenity space at first floor has been optioned with the client. However, due to the nature of the students in the school (complex autism), it was deemed to present too high a risk of falling/climbing and causing injury and harm to both students and staff.
26. The panel has concerns that the building does not appear to have any natural ventilation. Further details are requested on the ventilation strategy.	26. A CIBSE TM54 assessment will be carried out at the next design stage to ensure that the proposed energy consumption sits within the defined parameters.
27. An ambitious target should be set for the building's energy use intensity.	27. Natural ventilation has been the first consideration when it comes to defining the ventilation strategy. The MEP team are currently developing the overheating assessment, however preliminary results indicate that classrooms/ teaching spaces will require natural ventilation via secured opening louvres as well as 1 or 2 No. Natural Ventilation Heat Recovery Units, which is a form of fan assisted natural ventilation. Mechanical ventilation will only be required essential i.e. Kitchens, WCs, Pool Area and Changing Spaces.
28. Thought should be given to how biodiversity and solar technology can be combined. Photovoltaic efficiency could be improved through the use of building integrated organic photovoltaics.	28. The project proposes the use of high-efficiency photovoltaic (PV) panels that exceed the baseline 19% efficiency value outlined in Technical Annex 2G of the DfE Output Specification. To minimize maintenance requirements and extend the system's operational life, a self-cleaning methodology has been incorporated into the PV array design. While integrated organic photovoltaic panels were initially considered, they were ultimately not proposed due to budget constraints, lower efficiency, and shorter lifespan, offering higher maintenance regimes, requirements for a green roof hence a limited overall project benefit.

Financial and Other Mitigation

5.8 Due to the nature of use (education), the Havering Council's Community Infrastructure Levy is not applicable.

5.10 Other Planning Issues:

- Archaeology
- Biodiversity
- Microclimate - Daylight/Sunlight

- Infrastructure and Utilities
- Open Space and Recreation
- Flooding and Sustainable Drainage System
- Secured by Design
- Servicing Management

Summary of Issues

- 5.11 In order to assist members, officers have raised similar concerns/issues expressed by the Quality Review Panel with the developer team as outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 to 5.5 and members may wish to comment in relation to these points in addition to any other comments/questions that they may wish to raise.

Conclusion

- 5.12 The proposed development has been considered at five pre-application meetings with officers, and the scheme has been developed as a result. There are some aspects that require further work as identified in this report and Members' guidance will be most helpful to incorporate as the various elements are brought together.
- 5.13 Further, it is likely that this scheme may come back to this Committee for final review as part of the continuing Pre-Application engagement but only if members seek further clarification.