



Redevelopment of the Existing Helena Romanes School Site

The Proposals

Where is development proposed?

The site of the existing Helena Romanes Secondary School, Parsonage Downs, Great Dunmow. It falls within land allocated by the Great Dunmow Neighbourhood Plan for residential development under Policy DS2 (page 53-54 of the Neighbourhood Plan).



What is being proposed?

The residential redevelopment of the existing Helena Romanes School (HRS) is proposed following its relocation to a new school site, located off Buttley's Lane.

The sale of this site for residential development is 'enabling' development and any receipt from sale of the land will be allocated in its entirety towards the cost of delivering the new purpose built 'all through school'. The existing school site and buildings will no longer be required and there will be no loss of educational facilities or sports pitches.

The proposals will not affect the Great Dunmow Leisure Centre, which will remain in its current location.

What is an outline planning application?

This planning application is submitted in outline with access in detail but all other matters reserved. Helena Romanes School (HRS) is seeking approval in principle to develop the site for up to 200 residential units. This will leave the approval of the appearance, final layout, landscape, and scale to be decided at a later date, when further applications (the reserved matters) will be submitted to the Council.

As the scheme is submitted in outline, there are few formal plans. However, the application will be accompanied by a series of Parameter Plans covering Land Use, Landscaping, Height and Access.

HRS will also prepare an illustrative layout, a landscape strategy, some illustrative house types and street scenes. The illustrative layout and supporting material indicate a form of development of the site, which conforms to design principles, highway guidance and illustrates each of the 200 homes, with garden and parking provision. HRS will not seek formal approval of these plans; it will primarily be submitted to illustrate that the site area is capable of accommodating the quantum of housing proposed, in a form that will meet parking, garden size, highway and public open space standards and policy requirements.

HRS final Design and Access Statement will also provide information relating to how the site will connect to the settlement, the size and types of homes proposed, how the scheme has evolved, the possible design of dwellings and some illustrative street scenes. In addition, it suggests a possible mix of units.

How many homes will be provided?

It is proposed that there will be up to 200 homes provided on the site.

This will result in a density of development of 32 dwellings per hectare, which is comparable to new housing developments in the area.

Will anything else be provided alongside the homes?

Yes, it is proposed that open space will be provided as part of the development. This will include a 'locally equipped area of play' (children's play area) and a walking route around the site.



Will there be affordable housing?

Helena Romanes School (HRS) recognises the requirement for affordable housing in all major residential developments, alongside other planning obligations, subject to development viability. This proposal is for 'enabling' development with all funds received from the sale of the land to be channelled towards another significant public benefit, securing a brighter future for primary and secondary school pupils within Great Dunmow and other parts of the District. HRS is therefore seeking to prioritise funds received from the sale of the school towards the new school facility. Accordingly, HRS will support this application with evidence which demonstrates that HRS has sought to achieve the maximum planning obligations achievable as part of this proposal. This is a matter still to be determined during the planning application process as policy recognises that planning obligations will vary dependent on the viability of the development.

How many bedrooms will the houses have?

It is proposed that there will be a mix of housing types, including some smaller one and two bedroom homes. The exact mix has yet to be formally agreed with the Council but will seek to reflect the needs identified in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Will there be any bungalows?

We are looking into the possibility of providing some bungalows on the site.

Will there be open space?

Yes. Open spaces including children's play spaces will be provided as part of the development. It is also proposed that a dog walking circuit will be provided within the site.

Planning Application

When will the planning application be submitted?

It is anticipated that the planning application will be submitted in mid July 2020.

Who will the planning application be submitted to and why?

Unlike the application for the new school, which will be submitted to the County Council, the application for the new housing development will be submitted to Uttlesford District Council as the local planning authority.

When will the application be determined?

The Council attempts to determine larger planning applications, such as this one, within 13 weeks, although sometimes this process takes longer.



Planning Policy

Is this site identified for housing in the Uttlesford Local Plan?

The adopted Local Plan for Uttlesford was published in 2005 and pre-dates the proposals for the relocation of the school. The Council began preparing a new Local Plan and in its emerging Local Plan 2019, this site was allocated for residential redevelopment and also the proposed new school site for a secondary school. However, this new Plan was withdrawn, so is no longer taken into account when determining planning applications.

However, the site is identified for residential redevelopment within the Great Dunmow Neighbourhood Plan. This document is part of the 'development plan' and its policies will be taken into consideration when determining a planning application for this site just as if it had been identified within an adopted Local Plan.

What does the Great Dunmow Neighbourhood Plan say about this site?

The Great Dunmow Neighbourhood Plan identifies under Policy DS2 that this site is released for housing if the school relocates to another site and the site is no longer required for educational use. The Policy sets out a number of criteria which development must achieve. The current proposals will achieve those criteria as follows:

- a) A footpath-cycleway will be provided running through the site north-south;
- b) Provision of an appropriate contribution to the provision of cycleways / footpaths from the development to the primary and secondary schools and the Town Centre;
- c) Children's play space will be provided;
- d) The development will achieve an appropriate relationship with Frederick's Spring and the open countryside. The site is partially screened by existing vegetation along the boundary and with the exception of the access points these would be retained. This would assist in screening the development;
- e) Public open space and soft landscaping is strategically located to provide a buffer setting in the wildlife corridor;
- f) The layout will include a landscaped strip, which can be used as an informal walkway adjoining the new development and the existing properties of Parsonage Downs;
- g) Soft landscaping be maintained and enhanced to provide a buffer between the proposed development and listed buildings; and
- h) The development will be carefully designed to avoidance of unacceptable harm to the living conditions of neighbouring residents.

Transport

What will be the impact in terms of the roads and congestion?

The existing school site generates a number of vehicle movements currently when operational. The proposals will modify traffic arrival and departure patterns but are not expected to cause significant transport or highway impacts as a result of the conversion of the site to residential development. The Transport Assessment, which will be submitted as part of the planning application will set out the vehicle changes as a result of the development.



How many car parking spaces will there be for the people living in the houses?

The scheme is being brought forward as an outline planning application, with such matters of detail to be confirmed as part of a future Reserved Matters (RM) application which would follow any grant of outline planning permission. The RM application will provide details of the bedrooms each unit provides, however the work that has informed the preparation of this application ensures that car parking will be provided in accordance with the Essex Parking Standards and is appropriate for the type and size of residential units provided. This will also include car parking for visitors in accordance with the requirements.

Will the people living in the houses be able to get to places that they need to by bus, cycle or walking?

We are seeking to enhance footway and cycleway connectivity to the site as part of the development and in line with the Neighbourhood Plan allocated site details. These connections will link to the adjacent developments for footway and cycleway connection. Bus route improvements are being explored in conjunction with Essex County Council as part of these proposals. Residential Travel Information Packs are to be provided to all residents upon occupation to encourage sustainable travel.

Ecology

What are the species on the site, and will they be protected?

The site is currently well managed, with a dominance of mown lawn and buildings and most habitat areas are maintained as is expected in a school environment. Overall, the site is classed as being of *'low ecological value'*.

Surveys have been undertaken by qualified ecologists in respect of identifying protected species and reports are being prepared which will identify recommendations that will be fully complied with. The reports will be submitted as part of the planning application.

Bat surveys have been undertaken which have identified that one of the school buildings contains a non-breeding summer bat roost for the common pipistrelle. Prior to demolition a licence will be required to remove the roost and a mix of integrated and external bat roost boxes provided in the proposed development to compensate for this loss in roosting sites to protect the species. In addition, external lighting will be controlled along the western boundary to protect commuting and foraging bats which were identified in this area.

There is a known great crested newt population in the adjacent woodland to the west of the site. However, the site itself is not suitable for the species. Nevertheless, a temporary amphibian fence will be installed along the site's western boundary before construction starts to ensure the species is protected during construction.

There are two likely outlier badger setts within 30m of the site. To protect the species these will be temporary closed under licence (from Natural England) and, one-way gates used to prevent badgers using the site prior to construction. These gates would be subsequently removed to allow badgers to forage on the completed site once construction is complete.



Will there be any impact on wildlife sites in the area?

The adjoining Frederick's Spring to the west is mapped by Natural England as priority habitat 'Woodland and wood-pasture'. It is also a Local Wildlife Site and therefore receives protection via the planning system. This mainly ancient woodland site (containing mature oak, ash and lime trees) has been bisected by the northern section of the Great Dunmow bypass and formerly connected to 'Hoglands Wood' to the south-west.

The proposals include protective measures and a buffered edge along the boundary with Fredericks Spring providing visual and noise screening. Given the existing level of disturbance from the use as a school, no additional disturbance would be expected from the built development and proposed residents. Furthermore, there are no public rights of way through this woodland.

Flooding and Drainage

Is the site liable to flooding?

According to the Environment Agency's indicative floodplain mapping, the site is classified as being within Flood Zone 1 site with a low probability of fluvial and/or tidal flooding (less than 1 in 1,000-year annual probability of river and sea flooding (<0.1%) in any year).

According to the Environment Agency's indicative mapping for the local area, the site is not susceptible to pluvial/surface water flooding for the medium-risk scenario (1:100-year event).

Nearby borehole records available on the British Geological Surveys website indicate the majority of the site is not at risk of any groundwater flooding. However, groundwater monitoring shall be carried out to confirm this.

Sustainable drainage systems will be used to control runoff from the site to a greenfield discharge rate ensuring the development does not increase flood risk off-site.

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The post-development surface water discharge rate will be controlled to a commensurate greenfield discharge rate to mimic the existing scenario, to avoid overloading the receiving system.

The on-site surface water drainage infrastructure will be designed to comply with national and local policy and be able to withstand the impact of a 1:100-year (plus climate change) rainfall event.

The planning application will be accompanied by a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment.



Contamination

Is the site contaminated?

An initial site appraisal has been undertaken which identified that no known contamination is located on the school site. Any contamination is likely to be associated with hotspots of contamination associated with parking areas. In addition, due to the age of the school asbestos is likely to be present.

Before the existing buildings are demolished, a site investigation and asbestos survey will be undertaken as a required. Should contamination be identified, the remedial works would be undertaken.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Will the environmental impact of the proposals be assessed?

Unlike the proposed new school site, it does not qualify for assessment under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations and therefore an Environmental Statement will not be submitted as part of the planning application. However, the environmental impacts of the proposals will be assessed and documents covering each issue, such as flood risk, heritage impact etc will be submitted with the planning application.

Noise

Will the site be susceptible to noise impacts and, if so, what will be done about this?

The site is located away from residential areas and is located within a residential area away from main roads. The current noise environment during term time is associated with its use as a school. Whilst the leisure centre will remain this is not considered to generate significant noise and the site is considered suitable for residential use.

Air Quality

Does the site have a good level of air quality?

The site is not located within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and there are none in the area. The closest air quality monitoring location to the site is located to the west of the A120 along Stortford Road, Little Canfield and based on these nearest monitoring results and given that the Council has not declared an AQMA in the local area, existing air quality conditions are therefore considered to be relatively good. Details in relation to air quality will be submitted as part of the planning application.

Landscape and Visual Assessment

What will the visual impact of the development be?

The development has been carefully designed to minimise landscape and visual effects by maintaining the enclosed nature of the site. The greatest visual effect will be to properties adjacent to the site to the west and east and from future residents of Woodland Park. Additional boundary planting will be used to reduce the visual impact. In addition, some slight visual effects are expected from mid distant views to the north and east.

A landscape and visual assessment is being undertaken and will be submitted as part of the application.



Will there be a landscape buffer around the site?

A landscape buffer using native species is proposed along the east and west boundaries of the site with open space and landscaping proposed in the north. Landscaping within areas of public open space will include planting of tree groups which will filter the limited views from the north. The landscape buffer to the northern edge will separate the development with the school site and that at Woodlands Park.

In accordance with the requirements of the Great Dunmow Neighbourhood Plan the proposal includes a 20m buffer along the eastern edge of the site to Parsonage Downs.

Heritage

What will the impact be on listed buildings and the conservation area?

Great Dunmow Conservation Area and a number of listed buildings are in close proximity to the site including Newton Hall, and adjoining cottage and listed buildings along Parsonage Downs. However, the site is visually contained and consequently, any changes to the setting of the Conservation Area and listed building would not be significant.

The demolition of the school and replacement of low-rise residential properties is likely to reduce visual intrusion and thereby have a positive effect on the setting of the Conservation Area and listed buildings. This would be assessed in detail in a Heritage Statement that will be submitted as part of the planning application.

Archaeology

Is the site important for archaeology?

The site is not in an area of importance for archaeology. Due to the level of disturbance from previous groundworks and existing buildings no important archaeology is anticipated at the site.