

North Ascot – Schools & Housing Project - Myth Busting Statement

November 2018

Green Belt Development Myths

Myth: Green Belt land can only be built on in exceptional circumstances.

Fact: Green Belt policy at national and local levels considers certain forms of development in the Green Belt to be “appropriate”. This includes replacement buildings for the same use which are not materially larger, and the use of land for outdoor sport and recreation with the provision of suitable facilities.

Other forms of development that are not listed in the policy are considered to be “inappropriate development” and should not be allowed unless “very special circumstances” exist.

Myth: The building of a school free of charge is not a valid exceptional circumstance under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) or Green Belt Policy 1 (GB1) of the current Local Plan.

Fact: There is no definition of “very special circumstances” in the NPPF or Policy GB1. The test is whether the harm to the Green Belt, by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm resulting from the proposal is clearly outweighed by other considerations. No specific examples are given.

It is well established by case law that the decision maker, (the local planning authority or the Secretary of State) must decide if “very special circumstances” exist on a case by case basis.

The delivery on an adjacent site of a new state of the art school building to replace the existing Infant and Junior schools and provide a pre-school at no cost to the local taxpayer, but funded by 24 market houses represents a unique opportunity which can be considered as “very special circumstances”.

School Provision Myths

Myth: There is no need to expand the existing schools as there will be surplus capacity for primary school places in North Bracknell.

Fact: Bracknell Forest Council’s own forecasts show a 6.7% shortfall in primary school places across the local authority area by 2022/23. This shortfall increases to 17% by 2022/23 within the Bracknell North Area, which includes North Ascot.

Following initial discussions with Bracknell Forest Council and the first public consultation, the plans were changed from larger 3 form entry schools to the proposed 2 form entry schools to ensure a “like for like” replacement. However, it is essential to plan for the longer

term and these proposals provide the necessary space and flexibility for expansion to 3 form entry in order to future proof the school site.

Myth: There is no need for new school buildings, the current buildings are more than adequate.

Fact: Whilst the existing buildings are not very old, figures from the Council's current school buildings budget shows that approximately £1.8 million is required for maintenance and refurbishment of the existing buildings over the next 3–4 years just to maintain them at their present standards.

In addition there are a number of suitability issues with the existing buildings including inadequate classroom sizes and poor solar efficiency, which cannot be resolved without rebuilding the schools. The existing school playing field is also below Government minimum size standards.

If the decision on the amalgamation of the existing schools is to create a single school on their present site then this will entail substantial additional costs to the Council, which can be avoided if a new single school is built on the Marplace land.

This new school building and its external facilities will address all of these issues by providing accommodation to 21st Century standards, will be future proofed and will be delivered at no cost to the Council or the local community.

Housing Myths

Myth: Marplace will be building a block of flats on the site of the current Scout Hut.

Fact: Following the public consultation last October it became clear that there is a strong demand for local affordable housing. The proposals include 12 new affordable 2 and 3 bedroom family homes on the site of the current Scout hut. These will be a mix of terraced and semi-detached 2 storey homes, not a block of flats.

Myth: The new housing numbers will put an unacceptable strain on local infrastructure.

Fact: As a result of feedback from the local community, the number of new homes on the existing schools site has been reduced from 50 to a maximum of 24 high quality, family homes appropriate in scale and density for the local area.

The development is likely to be phased over a two year period, which should reduce the impact on local amenities and infrastructure. This housing development will also include a Community Infrastructure Levy payment to Bracknell Forest Council of approximately £1.38 million to fund infrastructure improvements by the local authority.

'Future Use' Myths

Myth: Marplace have 'secret' plans to develop the western half of the site for more housing.

Fact: The relocation of the proposed new school building is due to the route of a major national gas pipeline under Coach Road and Forest Road. Consultation with the appropriate authorities identified an extensive safety zone for this pipeline which is a fundamental requirement of the Health and Safety Executive. Therefore it became essential to relocate the proposed new school building(s) to the eastern half of the site.

As a result, the land on the western half of the site has been shown as a recreation area in order to preserve its openness and to accord with current Green Belt policy.

Myth: The new school building(s) were moved to allow for easier development of the western half of the site in future.

Fact: There are **NO** plans to develop further housing on the western half of the site, this area **cannot** be redeveloped for housing in the future due to the presence of the major gas pipeline and the mandatory safety zone.

Myth: The Rough is entrusted to the Crown Estate to prevent any works on it.

Fact: Marplace (No 480) Ltd has never had any interest or involvement in the land known as The Rough and is not aware of its ownership.

Traffic Myths

Myth: The new proposals suggest nothing to help ease traffic congestion in the area surrounding the school.

Fact: The school access road has been redesigned to significantly improve traffic flow in North Ascot, with access from Rhododendron Walk and from Forest Road to new parking areas for both schools. Ample drop-off and pick-up facilities are included to ensure that parents who wish to drive their children to school have no need to park on the local road network during morning and afternoon peak periods for travel.

The road will be separated by a central closed section with locked gates that will be managed by the schools to ensure it is not used as a through road (rat run), resulting in a much safer road environment for the school children and their parents.

'On-site Activity' Myths

Myth: Marplace have already begun to develop the land behind the backs of local residents.

Fact: As seen for the last few years, the land is being actively farmed and any recent activity has been solely for this purpose.

NO development work has been started and none will begin on site until planning permission has been granted and all pre-commencement planning conditions have been discharged.

Should permission be granted, the access road from Forest Road will be constructed first, then the new school and Scout hut will be built and occupied before any work on the housing

site can begin. **NO** work can start on the main housing scheme on the existing schools site until the new school has been completed and opened.

The construction of the new school is likely to take about a year to complete and be ready for occupation.
