

Response from The Governing Body of Edith Neville Primary School
on Planning Application 2015/2704/P for Central Somers Town
February 2016

Edith Neville Primary School desperately needs new facilities. The Planning Application for Central Somers Town provides for state of the art rebuilding. At long last the children of Somers Town will benefit from the best environments for their learning and wellbeing. The proposals answer many concerns of residents of the different communities of Somers Town and include the necessary rebuilding of other Somers Town facilities - Plot 10 Community Play Project and of St Aloysius Nursery. The proposals also improve and upgrade the failing public open space, where anti-social behaviour has deterred family use and enjoyment.

The quality and cohesiveness of these proposals could not be achieved by piecemeal rebuilding. The careful planning is historically aware and the high quality design makes this an exciting scheme for upcoming generations. While there is a cost - new private housing must pay for the proposals, and the scale of the housing tower may be controversial - nonetheless, no square metre of public open space is lost, and Camden's additional investment to provide 44 new social rented homes is welcome. Both Edith Neville and Plot 10 have given up some site area towards the overall proposals.

Time does not stand still. Today Somers Town is at the very centre of London, its knowledge and cultural quarter, with its national and international connections. Now is the time to look forward, and these proposals will serve to make Somers Town a proud, outward-looking mixed residential area in the heart of the capital city.

We know there is strong local support for these Central Somers Town proposals: a petition with 762 signatures was submitted to the Cabinet Committee in December 2015, welcoming the benefits and urging "This project is needed urgently, and we want it to go through without delay."

The Governing Body of Edith Neville Primary School strongly supports the Central Somers Town Planning Application and sets out the reasons in more detail below.

1. The Planning Application will provide for the desperately-needed and long overdue rebuilding of this school

Edith Neville Primary School has been in urgent need of new facilities for more than 20 years. Its current 1971 prefabricated building passed its design life in 1997, when it subsided and moved, and the school had to be evacuated for a full academic year for restructuring. Since then dangerous failings and costly repairs have taken place. In addition its facilities provide for an official number of 155 children compared to the 250 or more it has historically catered for.

The school and its Governing Body have been continuously planning and working for a rebuild since 2006. These Central Somers Town proposals offer the rebuilding which is desperately needed and long overdue.

2. The Planning Application provides a wide range of improvements and benefits for residents and diverse community groups both now and long term, including the Community Play Project and St Aloysius Nursery

The proposals also importantly benefit significant numbers of residents and families of Somers Town with improvements that include the rebuilding of Plot 10 Community Play Project and of St Aloysius Nursery. Plot 10 serves many Somers Town children and families enabling parents to return to work, and has also been in failing and inadequate accommodation for many years, and St Aloysius Nursery has to move from its current building on the Regent High site.

Over past decades Camden has failed to address the needs of many children using these facilities. These proposals at long last meet the challenge, and we applaud them. Somers Town has increasing numbers of children, a trend that is expected to continue ahead of other parts of Camden. Through the rebuilding of Edith Neville, Plot 10 and St Aloysius alone, hundreds of children, families and committed staff will benefit immediately, and for the future thousands more Somers Town children will have every opportunity for the learning, wellbeing and physical development that they deserve. This is critical in our area of high deprivation. Our children and families will benefit from wider aspiration and opportunities.

3. The Planning Application focuses on the current and future demographic and the need for state of the art educational, recreational, sporting and communal facilities for increasing numbers of children and families with children from birth through primary age to young adults

Children are all our futures. We share Camden's aspirations for education and wellbeing, and are committed to our school demonstrating cutting edge pedagogy and learning environments.

Edith Neville Primary School and its Governing Body are dedicated to excellence. We are intent on this school being a national and international model that is a credit to our children and to Camden Local Authority. Governors and Senior Leadership Team members have worked tirelessly with consultants and architects throughout the development of these proposals (and are dedicated to

continuing to do so up to the finished building). These proposals demonstrate a new approach to the learning environment. Change is happening at an accelerated speed. Who knows what learning will look like in 10 years time, let alone 25, 50 or 100? Space flexibility and relationships, and inside and outside learning, are crucial.

These proposals also recognise the need for open space within the safety and surveillance of the schools and adventure playground. Outside learning space within the school environment is critical for children's best achievement and wellbeing. We have long stressed this in responses to Camden, and we have fought hard for it throughout this design process. Our children live with little or no space in overcrowded conditions. They need their own space, safe, secure and dedicated to their health, relaxation, physical wellbeing, learning, socialising. This provision should be a critical part of any cutting edge school's remit. Public space cannot serve this purpose.

We have compromised for the good of the overall scheme and given up around a quarter of our site. With careful design the school includes essential outside learning space on its upper level as well as ground level. With this opportunity for a high-quality new school we are sensibly looking to a long and effective life, and building for 50-100+ years. Future inevitable expansion due to the growing population and increase of families and children in Somers Town is being designed in; and, as we have forfeited site area, expansion is designed upwards, with roofspace used for outside learning and activities both now and in the future.

With these proposals Camden will have achieved high quality design for learning, investment in and for its future citizens and therefore value for money.

4. The Planning Application will upgrade and improve the usability and safety of the public open spaces

These proposals for the public open space are long overdue. Degradation of public space will accelerate over the coming years – even within the time these proposals become reality. Public open space has to be used and enjoyed regularly and round the clock in order for it be safe and feel safe. Our public space is not at present - workers at the school and families in Somers Town do not like walking out early in the morning or after dark, and are anxious about gangs, drug dealing, dogs and fast cyclists. The proposals are designed to help turn this around. Safer and safer-feeling open space will be used more, which itself will make it even safer. Significantly more residents and workers, including workers from local shops and organisations as well as students will benefit from the redesign and improvements to the public open space.

We need this to happen now - it may be delayed too long if it does not happen as part of these proposals.

5. The Planning Application uses a comprehensive approach with high quality urban design and architecture that presents a cohesive whole while maintaining historic characteristics and creating a future-looking and aspiring centre for the area

This is a complex scheme which has required work and consultation over years. To Camden's credit it has gone a long way to balance stakeholder views and local concerns with high standards of design and planning. No scheme designed by developers would have spent the time and weighed cost and investment against social value in the way the local authority has had to.

These proposals have good design standards high on their agenda and piecemeal rebuilding will never match this opportunity. Phased rebuilding is not an option. If these proposals are delayed or stalled, benefits for so many will be delayed too long or lost. Future proposals in Somers Town may not be so concerned about design. Hundreds of Somers Town children and their families will suffer. This scheme is set to provide good and sympathetic planning, and some very good architecture.

6. We recognise that private housing is essential to fund the scheme. The Planning Application introduces well designed new housing to pay for the scheme, and additional social housing for local residents. Camden is additionally funding a higher proportion of social housing.

These proposals offer long overdue refurbishment within Somers Town, and private housing is needed to pay for them. The vision is a departure from the familiar Somers Town many residents know. However, the architects have taken into account the character of the place, safety, optimal uses, and its changing demographic.

Compromise has been called for on the part of stakeholders to ensure wider benefits. Edith Neville Primary School and Plot 10 have given up site area so that housing can be built while the area of public open space is maintained. The footprint of the tall housing is small, to avoid loss of public open space and to reduce its shadow impact.

The new housing, to a high design standard, will include 44 homes at social rents for Somers Town families in housing need. This represents a very significant additional investment by Camden, and is strongly welcomed.