

HPS. ABACUS 2019/2375/P

Alternative Site Search Note.

HCRD Commentary.

The applicants have reported on their site search with a view to justifying why they had to proceed with HPS in the absence of alternatives.

The DfE were the beneficiary of HPS site early in this process as a result of a transaction orchestrated by the then Mayor of London.

It would appear that no due diligence was carried out at the time, or it was ignored, regarding local planning policies explicitly against any further schools in Hampstead.

The DfE were intent on creating a 2 form entry Free school of 420 pupils in accord with their remit that such new schools should be not less than that capacity on operational cost grounds.

The applicants site search for the majority of this period was specifically targeted at a school of this size.

The site availability for a 420 school is inherently more restricted than for a 210 school. We understand that a new search for a 210 school site was notionally commenced around the time that HCRD were approached to share in a joint site search early in 2018.

During the course of a number of meetings and email exchanges HCRD introduced a number of sites.

Notably we established that the Belsize Fire Station site could be purchased given the developers were yet to commence construction following the award of a residential planning permission.

The DfE/DfSA had previously been aware of this site at a time when it was available at around £7m or half the cost of HPS.

This site is in the heart of the Abacus catchment area, not on a main road, not suffering from the pollution levels at HPS, and of a scale more befitting a Primary School. Furthermore it could rely on natural ventilation and have been an entirely sustainable scheme. The location lends itself to a walk to travel philosophy, given it is in the centre of its catchment area, and because it is not on a main road.

DfSA summarily rejected this site for reasons that did not bear scrutiny. On pressing them, eventually a long list of reasons was created including the listed building status, and the costs of the scheme. Had the same criteria been applied to HPS it would have comprehensively failed them.

The distinguishing feature of HPS is that it still retains the potential capacity for expansion to 420 and the DfE has invested their credibility in bringing it forward.

Following detailed exchanges on the above and other sites the DfSA summarily halted the alternative site search. This was shortly after they would have been notified of The Hoo building in Lyndhurst Gardens. This site is close to the edge of the catchment area and crucially 5 minutes less walk time to the heart of that area, and not on a main road.

HCRD subsequently bought this site to their attention. DfSA declared that it was not big enough.

A rudimentary feasibility study for HCRD revealed the site readily would accommodate the brief for a 210 school. A FOI request revealed that no report or feasibility study was actually prepared by FSA. In other words it was dismissed without review. Again this site was available at around £7m at half the cost of HPS.

## Conclusion

Alternative sites for a 210 pupil school have been available. These were much better suited, and at a huge financial saving, but they were summarily rejected.

The DfE have been committed to the use of HPS as the only site for a Free School irrespective of alternatives available.

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