
From: Fowler, David
Sent: 02 July 2019 16:25
To: Planning
Subject: FW: Abacus planning application

Please upload representation. 2019/2375/P

Thanks,

David

David Fowler
Principal Planner

Telephone: 0207 974 2123



From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 02 July 2019 12:07
To: Fowler, David <David.Fowler@camden.gov.uk>
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Abacus planning application

Dear David

Please see below our comment in favour of Abacus' application.

Best regards

[REDACTED]

As local Lib Dem councillors, we are in favour of the Abacus school's application. The school's journey began over a decade ago, when it became clear that the Belsize area had an acute shortage of primary school places. Belsize ward itself had no primary schools and all of the schools in the immediate vicinity (St. Paul's, Holy Trinity, the Rosary) had some or all of their places decided on a faith-basis, not a distance one. At that time, children were being offered places on the other side of the borough, requiring long, difficult journeys inappropriate for small children. There was a campaign demanding that local children should have the option of going to a good secular state school, that they could walk to.

Since then Abacus has had setbacks and triumphs. Today it is a thriving, popular one form entry school, rated outstanding by Ofsted and considered to be one of the top five primary schools in the borough. It is serving precisely the purpose it was envisaged to, except for its temporary location in the south of the borough, well-away from the area it serves. The school needs a permanent home.

The former police station is a good solution. We recognise that its location is not perfect. Ideally, it would have been situated within the catchment area, but it is close by and within walking distance. The building can be adapted to

work well as a one form entry school without impacting on its listed features. Crucially, as well as being a good solution, it is the only solution.

It has been suggested that there are alternative sites, that would be cheaper and located within the catchment area. This is untrue. Local residents, the Council and later the EFSA have scoured the area. There have over the years been other sites with potential that might have been better than this site, but each of them proved unworkable. The catchment area is a small, densely populated zone, largely within a conservation area. To find a site that is (a) available, (b) large enough and (c) adaptable as a school within (d) planning constraints has proved time and again to be extremely difficult. The former Belsize Fire Station is a good example. Perfectly located and at one point available, the EFSA looked at it in detail but had to conclude that it would not be possible to adapt the building to serve as a school within the planning constraints. Schools need classrooms that meet a minimum size. Carving out enough large rooms from listed buildings is often not possible.

It has also been suggested that Abacus is responsible for the financial problems that many schools in the borough are having, but these difficulties are due to insufficient funding from the Government. Similarly, Abacus has been blamed for falling enrolment in some schools, but again this is an issue caused by external factors, such as lower than expected birth rates and Brexit. Given that Abacus' most recent intake has been entirely from within its catchment area, its contribution to this problem must be marginal, particularly when some of the schools with the worst shortfall problem are in a different part of the borough, such as St. Aloysius.

There are some valid questions to ask about how the school will keep its impact on traffic and air pollution to a minimum. The onus is on the school to answer them, but it has clear policies and plans to address these issues. It is important to recognise that the school run problem in the NW3 area is caused almost entirely by the large number of private schools in the area, which serve a very large geographic area, meaning many of their children get driven to school on a regular basis. We support the NW3 Green School Run campaign and hope this will help reduce the problem. It would be wrong if a state school that serves the local community was denied a home because of a problem caused by schools serving a very privileged section of society.

Abacus is a small, outstanding state school, providing an excellent education to Camden children. It needs a permanent home. This building is the only answer.



Liberal Democrats, Belsize Ward