

**PLANNING, DESIGN  
AND ACCESS  
STATEMENT  
OAKWOOD HOUSE,  
SOUTH HAMPSTEAD  
HIGH SCHOOL**

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## Quality Assurance

**Site name:** South Hampstead High School, 1-3 Maresfield Gardens

**Client name:** Girls Day School Trust

**Type of report:** Planning, Design & Access Statement

**Prepared by:** Oliver Fountain

**Signed**

*Oliver Fountain*

**Date** 31/01/2023

**Reviewed by:** Jonathan Bainbridge

**Signed**

*J Bainbridge*

**Date** 31/01/2023



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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This application has been prepared on behalf of the applicant (Girls Day School Trust) and seeks full planning permission and listed building consent at the site of South Hampstead Senior School, 3 Maresfield Gardens in London Borough of Camden for the following:

“Minor external alterations to low level wall at site entrance to facilitate level access, erection of external lift to the southern elevation of Oakwood House (Full Planning Application) and Installation of automated door mechanisms to internal doors (Listed Building Consent)”, at Oakwood House, 1-3 Maresfield Gardens, Camden

- 1.2 The application submission is comprised of the following drawings listed in **Table 1** and documents listed below.

**Table 1 – submission drawings**

DRAWING NAME	DRAWING REFERENCE
Site Location Plan	639_E001
Demolition Plan	639_D100
Existing Ground Floor Plan	639_E100
Proposed Ground Floor Plan	639_P100
Existing Elevation AA	639_E200
Existing Section 01	639_E300
Existing Site Layout Plan Ground Floor	639_E1000
Proposed Ground Floor Plan	639_P100
Proposed Elevation AA	639_P200
Proposed Section 01	639_P300
Proposed Site Layout Plan Ground Floor	639_P1000

- Completed Application Forms (Bidwells)
- Covering Letter (Bidwells)
- Heritage Statement (including Statement of Significance, Assessment of Impact and Schedule of Internal Works with Annotated Photographs) (Bidwells Heritage)

- 1.3 The applicable statutory planning fee for the proposals **(£494.20 inclusive of third-party Planning Portal Service Charge)** has been paid online using the Planning Portal.
- 1.4 Due to the modest scale of the application and the urgency of the installation to provide inclusive access to Oakwood House, pre-application engagement has not been undertaken with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) on this occasion.

## 2.0 Background

### Site and Context

- 2.1 The application site (edged in red in **Figure 1**) is located on the west side of Fitzjohn's Avenue, at the junction with Maresfield Gardens. This application relates to Oakwood House which is a Grade II listed building. The site is also within the Fitzjohns / Netherhall Conservation Area.
- 2.2 SHHS was established in 1876 by the Girls Day School Trust (GDST) and moved to the present site at Maresfield Gardens in May 1882. The GDST is a charity, set up in 1872 to stand up for and provide education to young women and which has established 26 schools throughout the country dedicated to this goal.
- 2.3 Excellent academic results place SHHS comfortably amongst the country's top schools, and their pupils leave the school for some of the most prestigious universities in the country and worldwide. It is, however, predominantly a local school with the majority of pupils coming from the local catchment area. As such, the school is a significant asset to the community.

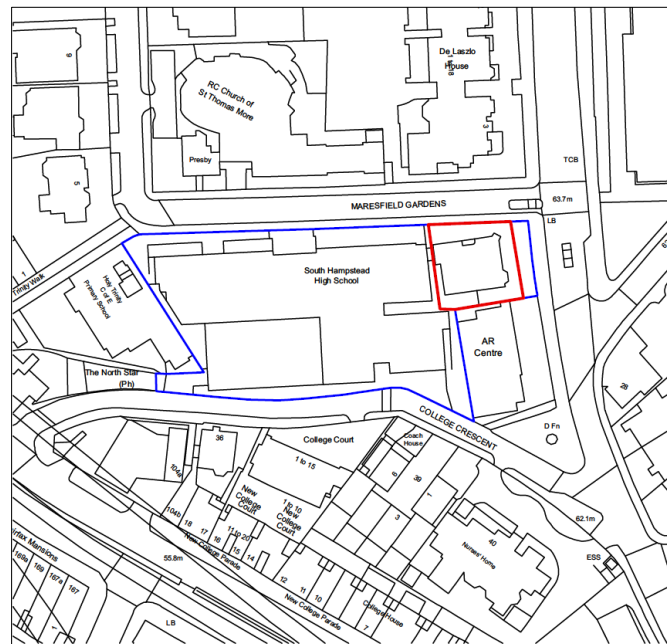


Figure 1 – Site Location Plan



Figure 2 – Site Photographs

## Planning History

2.4 Relevant planning history for the site is detailed below in **Table 1**.

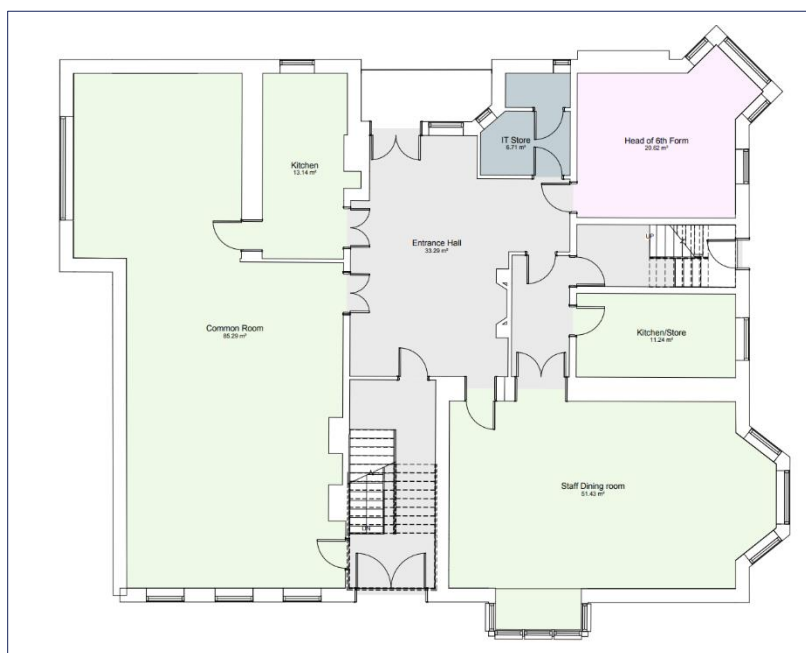
**Table 1 – planning history of the school site**

PLANNING REFERENCE	DESCRIPTION	
2017/1972/L	Alterations to internal areas of the school building to facilitate enhanced classroom provision and staff offices.	Granted 12-04-2017
2017/6770/P	Erection of brick wall, pillars and metal railings along College Crescent boundary to include 2x pedestrian gates, 1x vehicular gate and 1x gate for refuse/recycling facilities and associated alterations to adjacent kerb to secondary school	Granted 07-12-2017
2012/6843/C	Demolition and rebuilding of the existing front boundary wall and railings along Maresfield Gardens from Trinity Walk in connection with existing school (Class D1)	Granted 04-02-2013
2010/5482/P	Construction of new three and four storey school building, plus two storey basement and alterations to Waterlow Building and covered walkway, following the demolition of the existing buildings at 3 Maresfield Gardens, 31 College Crescent and stair towers of the Waterlow Building (use class D1), namely to set back building façade, addition of up-stand and reduction of louvre blades to windows	Granted 06-12-2013



## 3.0 Needs Statement

- 3.1 There is a pressing and urgent need for the installation of the proposed lift and other measures proposed to enhance the accessibility of the building to provide a safe means of access for all pupils.
- 3.2 Oakwood Hall was originally designed as a large private residential property and has been modified to suit its long-term educational use.
- 3.3 At ground level, the former main entrance hall is grand and opulent with the intricate decorative mouldings, timber panelling, architrave and cornice. The ground level rooms of Oakwood House include a Common Room, Kitchen, Entrance Hall, Dining Room and Office space as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3 – Existing Ground Floor Plan**

- 3.4 Oakwood House at present is not designed to accommodate disabled access and an external lift is required to provide access at ground level.
- 3.5 South Hampstead High School (SHHS) has disabled sixth form pupils on their pupil register who cannot presently access the sixth form building. Not only does the school need to provide urgent access to Oakwood House for their current pupils, facilitating access for all users is important for the future sustainability of the school for pupils, staff and visitors alike. This is considered to be a material planning consideration of significant weight in the determination of this application.
- 3.6 To tackle this issue, the school commissioned an Accessibility Audit. The findings of this audit identified that there is currently no means of level access provided to the ground floor entrance level of Oakwood House. Due to the rise in levels (circa 760mm) ramp access would need to be in excess of 15m which considering the existing graded approach would not be suitable to provide access for disabled users.



- 3.7 The Accessibility Audit further recommended that external doors are fitted with automation, including the provision of push button controls if necessary (device to be considered that enables the doors). This has therefore led to the application proposals forming of external and internal elements, as set out below under Section 4.

## 4.0 Application Proposals

- 4.1 This application seeks Full Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent (LBC) for the following:
- “Minor external alterations to low level wall at site entrance to facilitate level access, erection of external lift to the southern elevation of Oakwood House (Full Planning Application) and; Installation of automated door mechanisms to internal doors, at Oakwood House, 1-3 Maresfield Gardens, Camden (Listed Building Consent).
- 4.2 The proposals therefore comprise of two main elements, these being:
1. The installation of an external lift outside the forecourt of Oakwood House (planning permission and LBC)
  2. Installation of automated doors and associated fittings to internal doors in Oakwood House (LBC only)
- 4.3 Full details of the proposals can be observed in the submitted architectural drawings (see Table 1 for the full list).
- 4.4 The scheme seeks to provide equitable access for all students throughout the ground floor of Oakwood House. Facilitating this access requires installation of an external lift at the southern elevation of the building to access the raised landing of the principal entry point of the building.
- 4.5 Mechanisms to automate the opening and closing of the main entry doorway, and three internal doors are also required, and we understand to require Listed Building Consent. Push button control points are required on either side of each opening.
- 4.6 The installation of the lift will require the partial removal of the low wall surrounding the raised landing at the entrance to the building to facilitate level access, as identified in drawing reference 639\_D100.

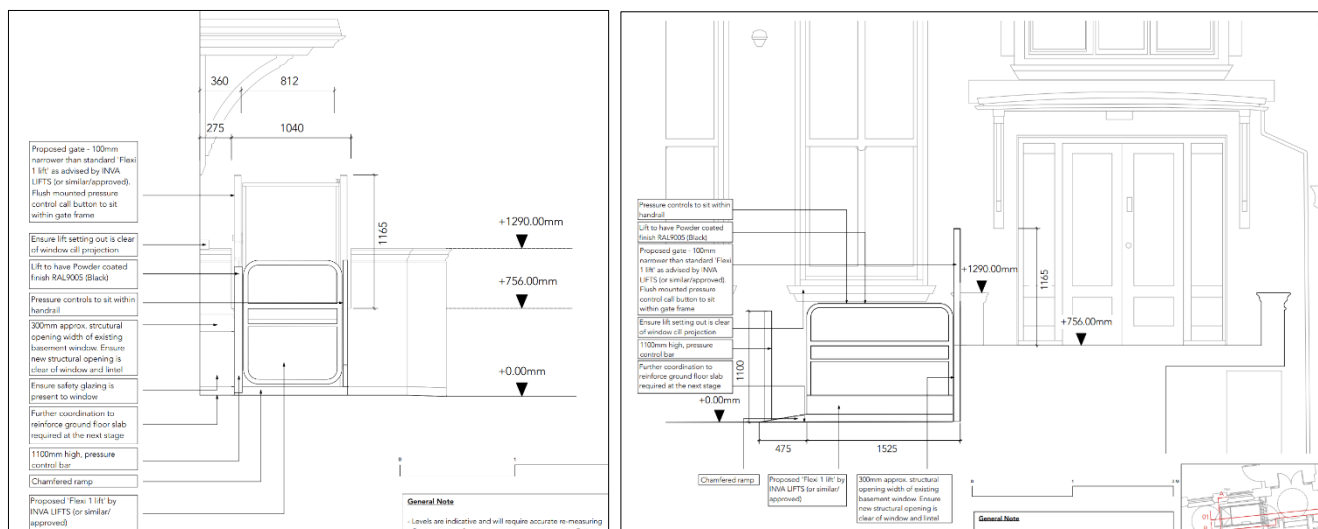


Figure 4 – Proposed Section (left) and Front Elevations (Right) – see submission drawings

## 5.0 Planning Assessment

### Policy Context

5.1.1 The 'Statutory development Plan' is the starting point for decisions on planning applications. In this respect, Section 38(6) of the 'Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004' which states that "if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise".

5.2 The statutory development plan comprises Camden Local Plan (2017) and the London Plan (2021). The NPPF is also a material consideration in the determination of the application.

#### Camden Local Plan (2017)

5.3 The Camden Local Plan is the principal document within the Camden Development Plan and was formally adopted by the council in July 2017. It establishes the council's vision and policies which will guide development in the borough until 2031.

5.4 The following policies are considered most relevant to the assessment of the application and are outlined below and assessed under the following headings.

- **Policy C6: Access for All** – in order to promote fair access and remove the barriers that prevent everyone from accessing facilities and opportunities the Council will expect all

buildings and places to meet the highest practicable standards of accessible and inclusive design so they can be used safely, easily and with dignity by all; and expect spaces, routes and facilities between buildings to be designed to be fully accessible.

- **Policy D1: Design** - the Council will seek to secure high quality design in development. The Council will require that development preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets in accordance with Policy D2 Heritage; and respects local context and character and is inclusive and accessible for all.
- **Policy D2: Heritage** - the Council will not permit development that results in harm that is less than substantial to the significance of a designated heritage asset unless the public benefits of the proposal convincingly outweigh that harm.

### London Plan (2021)

5.5 The London Plan was adopted in 2021. Together with the Camden Local Plan it forms the development plan under which the application must be assessed. The following policies are considered most relevant.

- **Policy D5: Inclusive Design** - Development proposal should achieve the highest standards of accessible and inclusive design. They should be convenient and welcoming with no disabling barriers, providing independent access without additional undue effort, separation or special treatment, and be able to be entered, used and exited safely, easily and with dignity for all.
- **Policy S3: Education and Childcare Facilities** - Development proposals for education and childcare facilities should ensure that new developments are accessible and inclusive for a range of users, including disabled people, by adopting an inclusive design approach.
- **Policy HC1: Heritage Conservation and Growth** - Development proposals affecting heritage assets, and their settings, should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to the assets' significance and appreciation within their surroundings. Development proposals should avoid harm and identify enhancement opportunities by integrating heritage considerations early on in the design process.

### National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

5.6 The NPPF is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The following elements of the NPPF are considered most relevant to the application proposals: -

### Achieving Sustainable Development

5.7 The NPPF confirms that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (paragraph 7).

- 5.8 Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (paragraph 8). These objectives are economic, social, and environmental.
- 5.9 So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, the presumption in favour of sustainable development requires decision takers to approve development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay (paragraph 11).
- 5.10 The social pillar of sustainable development is considered most relevant to the application proposals.

### Social and Education

- 5.10.1 Paragraph 92 looks to ensure that planning decisions achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places that promote social interaction, are safe and accessible, and enable and support healthy lifestyles.
- 5.10.2 Paragraph 95 states that local authorities should give “great weight” to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications. This paragraph further states the need to promote access to educational facilities that meet modern demands

### Historic Environment

- 5.11 NPPF directs local planning authorities to require an applicant to “*describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting*” and the level of detailed assessment should be “proportionate to the assets’ importance” (Paragraph 194).
- 5.12 Paragraph 195 states that the significance any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal should be identified and assessed. This includes any assets affected by development within their settings. This Significance Assessment should be taken into account when considering the impact of a proposal, “*to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal*”. This paragraph therefore results in the need for an analysis of the impact of a proposed development on the asset’s relative significance, in the form of a Heritage Impact Assessment.
- 5.13 An addition to the 2021 NPPF is outlined in paragraph 198. This states that local planning authorities should have regard to the importance of the retention ‘*in-situ*’ of a historic statue, plaque, memorial or monument irrespective of its designation. The paragraph goes on to suggest an explanation of historic or social context should be given rather than removal.
- 5.14 Paragraph 199 requires that “When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.”

- 5.15 It is then clarified that any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, either through alteration, destruction or development within its setting, should require, *“clear and convincing justification”* (Paragraph 200). This paragraph outlines that substantial harm to grade II listed heritage assets should be exceptional, rising to ‘wholly exceptional’ for those assets of the highest significance such as scheduled monuments, Grade I and grade II\* listed buildings or registered parks and gardens as well as World Heritage Sites.
- 5.16 The NPPF requires a balance to be applied in the context of heritage assets, including the recognition of potential benefits accruing from a development. In the case of proposals which would result in *“less than substantial harm”*, paragraph 202 provides the following:

*“Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.”*

## Planning Assessment

### Principle of Development

- 5.16.1 As above, paragraph 95 of the NPPF emphasizes the importance for local authorities to take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting the requirement to provide a sufficient choice of school places to meet the needs of local communities and explains “great weight” should be afforded to the need to create, expand or alter schools.
- 5.16.2 The proposed external chair lift is designed to improve the accessibility of a school building, Oakwood House for the benefit of all users. The proposals to alter the school site in this regard should be given “great weight” as directed by the Framework.
- 5.16.3 The principle of development is supported by policy Camden Local Plan policy C6 (Access for All). The Council promotes fair access to facilities and opportunities by removing the barriers that prevent equal access to them; this is precisely what the application proposals will achieve by altering the school building to make it fully accessible for all.
- 5.16.4 The principle of development is further supported by paragraph 130 f) of the 2021 NPPF which seeks to *“create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users”*.

### Heritage

- 5.17 Included within the application submission is a Heritage Assessment, comprised of both a Statement of Significance and an Assessment of Impact. The submitted heritage report assesses the significance of heritage assets within the nearby vicinity of the application site, in particular the Grade II listed building which is subject of this application. Oakwood House is considered to hold a good level of significance in heritage terms. The statutory duty under section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the special architectural or historic interest of a listed building and its setting has been discharged.

- 5.18 The report also provides an assessment of impact of the proposals and concludes that the *“proposed scheme would result in impacts ranging from negligible adverse to minor adverse impact on the significance of No. 1 Fitzjohn’s Avenue (Oakwood Hall) and a neutral impact on the Fitzjohns / Netherhall Conservation Area. The aspects of harm identified are considered, in all cases, to represent “less than substantial”.*
- 5.19 In line with paragraph 202 of the NPPF (2021) *“Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use”.*
- 5.20 As identified in the heritage report, the negligible adverse impacts are a modest consideration, especially when weighed against the provision of equitable and dignified access to the building through considered and unobtrusive interventions. The public benefits of the proposals are set out in more detail in this statement under the following section.
- 5.21 In this instance, the public benefits are significant and are considered to outweigh the low level of less than substantial harm identified. The proposals are therefore acceptable in heritage terms, and the proposals are considered compliant with policy D2 of the Local Plan.

## Design

- 5.22 In order to provide a design that enables access to ground level, the design of the proposed external lift has been developed in conversation with the contractor, Invalifts, to meet required specifications. The lift system as proposed provides for 1500 mm turning circles for code compliance. The design delivers on the objectives of the London Plan at its policy D5 (Inclusive Design) to be convenient and welcoming with no disabling barriers, providing independent access without additional undue effort, separation or special treatment.
- 5.23 As shown on the submitted drawings, adjacent to the low-level wall proposed to be demolished, there is an 300mm approx. structural opening width of existing basement window and the design will ensure the new structural opening is clear of window and lintel.
- 5.24 In relation to the proposed internal alterations to the doors of Oakwood House, the design of the proposed scheme has been developed with heritage specific guidance to ensure the interventions involve minimal fabric interruption or loss and are not visually obtrusive. This ensures compliance with Camden Local Plan policy D2 in both respecting local context and character and being inclusive and accessible for all.

## Public Benefits

- 5.25 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) identifies public benefits as *“anything that delivers economic, social or environmental objectives as described in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)”*. In particular, the proposals deliver on the NPPFs social objective.

- 5.26 There are significant public benefits stemming from the proposals which are set out below and arise as a result of providing inclusive access to the school building:

**The proposed lift and automated door fittings will facilitate inclusive access to the historic environment for all pupils, staff and visitors to the school site**

- 5.27 The NPPF provides support to proposals that improve access to the historic environment for the benefit of all users, with similar policy support enshrined in the Local Plan at policy D2 and the London Plan at its policy D5. The proposals will facilitate inclusive access to the historic environment (namely the Grade II listed No. 1 Fitzjohn's Avenue) for all pupils, staff and visitors alike.

**As a result of disabled users being able to access the building and the learning facilities therein, there will be associated educational and wellbeing benefits which promotes social inclusion**

- 5.28 There is clear evidence linking poor access to teaching accommodation to negative impacts on pupil wellbeing. This in turn undermines academic performance, parent/pupil satisfaction and staff retention. The proposed accessibility measures in the form of an external lift and internal automated doors, will prevent the school from having to maintain existing alternative (and unsatisfactory) arrangements to replace the facilities provided at Oakwood House which cannot presently be accessed. The proposed lift will provide more inclusive access to the school building, which contains a Common Room for pupils to socialise and interact; this will improve opportunities for social interaction with associated educational and wellbeing benefits.

**Pupil and staff recruitment & retention and wider educational impact**

- 5.29 As set out in Section 2, excellent academic results place SHHS comfortably amongst the country's top schools, and their pupils leave the school for some of the most prestigious universities in the country and worldwide. In order to continue to attract pupils to study at SHHS, it is important that the school provides equal opportunities for all, with no disabling barriers. Providing equal access to learning and teaching is essential for the school to deliver quality education to keep at pace with its competitor group.



## 6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 This Planning Statement has provided a detailed assessment of the proposed development relating to a new external platform lift and automated fittings to internal doors of Oakwood House against relevant national and local development plan policies.
- 6.2 As a result of this assessment, the following conclusions can be drawn:
- The proposals seek to provide a new platform lift to the entrance of Oakwood House in order to provide level access to the ground floor sixth form facilities;
  - This statement has demonstrated the urgency of need to improve the accessibility of the school site for the safety of all users;
  - In line with paragraph 95 of the NPPF, 'great weight' should be afforded to the need to create, expand or alter schools through decisions on planning applications. This is considered to apply to this application proposal;
  - The submitted heritage report describes the significance of the heritage assets which have the potential to be impacted by the proposal. The report concludes that the proposals will give rise to a low level of less than substantial harm; and
  - This identified low level harm is considered to be outweighed by the significant public benefits identified in this statement, namely the demonstrable benefits arising from the enhanced access to the school building by all users.
- 6.3 In conclusion and on balance, this application will deliver a sustainable development at South Hampstead High School. In line with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, it is concluded that the proposed development complies with the development plan and all other material considerations weigh in favour of the application proposal. Therefore, planning permission should be granted without delay.