

Planning Statement

FULL PLANNING APPLICATION FOR THE CHANGE OF USE OF YATELEY HALL FROM AN OFFICE (FORMERLY CLASS B1, NOW CLASS E) TO A SCHOOL (FORMERLY CLASS D1, NOW CLASS F1), CYCLE STORAGE & ASSOCIATED NEW HARD LANDSCAPING IN PARKING AREAS

**YATELEY HALL, FIRGROVE ROAD,
YATELEY, GU46 6HJ**

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On behalf of: Hurst Lodge School

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the change of use of Yateley Hall from office (formerly class B1, now class E) to a school (formerly class D1, now class F1). Yateley Hall is a Grade II* Listed Building¹, whilst the stable block (also envisaged for conversion) is a Grade II Listed Building².
- 1.2. The proposal entails the conversion of Yateley Hall, the stable building alongside other non-listed buildings on the site from office use to a Class F1 (non-residential school) use. The site would be occupied by Hurst Lodge School. At this stage it is anticipated that Yateley Hall could be used by the school alongside their current premises at Fernhill Road, Blackwater, Camberley, GU17 9HU. However, Yateley Hall would offer a long term home for the school that is presently unavailable to them due to lease arrangements on their current site. A long term home has been needed for the school since they were required to vacate their previous premises located in Sunninghill in December 2017.
- 1.3. This Planning Statement sets out the characteristics of the site and surrounding area, provides information on the planning history relating to the site and sets out an analysis of the proposal against the relevant planning policy context. It is accompanied by several technical reports, including those relating to heritage, transport / travel plan, flood risk, a marketing summary and relevant drawings consistent with the Council's validation requirements.
- 1.4. The proposal will deliver a development which would provide an efficient reuse of previously developed land whilst meeting a pressing and growing need for education and enabling a long term viable and appropriate use for the listed building. A list of benefits arising from the proposal, are summarised below:

¹ Ref 1272233, Listed on 8th July 1952.

² Ref 450351, Listed on 26th June 1987.

- Delivering economic benefits, by maintaining and enhancing the employment function of the site, through the delivery of an alternative use with the equivalent of a varied circa 60 full time equivalent jobs to be created.
 - Enabling direct short-term and long-term economic benefits resulting from the use of the site as a school.
 - Resulting in induced economic benefits arising from employees and potentially students spending income and monies on goods and services in the local economy.
 - Enabling a long term viable use of a designated heritage asset consistent with the site's history.
 - Securing a needed long term home for Hurst Lodge School that provides valuable education to both private and Local Education Authority funded students.
 - Providing a high quality learning environment for both employees and students at Hurst Lodge School.
- 1.5. This Planning Statement goes on to explain the planning policy considerations, informed by the suite of supporting technical documents and demonstrates that planning permission can and should be granted.

2. THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1. The site is located in Yateley, to the west of Hall Lane and south of Firgrove Road. Yateley Hall is a Grade II* Listed Building and within the grounds lies a stable block which is also Grade II Listed. The Hall lies at the core of the site, which includes associated land used for access drive, parking and landscaped areas. The site is located inside a defined settlement boundary and also lies within the Yateley Green Conservation Area.
- 2.2. The site is well contained from external views by existing mature trees and landscaping on its boundaries. Some of the site is covered by tree preservation orders and much of its vegetation would be protected by virtue of the Conservation Area designation in any event. There is no proposal to undertake any works to trees through this application.
- 2.3. The site provides approximately 2,345m² GIA of existing office floorspace. This is provided across three buildings comprising the main Yateley Hall, the cottage and the detached stable block. The site is approached from the north via a self-contained access that exits onto Fernhill Road. The site is served by considerable existing parking as indicated on the site layout plan.
- 2.4. It is understood that since the late 1980's the site has been used for office purposes. However, it is also understood that since 2004 the site has been largely vacant with one office business vacating the site in mid-2020 having held a 5 year lease. The site today is vacant. It has an extensive history and was used for the purpose of a school between 1947 and 1985 such that this proposal would return the site's use to one consistent with its history.
- 2.5. Following the changes made to the Use Classes Order in 2020, the site's present use would now fall within the Class E (Commercial, Business and Service) use. This encapsulates a number of previous commercial uses including A1, A2, A3, B1, D1 (part) and D2 (part). Further, the proposed use would fall within Class F1 (Learning and non-residential institutions). It is noted that for the purpose of the application form the old use classes are referenced due to there not being an updated section on the planning portal relating to

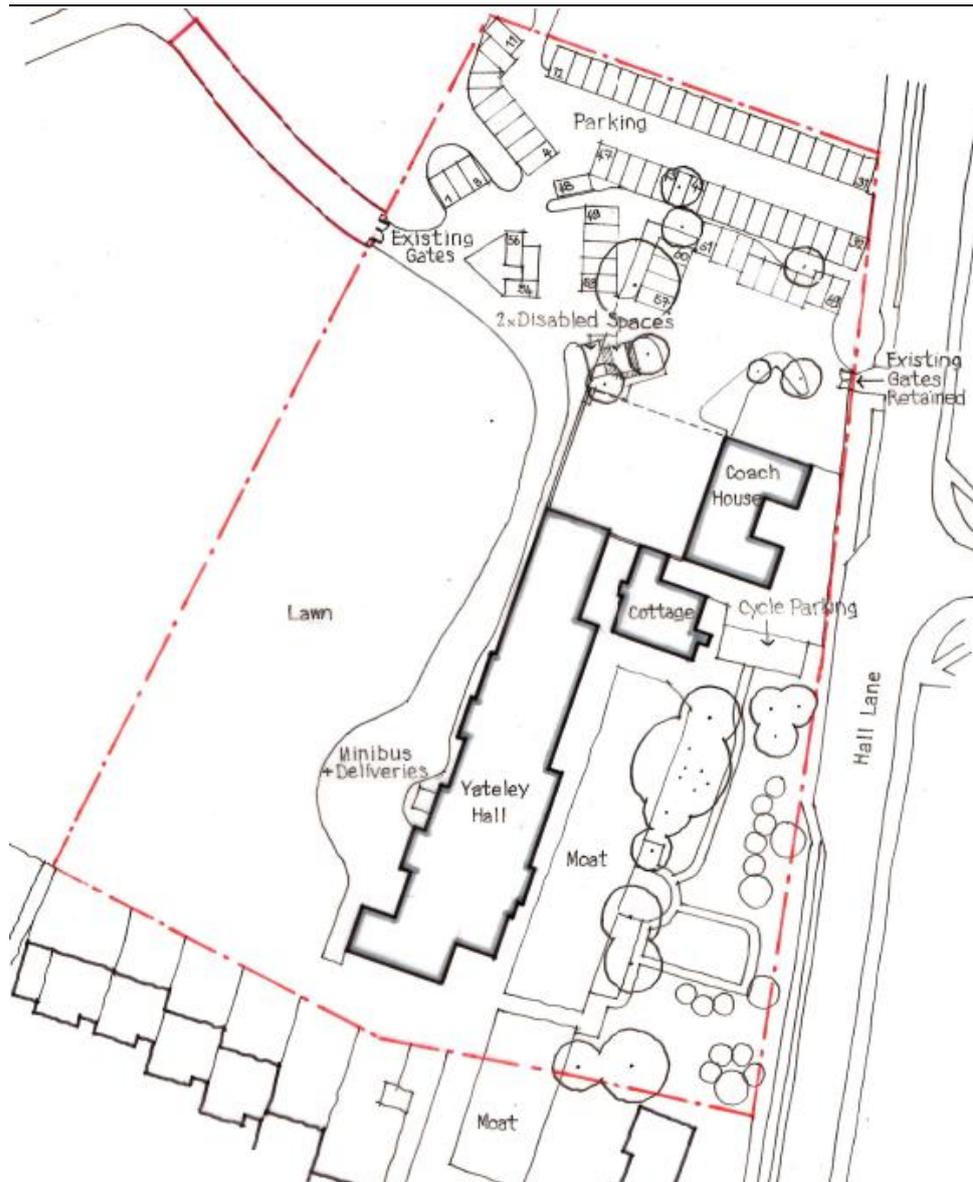
classes E and F1. Further, the site comprises previously developed land for which chapter 11 of the National Planning Policy ('NPPF') encourages its efficient use.

- 2.6. The site lies to the south of St Swithins Roman Catholic Church and associated hall. Yateley School (a state secondary school) lies to the west of the site. Part of the centre for Yateley (in the vicinity of St Peters Church and Yateley Medical Centre (with other shops, restaurants and services) lies around 500 metres north of the site. From the site entrance on Firgrove Road, frequent bus services (1/2 hourly in day) are available to Aldershot and / or Camberley. The site therefore lies in a location that can offer non car modes of travel.

3. THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1. This planning application is for the change of use of the Yateley Hall site from the former B1(a) office use to a school in the new use class F1. All the land and buildings would be converted as part of this proposal. No external or internal alterations to the buildings are proposed as part of the application. However, some Sheffield style cycle parking stands and parking re-arrangements are proposed as part of the application so to facilitate non-car / lower carbon modes of travel.

- 3.2. The proposed configuration of the scheme is shown on the extract from the Proposed Site Layout Plan over the page.



Extract from Site Layout Plan

- 3.3. With regard to the spatial element of the scheme, the total floorspace of the buildings would remain unaltered.
- 3.4. With regard to transport and highways, a Transport Statement accompanies the application. This sets out matters in relation to trip generation that would arise from the proposals and demonstrates their acceptability when benchmarked against the existing consented use of the site. In addition, it provides an analysis of the parking provision associated with the proposal and demonstrates its acceptability when assessed against the relevant parking standards. In addition, a Travel Plan has been prepared and includes measures

that will promote sustainable travel include cycle parking, travel information and cycle training.

- 3.5. The proposal is supported by a Heritage Statement that deals with the heritage impacts that are associated with the scheme, taking into account that Yateley Hall is Grade II* listed, the stables are Grade II listed and that the site is located within the Yateley Green Conservation Area.
- 3.6. The assessment concludes that the proposal would provide an opportunity to secure a viable and sustainable long term future for this important listed building and a use that has successfully operated from the site almost 40 years, and the same use that has in recent years been granted permission. This represents an optimum viable use of the building and forms a material public benefit that weighs heavily in favour of the proposed change of use.
- 3.7. A flood risk statement accompanies the application and confirms that no changes to existing site levels or any drainage infrastructure are proposed. Previous planning permissions granted in 2012 and 2014 incorporated permissions that would alter the vulnerability classification of the development from 'less vulnerable' to 'more vulnerable'. This is the same as the current application proposals. All flood considerations remain the same in respect of the current proposals as those of the approved schemes and therefore there can be no reason to object to the proposed use change on flood grounds.
- 3.8. The need for the proposal is both clear and pressing. Hurst Lodge School (HLS') have been operating since the early 1940's but were required to vacate their long-term home in Sunninghill in December 2017 due to a lease expiry. Since then, HLS have operated from a site located in Camberley on a short-term lease. The nature of the existing lease brings with it a continual risk that the school will have to relocate at short notice.
- 3.9. The school is a day school only that operates privately and serves the needs of 106 students and a total of 69 members of staff. Of the 106 students, circa 62 of the students are funded by Local Educational Authorities from Local Authorities in the respective Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire counties. HLS are a specialist in providing for the needs of Special Educational Needs and

Disabilities ('SEND') students who require specialist support that cannot be provided in the conventional state school system. This is reflected in the approximate student to staff ratio of 1 to 2 thereby reflecting the high levels of support provided to each student.

- 3.10. The school provides for the needs of a range of ages from 4 through to 19 years. Yateley Hall offers a site in close proximity to the school's established student and staff base and in a very well maintained listed building setting such a very high quality premises for an educational environment and associated staff offices can be enabled. The site therefore offers an ideal home for HLS and one that has been lacking since their necessary departure from Sunninghill in December 2017.

4. PLANNING HISTORY

4.1. Recent planning history relating to the site comprises the following:

Reference Number	Description	Outcome
12/01317/LBC	Internal alterations including removal of modern partitions, insertions of new partitions, insertions of new en-suite facilities and insertion of glazed entrance screen.	LBC Granted 11 th October 2012
12/01318/MAJOR	Change of use from vacant office space (Class B1) to residential school (Class C2) with ancillary element of day school provision, associated alterations to grounds including new railings and gates and hard and soft landscaping.	Granted 11 th October 2012
14/00437/FUL	Change of use of buildings from vacant office space (Class B1) to nursing home (Class C2) for up to 38 residents; associated alterations to grounds including new railings and gates and new hard landscaping.	Granted 30 th April 2014
14/00438/LBC	Internal alterations including the provision of 38 en-suite bedrooms, removal of modern partitions and insertion of new partitions, provision of hydraulic and platform lifts, provision of a laundry and caretakers' flat and a catering kitchen for residents.	LBC Granted 11 th April 2014

4.2. The site's planning history is referred to in greater detail in later sections of this statement. It is noted that recent permissions in particular that granted in 2012 for the change of use of the office to a school provide a useful indication of the potential acceptability of this proposal.

5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT & RELEVANT CASE LAW

5.1 For the purposes of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the development plan, against which the application proposal will be determined, comprises:

- Hart Local Plan (Strategy and Sites) 2032, adopted April 2020; and
- Hart Local Plan (replacement) 1996-2006 (saved policies).

5.2 The development plan policies against which the application should be considered are set out below.

Hart Local Plan (Strategy and Sites) 2032

5.3 Policy SS1 emphasises that development should be concentrated in settlements, especially on previously developed land in sustainable locations. The application site reflects this expectation, through its use of previously development land within the settlement of Yateley (one of the District's Primary Local Service Centres as indicated in Figure 2 of the Local Plan). Policy SD1 indicates that proposals like this scheme which are consistent with the development plan will be approved.

5.4 Policy ED2 indicates that sites should not be lost from a B Class employment use unless market signals indicate that the location is unlikely to be used for employment purposes or the activity cause harm to the environment or amenity of the area. The application is accompanied by marketing summary prepared by the owner's agent Campbell Gordon. This indicates that no interested party took forward serious discussions or put forward an offer except for a change of use proposal following 16 months of marketing³. Consequently, the scheme can be regarded as consistent with the requirements of Policy ED2.

³ This exceeds the minimum 6 months marketing detailed in paragraph 181 of the Local Plan

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- 5.5 The site's recent planning history indicates that the authority has previously allowed the change of use of Yateley Hall from employment to either a care home or residential school. Further, the proposal offers the ability to secure the optimum viable use for the building and results in considerable community benefit through the provision of a local service that provides for educational needs including Local Education Authority funded students in a high quality educational setting. The scheme's firm compliance with in particular paragraph 92 of the NPPF and Local Plan Policy INF5 should be considered in the overall planning balance and therefore provides a strong support for the principle of using the site for the proposed use.
- 5.6 Policy NBE8 requires that development proposals should conserve or enhance heritage assets and their settings, taking account of their significance. The accompanying Heritage Statement details how the proposals for Yateley Hall accord with the requirements of this policy and by restoring a use that successfully operated from the site for almost 40 years represents an optimum viable use and as such this forms a material public benefit that weighs heavily in favour of the proposal.
- 5.7 No physical alterations to the building are proposed through this application and it is therefore consistent with consistent with the expectations of Policy NBE9.
- 5.8 Policy INF3 acknowledges the importance of sustainable transport modes for development proposals. This is confirmed in the Transport Statement and Travel Plan which are provided alongside the application.
- 5.9 Policy INF5 supports the provision of new community facilities where they are sustainably located and will not have an adverse impact upon existing facilities. The provision of a school at Yateley Hall is consistent with this policy in that it enhances the provision of educational facilities in the District, including for Local Education Authority funded students.

Saved policies of the Hart District Local Plan (Replacement) 1996-2006

- 5.10 The scheme is reflective of local character and does not lead to harm to amenity consistent with the expectations of Policy GEN1.
- 5.11 Policy GEN2 allows for changes of use of buildings where (as envisaged at Yateley Hall) the building is capable of conversion without major reconstruction and that the alternative use is not harmful to the character or setting of the building. By proposing a use that requires no artificial subdivision of the building or any works at all the scheme firmly complies with these objectives.
- 5.12 Policy URB19 indicates how proposals within one of the Yateley Conservation Areas should not be harmful to the character of the area. As set out in the Heritage Statement, no harmful changes to the buildings are anticipated and therefore the proposed use must represent an optimum viable use such that a long-term appropriate use for an important building within the Conservation Area can be achieved.

National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF')

- 5.13 The NPPF, February 2019, is also an important material consideration in assessing the application.
- 5.14 Paragraph 8 (a) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the economic objective associated with the delivery of sustainable development:

“...to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity...”

- 5.15 Similarly, paragraph 8 (b) of the NPPF sets out that the social objective of sustainable development:

“...to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, but ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment,

with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being."

- 5.16 Paragraph 91 of the NPPF sets out that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which promote social interaction. Further, paragraph 92 supports the provision of community facilities:

"92. To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;

b) take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community;

c) guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs;

d) ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise, and are retained for the benefit of the community; and

e) ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services."

- 5.17 This is amplified in paragraph 94 which highlights the need to ensure a choice of education facilities are available:

"94. It is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:

a) give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications; and

b) work with schools promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.”

- 5.18 In relation to transport paragraph 109 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.
- 5.19 Paragraph 117 is relevant to the proposal, making it clear that planning decisions should make effective use of land, and that as much use as possible should be made of previously developed land. Paragraph 121 is helpful in indicating that Local Planning Authorities should also take a positive approach to applications for alternative uses of land which is currently developed but not allocated for a specific use, where this would help meet identified development needs.
- 5.20 Chapter 16 of the NPPF refers to the importance of conserving and enhancing the historic environment. The supporting Heritage Statement identifies that no harm will occur to designated heritage assets and there is actually considerable benefit in identifying a long-term appropriate use for the building.

Relevant Case Law

- 5.22. The statutory starting point is whether the application is ‘in accordance with the plan’, which is a phrase that has been the subject of consideration in the High Court in the context of Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In his judgment of 31 July 2000 (R v Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council ex parte Milne), Mr Justice Sullivan concluded as follows:

...I regard as untenable the proposition that if there is a breach of any one Policy in a development plan a proposed development cannot be said to be “in accordance with the plan”...

For the purposes of Section 54A, it is enough that the proposal accords with the development plan considered as a whole. It does not have to accord with each and every policy therein.

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- 5.23. The Rochdale judgment is applicable to the interpretation of Section 38(6) of the 2004 Act such that the decision maker must reach a decision as to whether the proposal is in accordance with the development plan when it is considered as a whole.
- 5.24. Section 38(6) of the Act does not prescribe that either the development plan or other material considerations be given any particular weight in the required balance. It is, in effect, an ordinary, unweighted balance between the two countervailing elements.
- 5.25. A further relevant judgment is dated July 2014 (Arsenal Football Club Plc v SoS for CLG and Islington London Borough Council). This refers to the need for a decision maker to determine whether a proposal is in accordance with the development plan:

It is up to the decision-maker how precisely to go about the task, but he must make the determination in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, and “he must as a general rule decide at some stage in the exercise whether the proposed development does or does not accord with the development plan”: (para 29).

- 5.26. The judgment then refers to the requirement for a decision maker to decide in light of a whole development plan whether the application accords with it. In a case where a development plan points in different directions it is for the decision maker to decide which policy should be given greater weight in relation to a particular decision:

The second strand of relevant legal principle was also stated by Lord Clyde in the City of Edinburgh case, that where a planning application is in accordance with some policies in the development plan, but in contravention of others, the decision-maker’s task is to decide in the light of whole plan whether the application accords with it. In R (on the application of TW Logistics Ltd) v Tendring DC [2013] EWCA Civ 9; [2013] 2 P & CR 9 the local authority had adopted a Conservation Area Management Plan and the issue was whether some of the proposals contained in it were unlawful as being inconsistent with the adopted local plan. Lewison LJ (with whom Aikens and Mummery LJJ agreed) said that the court must not adopt a strained interpretation of the local plan in order to produce

complete harmony between its constituent parts, and it must be wary of a suggested objective interpretation of one part of the local plan as having precedence over another. In a case in which different parts of the Local Plan pointed in different directions it was for the planning authority to decide which policy should be given greater weight in relation to a particular decision: [18]. (para 30). (Our emphasis).

In enunciating this point Lewison LJ drew on the proposition of Ouseley J in R (on the application of Cummins) v Camden London Borough Council [2001] EWHC 1116 (Admin) at [164], that it may be necessary for a council in a case where policies pull in different directions to decide which is the dominant policy, whether one policy

compared to another is directly as opposed to tangentially relevant, or should be seen as the one to which the greater weight is required to be given. Ouseley J derived this proposition in turn from the dictum of Sullivan J in R v Rochdale MBC ex parte Milne [2000] EWHC 650 (Admin) at [47]-[50]. (See also London Borough of Islington v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government [2012] EWHC 1716 (Admin), at [53], per Ouseley J). Recently Lord Reed restated the point authoritatively in Tesco Stores Ltd v Dundee City Council [2012] UKSC13; [2012] PTSR 983, [19]:

[D]evelopment plans are full of broad statements of policy, many of which may be mutually irreconcilable, so that in a particular case one must give way to another. In addition, many of the provisions of development plans are framed in language whose application to a given set of facts requires the exercise of judgment.” (para 31).

- 5.27. In summary, the above case law confirms that a decision maker must determine whether a proposal is in accordance with the development plan and undertake this judgment against the development plan as a whole. In undertaking this judgment, the decision maker will have to decide which policy (or policies) should be given greater weight in relation to a particular decision.

6. MAIN ISSUES

- 6.1. The application scheme enables a number of significant benefits. These can be summarised under the following headings:
- 1) Meeting important and established educational needs, including those with specialised needs that are not otherwise being met;
 - 2) Economic development and employment benefits;
 - 3) Sustainable location for the proposed new use/development;
 - 4) Listed Building heritage benefits; and
 - 5) Conservation Area heritage benefits.
- 6.2. The proposed change of use of the existing offices and the proposed new use of a school is an acceptable alternative use for the site, especially as it does ensure jobs are provided with around 60 FTE envisaged. Moreover, the new use is one that will meet an important need for educational purposes (including Local Education Authority funded students) that otherwise risks not being met.
- 6.3. The application material confirms that the proposed development is an acceptable alternative use in policy terms that meets an important need but also sustains the maintenance and optimum viable use of the listed building.

The Benefits

Benefits arising from the provision of a non-residential school (Class F1)

- 6.4. In terms of the public benefits that would arise from the implementation of this proposal it would contribute towards meeting educational needs for the District and the wider area. Of particular importance is the scheme's contribution towards SEND provision / needs as funded by Local Education Authorities ('LEA's'). HLS is a specialist provider in meeting these particular needs and a substantial proportion of the school's income comes from the LEA. This indicates the substantial contribution that the school makes towards meeting define state needs for educational provision that cannot be provided in the primary state school sector. The scheme is therefore consistent with Local Plan Policy INF5 that supports the provision of new community facilities and in

particular paragraph 94 of the NPPF that requires great weight to be given to the need to create expand or alter schools through planning application decisions.

- 6.5. The Transport Statement details the catchment of the existing school that will be relocated from its current premises to the proposed site at Yateley Hall. It is expected that these pupils will relocate to the new school and consequently the majority of pupils will be from Hart District or immediately adjoining authorities. The proposal therefore provides and addresses an important local need for education within the locality.
- 6.6. In this context, there are a number of significant material planning benefits that arise from the delivery of bespoke accommodation to meet educational needs.

1) Meeting important and established educational needs, including those with specialised needs

- 6.7. As well as the efficient re-use of previously developed land, the scheme would make optimum re-use of previously developed land in the urban area. The NPPF requires that strategic policy-making authorities should give substantial weight to using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other needs in planning decisions (paragraph 118). Substantial weight should therefore be afforded to the re-use of the site for the proposed development, given that the site is brownfield.
- 6.8. There is no specific policy framework or specific allocations for schools within the Council's development plan. This reinforces the case/need for this particular proposal. Whilst sites allocated for residential development could be developed to include educational facilities, this is primarily related to that directly generated by a particular residential scheme, rather than meeting existing established wider needs. The larger residential sites are acquired and developed by national and regional housebuilders with no flexibility in their business models or products to include an independent school (specialising in SEND) as secured through this scheme.

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- 6.9. The proposed school would therefore contribute towards meeting the intentions of paragraph 8 (b) of the NPPF, which sets out that the social objective associated with the delivery of sustainable development.

2) Economic development and employment benefits

- 6.10. Further significant benefits that would arise from the provision of school relate to the economic benefits associated with the implementation of such schemes, given that, whilst meeting a specific educational need, they are also employment generating developments.
- 6.11. The NPPF requires the planning policy framework to be sufficiently flexible to allow developers to respond to the prevailing economic climate, without stifling change, innovation and other forms of economic development in a world where economic creativity and growth will continue to expand. Commercial, economic generating, operations exist in many other guises, such as the provision and operation of schools.
- 6.12. NPPF paragraph 8 is clear that achieving sustainable development includes an economic objective; and this is to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth. This is all the more pertinent with the current and future economic climate arising out of the Covid-19 pandemic. Enabling the provision of commercial, economic uses such as a school is equally valid in terms of delivering the economic strand of sustainable development. It is anticipated that circa 70 staff will be employed at the site (NB: a number on a part time basis). Such roles would also be in a strong range of employment opportunities including, inter alia, primary teaching, management, specialist education, caretaker, cleaning and catering type roles.
- 6.13. Paragraph 80 of the NPPF obligates local planning authorities to place significant weight on the need to support economic growth and productivity. The re-provision of job availability on the site, retaining and enhancing significantly the site as an employment generator in these challenging times for office occupiers should therefore weigh strongly in its favour. This is in addition to the

opportunity offered by the proposal to meet the needs for education (including SEND) locally.

- 6.14. There will be direct long-term economic benefits arising from the employment opportunities associated with the day-to-day operation of the school. Education uses are different to a C3 residential scheme, where the economic benefits are shorter term and temporary.
- 6.15. In addition, there will also be indirect economic benefits arising from employment and activity in the supply chain companies providing support services for the school. An induced economic benefit will also arise through expenditure from employees spending their income on goods and services in the local economy. The scheme delivers an alternative employment generating use and therefore contributes to the resilience of a local economy.

3) Sustainable Location

- 6.16. The application site represents an ideal location in a spatial sense to meet the identified educational needs, being close to a large urban catchment area but ideally located on its edge, in an attractive setting commensurate with the objective of creating a high-quality environment for the students. The site is also ideally placed to meet the needs of parents and employees in the locality and to gain access to the site to drop-off and pick-up and work.

4) Listed Building heritage benefits: Yateley Hall

- 6.17. In terms of internal works to the listed building none are proposed through this application. However, the very limited alterations that are to be submitted under a Listed Building Consent in due course are detailed in the Heritage Statement (paragraph 4.1) which states.

“The proposed change of use does not include any physical alterations to the building (minor internal changes, which would leave the significance of the building unaffected, are anticipated). Although not assessed here, even the anticipated changes are minor and have been carefully considered to avoid any harm to the significance of the building”.

6.18. The Heritage Statement (paragraph 4.3) further confirms:

“The proposed school use would secure the future and maintenance, while keeping the main building in a single occupancy, and with minimal changes required. In the absence of any harmful interventions, the proposed school use is positively beneficial, and could rightfully be regarded as an ‘Optimum Viable Use’ for the buildings (especially Yateley Hall.”

6.19. The Heritage Statement goes onto identify the considerable benefit of achieving a long term viable and appropriate use for the listed building:

“Securing the Optimum Viable Use is a public benefit of the proposed change of use that must be taken into account in the planning balance. This attracts considerable weight, given that this is a very significant listed building.

Because no harm has been identified, there are no policy conflicts with Local Plan policies on heritage. Neither does the proposal trigger paragraphs 195 or 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The proposed development also complies with the statutory duties in s.66 and s.72 of the Planning Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act, 1990. However, securing the Optimum Viable Use of the building is a material public benefit that weighs heavily in favour of the proposed change of use.”

6.20. In light of the paucity of demand for the office floorspace at Yateley Hall (considered in more detail below), the change of use of the building to a F1 non-residential school lays the foundations to secure a long term, beneficial and sustainable use for the listed buildings. This is an important heritage benefit.

6.21. It is important at this stage to consider the site’s planning history. Since 2004 the building has largely been vacant and has had planning permissions granted in 2012 and 2014 respectively for a school and nursing home use. The officer’s report relating to the 2012 conversion to school proposal is in particular a useful indication as to how this application (LPA Ref. 12/01318/MAJOR) could be considered:

***Principle**

Saved local plan policy URB7 allows for a loss of a BI office use providing the site is not capable of continuing in that use or there would be a substantial benefit to the locality.

Saved local plan policy URB20 allows for the provision of new schools.

Yateley Hall is a Grade II* listed building and according to the English Heritage category it is considered to be of a particular importance of more than a special interest. Therefore any proposal to convert a listed building of this category to a school; and in particular a vacant listed building (since 2004), outweighs the need to retain an employment use (paragraph 132, NPPF). Moreover, it is also accepted by the Council that there is an abundance of office space within the District (see Employment Land Review 2009).

It is therefore considered that the proposal would satisfy saved local plan policies URB7 and URB20 as the loss of the employment use would be acceptable in principle.

CONCLUSION

It is considered that the proposal is acceptable in principle and would introduce a use that would not only benefit the community, but would also bring back into use a vacant Grade II* listed building. It is also considered that there would be a minimal amount of disturbance to the historic fabric of the buildings and as such their character and setting including that of the parkland would not be significantly harmed. It is therefore considered that the proposal would satisfy saved local plan policies and the NPPF.

- 6.22. The 2012 officer's report refers to the importance of finding a working use for the listed building and that a proposal to convert a listed building of this category to a school (and in particular a vacant listed building) outweighs the need to retain a conventional employment use. For various reasons the 2012 and 2014 permissions were never implemented. Further it is noted that by comparison to the nursing home proposal the subject scheme does not require considerable work and subdivision of the building in a way that the nursing home scheme did require. Whilst planning permission was granted for that use it is understood that the owner of the building preferred a use that did not require such artificial subdivision of the listed building and therefore instead did identify an office tenant who has since vacated the building.
- 6.23. The proposal now offers a real opportunity for a long term use of the site in a function consistent with the school use of the building that occurred between 1947 and 1985. HLS have tenancy related reasons to wish to move to the site in September 2021 and therefore the proposal enables an immediate viable use for the site that has ultimately been lacking for the vast majority of the period since the building fell vacant in 2004.

5) Yateley Green Conservation Area Benefits

6.24. The Yateley Green Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Proposals (2011) includes the following commentary in relation to Yateley Hall:

6.4 Yateley Hall

Yateley Hall is the most important historic building in the Conservation Area, and sits within a small area of parkland which is on Hart District Council's list of locally significant historic parks or gardens as it retains a ha-ha and a small section of canal, possibly the remains of a medieval moat. The building was restored in the early 1990s (and Calcott Park built in 1995) and used until a few years ago as the headquarters by St James' Place, now part of Lloyds TSB Bank. They moved out of the building a few years ago, since when it has been empty. St Swithun's R C Church and its associated buildings are located at the Firgrove Road entrance to the Hall, and date to the 1960s.

Negative features or issues for this Character Area include:

- The continued vacancy of the Hall, and the urgent need to find a new beneficial use for it before it starts to deteriorate
- The listed stables have been vandalised
- The St Swithun's complex of buildings, highly visible and of no architectural merit
- The setting of the Hall has been somewhat compromised by the construction of Calcott Park, and indeed by earlier housing development immediately to the south – further encroachments must be strongly resisted

6.25. The above comments in the Council's Conservation Area Appraisal include similar sentiments to those included in the 2012 officer's report namely that there is an urgent need to find a new beneficial use for Yateley Hall since it's vacancy in the mid 2000's and so to ensure that it does not deteriorate. As detailed in the supporting Heritage Statement, the proposal secures a long-term future use for the building and without any harm to the Conservation Area such that it accords with the principles indicated in the Conservation Area Appraisal. As such the scheme's heritage impact weighs heavily in favour of the proposed change of use.

Policy Theme Considerations

6.26. With the above benefits defined, key policy issues are now considered.

- A. Economic Development / Principle of Development;
- B. Heritage;
- C. Trees & Ecology;

- D. Transport; &
- E. Drainage.

A: Economic Development / Principle of Development

- 6.27. Local Plan Policy ED2 refers principally to Strategic and Locally Important Employment Areas as defined on the Policies Map. The site is not located in any of these protected employment areas.
- 6.28. Yateley Hall is identified as an ‘other employment site’ in the Council’s Local Plan in the context of Policy ED2. Therefore, proposals that would result in the net loss of ‘B’ class employment floorspace would be considered contrary to this policy unless there are “market signals indicating that the premises are unlikely to be utilised for employment use”.
- 6.29. The supporting text to the policy (paragraph 181) details the scope of “market signals evidence” to confirm suitability of a non-employment use. That said paragraph 181 specifically refers to proposals at locally important employment sites so its direct applicability to this site could be questioned. However, and notwithstanding, this application is accompanied by a marketing summary prepared by the owner’s marketing agent Campbell Gordon.
- 6.30. The marketing summary sets out the marketing exercise that has been undertaken since November 2019 at Yateley Hall. This demonstrates that the marketing of the employment floorspace at Yateley Hall has been ongoing for 16 months prior to the submission of this application. The quoted rent represented a similar level to that which the building had been let at previously to the most recent tenant. It was significantly lower than rents in the majority of urban centres in the Thames Valley and thus acknowledged that the location would not be suitable for a large proportion of office occupiers. The marketing campaign was listed on the agent’s websites, Right Move and Costar.
- 6.31. Over the period of marketing only 10 leasehold applicants had requirements which matched the size and location characteristics of the building. Of those 10 only 1 proceeded to view the building but did not progress because the configuration was decided to be too fragmented to occupy the site in the fashion

of a modern office. 3 serious discussions were held regarding a sale of the freehold of the property, but all of these were put forward on the basis of a change of use with no approaches being received to purchase the property for occupation as an office building.

- 6.32. Given paragraph 181 specifically refers to proposals at locally important employment sites it is unclear whether the need for such marketing is necessary. However, and in any event, it is clear from the evidence provided in the marketing summary document that it has not been possible to secure an alternative occupier for the existing office use, due to low demand. Moreover, much of this marketing took place prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has sent far-reaching shock waves through the country's economy, both at national and local level, particularly in respect of the future demand/requirement for office accommodation. It has resulted in a deep-rooted change in the demand for, and nature of occupancy of, office floorspace, such that demand has dropped significantly following a dramatic change in working patterns. Indeed, the changes to the Use Classes Order that occurred in September 2020 mean that the existing office use could be lost without the need for any form of planning permission in any event. Whilst some presence in a central office location is recognised as important by some companies, there is also an acceptance that remote and flexible working is equally important, and feasible, in the modern working world.
- 6.33. In this context, it is critical to plan for the future of Yateley Hall, being an important site, by identifying and implementing an alternative use for the site that will protect its integrity for future generations, whilst providing a strong and ongoing contribution to the local employment base and economy.
- 6.34. Therefore, whilst the site would no longer provide office floorspace, it is considered that the school, as a commercial operation, would generate significant local economic benefits, to the benefit of the economy of Hart District, providing employment opportunities, generating wealth and producing an economic output over and above meeting an important need that is not otherwise being met. The delivery of the school on the site is therefore in keeping with the economic strand of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF. It is noteworthy that if a school use were not to come forward the likely

proposal would be some form of residential use that would result in potentially no long term employment from the site and in addition, a pressure to internally subdivide the building resulting in potential harm to its Grade II* listed heritage value.

- 6.35. The Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath Joint Employment Land Review Update Final Report (November 2016) further acknowledges the need to take a flexible approach towards redevelopment or conversion of office stock for alternative uses:

“ 3. Enable the loss of some office floorspace to alternative uses:

The identified over-supply of lower grade office floorspace and the relatively high vacancy levels at certain locations within the FEA indicates that a flexible approach should be taken to enable some of this office stock to be redeveloped for a mix of uses or non-employment uses. However, such proposals should be resisted on those sites that emerging Development Plans identify as being of importance unless they provide complementary use(s) to support the operation and function of sites and / or support the wider regeneration of the site.

The redevelopment of some of the FEA’s ageing office stock that is becoming obsolete will reduce the oversupply of stock (specifically that of lower quality) whilst potentially improving the FEA’s image as a business location and providing development land to meet the needs of other land uses (such as residential).

There is an identified oversupply of bespoke large office premises and campus sites within the FEA that are in part a legacy of the rapid expansion and subsequent consolidation of the ICT and telecommunications sector. Whilst some of these sites provide Grade A accommodation, the bespoke design of these premises, alongside the isolated location(s) and more desirable alternative provision within the FEA and further afield make these sites unattractive to the market. Therefore, in accordance with paragraph 22 of the NPPF it is recommended that emerging Development Plans consider not allocating some of these sites for employment use if market evidence suggests there is no reasonable prospect of the site being used for that purpose.”

- 6.36. The subject site is not identified in a strategic or locally important employment area. Paragraph 181 of the Local Plan specifically refers only to locally important employment sites rather than non-designated ones. However, and notwithstanding, a marketing process has been undertaken for a period extending to 16 months without any interest being forthcoming for an office use

of the site. In addition, the referenced Employment Land Review acknowledged that there is an identified oversupply of bespoke large office premises in the functional economic area. It follows that market signals now indicate that the premises are unlikely to be utilised for a conventional employment use.

6.37. In addition, the scheme achieves an alternative strong compliance with Local Plan Policy INF5 and NPPF paragraphs 92 to 94 in meeting a community facility based need in the form of a school. HLS has existed since the early 1940's and is urgently in need of a new long-term home to house the existing 106 students that are predominantly funded by the Local Educational Authorities due to their SEND requirements. Further, the proposal also offers a use that still facilitates a substantial amount of employment opportunities to occur on the site and in addition, a use for a vacant listed building and finally, an appropriate one commensurate with the site's history.

6.38. The proposed change of use is therefore considered to be consistent with the approach taken by the Council in 2012 towards a proposal to use the site for a school purpose. A relevant extract from the officer's report is set out below:

Saved local plan policy URB7 allows for a loss of a BI office use providing the site is not capable of continuing in that use or there would be a substantial benefit to the locality.

Yateley Hall is a Grade II* listed building and according to the English Heritage category it is considered to be of a particular importance of more than a special interest. Therefore any proposal to convert a listed building of this category to care home; and in particular a vacant listed building (since 2004), outweighs the need to retain an employment use (paragraph 132, NPPF). Moreover, it is also accepted by the Council that there is an abundance of office space within the District (see Employment Land Review 2009).

CONCLUSION

It is considered that the proposal is acceptable in principle and would introduce a use that would not only benefit the community, but would also bring back into use a vacant Grade II* listed building. It is also considered that there would be a minimal amount of disturbance to the historic fabric of the buildings and as such their character and setting including that of the parkland would not be significantly harmed. It is therefore considered that the proposal would satisfy saved local plan policies and the NPPF.

6.39. The scheme complies with Local Plan Policies ED2 and INF5 and NPPF paragraphs 92 to 94 such that the principle of development can be supported. It complies with Local Plan Policy ED2, but in any event and as a matter of overall planning balance its use for a community led educational purpose and

one that offers a long-term appropriate use for a valued listed building would outweigh any loss of office impact in any event. It is therefore considered that the principle of development is established, and the proposed educational use carries forward positive weight in carrying out the overall planning balance.

B: Heritage

6.40. Yateley Hall itself is Grade II* listed and the stable block Grade II listed. The site also falls within a Conservation Area. The planning application is therefore accompanied by a Heritage Statement.

6.41. The Heritage Statement undertakes an analysis of the proposal against national and local policy and guidance in relation to heritage matters. It considers impacts both in relation to the listed building itself, and in respect of the Yateley Green Conservation Area and concludes that the proposals give rise to a use that has successfully operated from the site for almost 40 years and the same use that has in recent years been granted permission. The proposal represents an optimum viable use of the building. This forms a material public benefit that weighs heavily in favour of the proposed change of use. In addition, the proposal enables a viable long-term use for the site consistent with the need for one specifically identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal and the 2012 officer's report.

6.42. To conclude, the reuse of the building for the proposed use enables a substantial heritage benefit. Accordingly, the proposal results in no heritage harm and complies with the statutory duties in s.66 and s.72 of the Planning Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990. Securing the optimum viable use of the building is a material public benefit that weighs heavily in favour of the proposed change of use.

C: Trees & Ecology

6.43. The site is covered by a Tree Preservation Order. Furthermore, given the location of the site within a Conservation Area, permission would still be required for works to, or removal of, these trees. No works to any trees are proposed through the application and as a proposal for change of use without

any internal alterations, there will be no harm to any ecology such that the scheme is entirely appropriate in arboricultural and ecological respects.

D: Transport

6.44. The supporting Transport Statement explains that the site is accessible by walking, cycling and public transport. The site has an existing vehicular access arrangement from Firgrove Road and is suitable for continued use following the conversion. The site includes appropriate space for cycle and vehicle parking and the proposal is not anticipated to result in any severe impact on the local highway network.

6.45. A supporting Travel Plan has been prepared that will assist in encouraging all pupils and staff to travel by sustainable modes where possible and practical. Measures include cycle parking, travel information and cycle training to be coordinated by a member of staff who will also conduct annual surveys. This commitment will result in the ability to maximise travel to the site by sustainable modes and enable an improvement when compared to the absence of any travel plan required by the lawful existing office use. The scheme therefore complies with the transport related policies in the NPPF and the development plan.

E: Drainage

6.46. The site falls within a mix of flood zones. By virtue of the size of the application site it has been necessary to prepare a Flood Risk Statement to accompany the planning application. This confirms that the proposed development is appropriate and that it does not increase flood risk elsewhere. No changes to existing site levels or any drainage infrastructure are proposed and the principle of using the site for a school or care home type use has been considered in the previous full planning permissions granted in 2012 and 2014. The statement confirms that a safe dry access route can be achieved (as per the existing use) and by forming a change of use should not be subject to the sequential or exception tests. All flood considerations remain the same as those considered on the previously approved schemes and the scheme is therefore acceptable on flood risk and drainage grounds.

7. PLANNING BALANCE & CONCLUSION

- 7.1. This statement has detailed the proposals for the change of use of Yateley Hall, Yateley in order to enable an optimum viable use to protect the future integrity of the listed Yateley Hall.
- 7.2. The matters set out in this Planning Statement cover a breadth of issues, including:
- 1) Heritage
 - 2) Public benefits arising from the provision of a non-residential school (Class F1 Use)
 - 3) Economic benefits
 - 4) Economic development
 - 5) Trees & ecology
 - 6) Transport
 - 7) Drainage
- 7.3. The benefits of the proposed school use need to be considered in the overall planning balance. This statement has explained that the proposal would result in a beneficial heritage impact in finding a future long term viable use that is consistent with the site's history for these valued Grade II* and II listed buildings. Further, the proposal would result in substantial community and education related benefits by providing an ideal home for the long-established Hurst Lodge School at a time where there is a pressing need to find one. It will therefore result educational and substantial employment generating benefits as well. The scheme has been identified to be entirely appropriate in respect of transport and drainage. Finally, any conceivable loss of office use is evidenced as justified through the marketing summary and would be outweighed by the importance of finding a long-term viable future for the building given its Grade II* / II listed status in any event. It follows that a similar positive decision to that taken when approving a proposal to change the use of the site by the Council in 2012 (LPA Ref. 12/01318/MAJOR) can again be made.

7.4. The proposal's benefits can be summarised to include:

- 1) Helping to address the need for education, including pupils with SEND requirements.
- 2) Delivering economic benefits, by maintaining and enhancing the employment function of the site, through the delivery of an alternative employment generating use with the equivalent of 60 FTE jobs likely to be created in varied professions.
- 3) Enabling direct short-term and long-term economic benefits resulting from the operation of the school.
- 4) Bringing indirect economic benefits arising through supply chain service requirements.
- 5) Resulting in induced economic benefits arising from employees, visitors and potentially some students spending income and monies on goods and services in the local economy.
- 6) Enabling a long term viable and appropriate use of a designated heritage asset.
- 7) Securing a needed long term home for Hurst Lodge School that provides valuable education to both private and Local Education Authority funded students.
- 8) Providing a high quality learning environment for both employees and students at Hurst Lodge School.
- 9) Proposing a sustainable travel plan that will encourage non-car modes of travel.

7.5. As set out in this statement the scheme's net benefits are significant. In the context of paragraph 11(c) of the NPPF, the scheme accords with the development plan and can be approved accordingly.

7.6. The proposed development represents an acceptable development having regard to all relevant planning considerations such that planning permission can and should be granted.
