



New Marlborough School Chelsea

Heritage appraisal

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This statement supports the planning application for the redevelopment of Marlborough Primary School to provide a new school and adjacent commercial development, submitted on John Lewis plc.
- 1.2. It describes the historic context and significance of the buildings on the site and those in the immediate vicinity that comprise its setting. It evaluates the nature and level of heritage values associated with them, and explains the way in which the design of the new development reflects this understanding.
- 1.3. It is prepared in the context of *Section 12* of the *National Planning Policy Framework*¹, in particular *para 131* onwards. It takes account of the *Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide*² which remains relevant to the NPPF, in particular *paragraphs 54* to *66*. It takes into account the guidance offered by English Heritage in *The setting of heritage assets*³.
- 1.4. It also takes account of the approach to conservation and townscape of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), set out in *Section 34* of its *Core Strategy "Renewing the Legacy"*, and in particular policies relating to the conservation of the historic environment. These are consistent with the relevant policies of the London Plan (2011), in particular Policies 7.8 to 7.12.
- 1.5. It provides the information, proportionate to the significance of the heritage assets in the vicinity, necessary for the local planning authority to determine the application in relation to historic environment considerations.

- 1.6. The statement also follows the best practice guidance provided by the English Heritage publications *Conservation Principles Policy and Guidance*⁴, *The setting of heritage assets* and *Understanding Place: Historic Area Assessments: Principles and Practice*⁵.

2. Pre-application discussions

- 2.1. The application has been the subject of pre-application discussions with RBKC staff, informal public consultation, and the scrutiny of the Architecture Appraisal Panel. The feedback from these has also been taken into account.

3. Location and description

- 3.1. Marlborough Primary School occupies a site between Draycott Avenue and Sloane Avenue, with its main frontage and entrance on the latter. It is a mainly brick, mainly three to four storey building with stone and terracotta detailing.
- 3.2. The area around the school accommodates a variety of commercial uses, including the Clearings, a John Lewis plc warehouse and offices, the former Harrods depository and further west the former Michelin tyre garage (now *Bibendum* and listed Grade II). In the wider area of the school are a number of large residential mansion blocks.

¹ National Planning Policy Framework Department of Communities and Local Government 2012

² Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide Department of Communities and Local Government 2008

³ The setting of heritage assets English Heritage 2011

⁴ Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance English Heritage 2008

⁵ Understanding Place: Historic Area Assessments: Principles and Practice English Heritage 2010

4. History



Extract from John Rocque's map of London 1763

- 4.1. At the time that John Rocque produced his map of the area in the mid - Eighteenth Century, the application site was part of Chelsea Common, straddling Blacklands Lane, named after Blacklands House that stood at its southern end close to King's Road. The map suggests that the wider area was used for agriculture, grazing and market gardening. By the time Thompson produced his map of Chelsea in 1836, much of the area had been intensively developed, mainly for housing.



Extract from Thompson's Map of Chelsea 1836

- 4.2. The Marlborough Road Board School was built on the site of former terraced houses along Marlborough Road (now Draycott Avenue) and Keppel Road (now Sloane Avenue) in 1878. It was one of around 500 built to broadly similar designs across London between 1871 and 1904 by the School Board for London (SBL).
- 4.3. An earlier National School was built to serve the area in the early 1800s on a smaller site on the opposite (east) side of what was Marlborough Road, on the site of the present John Lewis Clearings building at the junction with James (now Denyer) Street (see extract from Thompson's map above). It has not been possible to identify a direct connection between the two institutions, and the origins and sponsors of the National and London Board schools were very different. They represent together, nonetheless, a continuous educational focus for the area.
- 4.4. The school was built in 1878 to designs derived from those of ER Robson and TJ Bailey, the Board's principal architect and deputy, respectively, at that time, in the predominant 'Queen Anne' style adopted by the SBL. The building illustrates the evolving scale and style of the Board's schools, as larger multi-storey schools were developed on tight urban sites.
- 4.5. At its most active, around the turn of the Twentieth Century, the Marlborough Road School had around 1500 pupils. Initially it had separate accommodation for girls, boys and infants. By 1907 the intake was mixed. Its roll has since fallen as the demographic character of the area and educational policy and provision changed.
- 4.6. At the time it was built, the school would have been one of the largest buildings in the area – a conscious policy of the School Board - and its style and decoration was intended to influence the improvement of the wider area. The surrounding area then was mainly residential with predominantly modest terraces replacing the few large houses and mansions of the Eighteenth Century.



Typical Queen Anne style of 1878 school now dominated by later development

- 4.7. Development in the vicinity intensified through the Twentieth Century, with houses replaced by blocks of flats; Edwardian and later private mansion blocks, and some public housing developments. As a result the school building became less conspicuous and dominant in the street scene, with surrounding buildings rising up to 11 storeys.
- 4.8. Commercial uses, notably warehousing, also replaced some of the housing of the immediate vicinity. The former Harrods depository building adjacent to the school to the north is similarly undesignated but has some aesthetic heritage value in its surface decoration, with extensive use of applied terracotta. The new commercial building will conceal the blank brick east façade of the warehouse.

5. Historic significance

- 5.1. The school is not in a conservation area, and has no recognised heritage status, statutory or otherwise. As a late Nineteenth Century London Board School, it nonetheless has some historic significance. This derives from the illustrative and associative heritage value of the building and the use, an example of the evolution of education policy and accommodation in the late Victorian period. It is in particular illustrative of the remarkable building programme of the School Board for London which built around 500 schools in just over 30 years.
- 5.2. It illustrates the stylistic and accommodation features of the later period of ER Robson's time as Chief Architect to the Board and therefore has some associative heritage value.
- 5.3. There is also aesthetic heritage value in the design of the school buildings. They are in the typical Queen Anne style which defined SBL buildings of the time, with period detailing such as the brick and stone banding at high level, use of cast terracotta and stone, decorative window heads and gables, and roof-top cupola.
- 5.4. There is also communal heritage value in the continuity of primary education serving the local community. The Board School replaced a National School on the site opposite which would have been built sometime between 1811 (when the National School Society was established) and Thompson's map of 1836, and together they have been teaching local children for getting on for two hundred years.
- 5.5. The historic significance of the SBL schools is well-studied and recorded. Such work was drawn together in a study by English Heritage in 1991, updated in 1994.⁶ The study was undertaken when responsibility for schools was passing from the Inner London Education Authority to the London Boroughs. The study evaluated over half of around 400 surviving Board Schools to identify whether there was a justification for further listing and to suggest criteria for the consideration of individual schools.

⁶ London Board Schools Andrew Saint for English Heritage 1991, revised 1994

- 5.6. A thematic review of Board Schools was carried out by English Heritage in 2008, based on the 1991/4 study to inform a renewed focus on, and investment in, the renewal and replacement of schools generally.
- 5.7. These exercises did not identify Marlborough Primary School (MPS) as a candidate for listing. There are a number of reasons why the significance of its heritage values falls below this threshold.
- 5.8. There are a large number of Board Schools remaining which reflect better the characteristics and evolution of LBS activity. The nearby Our Lady of Victories RC primary school for example, built just after MPS, was listed in 2009 for its distinctive architectural features, responding to its constrained site, and internal arrangements that were then unique, reflecting ER Robson's evolving approach to internal arrangement.
- 5.9. The aesthetic value of the school has been diminished by the intensive development of the surrounding area. The school is no longer a dominant feature in the townscape and is visible only from its immediate street frontages. Its impact is further reduced by its principal frontage being set back behind a high brick wall. The EH study records the late 1870s as a period when ER Robson's designs for the Board's schools was weaker.
- 5.10. The communal heritage value lies in the continuity of the use rather than the fabric of this particular building.

6. Impact of redevelopment on historic significance

- 6.1. The illustrative and associative heritage value will be sustained by the recorded history of this school and other Board Schools in London and elsewhere. The communal heritage value will be sustained by the reconstruction of the school on the same site – continuing the historic tradition of this facility serving the local community.
- 6.2. The aesthetic heritage value of the existing school will be lost, but will be replaced by the design value of the new school. This will be a distinctive building reflecting current standards and future aspirations for primary public education, by a respected Architect working to a carefully prepared brief. The palette of materials is influenced by those used in the school and other historic buildings in the vicinity. The new school will prove to be an appropriate replacement for the existing school which represented, at the time it was built, similarly modern thinking and aspiration.
- 6.3. The design of the new building will also respond to the changes to the setting of the site since the school was built. The new building will reassert the importance of the school to the area by building up to the boundary and presenting a distinctly modern and lively addition to the street scene, just as the current school did in its time.
- 6.4. Decorative features of the original school are reflected and incorporated where appropriate in the new building. The glazed brick plinth of the new building reflects that used on the interior of the existing school, and its green colour is a reference to the decorative treatment of the listed Michelin building nearby.
- 6.5. The brick and stone bands on the upper levels of the school are repeated, at lower levels on the elevations of the new school. Here they are coincident with floor levels, a feature of some of the older residential blocks in the vicinity. The use of copper and stone capping, and metal railings acknowledges the character of the original building. Some historic fragments will be incorporated to reinforce the perception of the continuity of the school as an institution on this site.



Brick and stone banding and historic decoration incorporated in Draycott Avenue elevation

7. Policy considerations

7.1. National and local planning policies guide development intentions. Such policies generally refer to designated assets, but *paragraph 135* of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) explains:

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

The evaluation in *Section 5* acknowledges this broad definition and explains the impact of the proposed redevelopment on the historic significance of the school and other heritage assets within the setting of which the new buildings will stand.

7.2. *Paragraph 128* of the NPPF states:

'In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.'

The assessment in *Section 5* provides an evaluation of the significance of the existing buildings appropriate to their importance.

7.3. *Paragraph 131* of the NPPF states that:

'In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

The evaluation of significance explains why it reasonable to accept the replacement of the existing building, and *Section 6* explains the way in which the new development will make a positive contribution to the character if the area.

7.4. The RBKC conservation policies are set out in *Chapter 34* of the adopted *Core Strategy*:

Policy CL 1 Context and Character

The Council will require all development to respect the existing context, character, and appearance, taking opportunities available to improve the quality and character of buildings and the area and the way it functions, including being inclusive for all. To deliver this the Council will:

- a. require development through its architecture and urban form to contribute positively to the context of the townscape, addressing matters such as scale, height, bulk, mass, proportion, plot width, building lines, street form, rhythm, roofscape, materials, vistas, views, gaps and historic fabric;
- b. require the analysis of context to be drawn from an area that is proportionate and relevant to the size of the development site;
- c. require the density of development to be optimised relative to context;...

Policy CL 2 New Buildings, Extensions and Modifications to Existing Buildings

The Council will require new buildings, extensions and modifications to existing buildings to be of the highest architectural and urban design quality, taking opportunities to improve the quality and character of buildings and the area and the way it functions. To deliver this the Council will, in relation to:

Architectural Design

- a. require development to be:
 - i. Functional - fit for purpose and legible;
 - ii. Robust - well built, remain in good condition and adaptable to changes of use, lifestyle, demography and climate;
 - iii. Attractive - pleasing in its composition, materials and craftsmanship;
 - iv. Locally distinctive - responding well to its context;
 - v. Sustainable - in the use of resources, construction and operation;
 - vi. Inclusive - accessible to all;
 - vii. Secure - designs out crime.
- b. require an appropriate architectural style on a site by-site basis, in response to:
 - i. the context of the site;
 - ii. the building's proposed design, form and use;
 - iii. whether the townscape is of uniform or varied character.
- c. facilitate the redevelopment of 'eyesores' by offering flexibility in relation to policies which make redevelopment with buildings more suited to their context demonstrably unviable;[.....]

Policy CL4 Heritage assets [including] Archaeology

- g. require development to protect the setting of listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments or sites of archaeological interest;
- h. resist development which would threaten the conservation, protection or setting of archaeological remains;

- i. require desk based assessments and where necessary archaeological field evaluation before development proposals are determined, where development is proposed on sites of archaeological significance or potential.

- 7.5. The architectural and townscape characteristics of the new school are addressed in a separate document. *Sections 5 and 6* of this appraisal demonstrate how understanding the historic context has informed the elevations and choice of materials.
- 7.6. The historic significance of the new school's context is modest, but its scale and form, as well as providing much improved accommodation and facilities, reflects the more intensive development of the surrounding area since the MPS was built. By building up to the perimeter of the site it uses the available space as efficiently as possible and reasserts the communal heritage value in its role as a local institution.
- 7.7. The proposed commercial building will replace a redundant school building with retail and business space and a new public pedestrian route. It is functional and attractive and its scale and simple detailing is appropriate to its position between the new school and its more exuberant neighbour to the north.
- 7.8. A desk evaluation of potential archaeological interest is submitted with the application as a separate document. This concludes that that significance of any evidence of earlier activity below ground is likely to be low, as is the likelihood of their being present. It suggests a watching brief during construction, covered by planning condition, will be sufficient to protect any possible finds that might be uncovered.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1. This assessment and the drawings and other supporting information accompanying the planning application demonstrate the care that the applicants, their architects and other advisers have given to ensuring that the new development is of a standard and form appropriate to its setting.
- 8.2. The design of the school, while informed primarily by the standard and range of accommodation required, acknowledges the importance of recreating a distinctive presence in the street at an appropriate scale.

The design of the school building reprises some of the historic features of the existing building and the surrounding area. The brick and stone bands of the original school are repeated and reflect the detailing of other nearby buildings. The use of traditional materials and the incorporation of historic fragments emphasise the continuity of the principal use.



Brick and stone banding, glazed brick and retained decorative stonework on Sloane Avenue elevation.

- 8.3. The communal heritage value is secured and strengthened by this new investment in continued education in a fine building on this site.



Original stone plaque and glazed brick plinth providing visual reference to original building

- 8.4. The form and scale of the adjacent commercial building has been designed to complement the scale and general arrangement of the depository building which it abuts and the way in which the surrounding area has developed since the school was built. The simple detailing of this building will emphasise the decorative character of its neighbour.



The scale and simplicity of the new commercial building is sympathetic to the character of its neighbour