<table>
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<th><strong>Barking and Dagenham Council Development Control Board</strong></th>
<th><strong>Date:</strong> 7 November 2016</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Application No:</strong> 15/00887/OUT</td>
<td><strong>Ward:</strong> Eastbrook</td>
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<td><strong>Reason for Referral to DCB as set out in Part 2, Chapter 9 of the Council Constitution:</strong></td>
<td>The proposed development is an application which, by reason of its scale, impact upon the environment, level of public and Councillor interest should, in the opinion of the Acting Head of Regeneration and Planning (Planning), be determined by the Development Control Board.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Address:</strong></td>
<td>Barking and Dagenham College of Technology, Dagenham Road, Rush Green</td>
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<td><strong>Development:</strong></td>
<td>Application for outline planning permission: Development of up to 125 residential units (Class C3) and replacement car parking facility for the use of Barking and Dagenham College with associated access, landscaping and associated works (all matters reserved except access).</td>
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<td><strong>Applicant:</strong></td>
<td>Barking &amp; Dagenham College</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contact Officer:</strong> Simon Bullock</td>
<td><strong>Title:</strong> Principal Development Management Officer</td>
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<td><strong>Contact Details:</strong> Tel: 020 8227 3803 E-mail: <a href="mailto:simon.bullock@lbbd.gov.uk">simon.bullock@lbbd.gov.uk</a></td>
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**Summary:**

The proposed development, submitted as an outline application, is for the development of up to 125 houses and flats on land within the curtilage of the Barking and Dagenham College campus at Rush Green. The site lies to the south of the College buildings and includes the main College car park, together with a substantial area of landscaped open space to the south and west of the car park. The site borders Eastbrookend Country park to the south and Central Park to the west.

The purpose of the proposed development is to provide funding from the sales value of the site with planning permission, to fund the refurbishment of the existing D Block teaching building within College site. D Block provides a poor quality teaching environment, is time expired and suffers from significant maintenance problems. The proposed refurbishment would result in a significant enhancement to the building and to the ability of the College to improve its facilities and continue to be attractive to new students. The new building would provide a ‘Centre for Advanced Technologies’.

The building refurbishment is to be part funded by a Local Economic Partnership grant of approximately £3 million, but this is only sufficient to cover approximately one third of the cost. The proposed development also necessitates the relocation of the existing College car park to the west of the site.

The College has made the case that in practice it does not have any recourse to other sources of funding or loans. This case has been assessed and it is accepted.
The whole of the proposed development site lies within the Green Belt, and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that such development is ‘inappropriate’ within the Green Belt by definition. The guidance states that such inappropriate development should be refused unless there are very special circumstances that clearly outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm caused by the proposed development.

For the reasons expanded upon below, it is concluded that there are not very special circumstances that would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt that would be caused by the proposed residential development. It is therefore recommended that planning permission be refused.

Recommendation(s):

That the Development Control Board refuse planning permission for the following reasons:

1. The proposed residential enabling development would be inappropriate in the Green Belt, would conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt, and would harm its openness and visual appearance, and the harm that would be caused to the Green Belt is not clearly outweighed by other considerations. Planning permission should therefore be refused in accordance with policy CM3 of the Core Strategy, policy 7.16 of the London Plan, and paragraphs 87 and 88 of the NPPF.

2. The proposed access arrangement, utilising the existing College access to serve both the residential development and the College car park, would result in increased usage, and an increase in conflicting right turn vehicle movements at the junction with Dagenham Road that would be detrimental to highway safety and the free flow of traffic, contrary to policy BR10 of the Borough Wide Development Policies Development Plan Document.

1. Introduction and Description of Development

1.1 The proposed development relates to Barking and Dagenham College’s site at Dagenham Road, Rush Green and involves residential development on the existing car park, and the landscaped open space within the curtilage of the College that lies between the car park and Eastbrookend Country Park, and the construction of a replacement surface level car park on open land within the College site that is to the west of the existing car park and to the south of the existing playing field.

1.2 The application site has an overall area of 4 hectares. The proposed residential development forming 2.8 hectares of this area would be sited directly to the south of the existing College buildings on an area of land approximately 306m wide by 93m deep. This land currently provides the main car park for the College, and an area of landscaped bunds and tree planting to the south of the car park that borders the country park.

1.3 The proposed replacement car park would be sited on an area of open grassland within the curtilage of the College site, at its south-west corner, adjacent to the College playing field, and to the west of the proposed residential development. The proposed car park has an area of 0.96 hectares on a site approximately 118m wide and 81m deep. This would be a surface level car park.
1.4 The application is in outline for up to 125 residential units, with all matters reserved. Indicative drawings have been submitted that provide an indication of the potential appearance of the development and which set maximum parameters for the scale of the proposed development, further details below. Vehicular access to the site would be provided by the existing access with no changes proposed to the junction with Dagenham Road.

1.5 The entirety of the proposed development site including both the existing car park and the open spaces are designated as Green Belt within the development plan. The purpose of the proposed development is to provide funding from the sale of the land to a developer, that the College would use to refurbish existing D Block within the College site to provide a modern, energy efficient ‘Centre for Advanced Technologies’. The College has concluded that this would be the most cost effective way to provide such facilities, and states that this building in its current form is energy inefficient, poorly designed, and difficult to maintain.

1.6 The budget for the D Block refurbishment is £9.59 million, and the cost of relocating the existing car park to facilitate the proposed residential development is £2.03 million, resulting in a total of £11.62 million. The Local Economic Partnership has approved a grant in principle towards the cost of the work of £3 million. The College is anticipating that the sale of the land would raise the shortfall of £8.62 million.

1.7 Residential development within the Green Belt is classified as ‘inappropriate’ and by definition harmful to the Green Belt, by the National Planning Policy Framework, regardless of its purpose.

1.8 This guidance states that inappropriate development should not be permitted except in ‘very special circumstances’, and that such ‘very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

1.9 The College’s case is that the proposed Centre for Advanced Technology (that has limited but insufficient potential grant funding) cannot be fully funded in any other way. The College see the development as a critical aspect of its stated vision to be a truly great college, and it says that failure to generate the funds will threaten the future capabilities of the college to respond to teaching requirements and demand. It sees the proposed centre as benefitting the local economy, local businesses, the training needs of students, and local residents in the environs of the College who would be able to access the improved facilities.

1.10 Less than half the proposed development site is covered by the tarmac surface of the existing car park, with the remainder comprising areas of open lawn interspersed with some trees, shrub planting, and landscaped bunds that have been designed to screen the car park from the adjacent country park.

1.11 The existing College car park provides 469 car parking spaces, and would be replaced with an equivalent capacity car park as described above (the original submission proposed a two storey car park but this was subsequently amended with cost grounds being cited, resulting in greater land take for surface level parking but reduced scale in terms of height).
1.12 The proposed residential development would comprise a mixture of 1 to 4 bedroom houses and flats between two and three storeys in height. Three storey flats would be limited to the site frontage facing onto Dagenham Road, two storey houses are proposed adjacent to the park boundary to the south, stepping up to three storey houses on the north side of the development land adjacent to the existing College buildings. Whilst the scheme is in outline form, maximum heights and the siting of buildings can be within agreed parameters to be determined at this stage.

1.13 Indicatively it is proposed that the housing mix would comprise 30 one and two bedroom flats, and 95 three and four bedroom houses. All the units would be for private sale with no affordable housing provided. This is on the basis that as an ‘enabling’ development the scale of housing should be the minimum required to fund the proposed refurbishment. If affordable tenures were provided the land value would be reduced, and a greater scale of development in the Green Belt would be required in order to provide the required funding.

1.14 A design code has been submitted that seeks to ensure that a high standard of design is secured in any future reserved matters application.

1.15 The application was validated on 24 August 2015 after which consultation was carried out. The applicant wished to submit some amendments to the scheme which included changing the originally proposed two storey car park to a surface level car park, and some minor changes to the layout of the indicative master plan.

1.16 In addition the College wished to submit an updated development viability appraisal to seek to provide evidence that the proposed scale of residential development is required in order to provide adequate funding for the proposed D Block refurbishment works. This has now been provided and the Council has carried out an independent assessment of this submission. Further details will be provided below.

2. Background

2.1 The College site has an extensive history of planning applications for new buildings and ancillary development on the site. Some of the more recent and significant planning applications are listed below. These planning permission help to demonstrate the significant expansion of the College that has taken place over the years, and the significant investment in the building stock in recent years.

2.2 08/00370/FUL - Erection of a motor vehicle workshop; PERMITTED.

2.3 09/00078/OUT - Demolition of existing college building (excluding Bramley building) and redevelopment to provide further education college with ancillary buildings, parking, sports facilities, landscaping and access; WITHDRAWN.

2.4 This above application proposed a comprehensive redevelopment of the site and also involved development within the College grounds on part of the land that is designated Green Belt. Members of DCB resolved to grant planning permission subject to a Section 106 agreement, and that decision was upheld upon referral to the Mayor of London. (However, before the agreement was finalised and the
decision issued the funding environment changed, preventing the development from proceeding, hence the eventual withdrawal of the application.)

2.5 Whilst the above scheme like the current proposal resulted in Green Belt encroachment it is not considered comparable in its Green Belt impact. The Green Belt encroachment was confined to a smaller area, mainly the area of the existing car park, and significant landscaped bunds were proposed and green walls to the building in order to reduce the landscape visual impact. Additionally a 'land swap' was proposed whereby previously developed land at the west of the site would have been returned to an open space, and this was proposed as an extension to the Green Belt boundary.

2.6 09/00394/FUL - Erection of a motor vehicle workshop; PERMITTED.

2.7 09/00507/FUL - Erection of extension to front entrance foyer; PERMITTED.

2.8 11/00396/FUL - Erection of 2 canopies, construction of paved surface and associated steps and ramps to provide sheltered 'breakout' space; PERMITTED.

2.9 11/00888/FUL - Erection of two storey infill building between the Bramley and Sports Centre buildings; PERMITTED.

2.10 12/00164/FUL - Erection of two storey infill building between the Bramley and Sports Centre buildings (amendments to planning permission 11/00888/FUL); PERMITTED.

2.11 12/00561/FUL - Demolition of bakery, front lodge, Block B, storage units and greenhouses and erection of two storey teaching and learning resource centre and external alterations to create new entrance and associated landscaping; PERMITTED.

2.12 12/00896/FUL - Demolition of block J and erection of single storey workshop building; PERMITTED.

2.13 In relation specifically to the existing car park; planning permission 99/00133/OUT was for the replacement of existing temporary buildings with new purpose built facilities and ancillary accommodation, rationalisation of existing site car parking and reorganisation and improvement of pedestrian access to and within the campus including associated new landscaping.

2.14 This decision granted permission for the construction of the current car park within the Green Belt taking account of the Inspectors report on the Unitary Development Plan which had stated:

"car parking use of the site for the College could be an acceptable use of the land, given appropriate landscaping. To my mind such a use could be accommodated within this part of the Green Belt without detracting from the open nature of the area and without requiring the alteration of the Green Belt boundary....."
3. **Consultations**

**Adjoining occupiers**

3.1 The applicant has submitted a Statement of Community Involvement setting out the steps it has taken to consult neighbouring residents upon the proposed development prior to the submission of the application.

3.2 This included a public exhibition on Thursday 19 March 2015 between 12 noon and 8pm, and two informal drop in sessions held on Thursday 4 June 2015 between 12 noon and 8pm, and on Thursday 16 July 2015 at the same time; all held at the College’s Rush Green campus.

3.3 In order to publicise the events leaflets were hand delivered to over 1,000 residential and commercial properties in the neighbouring area.

3.4 Approximately 25 residents attended the public exhibition, including a representative of Eastbrookend Country Park, with 4 completing feedback forms. Approximately 22 people attended the first drop in session, including representatives of the Rush Green Residents Group and Eastbrookend Country Park. Approximately 28 local residents attended the second drop in session but no local political or community stakeholder representatives. This last event was publicised via a community newsletter that is delivered to 2,500 local residential and commercial properties’ in the area. The College also presented their proposals to the Rush Green Residents Group on Monday 1 June 2015.

3.5 In summary comments made at the consultation events included the following main points:

- All spaces within the existing car park should be replaced
- Concern that the development would contribute to traffic congestion
- Suggestion that traffic lights should be provided for the site junction with Dagenham Road
- Additional bus services are needed
- Students currently park in Dagenham Road causing congestion
- There is support for a Controlled Parking Zone in the area
- Concern that there is insufficient social infrastructure in the area to support the development and that it would negatively impact on existing schools, doctors’ surgeries, chemists, and hospitals
- General support for expanding the College’s facilities, including the redevelopment of D-Block

3.6 Following receipt of the application the Council sent consultation letters to 719 neighbouring occupiers, site notices were displayed, and a press notice was published.

3.7 In response 111 individual letters and emails objecting to the development were received. More than half of these submissions utilise the same template letter but a significant proportion of the letters are individually drafted.

3.8 In addition 3 petitions objecting to the proposed development have been received.
3.9 The first is a 986 signature petition stating: “We the undersigned are opposed to any development on green belt land at Barking and Dagenham College. We believe the Council should rigidly defend the green belt and not permit a housing development on the site of the college car park.”

3.10 The second is a 445 signature online petition titled: “Save the Green Belt in Rush Green! - We the undersigned, are petitioning Barking and Dagenham Council to Refuse development of new flats and houses on Green Belt land in Rush Green.” 166 of those signing have provided comments setting out the reasons for their objection.

3.11 The third is a 23 signature petition stating: “I am herewith petitioning the council of Barking and Dagenham not to give permission to build on Green belt land.”

3.12 No letters of support have been received.

3.13 The vast majority of the petitioners are local residents and most of the addresses supplied are within the Rush Green area near to the College.

3.14 In summary the objections are on the following main grounds:

- Loss of Green Belt land that is intended for all to enjoy, contrary to planning policy
- Development within the Green Belt would create a precedent
- Protecting the Green Belt is of greater importance than enabling the College’s development plans
- There are no very special circumstances that justify the development
- The College should have planned its finances better in order to manage its budgets without the need for the proposed development
- Dagenham Road already suffers from significant traffic congestion at peak times, the proposed houses would add to this problem
- The development would worsen existing congestion at the Dagenham Road/Rush Green Road junction
- Local buses are already full at peak times due to school and College pupils
- Additional traffic would add to pollution
- College users park on the pavement of Dagenham Road leaving only the cycle lane for pedestrians and cyclists
- College users park on the neighbouring streets such as Camomile Road within the former Rush Green hospital estate causing nuisance to neighbours and a highway hazard at junctions
- A Controlled Parking Zone in the area (that may be required due to the College parking demand) is not wanted
- The proposed multi-storey car park would be an eyesore in the landscape - Officer note: *This has since been deleted in favour of a surface level car park*
- Local doctors’ surgeries, hospitals and schools are already overloaded, adding additional population to the area will worsen the situation
- Recent developments in the area such as that at the former Oldchurch Hospital, Romford and Roneo Corner, Hornchurch have exacerbated the existing shortage of community facilities
- The proposed development would have a negative impact on wildlife
Having regard to the objections letters, the most commonly raised, and most important issues for objectors appear to be the loss of Green Belt; concern that there is a lack of social infrastructure to support the proposed additional population; and additional traffic generation and College related on street parking in the area.

Greater London Authority (response from previous Mayor of London)

The need for the refurbishment of D Block is accepted, and past practice has demonstrated that a clearly evidenced educational need may be reasonably considered to be a very special circumstance.

The proposed ‘inappropriate’ development is wholly separate to the D Block proposals, therefore assurances would be required that the development is truly ‘enabling’ in status. This would take the form of an independently reviewed financial viability assessment, and a tangible link between the proposed residential development and the proposed refurbishment, providing assurance that the refurbishment would be delivered.

Nil affordable housing is proposed, and this is consistent with the ‘enabling’ nature of the development, and is acceptable in principle – subject to independent verification of the submitted viability appraisal.

If the independent review were to indicate a significant financial surplus, a corresponding reduction in the proposed quantum of residential development would be expected.

It is considered that the houses adjacent to the park boundary should provide an active frontage to the park. A Design Code should be submitted to secure key design principles within the proposed development.

Officer note: This has subsequently been prepared and submitted.

The perceived impact of the scheme on Green Belt openness from more sensitive locations within the country park and Central Park would be mitigated to a large extent by virtue of existing and proposed vegetative screening. Officers are of the view that the scheme generally responds well to the sensitivities of its Green Belt setting.

The scheme is not expected to have a significant impact on the strategic highway network or the public transport network.

Access to the proposed residential development would be via the existing priority junction from Dagenham Road leading into a private road and entering via a new junction on the southern side of the private access road. The proposed residential entrance would be located some 90m back from the Dagenham Road junction. It is stated in the Transport Assessment (TA) that the proposed residential road layout has been designed in accordance with the Department for Transport document Manual for Streets. Access to a new college car park will be located at the western end of the private access road. It is proposed that those driving and parking within
3.24 The location of the proposed development provides a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) rating of 2 (poor accessibility), determined using the standard methodology issued by Transport for London (TfL). In terms of sustainable modes of travel which will be available to any prospective occupiers, it is considered that the site is not conveniently located to provide opportunities for sustainable transport modes with the available accessibility to public transport services and therefore, unlikely to encourage a modal change and promote the use of sustainable transport. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to conclude that prospective occupiers and College students will make a high proportion of their journeys by car or other private vehicles.

3.25 We would expect this type of proposal to contain measures to provide facilities for cyclists and electric vehicle charging points also with some provision being made for future use of this type of system in accordance with the London Plan.

3.26 The level of parking provision for these types of schemes should be assessed on its individual merits, taking into account the location, size, public transport accessibility and local on-street parking demand. The residential parking level is 1 parking space per house and 1 parking space per flat in a communal car park. The existing surface car parking area for the college has a total of 469 spaces and the proposal is to provide the same total of spaces comprising of 458 in the new car park area and 11 spaces adjacent to the building to the north of the car park. Although we consider the ratio for the residential development to be acceptable, and the scheme is in accordance with current policy, by retaining the same amount of existing parking this will potentially cause additional pressures on the local network. There are currently existing car parking control measures in place within Dagenham Road because of the high demand for parking in the area and to prevent inconsiderate parking during the week at peak times.

3.27 Following pre-application discussions, a transport scope and estimations for trip generation of the new development were agreed. In order to assess the impact of the proposed development an industry generation database TRAVL (Trip Rate Assessment Valid for London) database has been interrogated with similar sites chosen in terms of being privately owned dwellings in suburban areas in London and was used to determine the modal splits to test the impact of the development on the wider highway network. In the Transport Assessment it states that the AM peak flows are higher than the PM peak and based on the surveyed flows the following distribution of residential trips has been assumed:

- AM Peak – Northbound 62%/Southbound 38%
- PM Peak – Northbound 57%/Southbound 43%

3.28 To assess the capacity and the operation of the existing site access between the existing and the proposed conditions, at its junction with Dagenham Road a Picady (Priority Intersection Capacity and Delay) model was used for the AM and PM peaks. Although, the trip generation assessment and junction modelling provided within the Transport Assessment suggest that the junction will continue to operate within capacity we are of the opinion that during the morning peak, to accommodate
the trips likely to arise from the proposed development, there will be some impact on the local highway network.

3.29 This significant proportion of car based journeys expected would worsen the congestion in Dagenham Road that already occurs which is further exacerbated by inconsiderate parking occurring in the vicinity of the neighbouring school during drop-off and pick-up times. During weekday peak times, in particular the morning peak there would be a potential for conflict between with those arriving by car and the residential motorists leaving the site who could be restricted from leaving the site efficiently and safely especially if they needed to travel in a south bound direction along Dagenham Road. This manoeuvre could also cause queuing to occur from the site and have a detrimental effect on traffic flows in Dagenham Road.

3.30 Having considered the merits of the scheme, it is considered that the development will be potentially detrimental to the local highway network and therefore we object to the application in its current form.

Environmental Health

3.31 No objection subject to the imposition of conditions to secure the following:

- Land contamination/ remediation
- Hours of construction work
- Control of noise and vibration during construction
- Construction management plan

Arboricultural Officer

3.32 The tree plan showing the proposed retentions is acceptable because it retains the best trees on the site. I have no objections to this plan proceeding.

3.33 Conditions should be imposed to ensure the protection of retained trees during construction works; and to require a method statement detailing tree protection measures for the construction of hard surfaces in close proximity to trees.

3.34 A landscape plan should be forthcoming for replacement planting.

Officer note: Full details of replacement planting would be required and secured under a reserved matters application.

Refuse Services

3.35 No comments received.

London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

3.36 No objections.

Access Officer

3.37 No comments received.
Officer note: The detailed layouts of the proposed dwellings, the main matter of interest to the Access Officer, would be considered under a subsequent reserved matters planning application.

Countryside Rangers

3.38 No comments received.

Historic England – Archaeology

3.39 Proposed development unlikely to affect heritage assets of archaeological interest, therefore no further assessment or conditions are necessary.

Children’s Services

3.40 The predicted pupil yield for this development is 89 school aged children based on 125 private residential units ranging between 1 to 4 bedrooms.

Designing Out Crime Officer

3.41 No objections regarding the location of the proposed buildings or the site layout. Thought will need to be given to the boundary treatment between the site and the Green Belt land to the south.

3.42 It is recommended to the developer that the site be considered for SBD (Secured by Design) accreditation for which the site appears ideal. This would reduce the opportunity for crime and anti-social behaviour, to the benefit of future residents and local services.

Parks

3.43 No comments received.

Heritage

3.44 No comments received.

Housing Strategy

3.45 No comments received.

Street Lighting

3.46 No comments received.

London Borough of Havering

3.47 Responded; stating no comments.

Thames Water
3.48 Requests the imposition of a condition requiring that development is not commenced until the submission and approval of a drainage strategy.

**Essex and Suffolk Water**

3.49 No objections.

**Parking Services**

3.50 No comments received.

**Ramblers Association**

3.51 No comments received.

**Natural England**

3.52 Responded; stating no comments.

**Campaign to Protect Rural England**

3.53 Objects to the application on the grounds that:

- No ‘very special circumstances exist
- The housing does not meet an identified housing need
- The Green Belt harm significantly outweighs the benefits
- The site continues to fulfil the criteria for Green Belt designation as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework

**Transport for London (TfL)**

3.54 Content for the Council to deal with local highway issues as the application does not affect the TfL trunk road network.

3.55 The proposed residential parking ratio of 1:1 parking is in accordance with London Plan policy.

3.56 Electric Vehicle Charging Points and Blue Badge parking spaces should be secured.

**London Wildlife Trust**

3.57 No comments received.

**Friends of the Chase**

3.58 No comments received.

4. **Local Finance Considerations**

4.1 The proposed development would be liable for the Mayoral and Borough Community Infrastructure Levies. The amount would be calculated and secured
through the reserved matters application when full details of the proposed floor space would be known.

5. **Analysis**

5.1 The fundamental question in assessing the application is whether or not the benefits arising from the proposed ‘inappropriate development’ in the Green Belt, amount to very special circumstances that clearly outweigh the harm caused.

5.2 This question will be considered in more detail further below, following an analysis of the other main planning issues relating to the proposal.

**Transport**

5.3 The transport officer acknowledges that the proposed development would have some limited impact on existing traffic congestion within the local highway network, but raises no objection on this ground subject to further consideration of the proposed junction arrangements.

5.4 To quantify the potential impact the submitted Transport Assessment (TA) makes a prediction, based upon data taken from sites with similar characteristics, that the residential development would result in 71 two way trips during the morning peak (08:00 to 09:00) and 63 during the afternoon peak (17:00 – 18:00).

5.5 The specific impact of this traffic on the existing junction of the College site access with Dagenham Road has also been assessed. This concludes that the junction has sufficient spare capacity to serve the proposed development. However, the transport officer considers that the resulting conflicting vehicle movements at the junction could contribute to congestion at certain times and be harmful to highway safety.

5.6 The proposed residential parking ratio of one space per unit for the residential development is in accordance with London Plan policy. The proposed parking provision is considered to provide a suitable balance between meeting the likely parking demand arising from the development and preventing the creation of a car dominated public realm. As set out by the transport officer, the detailed layout of the internal access roads would need to be designed to prevent unregulated on street parking which could affect access for emergency and refuse vehicles.

5.7 The existing car park that serves the College would be re-located as set out in the details of the scheme above. The replacement College car park would have an equivalent capacity to the existing. The proposed development would not therefore have an impact on parking demand or car parking provision at the College site, and the proposed D Block refurbishment works within the College that the current residential scheme would fund, will not result in an increase in the capacity of the site. The impact of the proposed development on existing parking demand arising from the College should therefore be neutral.

5.8 In relation to vehicular access the applicant has indicatively proposed that the existing College access road and entrance be utilised as a shared access to serve both the College and the residential development, with the access splitting within the site to provide a separate residential access road within the site confines.
5.9 The transport officer has raised some potential concerns with this arrangement, including that there is a potential conflict between morning traffic entering the site with a right turn in, and residential traffic leaving the site with a right turn out, onto Dagenham Road. However, he confirms that it may be possible to design an improvement to the layout of this junction or alternatively create a separate access for the residential traffic only.

5.10 Nevertheless, the vehicular access is not a reserved matter, and it must therefore be assessed as submitted at this stage. Whilst the proposal is for no change to the existing College access, the residential development would result in a significant increase in usage. As set out by the highway officer there would be an increase in conflicting traffic movements, particularly in the mornings when College traffic will be arriving and residential traffic will tend to be leaving the site.

5.11 It is considered that this would result in harm to highway safety and an increased likelihood of queuing at the junction at peak times that would create additional traffic congestion. The proposed access arrangement is therefore unacceptable and contrary to policy BR10 of Borough Wide Development Policies Development Plan Document.

**Design**

5.12 The applicant has submitted an indicative master plan and a supporting Design Code that includes some sketch elevations. These details are entirely indicative at this stage because the details of layout and appearance are reserved matters that would be considered under a subsequent application.

5.13 In addition parameter plans have been submitted that set out the maximum parameters for the proposed development in relation to matters including building heights, density, and the proximity of the development to the Country Park boundary. These are for determination at this stage.

5.14 In relation to building heights a maximum of two storeys (7.7m) is proposed for the southern half of the site that borders the Country Park, with up to three storeys (10.5m) in the northern half adjacent to the existing College buildings. The exception to this is a portion of the site at its east end fronting Dagenham Road which would be up to three storeys in height (10.5m) across the full width including the part that adjoins the Country Park.

5.15 These parameters would ensure space for a landscaped buffer between the development and the Country Park, and would minimise heights adjacent to the park, with the 3 storey elements situated adjacent to the existing College buildings. The proposed 3 storey element to the east is very well screened from the parkland by extensive tree cover in this area and also fronts onto the urban environment of Dagenham Road. Taking account of the above factors the proposed parameters are considered appropriate and acceptable in the event that the principle and quantity of the proposed development is agreed.

5.16 Whilst the master plan is indicative, it is considered that a design and layout of the character proposed may be acceptable and could provide a good quality and pleasant environment for future occupiers. The submitted Design Code, as
requested by the GLA, is also considered acceptable, and the imposition of a condition requiring adherence to this Code would help to secure the design quality of the details that would need to be submitted and approved under a reserved matters application.

5.17 With regard to trees, there is a row of trees alongside the northern boundary of the existing College car park, and some trees and shrubs along the eastern boundary of the site fronting Dagenham Road. A number of these trees are protected by a Tree Preservation Order.

5.18 In addition there are smaller relatively immature trees situated within the existing car park in a landscaping strip between car parking rows. Within the area to the south of the car park there are some landscaped bunds comprising a mixture of shrubs and self seeded small trees, and along parts of the southern boundary of the site there are self seeded trees and shrubs of variable density. None of these are subject to a Tree Preservation Order.

5.19 It is proposed that all except two of the northern boundary trees are retained, and all of the eastern boundary trees. It would also be possible to retain existing trees of adequate quality on the southern boundary and to enhance planting in this area.

5.20 The majority of the trees within the existing car park, and those growing on the landscaped area to the south of the car park would need to be removed to facilitate the development.

5.21 There is sufficient space within the development to plant a greater quantity of replacement trees, and the arboricultural officer has confirmed that the best of the existing trees at the site would be retained and has no objections to the proposed development. The proposed development is therefore considered acceptable in this respect.

5.22 Landscaping is a reserved matter for future consideration. However, if planning permission is granted a planning condition can be imposed requiring the retention of the two tree groups referred to above.

5.23 The appearance of the site from the surrounding Green Belt land will be considered in the section titled ‘Green Belt’ below.

Residential amenity

5.24 The indicative layout of the site shows that it would be possible to design a scheme that would provide rear gardens for each dwelling that would meet the minimum areas specified by policy BP5 of the Borough Wide Development Policies Development Plan Document.

5.25 Internally each dwelling would be required to meet the space and storage standards set out within the London Plan and the ‘nationally described space standard’.

5.26 In relation to accessibility 10% of homes across the site would be required to be constructed to wheelchair adaptable standards (M4(3) of the Building Regulations), with the remaining 90% to constructed to an accessible and adaptable standard. 
(M4(2) of the Building Regulations – similar to the former Lifetime Homes Standards).

5.27 A children’s play space would also be required in accordance with the London Plan. There is space within the site for such provision. It is also proposed that a direct pedestrian link could be provided between the development and the country park which would be of benefit to the residential amenity of future occupiers.

5.28 The submitted parameter plans demonstrate that at the proposed density and quantity of development it would be possible to ensure an acceptable standard or residential amenity for future occupiers that would be in accordance with policy.

5.29 The details of the plot and internal layouts of the proposed dwellings, and the other matters referred to above, would be considered and secured under a future reserved matters application.

**Environmental Sustainability**

5.30 The proposed energy strategy comprises enhanced building fabric and roof mounted solar photovoltaic panels in order to provide a reduction in carbon emissions of 35% over the minimum requirements of the 2013 Building Regulations.

5.31 The submitted flood risk assessment proposes a Sustainable Drainage System (SUDS) that is designed to contain surface water drainage within the site through the use of underground storage tanks beneath the landscaped areas. This has been designed to limit surface water run-off from the site to that which would be equivalent to a green field site in accordance with London Plan policy.

5.32 A desk top archaeological appraisal has been submitted and Historic England has advised that there is no requirement for further surveys at the site due to its limited archaeological potential.

5.33 The submitted ecology appraisal recommends that habitat surveys are carried out. It states that a reptile survey of the site is required; a badger survey of the site and the land within 30 metres of its boundary; and a survey of habitat suitability for great crested newts in respect of all ponds within 500 metres of the site. If suitable great crested newt breeding ponds are identified with connecting habitat to the site then a full great crested newt survey of the site would be required. These habitat surveys would ensure the protection of species if present, and mitigation of any habitat loss.

5.34 It would also be a condition requirement that vegetation and tree clearance should only take place outside the bird nesting season.

5.35 Landscaping is a reserved matter but the site provides plenty of opportunities for tree planting within the proposed development which would both enhance the visual appearance and contribute to bio-diversity. In addition there is a strip of land to the south of the proposed residential development, and to the south and west of the proposed replacement car park where the planting of native species in order to enhance bio-diversity could be secured by condition.

5.36 A proportion of the car parking spaces within the development would be required to be fitted with electric vehicle charging points in accordance with London Plan policy.
This would help to encourage the uptake of electric cars and consequent reductions in carbon emissions.

Green Belt/ Principle of the Development

5.37 The key Green Belt test (as set out within the NPPF) is whether the benefits that would arise from the proposed development would clearly outweigh the harm that is by definition caused by ‘inappropriate development’ and any other Green Belt harm that would be caused. Only where the benefits clearly outweigh the harm should planning permission be granted.

5.38 Members will need to reach a view on this matter, and clearly the weight to be apportioned to the relative harm and benefits is subjective.

5.39 There is no specific policy guidance on what may be considered very special circumstances. However, there are examples where ‘enabling development’, that is development which is designed to provide funds for some other planning related improvement, has been accepted as very special circumstances.

5.40 By way of example, the most recent case of major residential development within the Green Belt being permitted in the Borough, is that of Collier Row Road where Members of DCB granted planning permission in 2012 for the erection of 88 five bedroom detached houses, four bedroom farm manager's house and the enlargement and enhancement of the community farm including the erection of new farm buildings. The application was subsequently referred to the Mayor of London who did not call in the application.

5.41 In that case part of the development value arising from the scheme is to be utilised to fund the community farm improvements. However, there were also other factors considered to contribute to the very special circumstances including the zero carbon nature of the development, and the opportunity to improve visual appearance and upgrade despoiled land. Crucially, the site was already partially developed, though to a less intense scale than the approved scheme.

5.42 In relation to the College application in assessing the case for very special circumstances it is considered that there are three main questions that need to be asked:

A) Is the proposed development the only realistic way to fund the proposed refurbishment of D Block?

5.43 The case presented by the College on this aspect will be considered in more detail below.

B) If yes, does the independent review of the applicant's development appraisal confirm the need for the proposed scale of development of up to 125 dwellings?

5.44 An independent review of the applicants’ submitted development viability appraisal has been procured by the Council and the findings will be set out below.
C) If so, does the harm caused by these 125 dwellings and replacement car park outweigh the benefits of the refurbishment of D Block, or do the benefits of the refurbishment of D Block, outweigh the harm to the Green Belt?

5.45 The case for the benefits as presented by the College will be set out, followed by an assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the Green Belt.

A) Is the development the only option to enable the D Block refurbishment?

5.46 The College has made the case that the proposed development is the only option available to enable the D Block refurbishment, and its comments are summarised below.

5.47 The College states, within its submitted reports, and in a letter to the Council from the Acting Principal, that it has reviewed all potential funding streams for D Block including grants, loans, commercial sponsorship, and disposal of assets, and concluded that the only viable option is the sale of some of its commercial assets.

5.48 The College has applied for and successfully won a bid for partial grant funding of the project from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The amount of the grant funding awarded is £3,073,000 and the total value of the D Block project is £9,590,000 leaving a shortfall in funding of £6,517,000. Release of the grant funding is dependent on the College raising the remainder of the sum required.

5.49 The College notes that within the last 5 years it has carried out significant work to enhance its estate, including construction of the Jubilee building, and the Green Technology Centre. These works have cost approximately £20m that was funding by the College's reserves, a Skills Funding Agency grant, and a loan from Barclays Bank.

5.50 Having used its own cash reserves to support this work, the College claims that it has no realisable funds beyond those required for day to day operations of the establishment. It retains £1.8 million in cash reserves but this is required to support the everyday running of the College, and furthermore this level of reserves is part of the borrowing terms of its lender Barclays Bank.

5.51 In her letter, the Acting Principal says that neither she, the College's Chief Financial Officer, nor the Board of Governors, would consider further borrowing to be a financially prudent course of action, and that this would put the College at risk through unsustainable borrowings.

5.52 The existing borrowing, the report states, amounted to £5 million, loan lengths are on average 25 years, and currently repayment of that loan amounts to 13% of College revenue. In relation to the proposed D Block works the applicant states that taking on a further loan is considered a risky alternative, noting that since the LEP bid was submitted Further Education funding has become more limited following two rounds of financial cuts to the Skills Funding Agency.

5.53 It states that the College is one of the few which is financially secure, and that the future of the College depends on its ability to maintain this secure profile, and to maintain a suitable level of financial reserves.
5.54 The College states that it has sought to encourage commercial sponsorship and works closely with employers to create and maintain courses that lead to employment success. It states that given the lack of any significant sponsorship commitment to date it would not be financially prudent to rely on such income to fund borrowing for the major capital programme proposed, and that such income would be variable in nature and therefore unreliable.

5.55 The College concludes that given the lack of available Government funding, and in order to meet the educational needs in a meaningful time frame with the required degree of certainty, the only option is the disposal of its under used land for residential development.

5.56 In concluding her letter, the Acting Principal states “the proposed residential development can be accommodated without any detriment to the continuing operation of the College. We are passionate about improving the lives of our students, many of whom are residents of Barking and Dagenham, and we also care greatly about our community in Rush Green.”

5.57 In support of its case the College has submitted written confirmation of its successful LEP bid, and a copy of its annual report and financial statements for the years ended 31 July 2014, and 31 July 2015. These documents confirm the financial position of the College as set out above.

5.58 Having considered the College’s arguments and reviewed the supporting evidence, it is agreed that, at least for the foreseeable future, the proposed residential development, supplemented by the LEP grant, is the only way in which the D Block works can reasonably be funded.

B) Does the independent review justify the need for 125 homes?

5.59 In the event that the principle is agreed that the proposed residential development within the Green Belt is acceptable in order to fund D Block, based upon very special circumstances; is the scale of the proposed development necessary?

5.60 In other words could the D Block refurbishment be funded by a smaller scale of development within the Green Belt of less than 125 residential units, in order to ensure that the Green Belt impact is minimised.

5.61 The Council appointed Chartered Surveyors, Lambeth Smith Hampton (LSH), to conduct an independent review of the applicant’s viability appraisal.

5.62 The consultants were asked to answer the following key questions:

- Is the stated cost to refurbish Block D sound?
- Is the stated cost to provide replacement car parking sound?
- Are the quoted sales values, development costs, and consequent residual land value sound and reasonable?
- Is the proposed quantity of residential development the minimum required in order to enable the refurbishment work?
5.63 In response LSH has prepared a detailed report the conclusions of which are summarised below.

5.64 The consultant agreed that the cost quoted for the replacement car parking was reasonable, but considered that the sales values of the housing would be likely to be somewhat higher than that assessed by the applicants’ consultant, Iceni.

5.65 This increased value could result in a potential surplus in the scheme finances of £2 million. That is because it would result in a higher residual land value. The LSH assessment was that the residual land value would be in the region of £10.6 million.

5.66 However, LSH considered that the applicant’s assessment of the cost to refurbish Block D was light, and that certain elements of the build cost would be likely to be greater, including the need for a contingency.

5.67 LSH’s conclusion, with the information available, was that these increased costs could add up to £2.5 million to the costs of the refurbishment work. This would wipe out any surplus achieved on the land sale.

5.68 In response to these comments Iceni has replied. It agrees that the potential house sales would be higher than originally quoted which would have the effect of increasing the residual land value. It also agrees that the likely cost to refurbish Block D would be higher than originally quoted though not to the degree suggested by LSH. It provides relatively detailed costings for the refurbishment work prepared by the quantity surveying firm that has worked on other buildings within the site.

5.69 It concludes with a revised estimate of the residual value of the site of £10.4 million. This taken together with the LEP funding, minus the cost of the new car park would provide a potential fund of £11.5 million, a figure sufficient to fund the revised estimate for the Block D refurbishment work of £11.5 million with a small surplus.

5.70 This means that there is broad agreement by the two consultants about the cost of the land: £10.6 million versus £10.4 million; and regarding the cost of the refurbishment.

5.71 Iceni’s response has been put to the Council’s consultant LSH who have confirmed that they are broadly in agreement with its conclusions.

5.72 It is accepted by both consultants that the actual sales value of the site cannot be predicted precisely because this will depend on the level of interest from developers when the site is marketed; and the amount offered will be influenced by the developer’s own assessment of development cost and sales values.

5.73 However, given the detailed assessment by two sets of consultants that has arrived at a similar figure, it seems likely that the assessed residual land value is about right. In the event that a higher value is achieved it would be essential to ensure as part of a Section 106 agreement that this funding is invested in the College estate, and in the event that a somewhat lower figure was achieved it is advised that it would be possible for the College to make some minor cost savings to the Block D works through value engineering and minimising the costs of external landscaping for example.
Having regard to these findings, in conclusion it is considered that the independent review of the viability appraisal does justify the need for 125 homes in order to fund the Block D refurbishment.

C) Does the Green Belt harm justify the benefits?

In order to analyse this question the planning benefits of the proposed development and the planning costs will be set out below.

Benefits

The College is already good and serves the community well, it sees the Block D refurbishment as the last piece in the transformation of the site.

The College is a high performing college with around 12,500 students comprising 3,000 young people and 9,000 adults. It is a major employer within the Borough.

Over the past five years the site has been significantly enhanced through investments in the extension and refurbishment of existing buildings and the provision of enhanced learning facilities such as the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Centre, and the 'iCreate@BDC' a digital creative hub for students and local micro businesses.

The College wishes to consolidate its position by transforming D Block into a Centre for Advanced Technologies providing enhanced facilities and bespoke accommodation for advanced level technologies.

The existing D Block has narrow corridors and low ceilings giving an oppressive feel to the building. The classrooms are small and do not meet current needs. The building has poor insulation making it expensive to heat and difficult to cool during the summer. The roof regularly needs repairs to prevent leaks. The College do not consider the long term retention of the building in its current form to be a viable option.

The proposals for the refurbishment include rejuvenation of the external façade to provide better insulation and an improved appearance; internal enhancements – including wider brighter corridors, higher ceilings, and break out areas; and the provision of state of the art equipment and facilities to ensure high quality training.

The proposal would result in improved educational facilities at the College. The College is one of London’s leading providers of apprenticeship training, including for local businesses. The provision of the new facility would therefore make a contribution to local economic development in addition to providing new training opportunities and skills for local residents.

These objectives fit well with the Council’s priorities of encouraging civic pride, enabling social responsibility, and growing the Borough; and the conclusions of the Council’s independent Growth Commission report ‘No one left behind’.

In terms of benefits to local Rush Green residents the College already provides public access to a number of its facilities such as its library, and membership of its fitness centre. It is proposed that the enhanced D Block would accommodate a
larger learning resource centre and additional IT services that would be made available to the local community.

5.85 The applicant has also stated that the proposed development would make a contribution towards meeting housing needs within the Borough. Whilst this is true no affordable housing would be provided, the contribution would be modest, and given that the Borough has extensive areas of land allocated for housing, this would not be a reason to justify the release of Green Belt land.

5.86 In terms of securing the funds that would arise from the proposed development a Section 106 agreement would be required. This would ring fence the sales value of the development land to ensure that it is utilised for the D Block refurbishment, and the re-location of the College car park.

5.87 Details of the heads of terms of such a Section 106 agreement have not been proposed by the applicant or discussed in detail. It is suggested that such a legal agreement would require a provision to monitor the costs of the D Block refurbishment, and to ensure that any surplus is utilised for educational improvements at the Rush Green campus.

5.88 It considered that the agreement should require that the sale and subsequent construction of the D Block refurbishment takes place within an agreed timescale. It would also be necessary to ensure that in the event of a significant delay a revised viability assessment could be requested in order to take account of any changes to market conditions including the construction costs of the D Block refurbishment and the value of the residential enabling development.

5.89 It would also be considered advisable that the legal agreement should ensure that the residential development cannot be completed before the D Block works are commenced; or that the D Block works should be commenced prior to an agreed stage within the residential development.

**Costs/ Harm**

5.90 Inappropriate development must, by definition, be considered harmful to the Green Belt as stated at paragraph 87 of the NPPF, and re-iterated by policy 7.16 of the London Plan, and policy CM3 of the Borough’s Core Strategy. The development would therefore harm the Green Belt for this reason.

5.91 Such development is defined as harmful because it would tend to conflict with the five purposes of the Green Belt, as defined by paragraph 80 of the NPPF, which are:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
5.92 The proposed development would result in a substantial encroachment of the built-up area into open land which, with the exception of the existing car park, is undeveloped.

5.93 With the exception of the fourth bullet point related to historic towns, the proposal would conflict with each of the purposes of the Green Belt.

5.94 It is also necessary to consider in more detail the nature and extent of the impact of the proposed development on the Green Belt.

5.95 The Green Belt land that would be developed is private land within the control and ownership of the College. Therefore there is no general public access to this land, though it does provide some recreational space that can be utilised by students based at the College. For the most part its purpose appears to be to serve as a green buffer to the country park.

5.96 The fact that there is not public access to the land does not diminish its contribution to the Green Belt with reference to the 5 purposes set out above.

5.97 A proportion of the land, as mentioned above, is already developed, providing the main car park for the site, though this takes up less than half the proposed development site. The development of this car park within the Green Belt was also ‘inappropriate development’. However, clearly the development of buildings on the site would have a much greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt, in comparison with the existing surface level car park which, whilst being an urban feature, does not adversely affect openness in the same manner. Openness is one of the essential characteristics of the Green Belt defined by the NPPF.

5.98 In relation to the Green Belt purpose of preventing urban areas merging into one another, the gap between the south-west corner of the complex of College buildings and the closest urban area to the south-west of the site (houses in Bell Farm Avenue) is 350 metres. If the proposed development was carried out the proposed houses would extend by approximately 100m to the south of the existing College building, thereby reducing this gap between built up areas to 250m, which equates to a 29% reduction.

5.99 The applicant has submitted a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that includes a series of photographs of the site of the proposed development, taken from various vantage points within the Green Belt, both from the country park to the south and from Central Park to the west of the site. These demonstrate that the site is well screened by existing trees sited alongside the site boundaries to the south and west and that the development would not be prominent from these longer range views including views from Eastbrookend Country Park to the south of the site, and from Central Park to the west of the site. From some of the selected viewpoints the development site would not be visible due to the topography.

5.100 The photographs within the submitted document were taken during the summer months with the trees in full leaf. The tree screening will be less effective during the winter months when the trees have shed their leaves, though the trees would continue to have some screening affect.
5.101 The perimeter of the site for the proposed replacement car park has a particularly mature and thick tree screen to its north, west, and south sides, and to its east would be the proposed residential development. The southern boundary of the proposed residential site is less well screened, with the trees being less mature and smaller in this area, and in places there are relatively wide gaps between the trees.

5.102 The land within the country park to the south of the site is undulating. From the boundary of the site with the country park going south, the land rises for the first 100 metres or so, to a tree and bush covered ridge, whence the land inclines back downwards to the south. This results in the existing College buildings and the site of the proposed residential development not being visible in longer range views from the south, or being only partially visible depending on the exact point of view. The tree cover contributes to this screening effect.

5.103 However, the part of the country park immediately adjacent to the boundary of the site, would have a relatively unimpeded view of the proposed development. This area is used for informal recreation and dog walking and has a number of well trodden paths.

5.104 Presently the College buildings can be viewed from this area, but this is mainly the top of the buildings, and the existing trees, open space, and landscaping on which the proposed development would take place, partially screen the built development and provide a green visual buffer between the country park and the College.

5.105 The proposal would result in two storey housing being placed along the majority of this boundary with the park, with one block of three storey flats to the eastern end of this boundary. The indicative master plan (though siting is a reserved matter so this could change) shows 13 houses adjacent to this southern boundary and the flank elevation of the three storey flat block.

5.106 The indicative master plan shows the buildings along the southern boundary of the site being set back from the boundary by between 2m and 8m. In addition between the south boundary of the planning application site boundary, and the fence line between the College site and the country park there is a further strip of land with a width of between 7m and 13m.

5.107 The applicant has stated that this land has the potential to provide a landscaped buffer of tree, shrub and hedgerow planting that would help to screen the buildings from the country park to the south. Following a review of land titles it appears that this strip of land is owned by the Council although it lies on the College side of the fence line between the College and the Country Park. In this case landscaping could be secured through a Section 106 agreement.

5.108 On the basis of the indicative layout submitted this would result in the buildings on the south side of the site being sited between 9m and 17m from the physical park boundary.

5.109 The applicant has also suggested that the Council could impose a planning condition stating that buildings on the southern boundary of the site must have a minimum set back from the boundary with the country park. This is true, but it would be necessary to demonstrate that this could be achieved without conflicting with an acceptable layout for the 125 residential units proposed.
5.110 The proposed landscaping along the southern boundary would provide a degree of screening and help to soften the transition between the urban development and the open semi-rural character of the country park. However, due to the lie of the land referred to above, the houses would be a prominent feature in the landscape, and bring the urban development closer towards the country park. The scheme would, of course, also require street lighting and the houses would themselves be lit after dark and this would also have some impact on the country park environment.

5.111 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment includes a photomontage showing the potential appearance of the houses viewed from the northern end of the country park from a viewpoint close to the south boundary of the site. This confirms that the houses would be prominent in the landscape as viewed from this area, and result in a built up appearance in an area that is currently has a semi-natural green and open appearance.

5.112 With regard to the flat block this would have greater prominence due to its height, though it is adjacent to an area within the park of dense trees and shrubs that would appear to provide a screening effect particularly in longer range views. Nevertheless, it is possible to walk alongside the northern edge of the park adjacent to the boundary in this location and from that area the building would clearly be visible and very prominent.

5.113 The proposed three storey flat blocks would have a frontage facing Dagenham Road, and would be set well back from the road, approximately following the building line of the existing College buildings. Additional tree planting is proposed for the landscaped area that would be provided to the front of the building.

5.114 These flats would be the most visible part of the proposed development and would be viewed from Dagenham Road. Arguably this part of the scheme would have the greatest impact on the openness of the Green Belt due to its height. However, the two proposed flat blocks would face onto the main road and would be opposite a three storey block of flats on the other side of Dagenham Road, and would also be seen in the context of the existing College frontage. This element of the development would also adversely affect the openness of the Green Belt in this location, but would not have a particularly urbanising affect due to the existing context of this part of the site.

Conclusion

5.115 With regard to the concern raised by some objectors about the potential impact of the development on social infrastructure, the development would result in a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) being paid to the Council. This funding is for the purpose of helping to mitigate the impact of development and can be utilised for a number of purposes including community facilities.

5.116 With regard to education provision, locally a new primary school is being constructed at Eastbrook School, together with substantial expansion of the existing secondary school.
5.117 Leaving aside the Green Belt issue it is considered that the proposed development is acceptable in other respects and would be able to provide a satisfactory design and layout.

5.118 Therefore the acceptability of this development rests on whether very special circumstances exist to allow this inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will only exist if the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is outweighed by other considerations. Paragraph 88 of the NPPF states that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt.

5.119 Officers consider that the proposed residential development, supplemented by the LEP grant, is the only way in which the D Block works can reasonably be funded and that the independent review of the viability appraisal does justify the need for 125 homes in order to generate sufficient land value to fund the Block D refurbishment.

5.120 In terms of benefits the new D Block would be transformed into a Centre of Advanced Technologies providing enhanced facilities to the benefit of College students, indirectly it would be advantageous to some local businesses and it would potentially contribute to local economic development.

5.121 The College has an east London-wide catchment with approximately 50% of students being residents of this Borough. The College therefore provides a wider sub-regional facility.

5.122 If the facility is not provided at the Rush Green campus there is a clear dis-benefit, to the College and those who would make use of such a facility. The College state their intention is to allow local residents to utilise IT facilities and the learning centre within the proposed refurbished building. This is advantageous but the College already provides the local community access to some College facilities such as the library, and it is has not been evidenced that there is any shortage of such community facilities within this area.

5.123 The improvements to the College would be significant in the context of the College site and would clearly benefit students and users of the new facility. The College also state that there are wider benefits to the local economy, for example the College provides the learning centre for apprentices working for local businesses. This may potentially contribute to local economic development but this impact is difficult to predict or measure precisely. In contrast the impact on the Green Belt is significant and tangible and its impact would be felt in the immediate environment of Rush Green and the country park.

5.124 The Green Belt development that would be required to achieve the benefits would be harmful by definition. However the need to achieve a set land value to fund the college improvements has resulted in a form of development which in terms of the extent of Green Belt land it covers, its scale, massing and layout makes little concession to its Green Belt location and surroundings. Therefore the harm is considerable. The proposed homes would be a prominent feature in the landscape, particularly to the south and would cause a significant impact on the openness and the purposes of the Green Belt. In response to consultation there has been a groundswell of local opinion against the proposed development. The proposed
development would cause significant visual harm to the Green Belt, would result in a loss of openness, and would conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt designation. It is recognised that the evaluation of the very special circumstances presented is subjective and Members will need to weigh the benefits versus the costs of the development. However it is the view of officers that the benefits of the development do not outweigh its harm to the Green Belt.

5.126 Consequently there are not very special circumstances that would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt that would be caused by the proposed residential development and therefore planning permission should be refused in accordance with paragraph 87 of the NPPF.

Background Papers


- Local Plan Policy

  Policy CM1 General Principles for Development
  Policy CM2 Managing Housing Growth
  Policy CM3 Green Belt and Public Open Spaces
  Policy CR1 Climate Change and Environmental Management
  Policy CR2 Preserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment
  Policy CR4 Flood Management
  Policy CC1 Family Housing
  Policy CC2 Social Infrastructure to Meet Community Needs
  Policy CC3 Achieving Community Benefits through Developer Contributions
  Policy CP3 High Quality Built Environment
  Policy BR2 Energy and On-Site Renewables
  Policy BR3 Greening the Urban Environment
  Policy BR4 Water Resource Management
  Policy BR5 Contaminated Land
  Policy BR7 Open Space (Quality and Quantity)
  Policy BR9 Parking
  Policy BR10 Sustainable Transport
  Policy BR11 Walking and Cycling
  Policy BC7 Crime Prevention
  Policy BP3 Archaeology
  Policy BP5 External Amenity Space
  Policy BP8 Protecting Residential Amenity
  Policy BP10 Housing Density
  Policy BP11 Urban Design

- London Plan Policy

  Policy 3.5 Quality and design of housing developments
  Policy 3.6 Children and young people’s play and informal recreation facilities
  Policy 3.8 Housing choice
Policy 5.2 Minimising carbon dioxide emissions
Policy 5.7 Renewable energy
Policy 5.11 Green roofs and development site environs
Policy 5.12 Flood risk management
Policy 5.13 Sustainable drainage
Policy 5.21 Contaminated land
Policy 6.9 Cycling
Policy 6.13 Parking
Policy 7.3 Designing out crime
Policy 7.16 Green Belt
Policy 8.3 Community infrastructure levy

London Plan: Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance 2016

- National Policy

  National Planning Policy Framework
  National Planning Practice Guidance