

South Marston School Planning Application

The expansion of South Marston Primary School is to serve the residents of the expanded South Marston village – other new schools will be built to serve developments south of the A420 and at Rowborough. The proposals for tripling the size of the school and use of part of the existing Recreation Ground land are entirely in line with the South Marston Neighbourhood Plan which received overwhelming support at a public vote in the parish in 2016.

The application now recognises that the village expansion will deliver safe routes for walking and cycling, and avoid unnecessary traffic on village roads. It is not perfect, but recent changes to the plans as a result of Parish Council input have delivered significant improvements. The shift to walking and cycling to school as the preferred option for most residents in South Marston relies on having access to school through the school fence gates on the Recreation Ground boundary. The connections to these via the Bellway ‘hotel’ site are now part of the plans. We are promised ‘managed growth’ in pace with housing occupation to avoid overloading by out-of-catchment pupils who need to be transported by car.

The Parish Council remains concerned about:

- The timing and build process. Our information from the main South Marston developers is that having places available by September 2023 is at least 12 months too early, and likely to increase pressure to take out-of-catchment pupils in the early years.
- The re-routing of public footpaths across the Recreation Ground – the proposal in the planning application is unacceptable to the Parish Council and the alternative route ‘under consideration’ is the only one that would remove our objection.
- The plans deal satisfactorily with alleviating flooding on the proposed site, but currently prevent the existing drainage of the pitches on the Recreation Ground feeding into the ditches parallel to Old Vicarage Lane.
- The provision of formal hard play surfaces remains below government guidance. Although the impression is given that 2 netball courts are provided, these appear to be only 60% of the required size for competitive school matches.
- The capacity of covered cycle stores has been increased to 40. This is unlikely to be adequate and we would like to see this increased further.

There are a number of minor points regarding fencing and access for maintenance vehicles onto the Recreation Ground that need to be ironed out in detailed negotiations under the planning process. The proposed single storey buildings involve the use of several different coloured materials, which, on the pictorial representations, appear muted and could be acceptable. We are concerned to know that this ‘muting’ is a true representation.

We will be asking for conditions to any planning permission to cover several of the points made above.