

UTT/1952/11/FUL (GREAT HALLINGBURY)
(referred to Members at Officers' discretion)

PROPOSAL: Erection of classroom block

LOCATION: Howe Green House School, Great Hallingbury

APPLICANT: Howe Green House School

AGENT: Hawkins Brown

GRID REFERENCE: TL 509-187

EXPIRY DATE: 21 November 2011

CASE OFFICER: Mr C Theobald

APPLICATION TYPE: Minor

1.0 NOTATION

1.1 Outside Development Limits.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF SITE

- 2.1 The application site is situated within attractive countryside to the immediate south of Ladywell Drive and comprises a group of buildings which together make up Howe Green House School, a small independent junior and early years school established in 1987, and the attached Acorns nursery within a site area of 3.2 hectares.
- 2.2 Various buildings on the site have been refurbished and converted for educational use over the years, including the main school house (Howe Green House), a Grade II listed two storey building with later additions, and a smaller former two storey dwelling with modern single storey side extension situated to the rear and used by the nursery. A modern single storey school hall building (The Bayford Building) designed in the local vernacular style and built in 1997 lies on the eastern side of the main school house, whilst an unassuming modular classroom is situated opposite the hall along the road frontage.
- 2.3 The school house, the school hall, another educational building and the modular classroom unit together overlook a school quadrangle lawn which opens out onto the school car park, access road and playing fields on its eastern side beyond. The site is screened from the road frontage by a group of trees of high amenity value (TPO/77/53), whilst Howe Green Moat Barns and Moat Farm Cottages are located opposite the site to the immediate south.

3.0 PROPOSAL

- 3.1 This application relates to the erection of a new two storey classroom building for the school's junior department comprising 4 (No.) classrooms across both storeys with WC's and stores areas. The building would measure 19.7 metres wide by 8.7 metres long (171sqm), would have a high eaves line of 5.3 metres and a height to the ridge of 7 metres and would be sited at the eastern end of the lawn quadrangle. The building would incorporate a contemporary design having a Sedum (green) ridged roof, whilst the walls would be clad with cedar shingles and louvered vertical ventilation panels. The building would also incorporate a centrally positioned and recessed staircase and covered deck feature with glazed canopy over to the frontage (north) elevation and vertically emphasised ground to eaves height windows. The building has been modified since

receipt of the application and following a meeting between the school's architects and the case officer whereby it has been turned 90 ° on its axis as shown on the amended site layout drawings (1309-101A and 1309-102A) whereby its frontage elevation now faces north onto the lawn rather than facing directly through to the main listed school building from the car park as originally proposed.

- 3.2 Whilst this proposal qualifies as a Minor Development application, it is considered by Officers that it is appropriate to refer the application to Members for their consideration of the matter given the site's rural location and the proposed contemporary design of the classroom building within the setting and grounds of a Grade II listed building, particularly in light of the design advice received from the Conservation Officer in her consultation response (see below).

4.0 APPLICANTS CASE

- 4.1 A detailed Design and Access Statement has been submitted with the application, which incorporates a design brief for the proposed new school building. A summary of the statement is as follows:

- The school has now reached a point where it has grown to its maximum size and wishes to consolidate its accommodation to provide the best facilities for its pupils,
- A review of existing facilities was conducted following an ISI inspection in 2005 which identified the need to house the junior classrooms in one location with the Head of Junior Years and to improve the resultant decanted accommodation for ICT and Library use;
- The proposal is to provide replacement accommodation to enable the existing quantum of pupil numbers at Howe Green House School to have better and more appropriate classroom space provision;
- The proposal would help support the survival of the school as an existing user at this location;
- The current portacabin has been in use by the school for over ten years. It is located adjacent to the main school building and has been consistently maintained by the school to a level which allows its continued use as a key part of school life. Owing to its location, the portacabin is currently used extensively as a secure "early morning drop off" and "After school care" facility". It is also used during the school day as a music practice room. At present, the school anticipates that the portacabin will be serviceable for at least the next 5 year period. This is reasonable given the good condition of the building;
- Howe Green House School is committed to maintaining its good relationship with its neighbours and the local community and has kept the community abreast of its appraisals, including the current application proposal.

- 4.2 A statement of need has been included in the D & A Statement, which reads as follows;

"The new classroom building will allow a wider range of teaching styles to enable all of the junior classes to be housed in the same learning environment. The current Junior classrooms are only barely adequate with consistently full classroom sizes of 20 pupils. The class spaces vacated by the Junior children within the existing school building will allow the school to improve provision for our ICT suite to house 20 workstations, enough for one per child (the existing room only allows for 10 workstations). The relocation of the ICT suite would in turn enhance the space for the teaching of Art, Design and Technology in the existing buildings. Current library provision would also be improved as the current library is small and restricts the space and how it could best be used as a resource. The ICT suite would benefit from being alongside the library to form an Information and Resources facility. The relocation of classes would also afford appropriate space for an improved visitors' reception area. A further benefit would be to provide more space for the teaching of class music".

4.3 In addition to the above, a letter in support of the new classroom block proposal has been submitted by the School Headmaster in which it is stated that the proposed facility would improve the existing facilities available to enable the school to maintain its position in a competitive market whilst at the same time not seeking to increase pupil numbers.

4.4 Additional information has been received from the architects in respect of the revised siting of the classroom building following a Council/applicant site meeting where it is stated that;

"In terms of the revisions to the scheme, the only amendment is the siting of the classroom block. It has been orientated such that the vista from the school grounds towards the listed school building remains clear and uninterrupted. The repositioning of the building also ensures that the building is "hidden" by the existing trees and hedges along the perimeter of the school grounds. This reduces any potential impact to both residential neighbours to the south-east and to the adjacent road".

4.5 A detailed Phase 1 and Ecological Protected Species Survey Report has been submitted with the application. This states that the site footprint has a very low ecological value and that the development would have no impact upon any protected species provided that sufficient measures are taken during construction phase to ensure total protection of the outstanding example of a mature English (Pedunculate) Oak located immediately south-east of the proposed development location. The report adds that none of the adjacent trees show a high potential for supporting bat roosts and that there is the opportunity to improve bio-diversity through the development process, including bat boxes and nesting boxes.

5.0 RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

5.1 This school site has an extensive and evolving planning history from the 1980s onwards, which includes planning approvals for a demountable classroom (1993), an extension to a ground floor classroom (1994), the erection of a purpose built school hall (1995), the construction of a car park and sports facilities (1995), the change of use from agricultural land to school playing fields (1997), extensions to the nursery buildings (2002) and alterations to the existing access road to form a one-way internal loop system (2008). Preliminary enquiry submitted in 2011 in respect of proposed new classroom building when the Council advised the school that need had to be demonstrated for the new facility given the site's rural location and that sensitivity had to be given regarding the building's siting and design in view of the adjacent Grade II listed building (Howe Green House). That response now forms the basis of the current application.

6.0 POLICIES

6.1 National Policies

- Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development
- Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment
- Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
- Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation
- Planning Policy Guidance 24: Planning and Noise

6.2 East of England Plan (Revised May 2008)

- EEP – SS1: Achieving Sustainable Development
- EEP - ENV3: Biodiversity
- EEP - ENV6: The Historic Environment
- EEP – ENV7: Quality in the Built Environment
- EEP – ENG1: Carbon Dioxide Emissions & Energy Performance

6.3 **Essex Replacement Structure Plan 2001**

- None.

6.4 **Uttlesford District Local Plan 2005**

- ULP Policy S7: The Countryside
- ULP Policy GEN2: Design
- ULP Policy GEN7: Nature Conservation
- ULP Policy ENV2: Development affecting Listed Buildings
- ULP Policy ENV3: Open Spaces and Trees
- ULP Policy ENV10: Noise Sensitive Development and Disturbance from Aircraft
- ULP Policy ENV15: Renewable Energy

6.5 **Supplementary Planning Guidance**

- SPD4 Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

7.0 **PARISH COUNCIL COMMENTS**

- 7.1 The Parish Council strongly supports this proposal (original drawings). Re-notified on revised building siting drawings - further comments to be reported.

8.0 **CONSULTATIONS**

Thames Water:

- 8.1 No objections regarding sewerage infrastructure.

Essex County Council Ecology Officer:

- 8.2 The Phase 1 Habitat Survey report advises that little bio-diversity would be affected by the proposal. The key constraint is a mature oak. However, no protected species should be adversely affected providing that the oak is protected. A BS5837 survey should be undertaken by an arboriculturalist prior to any construction to advise on how to protect the oak. Other vegetation may also be adversely affected by the proposed path and this should be minimised. The applicant should also look at ways of improving the school grounds for bio-diversity as advised in the report's recommendations and in accordance with the Natural Environment and Rural Community Act 2008, including;
- An intensive green roof to the proposed building to support locally native wild flowers and/or an eco-classroom
 - Replacing the Rhododendron shrub with native trees and shrubs
 - Erection of bird and bat boxes
 - Working with the school to ensure children fully understand what bio-diversity provisions have been put in place and why and how they should be managed.

Specialist Advice on Historic Buildings and Conservation:

- 8.3 Howe Green House is a timber framed structure of early C16 origins, probably historically forming a centre to Howe Green Farm, the extensive traditional outbuildings which still exist on the other side of the road and now converted to residential use. The original farmhouse has been extensively added to and converted to a school with a number of additional school facilities located in various outbuildings. The more recent new buildings are the new large school hall and the rather unsightly portacabin classroom.
- 8.4 The proposal subject of this application is to form a substantial freestanding two storey building providing further classroom facilities. The new building would be located within the open area of grassland containing a selection of mature trees. The principle of the

formation of another building at this site in this location is a planning matter which would be considered on balance in the context of the specific need in this instance. I am concerned, however, with the design choice made. The listed building itself and all the supportive later buildings (apart from the unsightly portacabin) as well as the converted farm buildings in the vicinity are architecturally of traditional character which respond well to local vernacular. The new classrooms building would be a monolithic block with two bulky blind walls and a sedum roof typified by its untraditional shallow pitch form which consequently would be practically invisible from ground level. These features, together with the two long elevations with substantial areas of glazing, would give the structure an air of prominence affecting the primacy of the principle listed building.

- 8.5 I consider that a single storey building of appropriate length, under a traditionally pitched roof and a footprint embracing the unfortunate portacabin, would be a more appropriate way forward in this instance.

Landscape Officer:

- 8.6 The revised siting for the proposed classroom block would be closer to a preserved group of trees situated half way along the site frontage (TPO/77/53). The preserved trees include a large Oak tree specimen in the south-east corner of the site. The revised site plan shows that a smaller specimen tree would be located on the western flank elevation of the proposed building. The available details show that it is unlikely that any preserved trees or their root systems would be damaged by the proposal were suitable tree safeguards to be put in place to secure their wellbeing. In the circumstances, no landscape objections are raised regarding the building's revised siting providing that an appropriate tree safeguarding condition is imposed on any planning permission granted.

9.0 REPRESENTATIONS

- 9.1 None received. Neighbour notification period expired 19 December 2011. Neighbours re-notified on revised building siting - further comments to be reported. Site Notice expired 29 December 2011. Advertisement expired 5 January 2012.

10.0 APPRAISAL

- 10.1 The issues to consider in the determination of this application are:

- A Countryside Protection / Design / Listed Building Protection (PPS1, PPS5, PPS7, ULP Policies S7, GEN2, ENV2, ENV15 and SPD "Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy");
- B Whether the proposal would be harmful to protected species (PPS9 and ULP Policy GEN7);
- C Whether the proposal would have an adverse impact on preserved trees (ULP Policy ENV3);

A) Countryside Protection / Design / Listed Building Protection

- 10.2 The application site is located within a rural area adjacent to an Area of Historic Parkland as shown on the local plan Proposals Map and close to the boundary with the Metropolitan Green Belt. The local landscape comprises level or gently undulating land interspersed with scattered development with numerous trees. The southern road frontage boundary of the site has a grouping of preserved trees, including a large preserved oak tree in the south-eastern corner of the site.
- 10.3 ULP Policy S7 states that the countryside beyond the green belt will be protected for its own sake and that planning permission will only be granted for development that needs to take place there or is appropriate to a rural area. The policy adds that there will be strict controls on new building and that development will only be permitted if its appearance

protects or enhances the particular character of the part of the countryside within which it is set or there are special reasons why the development in the form proposed needs to be there.

- 10.4 The site comprises an established independent early years school and affiliated nursery where planning permissions have been granted in the past for building conversions, extensions and new build, most notably the school hall building in the 1990's (The Bayford Hall). The school is therefore established at this rural location. The school has made the case that the proposed new classroom building is required to rationalise existing school activities at the site and to improve junior classroom facilities without increasing existing pupil numbers. It is considered from this presentation that the school has demonstrated a need for the new building and that this element of Policy S7 has been complied with.
- 10.5 It therefore remains to be considered whether the proposal would protect the countryside for its own sake. As previously mentioned, the local character of the area comprises an attractive local landscape, with the Ladywell Estate situated to the north-east of the site. The original siting of the building was proposed for the head of the school quadrangle, although it was considered by officers that the long side of the building would have represented a "hard edge" to the building grouping when viewed from the east particularly given its two storey nature, which has resulted in a negotiated position whereby the building has been turned 90° to be parallel with the site's southern boundary resulting in less of the building mass being visible from outside of the site. The building would also be partially screened from the road frontage by the existing boundary tree line and other foliage and it is considered that the proposed building would not have an adverse effect on the character of the area by reason of this revised siting in terms of countryside protection.
- 10.6 The proposal building represents a contemporary rather than traditional design, incorporating as it does a sedum (green) roof and cedar shingle walls. The applicant has purposely chosen this design to maximise energy efficiency and performance to reduce school running costs whilst at the same time seeking to favour a more eco-friendly school building on the site in the spirit of sustainability. The proposal would generally conform to ULP Policy GEN2 where it would have a bias towards energy efficiency, although it is arguable whether it meets criterion GEN2 a) where it is stated that the design of development shall be compatible with the scale, form, layout, appearance and materials of surrounding buildings. However, the applicant has argued that there is a mixture of building styles on the site with no single design thread running between them.
- 10.7 The Council's Conservation Officer has commented in contrast that she has concerns over the choice of design adopted for the building where she has remarked that the listed school house and supportive later buildings (with the exception of the unsightly portacabin used as the drop off centre and music rooms) are architecturally of traditional character which responds well to local vernacular (most notable The Bayford Building) and where the proposed classroom building by comparison would have an untraditional character and which would affect the primacy of the principle listed building due to its overall size and proximity to the listed building. Her own stated preference would be a suitably designed and scaled single storey building of traditional appearance to echo the main school house and the school hall.
- 10.8 It therefore remains to be assessed whether the proposed building would have such a material impact on the setting of the listed building to warrant a refusal of planning permission under ULP Policy ENV2 given these two conflicting design positions. Whilst the comments of the Conservation Officer are duly noted, the proposal building would not exceed the ridge height of the adjacent school hall (Bayford Building) and it is considered that an exceptional case can be made in this instance where the building would represent

an innovative and sustainable design incorporating the opportunity for green roof bio-enhancement as a building contrast to the existing buildings on the site.

B) Whether the proposal would be harmful to protected species

- 10.9 The Phase I Habitat Report submitted with the application has concluded that the potential impact of the proposal on protected species and existing bio-diversity at the site would be negligible. The Essex County Council Ecology Officer has raised no objections to the proposal subject to suitable bio-diversity enhancement measures being conditioned. No objections are therefore raised to the proposal under ULP Policy GEN7 subject to appropriate safeguarding and mitigation conditions.

C) Whether the proposal would have an adverse impact on preserved trees / existing open space

- 10.10 The proposed building would be sited close to a preserved oak tree, which, according to the bio-diversity report is borderline to being an ancient tree and would also be sited within close proximity of other group preserved trees. The Council's Landscape Officer has not raised any objections to the proposal providing that close attention is given to tree protection works during construction stage of the building and in this respect would not be contrary to ULP Policy ENV3.

11.0 CONCLUSION

- 11.1 The following is a summary of the main reasons for the recommendation:

- The proposed building would provide additional junior classroom facilities for this independent school and would rationalise existing school activities without increasing pupil roll numbers where the need for the new facility has been demonstrated;
- The building has been re-sited from its originally more exposed position to a more protected position on the site so as to reduce its visual impact within the local countryside setting;
- The building is of a contemporary and sustainable design incorporating a green roof. Specialist advice received from the Conservation Officer is that the building would not be of an appropriate design and scale for the setting of the listed school house and should have a more local vernacular design and appearance such as that of the adjacent Bayford Building where this design approach was previously adopted. However, it is considered on balance that the building represents an innovative and contrasting style to the existing buildings on the site where it would introduce an interesting sustainable design feature within this education setting;
- The building would not have a harmful impact on protected species where there is the potential for enhanced bio-diversity;
- The revised siting is considered acceptable providing that appropriate tree protection measures are put in place to protect the group of preserved tree which lie in close proximity to the proposed building.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 12.1 It is recommended that planning permission be granted for the proposal subject to suitable conditions.

CONDITIONS:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this decision.
REASON: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans as set out in the Schedule.
REASON: For the avoidance of doubt as to the nature of the development hereby permitted, to ensure development is carried out in accordance with the approved application details and to ensure that the development is carried out with the minimum harm to the local environment in accordance with the Policies of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005) as shown in the Schedule of Policies.

3. Before development commences full details of both hard and soft landscape works shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Subsequently, these works shall be carried out as approved. The landscaping details to be submitted shall include:-

a) proposed finished levels

b) means of enclosure

c) pedestrian access and circulation areas

d) hard surfacing, other hard landscape features and materials

e) existing trees, hedges or other soft features to be retained

f) planting plans, including specifications of species, sizes, planting centres, number and percentage mix

g) details of planting or features to be provided to enhance the value of the development for biodiversity and wildlife

h) details of siting and timing of all construction activities to avoid harm to all nature conservation features

i) location of service runs

j) management and maintenance details

REASON: The landscaping of this site is required in order to protect and enhance the existing visual character of the area and to reduce the visual and environmental impacts of the development hereby permitted in accordance with Policies GEN2, GEN7, GEN8, ENV3 and ENV8 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

4. All hard and soft landscape works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details. All planting, seeding or turfing and soil preparation comprised in the above details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the buildings, the completion of the development, or in agreed phases whichever is the sooner, and any plants which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the local planning authority gives written consent to any variation. All landscape works shall be carried out in accordance with the guidance contained in British Standards, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

REASON: To ensure proper implementation of the agreed landscape details in the interest of the amenity value of the development in accordance with Policies GEN2, GEN7, ENV3 and ENV8 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

5. All existing trees within the vicinity of the proposed building, including those preserved by an existing Tree Preservation Order, shall be suitably protected in accordance with a tree

protection scheme in accordance with BS5837 "Trees in Relation to Construction", details of which shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted and which shall include a proper assessment of the root system of the identified mature Pendunculate Oak by a qualified arboriculturalist which is considered to be of high amenity value. The approved scheme shall be implemented prior to and for the duration of construction work of the development hereby permitted.

REASON: To ensure the protection of trees within the site and in the interests of visual amenity in accordance with Policies GEN2, GEN7, ENV3 and ENV8 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

6. The design for the building hereby permitted shall include an intensive green roof to support natural habitat creation as identified in the applicant's Design and Access Statement prepared by Hawkins Brown dated February 2012 as revised.
REASON: In the interests of sustainable development and bio-diversity in accordance with Policies GEN2 and GEN7 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005)
7. The proposal shall incorporate all other identified bio-diversity measures as set out in the recommendations and accompanying appendices of the Phase 1 and Ecological Protected Species Survey report prepared by MKA Ecology Limited submitted in August 2011 as included within the applicant's Design and Access Statement prepared by Hawkins Brown dated February 2012 as revised.
REASON: In the interests of bio-diversity enhancement in accordance with Policy GEN7 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).
8. Before commencement of the development hereby permitted, details of surface water drainage works shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Subsequently the drainage shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details. Before these details are submitted an assessment shall be carried out of the potential for disposing of surface water by means of a sustainable drainage system in accordance with the principles set out in Annex F of PPS25 (or any subsequent version), and the results of the assessment provided to the local planning authority. Where a sustainable drainage scheme is to be provided, the submitted details shall:
 - i. Provide information about the design storm period and intensity, the method employed to delay and control the surface water discharged from the site and the measures taken to prevent pollution of the receiving groundwater and/or surface waters;
 - ii. Include a timetable for its implementation; and
 - iii. Provide a management and maintenance plan for the lifetime of the development which shall include the arrangements for adoption by any public authority or statutory undertaker and any other arrangements to secure the operation of the scheme throughout its lifetime.REASON: To control the risk of flooding to the development and adjoining land in accordance with Policies GEN2 and GEN3 Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).
9. Before development commences, samples of materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be implemented using the approved materials. Subsequently, the approved materials shall not be changed without the prior written consent of the local planning authority.

REASON: To ensure a satisfactory standard of development in the interests of visual amenity in accordance with Policies GEN2 and S7 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

10. Prior to commencement of the development hereby permitted, details of noise insulation measures for the proposed building shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the

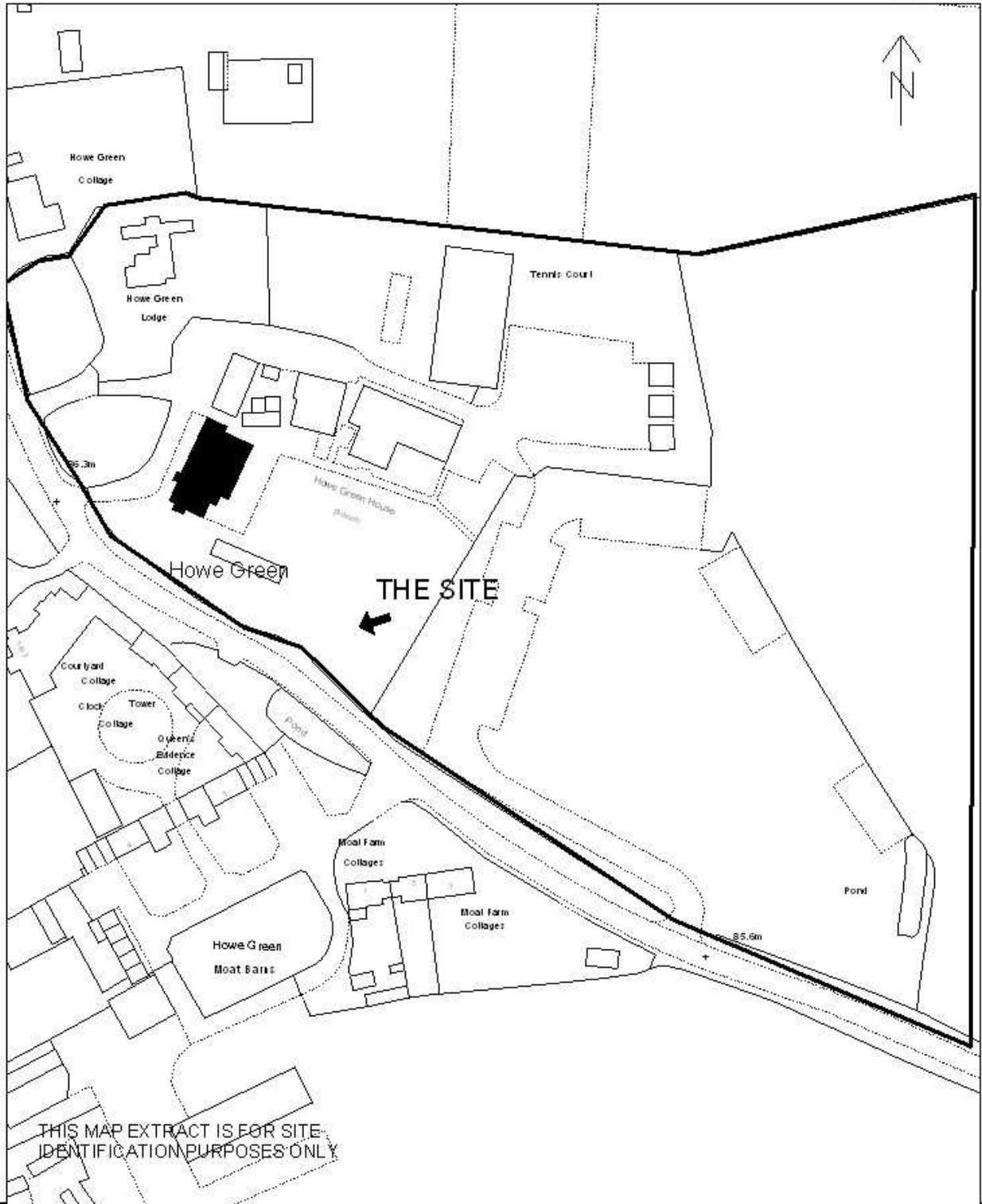
local planning authority. The building shall not be occupied until it has been constructed incorporating the sound insulation measures as set out in the approved details.

REASON: The site lies within the area seriously affected by noise from aircraft using Stansted Airport in accordance with Policy ENV10 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

11. Prior to commencement of the development hereby permitted, details of any external lighting proposed for the building and leading to it shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority and shall be implemented as approved.
REASON: To ensure the development does not adversely affect the rural character of the area in accordance with Policies GEN2, GEN5 and S7 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).
12. The development as designed, specified and built shall achieve the equivalent of a BREEAM 'very good' rating, namely the building emissions rate (BER) achieved shall be at least 25% lower than the target emissions rate (TER) as calculated by the Building Regulations 2006 Part L2A SBEM methodology, and will incorporate other water saving and environmental features agreed with the planning authority.

The applicant will provide the planning authority with a design SBEM rating of the proposed development carried out by an accredited assessor before work commences on-site, as well as details of water saving and other environmental features. Within four weeks following its completion, the applicant will provide a SBEM rating of the as-built building and details of water saving and other environmental features incorporated.

REASON: In the interests of the promotion of sustainable forms of development and construction in accordance with Policy GEN2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).



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