

## **SITE 36P**

### **Main Issues**

- 1) Whether there is a demonstrable need for a primary and/or a secondary school at Canada Water, and whether that need is sufficiently certain to justify the allocation of land for education purposes;
- 2) if so, whether a primary and/or a secondary school would be better promoted other than at Site 36P, either at Canada Water or elsewhere in the Borough;
- 3) whether the loss of existing uses at Site 36P (i.e. European Bakeries Ltd, DataRun and Boots the Chemists Ltd) would seriously detract from the employment opportunities of the locality;

### **Inspector's Reasoning and Conclusions**

1. The Latest Proposed Change is for a Class D1 Use for this land, with Education as the priority.
2. The making of projections is an inexact science, and doing so for school places is no exception. It should be based upon the most recent information and subject to constant review. The danger, however, is that decisions will be unduly delayed while yet more up to date information is awaited. Another difficulty is that it is highly unlikely that any site will meet all relevant criteria, in whichever documents they are found. That applies to Site 36P.
3. The Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Primary Review Commission Report (January 2005) notes the importance of building on school successes in raising standards for all students and the need to ensure that any proposals consider the role of the school in its community. The Commission Membership was wide-ranging and impressive, including a former Director of Education for the London Borough of Lewisham, a local Primary School (PS) Headteacher and a representative of the black and ethnic minority community. I do not doubt the thoroughness of its approach and the soundness of its aims and approach, much of which in my opinion is also relevant to the provision of secondary education.
4. The Education Topic Paper Table 3.3 shows a 17.4% surplus of primary school places in the Surrey Docks/Rotherhithe area in 2008, but the most recent information concerning primary provision is in the Commission Report. Amongst its main points is the conclusion that the existing surplus of spaces will be taken up within the next few years and that there will be a deficit in reception places from 2007 leading to an overall deficit from 2010. There is no breakdown, however, between the need likely to arise from the natural growth in the existing population at Canada Water and that from the residential regeneration schemes. Given the pressures for housing in Southwark and South East England in general, there is no good reason to expect that present delays and *the hurdles to surmount* in these schemes will continue wholly and

indefinitely. Therefore, bearing in mind the reasonable allowance of a 5% margin in the number of projected places required, I consider that the Council's current estimates are realistic and convincing.

5. These estimates of primary provision show that from 2007 in the Rotherhithe planning area there will be a need for at least one additional one-form entry (FE) to meet a deficit of 33 places, 4FE by 2010 and 5FE by 2014. Indeed, as not all the potential population yield (4228-5858) from the expected scale of residential development at Canada Water has been included in the projections, these may be conservative estimates. Thus, even though there is likely to be spare capacity in existing schools during the next few years, the Council is right to look ahead towards the end of the plan period and provide for the additional need for places that should reasonably be expected.
6. Despite the caution that should be applied to projections, an important consideration that the Commission Report acknowledges, I regard these figures as realistic. Woodland Views Limited says that the research undertaken by the Council has been neither thorough nor transparent. Be that as it may, I conclude that the combination of the Council's work and the rigorous examination of all relevant considerations during 3 days of the Inquiry has resulted in a robust and creditable assessment. Present information provides a sound foundation upon which to proceed.
7. Prospects for the expansion of existing primary schools were examined at the Inquiry, and I can add little to the Council's convincing points. Possibly the Albion PS and the Peter Hill PS could be expanded, as the Commission Report accepts, each one providing another one FE. In view of the proposed regeneration at Canada Water, however, it notes that *the intention should therefore also be that a site is secured within the Canada Water regeneration area for a new primary school*. The Pilgrims Way PS is, in my judgement, too far to the south and hence inconveniently located for young children living at and near Canada Water. St John's PS is apparently too small to be expanded. St Joseph's PS could be expanded only with the agreement of the Roman Catholic Diocese which I am given to understand prefers one FE schools and would support increasing capacity only if there were a need to accommodate Catholic children.
8. On current information, I consider that land should be allocated at Canada Water for a primary school. I say that with some caution, mainly because the Council accepts in its letter of 13 January 2005 that *the requirement for a primary school is not so clearly established* as for a secondary school and stated at the Inquiry that there was a 70-80% likelihood of the need for a primary school. It could take its first pupils in 2012/2013. The Council agrees that *it is too early to conclude now that the Council should spend money on acquiring a site for a primary school at Canada Water*. In these circumstances, it should re-assess the potential to expand existing primary schools in and near Canada Water, monitor its estimates in the light of any new information, review the components and extent of the need for another primary school and, if need be, modify the UDP accordingly.
9. A broadly similar picture emerges with regard to the need for secondary provision. Year 7 is the year of entry to secondary school, and any deficit in provision would be especially unfortunate at that stage. The most up-to-date projections are in the

Education Topic Paper. These show that there is likely to be an increasing deficit of secondary school places in the Borough from January 2007, a situation that could be aggravated by a prudent 5% or 10% margin of provision. The estimates show that there will be a Borough-wide need for an additional 9FE in 2010 to meet the expected deficit and to ensure a 5% margin. Even with a current surplus of 29 places at Bacons College, there is no evidence to show that this local school could be sufficiently expanded to accommodate the expected need, even if that were desirable.

10. In 2002/2003 as many as 314 Year 7 pupils living in Southwark attended schools in Lewisham. The Council is seeking to provide some of those pupils with the opportunity to go to schools in their own Borough, and in principle I regard that as a worthy ambition. It could take the need from 9FE to 11-12FE. There is, in any event, a shortage of about 200 places in the northern parts of Lewisham, so there is little foreseeable scope for this Borough to take more of Southwark's pupils, even if that were desirable.
11. The above estimates relate to the entire Borough, and so it is necessary to take especial account of those parts of it where most residential development has taken, and is likely to take, place during and beyond the years to which the projections relate. These are Elephant and Castle, Bermondsey and Canada Water. Significant provision will be made for education at the first 2 localities to take account of the demand for school places likely to arise during the plan period and it is reasonable for the same approach to be taken at Canada Water.
12. The exact number of dwellings at Canada Water at a given time cannot be guaranteed, nor the precise travel-to-learn patterns predicted, but it is reasonable to presume that a substantial amount of residential development will take place there during and beyond the plan period and that its role as a good public transport node will enable it to be a focus for the provision of such services as education, and to a wider area. Whilst there is a bus service to Peckham, I am not persuaded that the potential surplus of 184 spaces at the Academy at Peckham would provide a sufficiently convenient and sustainable alternative. Much the same applies to any surplus of spaces at Elephant and castle and Bermondsey.
13. One of the purposes of a development plan is to provide as much certainty as possible that infrastructure will be in place in reasonable time to accommodate the demands likely to be made upon it throughout the plan period which, in this case, is 2016. That general proposition applies to schools, and is not invalidated by any delays in the implementation of planning permissions for residential development as has occurred at, for example, Site 29P.
14. Thus I am persuaded that the need, based upon present information, is sufficiently clear to justify the allocation of land for education purposes. As agreed at the Inquiry, it usually makes sense to locate primary and secondary schools on the same site. I therefore conclude that the need is sufficiently certain to justify the allocation of land at Canada Water for both a primary and a secondary school, and preferably on the same site. It is not enough to rely solely on contributions arising from Section 106 Agreements. The land should be identified for the receipt of those contributions.

15. On the second issue, I accept that Site 36P is not ideally suited for a primary and secondary school. This is mainly owing to its restricted size, about 21,000 sq m compared with the DfES recommended site size of 23,540 sq m for, for example, a 2FE+6FE+VI, and its elongated shape. Its main advantages, however, are its location close to existing and proposed residential areas, its access from a relatively quiet road and its position adjoining the Russia Dock Woodland. This is an attractive and interesting area of public open space which could provide scope for such curricula activities as art and nature studies. In an inner London Borough, this is a very pronounced benefit and I attach a good deal of importance to it. I believe that children should be introduced to the wonders and beauty of nature at as early an age as possible.
16. The Objector suggests other sites and locations. I can see little point in identifying land for these schools other than at Canada Water, in that they should be able conveniently to serve children from the local surroundings. That is particularly true in the case of the primary school. In this context, the site is well located. Conversely, proposed schools at Elephant and Castle, Bermondsey and elsewhere in Southwark should, in principle, provide places for the children living in those areas, rather than those from Canada Water. One reason for this approach is to reduce the need for travelling, especially by car. That is the Council's approach, and I support it.
17. One suggested alternative is a combination of Sites 25P and 28P. Together they are larger than Site 36P, but this implies a site bisected by Surrey Quays Road. A split site would not be an impossible arrangement, although no doubt less practicable in terms of management and the duplication of resources. But my inspections convince me that this is often a busy road, serving as it does much of the residential, employment and commercial parts of Canada Water. The nearby road junction is also busy and, rightly, the prospect of a school or schools sited so close to it is not something likely to find favour amongst parents. The sites are also appreciably further from Russia Dock Woodland, and the time taken for pupils to walk there and back would much reduce the period that could be spent on studies there.
18. These 2 sites are close to Canada Water bus station and the East London and Jubilee Lines station. Good accessibility is an important attribute for a school, but the excellent location of these sites at a public transport interchange with frequent and connecting services to many parts of London and beyond demands that their full potential be realised. I therefore support the Council's view that high density residential schemes should be sought on them. It should be higher than on Site 36P, which is further away from the station, should any residential development ever take place on it. Together, these 2 sites are expected to provide for as many as 2000 dwellings during 2006-2009, and I support that approach.
19. The allocation of these sites for education purposes, either separately or together, would not improve the UDP. Better use should be made of them, in line with national guidance in Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 3 paragraphs 47 and 58 which urge local planning authorities to seek a greater intensity of development at places with good public transport accessibility such as city, town, district and local centres or around major nodes along good quality public transport corridors.

20. Sites 5P and 26P are at some distance from the main proposed residential areas of Canada Water, and less conveniently located with regard to public transport. Although on the Rotherhithe Peninsula, they are not within the regeneration area that includes Site 36P. All things being equal, it makes more sense in land use and regeneration terms to build a new school or schools within, rather than without, such an area.
21. The Objector suggests a Roberts Close/Quebec Way Learning Campus comprising the existing Alfred Salter PS with its open space, a cleared site at the boundary of the Russia Dock Woodland and a 2-storey warehouse uses for offices. Three options are set out and explained. I have little enthusiasm for any of them. They imply encroachment into the School's land, and most unfortunately its nature garden. This, and any other open land taken, could no doubt be replaced. Nevertheless, this natural area is well-used and valued and I accept that it plays a vital part in the school curriculum. There would need to be very good reason indeed for the disruption that would attend this suggestion.
22. My highly useful inspection of the buildings and grounds of this School convinces me of the happy atmosphere that pervades and of a little community at ease with itself. In 2003/2004 there were 147 applications for the 60 Published Admission Number. Even allowing for some multi-applications, the popularity of this School amongst parents comes as no surprise to me. I do not doubt that staff and Governors do a good job and that the children greatly benefit. The Council says that the Governors would be likely to resist the Objector's suggestions, and that is hardly surprising. The harmonious circumstances at the School should be allowed to continue without uncertainty or disruption. In any event, I suspect that most of the advantages that the School might derive from closeness to others could come from the use of Site 36P for education.
23. The Council estimates that some 2340 pupils, aged 3-19 or 7-16, would be placed on what is rightly described as a highly constrained site. The Objector assumes 2040 pupils. Whatever the actual figure and whether or not there would be a sixth form intake, I agree with the Council that the general proposition would *compromise the success of one school to create a very difficult and cramped learning environment for over 2000 pupils in order to build more residential development*. Good management might reduce some pressures and alleviate problems, but I see no good reason for promoting a state of affairs where it would be necessary to deal with such potential drawbacks. Thus, whilst in principle I acknowledge the advantages of co-location and a "learning campus", they should normally be created in accordance with an initial design rather than by addition to, and disruption of, an existing successful school. The advantages claimed for the options, including a square-shaped site, do not outweigh the disadvantages.
24. One of the disadvantages of Site 36P is that buildings and other land are in private ownership and so, in terms of time, it is less deliverable than cleared land like Sites 25P and 28P that the Council owns. Compulsory acquisition is a lengthy process. But its acquisition would not necessarily be more costly if the lost opportunity costs of its other lands are taken into account. The likely lifetime of a school and the need for good quality education in a good environment are important matters. It therefore makes more sense for the best site to be allocated in the UDP rather than less suitably

located, arranged or owned land where a school and/or schools would be on a split site bisected by a busy road. The Objector's suggestions concerning alternative school sites and for a mixed use on Site 36P are possible, but undesirable. Put another way, their adoption would not improve the UDP.

25. The Council's proposals for Site 36P will result in some blighting of the land. But the certainty derived from an allocation, together with the Council's determination to acquire the land, by compulsion if need be, and develop it for the stated purpose, should reduce that blight to a reasonable minimum. These considerations should not thwart a good opportunity for local children.
26. In other circumstances, Site 36P would be suitable for a mixed use and/or residential development. I have no doubt that a well designed scheme benefiting from the closeness of Russia Dock Woodland could be achieved. I conclude elsewhere, however, that the Council should be able to meet the housing requirements of the London Plan. This consideration, as well as the likely need for additional schools in this part of the Borough during the plan period, makes the use of the land for education a better proposition.

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27. I turn now to the third issue concerning the loss of existing uses and jobs at Site 36P. The Objector considers that this land is *not in an appropriate location for continuing employment use nor considered to be required for that purpose at strategic or local level; nor does it have good access to the strategic road network. Redriff Road is primarily a residential distributor.* These are good points, as are the ones about the unsuitability of the height and size of the buildings for warehousing and distribution. Nevertheless, the prospective loss of 100-200 jobs on the land is regrettable even if inevitable, and I urge the Council to assist those concerned with finding alternative premises.

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28. In conclusion, therefore, I endorse the Council's proposals for Site 36P for education use. It would be reasonable, however, for any other suitable use to be permitted on the land in advance of construction starting on a school or schools provided that the remainder was of adequate size and shape for the priority use. I see little need for the employment buffer to which the Notes previously referred.
29. I have taken account of the many other points made in written and oral evidence. These include the shape of Site 36P, alignment and design of buildings, noise, access arrangements and comparative distances to open space of various types. They do not, however, outweigh those considerations that lead to my recommendation.

### **Recommendation**

30. I recommend that, provided that any new information available up to the adoption of the UDP continues to point to the likely need for a primary and secondary school, the UDP be modified in accordance the Southwark Plan (18<sup>th</sup> July 2005).