



DATE VALLEY SCHOOL – extension of operating hours and Saturday use

Application number 18/P1957 July 2018

1. Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage takes an active interest in the future of the Cricket Green Conservation Area and its environs. We are the civic society for this part of Merton and part of the wider civic movement through membership of the national charity Civic Voice. We have been closely involved in the development of the Borough Character Studies, the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and numerous development proposals in the area. We have worked with the London Borough of Merton and our local councillors to produce the Cricket Green Charter which establishes our approach to development and change in the area and has been acknowledged in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Cricket Green (<http://mitchamcricketgreen.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/cricket-green-charter.pdf>). We have also contributed to production of the Merton Heritage Strategy as a member of the Merton Heritage Forum. We are members of The Canons Steering Group delivering a £5m Lottery funded project and also undertake practical projects, organise walks and run Mitcham Heritage Day.
2. Date Valley School is located at one end of a narrow cul de sac with single access in the heart of the Conservation Area. It is in a mixed residential area with a charm and quality which is rare in Merton and needs to be respected. The character of Cricket Green Road is explicitly recognised in the Cricket Green Charter and is currently the focus of investment by Future Merton through the CIL Neighbourhood Fund.
3. In summary our views on this application to extend opening hours to include Saturdays (8am-1pm) and till 7pm on weekday evenings are that it should be refused on the grounds that current traffic, parking and amenity impacts from the school are already unacceptable and not being effectively managed by the school travel plan, and the impacts of the extended hours cannot be adequately mitigated.
4. Date Valley School has had a significant impact since it was set up in Mitcham Court. These impacts are already much greater than anticipated and they are not being adequately managed by the conditions placed on the existing planning consent. It is particularly disappointing that Date Valley School has submitted these proposals without any engagement with local residents, especially as any mitigation plans will only work through effective collaboration between the school and local residents.
5. The problems with access to the school are manifest on a daily basis and include:

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- significant access problems along Cricket Green putting pedestrians (including children going to school) at risk. Cricket Green is a narrow road with limited pavements and is of significant character. It operates as an informal shared space with equal priority for cars and pedestrians and strengthening this shared role is a key objective of the current investment of CIL Neighbourhood Fund monies by Future Merton. The school run is one of the major threats to this
- major parking problems along Cricket Green and in Chatsworth Place, including fly parking, obstruction of residential spaces, flagrant breaches of the school travel plan and illegal parking on private land alongside a failure to enforce the parking restrictions introduced when the School opened. We also have regular reports of verbal abuse being levelled at local residents who challenge drivers in breach of the school travel plan and the police have needed to attend incidents which have arisen

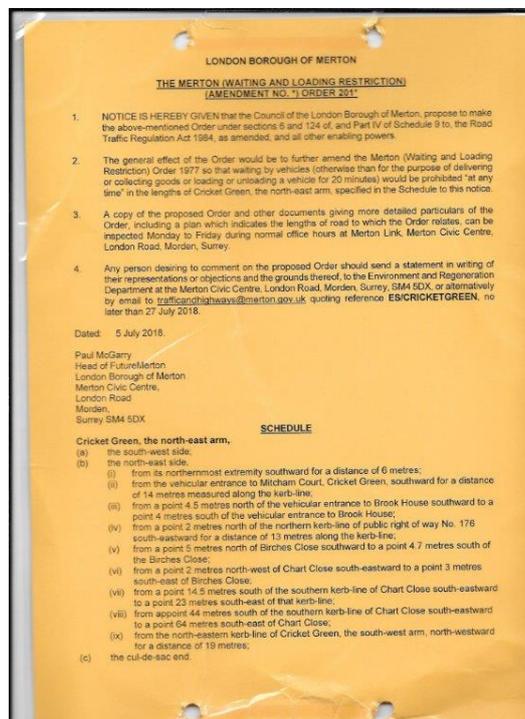


- impact on the registered town green through intensive use of the open space immediately outside the school to the exclusion of other uses and incursions onto the historic cricket ground managed by Mitcham Cricket Club where the game has been played continuously since 1685, longer than anywhere else in the world. The most recent event in July 2018 included passing pedestrians being stopped when walking along Cricket Green Road and being asked to pay an entrance charge to continue their progress along a public street



6. The proposed extension of hours will take these pressures to a new level. The boundary of acceptability has already been crossed and an extension of hours will exacerbate the situation. The development is in conflict with adopted planning policies (including CS2i, CS13a, CS13c, CS18b, CS18d, CS20d and DM EP2) as it will seriously erode the tranquillity and character of this part of the Conservation Area and impact badly on the amenity of local residents. The failure of the travel plan to mitigate even the existing situation means that it is not possible to apply the "agent of change" principle. The application should be refused.

7. We welcomed refusal of similar proposals in 2014. The current proposals do not address the reasons for refusal as the negative impact of the school is already beyond what is acceptable. A six day a week school operation and one which extends later into weekday evenings would be completely unacceptable in terms of its local impact. Since 2014 the problems in Cricket Green Road have deteriorated and we can infer that Merton Council recognises this as it is making further amendments to the Merton (Waiting and Loading Restriction) Order 1977 so as to prohibit waiting by vehicles at any time.



8. Great weight is attached to the role of the school travel plan in addressing the negative impacts from the school. Yet, Merton Council has publicly acknowledged it does not have the staff or resources to monitor school travel plans adequately let alone enforce them. This was confirmed publicly at the Mitcham Community Forum in October 2014. It was also a feature of the discussion at the Planning Applications Committee when it considered the previous application. Officers shared this view at the Mitcham Community Forum in 2014 where it is minuted that there have been "*noticeable problems since the start of the term in September*". The test is whether the impacts can be managed into the long term and a planning condition to achieve this through a school travel plan is clearly not being complied with and proving unenforceable.

9. Government policy on the use of planning conditions is crystal clear – one of the six tests for their use is that they should be enforceable (paragraph 206, National Planning Policy Framework). By the Council's own admission this is not the case with school travel plans and the development at Date Valley School can only be made acceptable with an adequate and enforced travel plan in place.

10. Notwithstanding this objection, we ask that if permission were to be granted subject to a revised school travel plan this would need to specify where its requirements will be strengthened, require engagement of local residents in its preparation and demonstrate that resources to both monitor and enforce it are available. We also ask that any revised school travel plan meets more than bronze accreditation under the STAR Sustainable Travel and Accreditation Scheme. Given the sensitivity of this location and the evident problems with existing levels of use we believe that a much higher accreditation level should be required. This approach should be developed in collaboration with the local community and we should be happy to play our role in supporting this in relation to the existing situation, regardless of future plans.