

Appendix A

The South Woodham Ferrers Town Council wishes to raise the following observations in relation to the preapplication of the Demolition of Existing Chetwood School and construction of a new 102 Place SEND Secondary School.

1. Loss of Grassland Habitat and Ecological Impact

Approximately one third of the existing site currently comprises of an established grass field. This area provides valuable habitat, particularly for reptiles and amphibians. The Council is concerned that the development would result in the loss of this grassland and therefore the displacement or potential reduction of local reptile and amphibian populations.

The site adjoins a designated local nature reserve which is known to be significant for breeding reptiles and amphibians. The ecological relationship between the application site and the adjacent reserve should be carefully considered. The Council would welcome further clarification regarding ecological surveys undertaken, mitigation measures proposed, and how habitat connectivity will be preserved.

Whilst the application references a 10% biodiversity net gain (7.1), the Council notes that biodiversity gain calculations do not necessarily compensate for the loss of established natural grassland habitat. Replacement landscaping, particularly if managed or ornamental in nature, may result in a less species-rich environment compared to the existing semi-natural grassland. The Council therefore seeks reassurance that the biodiversity proposals will deliver genuine ecological enhancement rather than a simplified habitat replacement.

In addition, there is concern regarding the potential loss of mature trees on site. Mature trees contribute significantly to biodiversity, landscape character, and carbon storage. The Council would request confirmation of any trees proposed for removal and justification where loss is unavoidable, alongside details of compensatory planting.

2. Design and Reference to Local Vernacular

Section 6.15 of the application refers to a “metal vernacular” and the use of metal cladding, suggesting that this reflects local character. The Council seeks clarification on this point. It is not immediately evident that metal cladding forms a predominant or traditional element within the surrounding built environment.

The Council would therefore request further evidence demonstrating how the proposed materials reflect the established local vernacular and how the design integrates sensitively with neighbouring properties and the wider character of the area.

3. Compliance with the Neighbourhood Plan and Community Need

The Neighbourhood Plan places emphasis on meeting identified local community needs, including educational provision. While the application references educational use, the Council questions whether the proposal demonstrably meets the specific needs of this town.

There is particular concern regarding the stated catchment area extending across Essex. If the facility primarily serves a wider regional population rather than the immediate local community, this may conflict with the Neighbourhood Plan’s intention to prioritise local provision. The Council requests clarification on:

- The proposed catchment area
- The proportion of anticipated users from within the town
- How the development will specifically address the needs of local residents

The Council considers it important to ensure that community infrastructure is aligned with locally identified need.

4. Loss of Polling Station Venue

The building currently serves as a polling station for the Chetwood and Collingwood wards. The loss of this venue would affect electors across approximately half of the town of South Woodham Ferrers. The Council seeks confirmation of how this statutory function would be accommodated in future and whether a suitable alternative venue has been identified within reasonable proximity to affected residents.

5. Transport, Access and Parking

Although the Council welcomes the inclusion of a designated drop-off zone, there remains significant concern regarding vehicle movements and parking pressures. Given the potential for users to travel from outside the immediate area, there is likely to be an increase in traffic volumes at peak times.

The surrounding road network is already subject to congestion and on-street parking pressure. The Council would therefore request:

- Clarification on how overspill parking will be prevented
- Consideration of safe pedestrian access and road safety implications

Mitigation measures should be clearly defined to minimise disruption to neighbouring residents and businesses.

6. Retention of Memorial Plaque.

The Town Council recognises that the current building includes a commemorative plaque located within the play area, honouring children connected with the former Chetwood School. The plaque is of both historic and community importance.

The Council respectfully requests confirmation that the plaque will be carefully preserved and sensitively incorporated into the new building. Alternatively, if this is not possible, it should be returned to the relevant family in South Woodham Ferrers.