

David Gough-Cooper
 Managing Director
 Cooper Estates Strategic Land Limited
 Claremont House
 65c Main Road
 Longfield
 Kent DA3 7QT



Children Young People &
 Education
 Worrall House
 West Malling
 Kent ME19 4AE

Direct Dial: 03000 414302
 E-mail: ian.watts@kent.gov.uk
 Ask For: Ian Watts
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Dear Mr Gough-Cooper

Education Justification for the Proposed Development on Four Elms Road, Edenbridge

Kent County Council (KCC) Education has considered your proposal to develop land south of Four Elms Road, Edenbridge. We note your proposal to allocate sufficient land for a 4-6FE secondary school on the site.

Kent County Council welcomes this proposal to provide a school site for a number of reasons.

Demand for Places

There is currently and forecasted to continue to be, a significant demand for secondary school places in the Sevenoaks District. For the next intake in September 2021, we are expecting there to be no, or very few, surplus places. This is as a result of gradual increase in the primary school intakes across the whole District, to accommodate new local demand. From the current Kent Commissioning Plan:

Sevenoaks Analysis – Secondary
Year 7 surplus/deficit capacity if no further action is taken

Planning Group name	2019-20 capacity	2019-20 (A)	2020-21 (F)	2021-22 (F)	2022-23 (F)	2023-24 (F)	2024-25 (F)	2025-26 (F)	2026-27 (F)	2026-27 capacity
Sevenoaks and Borough Green Non-Selective	615	-21	-19	-49	-37	-35	-54	-27	-35	585
Dartford and Swanley Non-Selective	1,135	22	-28	-28	-101	-137	-86	-141	-150	1,140
West Kent Selective	1,200	-22	-61	-91	-129	-96	-84	-39	-68	1,145

It should be noted that the table above provides an indication of the position, based on what has been approved. Any new housing, particularly the Four Elms Road development itself will increase the numbers of secondary aged students which will cause the deficit to rise further.

Non Availability of Sites

KCC Education understands that more than 90% of Sevenoaks is metropolitan green belt, and that therefore, land availability is challenging. KCC Education further understands that where there is land available, such as following a 'call for sites' exercise, the District Council must prioritise housing. With new housing comes a need for more school places, both secondary and primary. The difference being that a 2FE Primary School can be accommodated on a site between 1.7 to 2 hectares. A 4FE secondary school site needs more than double that, so the opportunities to identify a site are fewer.

KCC Education therefore considers the offer of a secondary school site to be very helpful to ensure that children in the Edenbridge area have access to a secondary school.

Local Pressures

It is necessary to understand the pressures that impact on Edenbridge secondary provision. Secondary school aged children in Edenbridge have a wide variety of schools available to them. However, all these schools are usually some distance away from their place of residence. Nearly all schools in England operate an oversubscription criterion that measures the straight-line distance between a school and the child's home, with the nearer student likely to be offered the place. Therefore, while an Edenbridge student can try to apply for a Grammar school place, a faith school place or a place in an all-ability school, their straight-line distance may put them at a disadvantage.

This issue affects cross border applications too. Secondary schools in Surrey, East and West Sussex may take Edenbridge students, but we have been notified that places are becoming fewer, due, in part, to those local authorities approving new housing in those areas – so increasing more local demand. Without a new school in Edenbridge, any new students will likely have to travel much further to find a school place.

Sustainability

Notwithstanding the above justifications, KCC Education would highlight the issue of sustainability of a new school.

Although by no means certain, any new school would be more likely to be funded by the Department for Education (DfE). The Department has guidelines on the size of school that it would consider of a size to be financially viable. A 4FE secondary school would have to be carefully planned for the DfE to agree to build and promote. A 6FE secondary school is far more likely to gain approval by the DfE.

The issue is that KCC would need to query whether a 6FE school is going to attract sufficient students to make it financially viable. Edenbridge is a standalone community, and while a new school could offer places to students across West and South West Kent, KCC would need to conduct studies to ascertain whether there is sufficient demand in the short, medium and long term.

The opinion will be linked to an analysis of the number of surplus places, or deficit places, that exist in the schools that traditionally, Edenbridge students apply to, for places. It would appear that currently, there is insufficient demand for a 6FE school, but it is highly likely that this situation will change in the future; particularly following publication and implementation of the Sevenoaks Local Plan. Therefore, the offer to retain the site for school use until 2035, or beyond is very welcome.

Yours sincerely



Ian Watts
Area Education Officer (North)