



24/02765/OUT – Four Elms Road Development

Response to Document (KCC_EDUCATION-3633839)

NEDRA (New Edenbridge District Resident's Association) would like to offer some observations and raise concerns regarding the letter update sent from KCC and uploaded to the planning portal for 24/02765/OUT.

We have identified several issues relating to this update that we believe require urgent clarification and consideration:

1. Parental Preference and Suitability of an All-Ability / Non-Selective School

The proposed new school in Edenbridge is described as an all-ability / non-selective secondary school. However, KCC acknowledges that **parental preference** plays a significant role in school admissions decisions. For example, many parents in Edenbridge and surrounding areas may opt to send their children to grammar or faith-based schools rather than an all-ability school. This would also be true of people outside of Edenbridge.

- **Grammar Schools:** Parents in Edenbridge who value a selective education are likely to continue sending their children to grammar schools outside of Edenbridge. A new non-selective school may not adequately address their educational preferences, reducing its attractiveness and utility for some families.
- **Faith Schools:** Similarly, families seeking faith-based education may bypass the new all-ability school in favour of faith schools in neighbouring areas, impacting projected local demand.
- **The Right to Choose:** The core principle at stake is that parents should have the right to select a school that offers the appropriate academic mix to suit their children's individual needs.

We urge KCC to provide a detailed analysis of how these parental preferences will be accommodated within the proposed school structure. We understand from your document that you have an excellent record of forecasting demand, so you are likely to have the figures to provide this analysis, not just for Edenbridge but for the surrounding areas.

2. Transportation and Environmental Concerns

The document suggests that children from outside Edenbridge would fill the school places. However, **transportation into Edenbridge** from surrounding areas is a significant barrier:

- Edenbridge suffers from **poor public transport connectivity (buses and trains)**, making it impractical for children from nearby villages or towns to access the school without driving.
- Increased reliance on car travel will result in **higher traffic volumes and pollution**, directly contradicting local and national efforts to reduce environmental impact.

We recently responded to the KCC Transportation plan which had little to no Transport infrastructure improvements for Edenbridge planned, so this situation is unlikely to improve in the near future.

Without a comprehensive transportation strategy to support the movement of children from surrounding areas, this proposal risks being impractical as well as environmentally damaging.

3. Uncertainty Surrounding a New School

We are concerned that as the proposed school will be **completely untested**, it is unlikely that parents outside of Edenbridge will send their children to a school with no track record of academic performance, qualified teaching staff, or established reputation. This is compounded by the existing availability of established schools in neighbouring towns.

For Edenbridge residents, while convenience may initially attract some families, the lack of an academic history will still pose a significant deterrent for many. We ask KCC to outline how the new school will mitigate this issue and build trust with parents, especially those from outside the area.

4. Historical Failure of Secondary Provision in Edenbridge

The historical closure of Eden Valley School raises doubts about the viability of another secondary school in Edenbridge:

- What guarantees does KCC offer to ensure that a new school will not face the same fate as Eden Valley?
- What specific lessons have been learned from the failure of the previous school, and how will they inform the planning and operation of this new institution?

Without addressing these questions, the community lacks confidence in the long-term viability of the proposed school.

5. Housing Development Numbers and Viability

We note that the required housing numbers to sustain a 5-form entry (FE) or 6FE school (1475 and 2225 new homes, respectively) align with figures previously shared by KCC representatives, including Christine McInnes, and are **very much tied to the Local Plan, not this specific site**. However:

- The housing trajectory outlined in the document still appears insufficient to meet these targets within a reasonable timeframe.

- This raises concerns about the sustainability of demand for the proposed school.

It is unlikely that surrounding towns will take on much of this housing growth due to their own constraints. This suggests Edenbridge would bear the brunt of these housing requirements, leading to significant overdevelopment and strain on local infrastructure. If the school is to be sustainable, it would rely almost entirely on **substantial housing growth in Edenbridge itself**. This raises further concerns about the scale of development required and its potential impact on the town's infrastructure, environment, and character.

6. Potential Displacement of Edenbridge Children

The statement, *“New housing developments in Sevenoaks will mean that places currently occupied by children traveling from Edenbridge may be taken up by children living in Sevenoaks,”* is highly concerning. Does this imply that Edenbridge children may be displaced from existing schools due to capacity pressures in other parts of the district?

If so, this raises serious equity and access concerns for Edenbridge families, who may face fewer options and increased travel distances for their children's education.

7. Need for a Comprehensive Strategy

To address these issues effectively, we urge KCC to:

- Provide a detailed transport and accessibility plan for Edenbridge to mitigate environmental and logistical challenges.
- Clarify how parental preferences (grammar and faith schools) will influence demand modelling and inform provision planning.
- Demonstrate how lessons from past school closures in Edenbridge will guide the successful establishment and operation of the proposed school.
- Ensure transparency regarding housing and pupil numbers to avoid unrealistic projections that jeopardise the school's sustainability.
- Commit to protecting Edenbridge residents' access to nearby schools, regardless of broader district pressures.

We look forward to a detailed response addressing these concerns and providing assurances to the Edenbridge community.