

Rhian Kanat's Speech to SHaW Public Inquiry 23 November 2018

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I am a local resident and mother of 2 boys aged 3 and 5. You will have heard much, I'm sure about the projected secondary school shortage, and it is a subject I have campaigned on myself as my children will reach secondary school age as the shortfall is predicted to bite. However, I am nonetheless vehemently opposed to a school on this site. The concept of the school itself (health and wellbeing) seems a good one, but it would be much better served on a larger site in a less congested area where it would stand a good chance of becoming a real community asset where parents actually want to send their children. However, it is clear that the current proposal for a 10 storey high rise school with no playing fields on one of the Borough's busiest junction lacks all common sense and no parent would want to send their child to this sort of school, if built.

And this is not only my view, as a candidate in the local elections in May I have had many many conversations with local parents and residents of all ages about the concept of a high rise school on this site and all of them think it a ridiculous idea. We have a petition in opposition to a school of this size on this site with over 400 signatures and growing every day. To give you a flavour of the thoughts of the wider Bromley population on this proposal, many of whom are simply not able to attend inquiries such as this in their working hours, I'd like to read some quotes of comments made in response to a Facebook post alerting residents to this proposal:

David said: "Surely a prime opportunity to take some land to improve the junction and traffic flow? SHORT SIGHTEDNESS AGAIN? Plus a school in an area with such poor air quality from all the buses and cars stationary all day long? Terrible idea"

Frances: "I honestly can't think of a worse place to build a school."

Dylan: "This junction is the worst thing about Bromley, a complete bottleneck for traffic as the only way in and out of the entire south part of Bromley. Adding anything there without sorting the issue is a bad idea but a massive school? Madness"

Laura: "A school with no open space... On a busy junction?? This shouldn't have even got to the point of being discussed!"

Alycia: "1200 pupils, leaving school on such a busy junction, it's just an accident waiting to happen!! Also a building of that height will block the view of the Keston Ridge which I thought wasn't allowed. It's wrong on so many levels!!"

Gita: "Sounds like a horrible experience for the pupils. And imagine what the traffic will be like when combined with the existing Ravensbourne School bottlenecks. Don't forget, also, the impact of that monstrosity at Bromley South (referring to St Marks Square) when people, hotel traffic and cinema traffic are taken into account. Sounds like a nightmare to me."

Veronica: "Horrendous! Just because the Education sector owns the land, doesn't mean they can build any school there let alone one of such proportions. Outrageous."

And this shouldn't be dismissed as self serving nimbyism. These are comments from individuals who care about the town and community they live in and want to see it developed in a sensible way. Anyone who knows this junction well and uses it regularly can instantly see that siting a large school here is a terrible idea and the biggest losers will be the children who attend the school themselves.

If this school is built here then that is the loss of an opportunity to build it on a more suitable site with a larger footprint and cleaner air, allowing playing fields and a far better chance for the school to flourish and become a popular local asset. We need new schools, yes, but not at the expense of common sense and insisting on the best for our children. Bromley is a large Borough and other sites could be made available with concerted effort but that has not happened here. Instead the local community is left with feeling that the ESFA are stuck with a site intended for other purposes (first a primary and then a UTC) which they are now desperately trying to use at any cost rather than be left with an expensive unused asset. What may be convenient for the ESFA will leave a long and difficult legacy for our Borough with congested footways, overcrowded bus stops but worse than that, the loss of the opportunity for the substantive imaginative redevelopment of this junction to promote active travel that is so badly needed.

With the very large developments at St Mark's Square and St Mark's Reach bringing thousands of new homes to the area, the pavements at this junction will become intolerably congested at peak times even without the school and the minor pavement widening proposed by the school scheme will not be sufficient. I speak here as a pedestrian who walks the pavements of this junction every weekday to deliver my children to nursery. I live on the Palace Estate (near to where we are now sat) and walk my children to their nursery on Hayes Road daily

on occasion both at peak morning rush hour 7.45-8.30am and in the evenings at around 5pm. I can speak from experience that the pavements are very congested in the morning peak, with parents with small children walking to local nurseries or to the St Marks primary school often with children on scooters and in buggies; secondary school children heading to Ravensbourne and many many commuters heading to Bromley South station. The pavement on both sides is already very congested and that is even before St Mark's Square has opened and St Mark's Reach has been built, both of which will substantively add to the number of commuters on these footways. The thought of adding 1200 extra school pupils into this mix genuinely fills me with horror and is an accident waiting to happen. The footways adjacent to the proposed school are some of the worst with extremely narrow pavements that are not wide enough to not allow a parent with a buggy to pass a single pedestrian coming the opposite way. I have reviewed the School's drawings to widen the pavements here but this is a marginal improvement only that will go no way near far enough to ease congestion at peak times.

This junction needs substantive wholistic improvements to aid pedestrian access, something I believe was recognised in the 2010 Area Action Plan for Bromley Town. Instead what we are being offered is piecemeal minor improvements by each separate developer that is gaining from developments around this junction, each time feeling like the bare minimum and lacking any comprehensive overriding plan. And this school development will be the final nail in the coffin of any hopes of change to this problematic junction that is so hostile to pedestrians and cyclists and a bottleneck for motorists. We need a much much smaller development on this site that will allow for substantive junction remodelling including making the junction tolerable for pedestrians and cyclists alike. The only way to coax people out of their cars for short journeys in this area is going to be to improve the footways and cycle-paths through this junction. I know many nursery parents who often drive to collect their children – not because it is quicker – with congestion it is often longer by car than by foot, but because the walk around the Westmoreland /Masons Hill junction feels so polluted, hostile and difficult to navigate with small children due to narrow pavements and crowded located bus stops located in narrow areas (the one outside St Marks church being a prime example).

I am sure much has been made of the fact that the site is designated for education use in the draft local plan. And it has been noted that the draft plan went through a public consultation process. However, on this point I would like it acknowledged that there was no meaningful consultation with residents that broke down the 600 page consultation document into easily digestible chunks for members of the public going about their busy lives. So, for example there was no council consultation aimed at local residents to 1 Westmoreland Road that specifically flagged the allocation of this site for a large secondary school. The first that residents became aware, was when the planning application was made and since that point residents have been making their feelings very clear - the public do not want this school. Unfortunately, although perhaps not coincidentally, the planning application was only made after the public consultation for the draft local plan had closed, meaning that residents were prevented from objecting to the designation for this site in the local plan or at least requesting that if it must be used for education, that there are limitations set on the type, size and scale of the development.

I understand that the ESFA originally proposed that the site be used for a primary school, La Fontaine, however when that school was switched from 2 to 3 Forms of Entry they refused to be placed there as the site was too small (not to mention the air pollution). How then is it now deemed suitable for a school twice that size? If the site must now be used for education perhaps use as a UTC (a previous idea for the site) would work better with a more spread out flow of students of an older average age and smaller in number? But not a secondary school for 1260 pupils. It lacks all common sense.

Finally, I want to reiterate that other sites could and should have been made available but no meaningful effort seems to have been made to do so given the convenience of this site already owned by the ESFA, no matter how unsuitable. With other new schools already in the pipeline (Eden Park, Bullers Wood for Boys and Harris Sydenham) time could be bought to find a suitable site for this school elsewhere. I refer you to the Education Background Paper to Bromley's draft local plan which contains an assessment of several possible sites – Kentwood for a 4 Form Entry school, the Civic Centre (where we are now) which has also been identified in the past for a 4 Form Entry school, or the Turpington Lane site which is allocated for education in the draft local plan and has the advantages of being almost 4 times the size of 1 Westmoreland Road and also very close to this school's "sister" institution, Bromley College, allowing for sharing of facilities.

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For all of the reasons outlined above, I respectfully urge you to put common sense over technical arguments and respect the strong views of Bromley residents and refuse permission for a school of this size and scale to be built on this site.