Key Issues –
- Sensitive landscape – Green Belt release to fund school regeneration programme.
- Hybrid application containing both outline and detailed elements.
- Parameter Plans required to set quantum threshold for Outline application assessment purposes.
- Full application assessed on detailed plans.

Purpose of the project
Seashell Trust is a registered charity based in Cheadle Hulme providing education and care facilities for children and young people with a combination of deafness, blindness and autism, attendant with profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Seashell Trust is currently the leading facility of its type in the UK, but significant investment is urgently required to ensure that the charity is able to exist into the future, meet increased demand and extend its national reach to many more families.

Description of the project
• Detailed Application for the demolition of existing ‘Quad’ and ‘Gayton’ buildings and erection of a new school (Use Class D1) with associated kitchen and dining facilities, swimming and hydrotherapy facilities (Use Class D2), infrastructure, drop-off parking, access, landscaping and ancillary works.

• Outline Application (all matters reserved except access) for the erection of up to 325 dwellings (Use Class C3) in northern fields with associated infrastructure, parking, access, landscaping and ancillary works.

• Outline Application (all matters reserved except access) for the demolition of the Chadderton building, Orchard/Wainwright/Hydrotherapy/Care block, Dockray building, part of existing college, 1 Scout Hut and 1 garage block, and erection of new campus facilities (Use Class D1/D2 – Reception, Family Assessment Units, Family Support services/Administration/Training/Storage Facility, Sports Hall and Pavilion) with associated infrastructure, parking, landscaping and ancillary works.
Lessons learnt

Pre-application discussions established that an EIA was required for the development. Subsequently a joint screening and scoping opinion was submitted to the Local Planning Authority (LPA).

The LPA responded within the statutory screening period of 3 weeks stating that the proposed scheme was EIA Development.

The LPA never provided a scoping opinion. After several discussions with them, it seemed that the submission of a joint screening and scoping report confused a number of statutory consultees and subsequently the LPA felt they were never in a position to provide a formal scoping opinion. This came as a surprise because this process has been used numerous times before without any issues, in-fact it normally streamlines the process.

Lessons to learn from this would be to ensure that the LPA explained the process clearly while requesting opinions from statutory consultees.

The EIA process as a whole was not delayed because the assessment was based on the initial scope that had thoroughly reviewed baseline studies to scope issues in and out.

Lessons learnt cont.

Continuous design changes of the school and campus evolved through the process, and this triggered a number of landscape updates. Ecology and especially mitigation for Great Crested Newts played a large part in the layout of the site due to the need to maintain ponds on site and replace the one pond that required removing. This led to an ‘Ecological Zone’ that was set aside from any development and led to the final landscape design being able to incorporate habitat corridors, linking the zone to the wider green infrastructure. This solution was created late in the day, but was influenced by the school and campus design. Subsequently little could be done about this, but it does reminds us that the EIA process needs to be flexible and not a fixed procedure, to incorporate changes throughout the design stage.

The application is currently live and subject to the statutory consultation process.

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