



MAPLE INFANTS' SCHOOL

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PROPOSED EXPANSION OF SASM & MAPLE INFANTS' SCHOOL

SUMMARY

- Maple Infants' School and SASM are moving to three-form entry. This is at the initiative of the Borough. We support the initiative.
- The timetable for the expansion plans has been very compressed. Maple Infants' and SASM first heard of the plans in September 2013.
- The expansion project has moved to the planning application stage and the formal application is on the RBK website.
- The option agreed by SASM and RBK entails a two-storey block overlooking our rear playground area.
- We have had strenuous discussions, both with RBK and SASM, to express our concerns but it now seems likely that the two-storey block will go ahead in its proposed location. (Although we are not privy to any objections that have been or may be lodged with the planning authorities.)
- While we continue to discuss the plans with RBK, we are also working to mitigate any effects of the current plan on our school, both during the duration of the works and permanently.

5th March 2014

Dear parents & carers,

You will be aware from recent newsletters that expansion of both St. Andrew's and St. Mark's (SASM) and Maple Infants' School is being proposed. We have already held two information meetings (on 22nd January and 11th February) to discuss our expansion but, as the deadline for comments on SASM's planning application is fast approaching, I thought I should give you an update now. Of necessity, this is fairly long but your views are urgently required – please see my contact details in the heading above and at the end of this letter. I shall focus below mainly on SASM's proposed expansion, which is planned to start and be completed before any expansion at Maple Infants' begins. (As Maple Infants' project progresses, I shall contact you again to give you details on that and seek your comments.)

Let me start by setting out the sequence of events that has brought us to the current point.

Background

At present, both Maple Infants' School and SASM are what is called “two-form entry” schools. That means that the officially approved permanent capacity entails the entry of two forms of 30 children each in the respective first years of the schools; i.e. 60 children join Maple Infants' in the Reception year and 60 children join SASM at the beginning of Year 3.

HEAD TEACHER: MRS E ROBINSON

In fact, the increase in the school-age population in the Borough (RBK) has led both schools to run “bulge” classes, in addition to the permanent two forms. These additional classes are agreed with RBK but are not permanent.

At Maple we have bulge classes in Year 1 and Year 2 currently; SASM has bulge classes in Year 4 and Year 5. If the demand for school places remains high, and in excess of two-form entry at both schools, at some point this demand needs to be addressed by a formal change to three-form entry. This moves away from the ad hoc nature of bulge classes and allows each school to plan and manage more effectively.

RBK’s proposal for three-form entry at Maple Infants’ & SASM

RBK published its proposal for three-form entry at both schools on its website on 24th January 2014 and there was a four-week period for responses. Please note that this consultation was solely in relation to the expansion to three-form entry; it did not involve the execution of that proposal by means of the construction of new classroom facilities. Any proposal to construct such facilities is the subject of a specific planning application (see below). Our Head Teacher, Liz Robinson, also informed you about the expansion proposal on our website and in her newsletter. The three-form entry proposal and responses to it will be considered formally at the People’s Services Committee on 25th March.

It is important to note that the initiative to expand both schools to three-form entry came from RBK; while both schools have recognised the need for such an expansion, the proposal has to come from the Borough.

Plans for expansion blocks

The current sequence of an expansion proposal and the subsequent planning application for the proposed two-storey classroom block at SASM began on 25th September 2013, when SASM’s governing body was informed by RBK of its intentions. The governing body was asked to consider the proposal at its meeting on 10th October 2013. Initial agreement from the governing body to begin planning was given at that meeting. Detailed planning options for new classroom blocks were shown to members of the governing body shortly before its next meeting on 19th November. They were led to understand that failure to agree on a particular option then would, in all probability, prevent the construction programme from being completed by the 2014 autumn term (and hence remove 30 potential places at SASM for Maple children).

Maple Infants’ School first became involved at its governing body meeting on 9th October 2013, when representatives from RBK gave a presentation on the shortage of class places in the Borough and a representative from Atkins discussed potential solutions for Maple Infants’. Maple governors raised concerns at that meeting about the size of the existing hall, in the context of the proposed increased intake, the quality of the new building and the lack of playground space. At this stage, it had not been decided whether to proceed with building works for Maple and SASM in parallel, i.e. simultaneously, or to build SASM’s block first.

At the next meeting of our governing body, on 4th December, we received a further presentation from RBK and Atkins. This presentation detailed the various options that had been shown to SASM and we continued to discuss options for Maple Infants’ expansion block. Your governors expressed serious misgivings about the preferred SASM option (“option 6”), questioning the

need for a block of that size (8 classrooms) and pointing out that it could significantly reduce the light coming into our rear playground. With respect to our own expansion, we asked that RBK should consider a two-storey option, in order to minimise the loss of playground space. Again at our last meeting, on 5th February, the governing body discussed the expansion plans for both schools.

Away from formal meetings, I have also been in fairly frequent communication with RBK concerning detailed aspects of the expansion plans.

Where we stand now

We are proceeding under the assumption that the RBK's proposal for three-form entry at Maple Infants' and SASM will be accepted.

SASM and RBK have agreed to proceed to the next stage with their preferred option for SASM's expansion block. Accordingly, a planning application was lodged on 20th January 2014 and became valid from 30th January 2014. The full application and supporting documents are shown on RBK's website – please search for application number 14/16033 in the planning applications section of the website. Note that the deadline for responses to the planning application is 12th March 2014. You will almost certainly not have the time or inclination to review all the documentation but I would refer you to the actual plans for the building; these are of a manageable length. The planned block is two storeys high and would be situated behind the boundary at the upper end of our playground. N.B. The plans posted by the RBK on its website erroneously showed some encroachment into our current playground area. Both Liz Robinson and I objected to RBK about this and they have responded with a revised plan, which retains our existing boundary and does not entail any loss of our playground.

The main issues

From our own analysis and feedback from various parents, we have identified the following issues:

1. Does the block need to have 8 classrooms, when the minimum number required to enable three-form entry is 4 classrooms?
2. Does the block need to be located in the proposed position?
3. Will the block negatively affect our playground area? In particular, will it cut out light and cause a very enclosed atmosphere?
4. Which access route will works traffic use and will that also affect our school?
5. Will the extent of SASM's proposed block require use of more than its fair share of the budget allocated to the expansion programme for Maple Infants' and SASM?

I shall address these in the same order:

1. Mrs. Alison Vigurs, Head Teacher of SASM, has set out the case for 8 classrooms in a letter she sent on 28th February to SASM parents (and she has offered to make it available to Maple parents: contact office@sasm.rbksch.org). Her main points are that: there is a sound educational rationale for having all children in a year group on the same floor; extra classrooms would provide space for additional staff to teach literacy and numeracy in small, mixed ability groups; the additional rooms would also be used as resource centres for art and DT, music, science, library and computing. She has offered to share these “extra” rooms with Maple Infants’. I would also note that they would be available to our pupils while we require temporary facilities during our own building programme (currently expected to go ahead in the 2014/15 academic year).
2. We have had repeated, extensive discussions with RBK about this. The main alternatives that we asked them to explore were to site the block either by the boundary adjoining the Freemasons Lodge or at the upper end of SASM’s site. Both of our alternative proposals have been rejected by RBK, on the basis of advice from their internal planning consultants.
3. We think that it is self-evident that the proposed block will have a significant visual impact on our playground. Some of that impact is measurable and a “daylight and sunlight” report has been commissioned to assess it. Among the report’s main conclusions are that our playground will continue to have satisfactory levels of sunlight and “Average Daylight Factors” in our classrooms facing the new block will remain in the recommended range, under the current regulations and DfES recommendations.
4. The access route proposed for works traffic is via St. James’ Road, the slip road alongside Dolphin Close and then through the far side of our playground and into SASM’s playground. This would clearly have a detrimental effect of the playground area in our school and the overall school environment. We sought urgent clarification from RBK and also requested that an alternative access route via the far end of SASM’s site should be investigated. The response we have received from RBK makes it clear that our alternative would not be feasible, due to current Highways regulations and other safety aspects. Given that response, we have engaged in detailed discussions with RBK and its contractors to ensure that the access route through our playground will be securely segregated from the playground. We have been assured that a “banksman” i.e. a traffic controller, will be permanently on site during works hours to control the flow of traffic. Liz Robinson and I still have concerns about exit routes in the case of a fire emergency and she is currently pursuing this point.
5. I am trying to clarify with RBK whether a joint budget exists. In any case, we have been assured that sufficient funds have been allocated to our building programme. I shall continue to pursue this.

Send us your views!

We need your feedback. At the moment, we have only heard from a minority of parents. If you are a member of the “silent majority”, please don’t remain silent - before I respond to the planning application on behalf of the governing body, I would welcome as many comments as possible (either for and against) from you, so that I can represent the broadest cross-section of our parent and carer community. Please give any comments directly to our school office or send an email to my attention at office@maple.rbksch.org

Finally, I would like to close by stressing the common interests of Maple Infants’ School and SASM. Many of your children will move up into SASM in due course, and indeed some of you will already have children at both schools. We have valid concerns about the form and location of the proposed expansion block and we have been pursuing those concerns actively on your behalf. Nevertheless, SASM is our closest neighbour and partner and we are not in a competition or battle with that school. We all recognise that our current sites are not ideal and present serious constraints in many dimensions. At the end of the day, we are all working to ensure the best outcome for your children, as they begin their school careers at Maple Infants’ and then move on to SASM. As a concrete measure, I shall be forming a joint working party with SASM to monitor the building programme and address any issues that arise.

Thank you for bearing with me through a very long account of this project. I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'GWH' in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Geoffrey Hilliard
Chair of Governors