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HARPENDEN URBAN DESIGN GROUP'S REPORT
TO HARPENDEN URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL
ON THE POSSIBLE USE OF FORMER RAILWAY LAND
BETWEEN CRABTREE LANE AND STATION ROAD AS
A SITE FOR SOCIAL BUILDINGS

SITE

1. The area of land is just ^{under} two acres. It is about 350 yards long by 33 yards at its widest point, narrowing to 13 yards at the centre. The cutting varies in depth from 16 feet near the bridges to about four feet at its shallowest point near the centre. It has steeply sloping embankments covered with trees and undergrowth. Apart from the track itself there is practically no level ground.
2. Its wooded character makes the site an attractive setting but it is impossible to put the land to any useful purpose without partially filling it. This would mean the loss of many trees but seems unavoidable if the land is to be used. The quantity of fill which would be required to make the site usable throughout its length will be considerable.

BUILDINGS

3. The number of organisations to be accommodated, and their requirements, are not known to us, but from our initial investigation it appears that two large buildings (or two groups of smaller buildings) and one other smaller building could be fitted comfortably onto the site when filling has taken place. Shared parking between the buildings is suggested (see sketch map).
4. An additional large building (or another group of smaller buildings) might also be provided if the relatively narrow strip of land (coloured pink) was purchased from the owners of gardens in Langdale Avenue. Since many of these gardens are over-long and irregular some owners might be willing to sell off other portions, subject to suitable screening, if it was desired to extend the area for social buildings still further.

ACCESS

5. It is assumed that road widening will take place at the Crabtree Lane bridge and that access to the sewage works land is likely to be provided on the opposite side of the Lane at some time. It is also assumed that widening will be carried out at the Station Road bridge. Even so it would be difficult to provide access for vehicles from Station Road without creating additional traffic hazards. It is therefore suggested that access should be from Crabtree Lane only. Access from any other point in the neighbourhood does not seem possible without demolishing property in Langdale Avenue or Marquis Lane.
6. Pedestrian access should be from both Station Road and Crabtree Lane with a continuous footpath from end to end. It would be advisable to provide at least a minimum of lighting.

7. It is suggested that a drive for vehicles - an improved version of Granary Lane - should be taken through the site from Crabtree Lane. It would be easy to site along the natural avenue of trees on top of the north east bank, at a relatively high level to which it would climb up from the Lane. The top of the bank provides a consolidated base on which to construct the drive. After rising to the top of the bank it would follow the natural fall of the land towards the centre of the site.

As well as the new buildings, this same drive - if extended - could serve the backs of properties in Marquis Lane to provide them with garage access if desired. To encourage careful use the drive should be single lane with passing places at intervals.

8. To avoid urbanising the mainly wooded setting it is suggested the drive should not be curbed like a conventional highway but that the hardcore base should be contained at the edges by a strip concrete foundation and the surface dressed, allowing the edges to naturalise.

DRAINAGE

9. As there is a tendency for fill to pack down very solidly under the earth-moving machines it would be advisable to provide some land drainage to avoid surface water ponding in low lying pockets. The drive at its lowest point near the centre of the site should certainly be drained with gulleys and dumbwells.
10. The existing intercepting soil sewer passes through the land coloured pink and a siphon washout links it with the sewer in Marquis Lane. Presumably the new buildings could be drained into Marquis Lane using the same wayleave.

LANDSCAPE & AMENITY

11. For most of their length the boundaries of the site are well screened by trees or hedges though there is no screening at present to the rear of "Granby Court" gardens in Marquis Lane nor to some of the houses immediately north of them. These will need planting. Otherwise new buildings should not affect the visual amenities of existing residents - especially if they are kept low in relation to the surrounding area.
12. Before any filling takes place a survey of the site will be required to show the position of all trees and groups of saplings etc; and levels should be taken, in order that the filling, when carried out, can be controlled. This would be with the intention of causing the least possible destruction of the existing environment. Trees below the fill line will have to be grubbed out but many mature specimens and clumps of saplings can be saved - particularly towards the tops of the two banks, and also the boundary hedges. In certain instances the fill could be graded to avoid felling a particularly good mature tree or group: this would create a number of attractive dells or hollows which could then be completed by supplementary planting. Other trees and bushes which remain can be filled out by new planting - particularly around the buildings and car parks.

It is suggested that fill should be to within four feet of the top of the north east bank and that it should be dished towards the middle, falling from the north east and rising again to the south west where quite a steep bank should be retained. These would level off towards the centre of the site.

13. The location of any building likely to generate noise ought to be considered carefully in relation to surrounding properties - new and existing. Protection can be engineered by siting the building low and baffling sound with well planted banking.

CONCLUSION

14. The proposal is well worth detailed study and costing on the lines set out above. It will bring into profitable use land which would otherwise be inaccessible and unusable. Although its natural features would be drastically altered by filling, its attractiveness as a site could be restored by skilled landscaping. The supervised control of filling would be important.

The land is not part of the proposed Lea Valley through walk but a through footpath serving the site would also be an amenity to the neighbourhood.

HARPENDEN URBAN DESIGN GROUP

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