

## **SUPPORTING STATEMENT (D and A)**



**For**

### **PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE FROM RESIDENTIAL DWELLING TO SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS DAY SCHOOL, TOGETHER WITH EXTENSIONS, ALTERATIONS & ASSOCIATED EXTERNAL WORKS**

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**For**

**DPS EDUCATION LIMITED**

**PLANNING APPLICATION ISSUE**

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## **Application Summary**

- This application seeks approval for the Change of Use of a dwellinghouse to a School for Children with Special Educational Needs, together with alterations and extensions.
- The school would provide specialist therapeutic care for children with specific educational requirements.
- The site is Dorcette House, Little Lane, Whaplode which is a substantial site located approximately 1 mile south-south-west of the centre of the village of Whaplode.
- The building is not listed, nor is it within a conservation area. The buildings on the site are not believed to have any significant value either historically or architecturally.
- The school will provide specialist therapeutic education and it is key that this is delivered in a setting that is not urban. The siting in a rural location is of significant benefit to the pupils who generally are unable to progress in a standard school setting. Education on the site needs to be able to relate more closely to nature and the natural environment that is found in rural locations.
- The school would employ between 12 and 15 staff, some full time and some part time.
- The anticipated number of students would be 32 and the age range would be 5 to 16 years (i.e. Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4).
- Vehicular access to the site would be via new entrance and exit points from Little Lane along the south boundary. This has been discussed with LCC Highways Department as well as South Holland Internal Drainage Board and it is understood that this is acceptable to all parties. The existing access from Thorpe's Lane would remain in place but use of this would be limited, to a similar level as currently exists. All pupils, the majority of staff, and any ancillary deliveries etc would be via the Little Lane approach.

## **Applicant's Statement**

### **DPS Education Limited**

#### **The case for wishing to locate our proposed Therapeutic school in rural Lincolnshire rather than in an urban settlement area.**

The school and the business will be majority owned and run by a husband -and -wife team who live in the Lincolnshire area and have done so for over 20 years and whose own children attend local schools.

They have worked in SEN schools based in the nearby county of Rutland, for over 20-years, both outstanding educational provisions at the time. We know that there is a growing demand for SEN placements in South Holland, South Kesteven, West Norfolk and North Cambridgeshire. We will provide a therapeutic school that will promote the social, emotional, and educational development of each young person, in an idyllic rural setting, to allow the pupils to embrace the environment and nature to support their learning and individual needs. We will work with local authorities to establish requirements so that we can best support the demand forecast for SEN provision locally.

Therapeutic schools are best situated in rural locations. They provide young people with a peaceful setting allowing them to connect with nature and their surroundings, to bring about a sense of calm so that individual needs can then be met. Having worked in two, highly successful, family run schools in rural Rutland; where the location did not look or feel like a traditional school, but more like a home environment, we saw children thrive educationally and as people. Children felt safe and able to deal with anxieties due to the tranquil setting. This gave them the opportunity to be at one with nature in a peaceful setting surrounded by wildlife. This coupled with our person-centred approach and therapeutic ethos, will aid in a positive change in how young people view themselves which, in turn, will help them engage in education and with the people around them.

The school environment will be a lovely green environment of therapeutic spaces with wildlife, animals, vegetable growing plots and a sensory garden where children will be able to appreciate sustainable living and the wonders that being in a rural setting can offer. The therapeutic value of the outdoors, and joy in watching and learning from birds, animals, trees, insects, and wildflowers is very significant. Also growing their own vegetables to be eaten at mealtimes, will aid in understanding the importance of sustainable living. Having these therapeutic spaces on their doorstep will be utilised for core curriculum learning opportunities.

We will connect with the local community and draw as many staff as possible from the local area. We will shop locally to support small businesses such as butchers, bakers, and farmers to source our produce. We will use connections with local farmers to establish learning opportunities, for our children.

We will network with other local schools to provide shared learning opportunities and offer support where needed, including training opportunities. We will develop our knowledge of the local history with the children, giving them further opportunities to aid in their education. We will support local projects and charities by encouraging our young people and staff to become involved and understand the importance of working together to support the community.

In addition to this, to compliment the therapeutic setting, we will have classroom spaces that will allow the nature to be drawn within the classrooms with picture windows, therapeutic colours, and furnishings to bring the outside in.

We aim for classes to be no bigger than 8 children with a qualified Teacher and teaching assistant. To further support individual needs, we will be working closely with an Educational Psychologist and offer in house therapy to support both children and their families.

The property is already securely fenced and gated with mature trees surrounding the perimeter of a 1.25 acres paddock. This will provide play and recreation space as well as homes for domesticated animals and wildlife.

All children and staff will dine together, and children will often be involved in the preparation, cooking and presentation of the meals provided. Whenever possible, using the food they have helped to nurture and grow or, sourced locally.

We would hope to work closely with South Holland Education Department, Social Services, and local Schools and Colleges. Once established, we will provide training support and placement and employment opportunities to students and adults where appropriate.

It is fairly normal for a child attending an SEN school to travel for up to one hour, either by taxi or in a parent's car, so public transport is rarely utilised. We will therefore be providing a family breakfast to start the day. We intend to re-design the school gateway and entrance and enforce a one-way traffic flow system on the site, for drop-off and pick-up, so queues do not form on Little Lane causing obstruction.

Although Dorcette House is in a rural location, it is easily accessed from the A16, A17, and the A151. It is close to the nearby villages of Whaplode, Moulton, Long Sutton and the Deepings, as well as to Spalding and Holbeach, so will have the potential to provide local employment and easy trading opportunities with local businesses.

We have chosen to focus on South Holland because we believe there is a local demand for a high quality, SEN specialist school. By placing children with us the Council can make significant savings on assisted transportation costs and we will ensure that we work closely with the Education and Social Services departments, in order to deliver an outstanding provision, with the best possible outcomes, for children entrusted to our care.

Our aim is to provide an outstanding learning environment where the children will have a pathway to success. We will empower our learners and provide them with the tools necessary to make a successful transition into the wider world. By helping to build their confidence, their social skills and abilities, they will be better able to make a positive contribution to society and feel better about themselves, their families and their local environment.

A very high proportion of Therapeutic schools are in rural areas, for the reasons already outlined. We cannot overstate the importance of a tranquil setting for a therapeutic school. It is the bedrock on which children can flourish and grow to become confident, happy successful people.

We hope you will support our case.

## Site observation and analysis

### Location

The property is located at Little Lane, Whaplode which is approximately 1600m S-S-W of the centre of Whaplode. A location plan at a recognized scale is provided within the application pack to enable it to be located and the extent to be identified.

The proposed Change of Use is for the whole site.

### Site description

The site comprises two areas of land separated by Thorpe's Lane (fig. 01). The area to the west is the bulk of the site and contains the buildings of Dorcette House. These comprise a main two storey, 5 bedroom dwelling with a substantial single storey extension accommodating a swimming pool. This building complex occupies the south-east corner of the site, immediately adjacent the Thorpe's Lane / Little Lane junction. Immediately north of Dorcette House stands a 4 car garage block, with large ground floor office and with accommodation in the roof above. To the west of these buildings is a large area of lawn, surrounded by a substantial screen of trees on all boundaries. On the east side of Thorpe's Lane the site accommodates a hardstanding area (previously a garage but since demolished), soft landscaping and mature trees. Thorpe's Lane is a rural lane that continues north and east to join Mill Gate, just south of Whaplode.

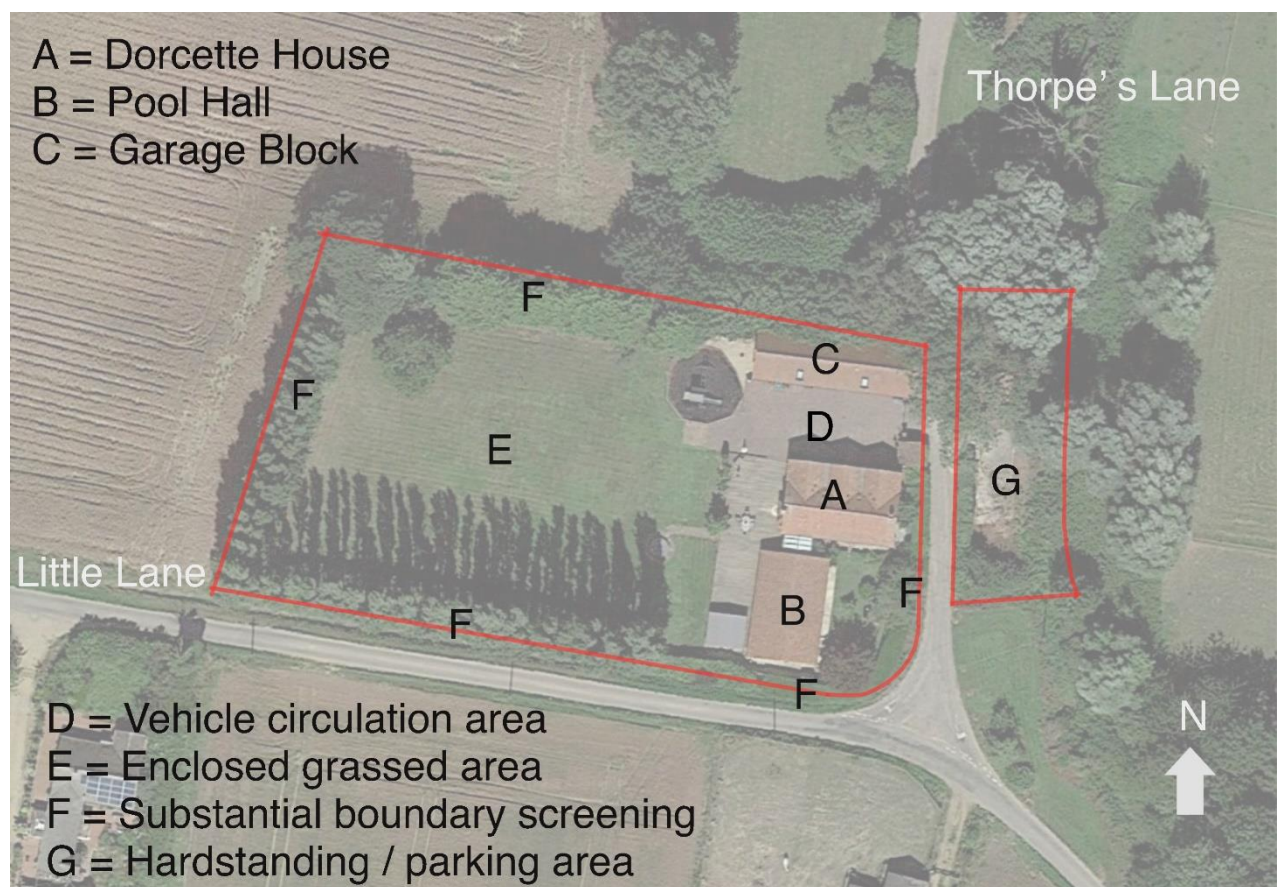


Fig. 01 – Annotated aerial view of site

## Site boundaries

### Dealing first with the west area of the site:

The south boundary is formed by a drain running along the north edge of Little Lane. Immediately north of the drain stands a row of large Poplar trees that extends along the boundary for approximately 60m, starting at the west end of the site (fig.02). Inside the poplars is a substantial timber fence and then further significant planting. The 30m or so of boundary from the end of the poplars to the road junction is defined by dense, high hedging of mixed species (fig. 03). The site is very substantially screened from the south, with virtually no views in when the trees are in leaf.

The west boundary runs perpendicular to Little Lane and is marked by a row of large Poplar trees that extends the full length of the boundary (fig. 04). Beyond this stands open fields in agricultural use. The site is very substantially screened from the west, with virtually no views in when the trees are in leaf.

The north boundary is defined by substantial trees from the west end extending approximately 60m east. Beyond this, to the north of the garage block, there is 1.8m to 2.0m high timber close boarded fencing. Beyond the fence there are again substantial trees (fig. 05). Beyond this boundary is a lawned field, further hedging and trees and then a residential dwelling. The dwelling is approximately 80m north of the boundary.

The east boundary abuts Thorpe's Lane and is defined by high hedging, trees and an area of high brick walling that contains the metal entrance gates (fig. 06).



Fig. 02 – The west section of the south boundary



Fig. 03 – The east section of the south boundary



Fig. 04 – The west boundary



Fig. 05– The north boundary (hidden by trees)



Fig. 06 – The east boundary

Dealing with the east area of the site:

The south boundary is formed by a drain running east to west, this is otherwise open (fig. 07).

The west boundary abuts Thorpe's Lane and is defined by high hedging and trees (fig. 08) except for the entrance point which is open.

The north boundary is defined loosely by substantial trees (fig. 09). Beyond this there is a lawned area with further trees, but no buildings.

The east boundary is formed by a drain running north to south, this is otherwise open (fig. 10).



Fig. 07 – The south boundary



Fig. 08 – The west boundary (right side of photo)



Fig. 09 – The north boundary (from the north)



Fig. 10 – The east boundary

### Neighbouring Development

The site is located in a rural area. To the south-east there is a dwelling approximately 120m from Dorcette House. To the north-east there is a dwelling approximately 100m away. To the south there is a bungalow approximately 30m from the Dorcette House south boundary (fig. 11). To the south-west there is a dwelling and business approximately 90m away (fig. 12). To the west there are residential properties, but these are in excess of 700m away (fig. 13). To the north is a dwelling with associated farming business, this is located approximately 100m to 160m north of Dorcette House (fig. 14).

Aside from the above development, all land around Dorcette House is generally in agricultural use.



Fig. 11 – Dwelling to south of site.



Fig. 12 – Property to south-west of site.



Fig. 13 – Dwelling 700m west of site.



Fig. 14 – Dwelling to north of site.

### Existing access arrangements

Both parts of the site have vehicular access direct from Thorpe's Lane. The east area has open access (fig. 15). The west area has gated access for vehicles and pedestrians (fig. 16).



Fig. 15 – Access to the east area



Fig. 16 – Gated access to the west area.

Whaplode and the A151 can be accessed to the north via Mill Lane. Moulton and Spalding can be accessed to the west via Hog's Gate.

### Streetscape / planting

The wider Fenland landscape is characterised by open fields in agricultural use, with drains and lanes separating them, but with few trees or hedges. Dorcette House however is surrounded by a significant number of mature trees and hedges on all sides. These enclose the site and create an established setting.

### Amenities

The site is located approximately 7km east of Spalding which has a full range of amenities and transport links. Holbeach is located approximately 4.3km north-east of the site, again this offers a range of amenities.

### Views into, through and out of the site

The site is very well screened by substantial trees and hedges along all its boundaries. Consequently, there are no significant views into the site; it is very private. Likewise, the natural screening heavily restricts views out from the site.

### Architectural Context

The map study that appears later in this report indicates that there was some development on this site at least as early as 1887. At that date there is a building where the main house stands and there is a second building immediately north of it in a similar location to the garage block, though in both cases the extant structures appear larger in footprint than originally existed. A survey of the existing house indicates that it may well have been constructed in sections, possibly over a lengthy period. Investigation beyond this level is however beyond the scope of this study.

The building exterior appears to have been refaced with render in around 1998, so identifying construction from different periods is difficult. The dwelling is two storeys high, finished with brick at ground floor level, with render and timber above (fig. 17). The roof is a tiled pitch configuration between gables and with 3 additional gables facing north. The garage block is generally of facing brick construction, beneath a tiled pitched roof (fig. 18). Overall, the development of site is not of particular interest from an architectural perspective.

Other development nearby comprises 20<sup>th</sup> Century bungalows and dwellings along Little Lane, an earlier 3 storey farmhouse and 20<sup>th</sup> Century farm buildings on Thorpe's Lane. There is however no particularly dominant architectural style.



Fig. 17 – Dorcette House



Fig. 18 – The garage block.

### Context – Physical

The proposals do not seek to significantly change the physical context, the extensions required are relatively modest in scale. The site would however change from a private dwellinghouse to a school and the access arrangement would be amended as required by LCC Highways.

### Context - Social

The building was previously used as a residential property and historically it is suspected that it was used in connection with agriculture. The proposed use would be as a school for Special Educational Needs which would provide a service of benefit to the district.

### Context – Economic

As previously stated, the building is currently a dwellinghouse, though there appears to be an element of work being undertaken from this site. The proposed use would employ staff and provide a service which is therefore a change from that which currently exists. This would provide an economic benefit within the district.

### Site history

The site is believed to have been developed in part since as early as 1887. Documentation during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century indicates continued use over this period. It is suspected that the main lawned area on the west side of the site previously accommodated additional buildings, possibly greenhouses or sheds for agricultural use. These buildings appear to have been removed possibly between 1987 and 1999. To the south of Dorcette House was an external swimming pool, however this was enclosed with a permanent building around 1998 (SHDC planning reference H23-0510-98) at the same time as the house was extended. On the east side of Thorpe's Lane a timber framed and clad double garage was erected on a concrete slab some time prior to 2002 (SHDC planning reference H23-0910-02), this has subsequently been removed.

### **Summary of site observations**

The foregoing analysis captures the key characteristics of the site and from these it is believed that the following statements can be concluded.

1. The site is in a relatively rural location, which appears well suited to the desired purpose.
2. The site offers accommodation that can be remodelled for the intended purpose without significant intervention and with only very modest extension.
3. The main site to the west of Thorpe's Lane is extremely well screened from all directions. The site is private, and any activity should be very well contained by the significant boundary screening present.
4. The south edge of the site, as redesigned, can provide suitable drop-off and pick-up for pupils, with adequate circulation area for vehicles. This area can also provide parking for the majority of staff vehicles.
5. The building offers sufficient and suitable accommodation for all teaching and support spaces.
6. The large, enclosed lawn area will provide an ideal location for growing food and providing other rural experiences for the pupils.
7. Very modest extension works will be required, but the site is large and the areas to be developed would not cause any significant loss of site area.

## **Design Statement**

For design and access statements Government guidance requires that the statement covers 6 specific areas. These are covered as follows:

### **Use:**

The foregoing report illustrates that the proposed use as Dayschool for Special Educational Needs is a change from the existing use. However, the school needs to be in a non-urban context where a closer connection with nature and the environment can be enjoyed. The site is very well screened and as such appears to offer the perfect environment for the proposed use.

### **Amount:**

The scheme drawings demonstrate that the building complex can generally provide the classrooms and support facilities required. The proposed extensions are modest in size and will provide toilet and changing accommodation. The amount of additional floorspace proposed is therefore very limited.

### **Layout:**

The existing building layouts, with a few minor alterations lend themselves well to use as a day school. The accommodation layout is logical. The open garden area to the west side of the site is well positioned for the intended use.

### **Scale:**

The proposal requires only modest extension to Dorcette House and the pool building. No extension works are required to the garage block.

### **Landscaping:**

The site already has much soft landscaping and many trees. There will need to be some reorganization of the south side of the site to accommodate new access and egress points for vehicular circulation and parking. In essence however, the majority of landscaping on the site will be retained and managed.

### **Appearance:**

The proposals include refacing the south elevation of the brick-built garage block to better tie in with Dorcette House (which is partly rendered). The proposed extension to the pool building will utilize the same, common suite of materials found on Dorcette House and the pool building.

### **Planning Statement:**

It is acknowledged that this proposal is located outside of any of the settlement development boundaries within the district. However, it has been demonstrated previously that a rural location is required to provide the best educational environment to benefit Special Educational Needs pupils. These characteristics cannot be provided in a standard school environment.

The pupils do not live in a single settlement and will not therefore travel from a single location. Due to the characteristics and specialist requirements of the pupils, they need to be transported to the school by private vehicle rather than on public transport, and consequently the proximity of the school to public transport networks is not relevant in this case.

At present the area does not have sufficient facilities for Special Educational Needs and as such this school will provide for pupils living in the area. It may well shorten commuting distances for those currently having to travel to specialist schools outside of the district. As such this facility will be of benefit to a potentially vulnerable element of the community, in a way that can improve their life experiences. The applicant's statement has highlighted how this school can interact with the wider community and other local schools to share learning opportunities, offering support where needed. The facility would also offer economic benefit both in providing employment opportunities to local people and also supporting local businesses purchasing produce and other supplies.

### **Access Statement:**

#### Access to the site

The site is located south-west of Whaplode. The parameters for travel are set out within the applicant's statement elsewhere within this document. Neither the pupils nor the staff will rely on public transport, but this is normal for schools of this nature.

#### Access into the building

The pupils using this service will not generally tend to have physical disabilities. Level access will however be provided where achievable.

#### Access within the building

The existing internal access arrangements present some restrictions, though are likely still to be suitable for some people with less severe mobility restrictions. These should not present difficulties for the proposed user group.

#### Facilities within the building

The facilities already exist and have been suitable for previous use, though not by people with significant disabilities. The proposals include a new accessible WC within one of the proposed extensions.

### **Flood Risk Assessment:**

A separate flood risk assessment is provided as part of this application.

### **Environmental Statement:**

The applicant does not consider that the proposed building works fall under either Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 and as such a statement is not considered necessary.

### **Demolition Statement:**

No significant demolition is proposed.

## **Conclusion**

The applicant's statement sets out the purpose of the school and explains why it is necessary for the facility to be in a rural setting. This is a key consideration in their selection of this site. Reference has been made to other successful SEN schools which are in rural settings in the Rutland area. The rural setting is key to creating a strong connection with nature and ensuring that the school can offer very specific characteristics that benefit the pupils that will attend. The pupils are not able to flourish in a standard school setting, so the rural location is considered essential. It is also stated that pupils usually commute to such schools using private transportation. Whilst it is acknowledged that this might not be considered the most sustainable method, the lack of such a facility locally means that young people in the district that have special educational needs may well currently be having to travel very considerable distances to facilities based outside of the district. Therefore, having a facility locally would reduce travel distances for locally based pupils.

The foregoing analysis has indicated that the site is very private and is already very well screened from neighbouring properties. It has external space that can actively benefit the pupil's education, it is also well connected with nature. Through dialogue with LCC Highways and the South Hollan IDB it is considered that suitable access and egress for vehicles can be achieved.

Overall, therefore the applicant considers that the site is extremely well suited for the proposed use. This will provide an important community facility within the district, as well as providing employment opportunities locally.

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