

From: Emily Wade <Emily.Wade@midsussex.gov.uk>
Sent: 04 September 2025 14:50:46 UTC+01:00
To: "Caroline Grist" <Caroline.Grist@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: Worth School DM/25/1778

Hi Caroline

Comments on the above planning application.

Worth School is an independent school forming part of the Worth Abbey estate. The school and abbey campus includes a number of listed buildings, which are:

- Worth School- the main school building, constructed in the mid-late 19th century as a grand country house (Grade II listed)
- The former stable block to the house, dating from 1885 (Grade II listed)
- A pair of carriage gateways and railings to the west of the house dating from 1922 (Grade II listed) (considered too distant to be affected by the current proposal); and
- Worth Abbey Church, located just to the east of the house, dating from the 1960s (Grade II listed).

The Worth estate, originally known as Paddockhurst, was purchased as a farmstead and associated farmlands by a developer (George Smith) in the mid 19th century, and the country house constructed for him to a design by noted architect Anthony Salvin. The former farmhouse was retained and survives a part of the school campus. The substantial stables building was added later, to the north of the house, although the prominent clocktower was not added until 1921, as a memorial to the son of the then owner, Lord Cowdray, who died in WWI. The estate was purchased in 1933 by John Chapman, the Abbot of Downside, who established the property as Worth Abbey, a dependent priory of Downside Abbey. The School also originates from this date, later becoming independent from Downside in 1957. The church, as above, was constructed from the 1960s on and was consecrated in 1975. The house, school and abbey have been altered and enlarged over the years, and numerous buildings constructed around the site as part of the school campus. Notwithstanding this, the surviving gardens between and around the buildings, and the wider rural setting make a positive contribution to the special interests of the listed buildings and the manner in which these are appreciated, contributing to the historical illustrative and aesthetic values of the house/main school and stables, and the abbey church, as constituent parts of a former country estate of some pretension, later a rural school and abbey complex.

The current proposal is for the installation of an emergency back up diesel generator within a garden area between the listed school and church buildings, and the former stables block. The generator is a fairly substantial structure, approx. 8.4 x 2.4 x 3m, and is of an uncompromisingly industrial appearance. It is proposed to be sited on a concrete base and surrounded by a 1.8m high close boarded fence enclosure (13m x 9.4m).

The generator would be sited in close proximity to the above-mentioned listed buildings, and would be potentially particularly prominent from the northern entrance frontage of the Abbey Church. At present, the site is to an extent surrounded by existing trees and planting, which would afford a degree of screening, but it is not entirely clear from the current submission to what extent this planting could in practice be retained during the installation and operation of the generator, and in any case planting must be regarded as potentially ephemeral. The surrounding close-boarded fencing is at only 1.8m high insufficient to effectively screen the 3m high generator, and would in itself not be an attractive addition to the settings of the listed buildings, having an inappropriately suburban character. As is noted in the relevant Historic England guidance (GPA Note 3, *'The Setting of Heritage Assets'*): *'Where attributes of a development affecting setting may cause some harm to significance..., screening may have a part to play in reducing harm. As screening can only mitigate negative impacts, rather than removing impacts or providing enhancement, it ought never to be regarded as a substitute for well-designed developments within the setting of heritage assets. Screening may have as intrusive an effect on the setting as the development it seeks to mitigate, so where it is necessary, it too merits careful design. This should take account of local landscape character and seasonal and diurnal effects, such as changes to foliage and lighting. The permanence or longevity of screening in relation to the effect on the setting also requires consideration. Ephemeral features, such as hoardings, may be removed or changed during the duration of the development, as may woodland or hedgerows, unless they enjoy statutory protection.'*

In my opinion, the current proposal raises concerns in terms of a potential harmful impact on the setting of the adjacent listed buildings, in detracting from the surviving verdant 'garden' character of that setting, and in introducing a substantial, unattractive feature of an industrial appearance, which notwithstanding the surrounding screening by vegetation and close boarded fencing, has the potential to be unduly visually prominent, particularly in views from the entrance frontage of the Abbey Church. This screening may prove ephemeral and/or seasonally variable, and in the case of the fencing is in itself also unsympathetic to the context.

For these reasons I would recommend that the proposal is reconsidered, to re-site the generator in a less visually prominent position, away from the immediate vicinity of the listed buildings in question.

As it stands, I consider that the proposal is contrary to the requirements of District Plan Policy DP34. In terms of the NPPF, the proposal causes harm through impact on setting to the special interests of all three of the listed buildings discussed above. I would place this harm at around the low-mid point of that scale- potentially slightly higher with respect to the Church than to the house/school building and former stables.

Thanks

Emily

Please note that this advice is given at Officer level only and is without prejudice to the formal decision of the District Council.

Submit your planning application online.
<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>

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