

Should Britain's most expensive state school design be scrapped?



## EDITORIAL

### **Calls to scrap Aedas-designed school in London borough**

It is to be the most expensive state school and the first custom-built comprehensive in Britain, but the Aedas design for Holland Park school in London's swanky Kensington borough has come under heavy fire this week. Being brandished as 'monolithic and relentless' and a 'very large slab block' respectively by an architects committee and English Heritage, the conservation watchdog, the design is currently set to cost £72.6 million but opposition casts a shadow over the plans.

The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea's decision to sell off much of the current school's plot of land and recreational areas for property development led to the initial onslaught by locals and politicians. The council are accused of 'losing moral authority over affordable housing' by UK political party the Liberal Democrats as the land is to be used for luxury housing which would raise more funds for the school development. Prior to the granting of planning permission by the council's Major Planning Development Committee on the 26th June, Robin Meltzer, the Chair of Kensington & Chelsea Liberal Democrats, said:

"This application represents a very dangerous precedent. Granting planning permission will surrender any moral authority on these issues. When the council breaks its own rules so flagrantly, what developer with a plan for off-site housing will be fearful of a negative response from an RBKC planning committee?"

The school is in a local conservation area and although it is generally accepted that the current school facilities must be updated the council's own architectural

committee and more recently English Heritage have objected to the new design as being out of keeping with the conservation area. Other opponents include Sport England who object to the loss of outdoor recreation space for children.

However the plans are not opposed by all. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) believes that the design – which would introduce the first purpose-built comprehensive school in the UK – would “become a reference point for future school proposals in London and beyond”.

Aedas describe the proposed facilities as being “developed around a central atrium with minimum footprint”. The facilities will, “include a range of flexible learning spaces, an integrated IT/flexible learning Centre and a 25 m swimming pool.”

Planning permission has been granted and work is due to begin this year but with strong opposition from political figures and residents, the UK's most expensive school proposal could be on suspension until the dispute is resolved.

Niki May Young  
News Editor

(Additional

