55 Barrack Road
Northampton, NN1 1AN

Design and Access Statement for the mixed-use redevelopment of the former Royal Mail sorting office at 55 Barrack Road to accommodate a new through school consisting of a 2FE Primary School, 10FE Secondary School and 300 place sixth form, as well as other uses including a nursery, cafe, gym and residential units.

1.0 Description of the Proposal

Proposed conversion and extension of existing former Royal Mail sorting office building to provide a 420 place primary school, 1500 place secondary school with 300 place 6th form, as well as a private nursery, cafe, gym and 7 residential units.

Demolition of an existing metal transport shed at the west of the site, canopy and brick wall to loading bay, rear stair core and general site clearance surrounding the existing building.

Other external works include alterations to external elevations, infilling of internal roof courtyard, provision of new hard and soft landscaping at the front, side and rear of the building, creation of new pedestrian and cycle access, construction of a new single storey external deck to provide additional car parking and play/teaching space, provision of replacement boundary treatment (in part within a Conservation Area) and of outdoor recreational space including new floodlit MUGAs.

1.1 General Introduction

This Design and Access statement has been prepared by Architecture Initiative on behalf of Northamptonshire County Council (NCC). It accompanies a planning application for the change of use and associated alterations to the former Royal Mail sorting office at 55 Barrack Rd, Northampton, to create a mixed use development on the site comprising a school and other associated leisure, cafe and educational uses as well as seven residential units.

The building is owned by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, having been recently purchased by the Education Funding Agency (EFA), an executive agency of the Department for Education (DfE) responsible for state education funding, for the purpose of its reuse to create a new school and other associated leisure, cafe and educational uses as well as seven residential units.

The EFA have, and will continue to be, fully involved in the design, development and delivery of the project.

1.2 Document Overview

This design and access statement should be read in conjunction with the application form, planning statement and other documents and drawings submitted as part of the full planning application.

This document has been prepared in line with the requirements set out in The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) 2010 document. It also addresses all aspects covered in the CABE document Design and access statements: How to write, read and use them (2006), providing detail and explanation of Use, Amount, Layout, Scale, Landscaping and Appearance.

This document details the proposal, from brief and background through to the development of the final layout and design in sections listed below.

Section 1.0 Introduction + Background
Section 2.0 Context + Scheme Development
Section 3.0 Design Proposal
Section 4.0 Landscape, Play Space & Sport
Section 5.0 Access
1.3

**Summary of Proposal**

The primary function of the proposal is an educational facility, however due to the size and nature of the existing building, other complimentary uses will be introduced to create an active building frontage and an income stream for the school.

The development comprises the re-use and conversion of existing former Royal Mail sorting office building to provide a through school and other complimentary mixed uses. Change of use to A3, D1, D2 and C3 use.

Conversion and extension of the building to provide a 420 place primary school, 1500 place secondary school with 300 place 6th form, as well as a separate private nursery, cafe, gym and 7 residential units.

Works to the existing building include creation of new window openings, replacement of existing windows, over-cladding of first floor projection of existing building facing Barrack Road elevation, the infilling of the existing external courtyard to form a school sports hall space by building up a new façade off the existing structure, formation of new rooflights and the infilling of the southern portion of the undercroft car park to provide school accommodation.

Demolition includes removal of the existing metal transport shed structure at the west of the site, canopy and brick wall to loading bay, rear stair core and general site clearance to front and rear of the building.

External landscape works to create a shared public entrance plaza at the front of the building facing Barrack Road with existing paving and trees replaced (the paving is proposed up to edge of kerbs). The existing vehicular accesses off Barrack Road will be retained and amended. Creation of new pedestrian and cycle access at north-west corner of site. Replacement of existing external metal boundary fence, including works on the boundary of the Conservation Area to the north-east of the site.

To the rear of the building a new single storey deck is proposed with car parking at ground level and play/teaching space above. School play space includes landscaped play areas to the southern side and rear of the building including tenoed and 3R MU/GA courts.

The application site area is 1.58 hectares.
Map: The map above details Northamptonshire County Council's 3 mile school catchment area.

The site is located at 55 Barrack Road and is approximately 500m north of the town centre and a 5 minute walk from Northampton's new bus station. Being so close to the town centre it has the benefit of utilising the transport infrastructure. This allows the school to service a large catchment area.

Government estimates published in January 2012 suggested that the number of children at primary schools in England is expected to rise by a fifth in the next decade.

Northamptonshire is already experiencing growth through a rising birth rate, high levels of inward migration and growth from housing development. Census data illustrates a rise in the under fives population of 19% between 2001 and 2011. The most recent data for children starting school in September 2012 shows a rise of nearly 10%. Northamptonshire County Council has a statutory obligation to provide sufficient school places for all pupils living in the area.

The application proposes the provision of an additional 420 primary spaces provided within the footprint of the redundant sorting office. The primary provision will mostly serve a local need, but has the potential for a wider catchment.

The proposal also accommodates for the progression of the school children moving on from primary school, providing 1500 new secondary school places and 300 sixth form places and addressing the anticipated shortfall in secondary school places in the future.

Refer to the accompanying Planning Statement for further details.
2.0 Barrack Road Context

The site is located to the north of Northampton town centre, within the designated “Central Area” as identified within Northampton Borough Council’s Central Area Action Plan (CAAP, Jan 2013). Policy 34 in the CAAP is formally allocated to the site (see extract below).

It is on the western side of Barrack Road, the A508, a main arterial route which runs from Northampton town centre to Market Harborough.

The site borders the public highway to the east (Barrack Road) and north (Semilong). The properties on Barrack Road are mainly commercial or business uses and the area to the north is predominantly residential. There are also dwellings to the south of the site, adjacent to Barrack Road. To the west of these is Gibraltar Barracks, used by the Territorial Army, and beyond this Castle Primary School, a two-form-entry primary school academy whose and play space continues to the west. The north-western boundary of the sorting office site shares a boundary with the Northampton Bangladeshi Association building. Beyond Barrack Road to the east is The Racecourse, a large public park with extensive sports pitches.

The site and building have been derelict since 2003.
The existing mail centre was designed and built in the late 1970's on the site of the Gibraltar Barracks and was a major source of local employment. At that time it was a state of the art facility with a fully mechanised sorting office on the principal upper level, deliveries on the lower level and office accommodation at the front of the building. Apart from a quiet period on Sundays, it opened on a 24 hour basis with 3 eight hour shifts per day and associated round the clock vehicle movements delivering post throughout Northampton.

Following a fire in September 2003, mail sorting was immediately relocated to alternative premises to ensure continuity of postal deliveries. For some time after this, vehicle maintenance continued to take place in the operations building at the rear of the main depot building.

From August 2003, all uses of the building by Royal Mail were discontinued. The large vacant buildings have become a magnet to vandalism and other anti-social behaviour, and has been completely enclosed with a security fence since March 2009.

Royal Mail Estates Ltd submitted two full planning applications to Northampton Borough Council (NBC) for the change of use of the building into a supermarket in 2010 and 2011, the former withdrawn in May 2011 and the latter gaining planning approval in November 2012. Even though consent was granted for the scheme, Tesco PLC, who were to purchase and develop the site and building, withdrew from the development.

The site bounds the Barrack Road Conservation Area, which borders the eastern part of the sites northern boundary and is also rear to two other conservation areas; Kingsley to the east and Holy Sepulchure, which covers the town centre, to the south.
Due to its proximity, Barrack Road Conservation Area is of particular relevance to the change of use proposals for the site. The Conservation Area designation covers a half a kilometre of Georgian terraces, which in the 1930’s were regarded to be the “finest approach” to the city centre. Materials which characterise the buildings of this area include yellow and buff brickwork, stucco, and slate.

The existing sorting office building sought to respond to this local context; its yellow/brown brickwork reflective of the material aesthetic of the conservation area. However since falling into disrepair the existing is considered to be a poor neighbour to the Conservation Area.

The existing sorting office building is directly adjacent to a row of properties on Adelaide Terrace and Leicester Terrace which form the southern limit of the Conservation Area. Most of these buildings are Grade II Listed and again date from the early part of the 19th century. Numbers 1-3 Adelaide Terrace form an interesting group of buildings; although essentially separate houses they were built as a symmetrical group centred around a recessed balcony.

The buildings within the Conservation Area are constructed either of sandstone or in brick with the front elevations to a number of properties being rendered. Roofs were covered in either Welsh slate or plain clay tiles, though replacement concrete tiles are now very common, and the majority were constructed with the ridges running parallel to the street. Chimney stacks are generally ridge-mounted and of a simple rectangular design.

Well-established trees make an important contribution to the positive character of the area. There are a number of mature trees which line Barrack Road as it runs north.

Any proposals for the site must consider the setting of both the Conservation Area and the Listed Buildings and make a positive contribution to the townscape character of the area.
2.3 The Existing Building

There are two buildings currently on the site; the large 4-5 storey brick-faced former sorting office on Barrack Road and a metal transport shed which stands to the west of the site (due to be demolished in this proposal).

The former sorting office building has five main areas: A stack of office accommodation to the front adjacent to Barrack Road, behind which are the two main double-height, open plan floors of the building; the lower was used for mail deliveries, the upper was the sorting office floor. Above this, on the top floors, was the staff canteen and social areas, an outdoor courtyard as well as plant rooms. Below the rear portion of the building is a car park level which was used by staff and accessed via the access road which runs along the northern boundary of the site.

The building has a ferrous-concrete structure, with the majority of the building on a 10.6mx12.4m structural grid with a concrete waffle-slab floor structure. The nature and construction of the building make it ideal for conversation. Conversely the size and large concrete structure means that demolition of the building is cost prohibitive.

Design Considerations

The following items had to be considered at the earliest stage of the project:

- Response to the neighbouring Conservation Area context, character and heritage assets.
- Public realm improvements via the creation of a gathering space at the front of the building.
- Highways access, car parking for staff and visitors & pupil drop-off/pick up, as well as providing safe pedestrian routes to the site.
- Re-branding of the existing derelict building as a new facility.
- Efficient re-use of the existing building; ensuring that educational requirements are met.
- Provide an educational facility to “Building Bulletin” standards
- Provide a high quality facility.
- Utilise site for play and sports activities and make use of local recreational facilities.
- Equality Act/Disability Discrimination Act compliant access.
- Ensuring value for money in the design and within the funding constraints.
- Wrap around services and curriculum activities.
- Potential out of hours community use of the building.
- Seek as a minimum to achieve a BREEAM ‘Very Good’ rating.
2.4

Photographs: Off Site

The building is a prominent landmark in the locality. Its currently boarded up front elevation is visible to all traffic passing in and out of the town centre along the busy Barrack Road.

Photography Key

1. View looking down service vehicle access
2. View of south elevation from Barrack Road
3. View of neighbouring residential block
4. View of neighbouring residential block
5. View of the building as seen from driving northwards along Barrack Road
6. Entrance to the neighbouring Castle Primary School on St. George’s Street
7. View of the building as seen from driving southwards (towards the town centre) along Barrack Road. In the summer months, the building is currently largely obscured along the east elevation by the large trees.
8. View from the entrance to the Northampton Bangladeshi Association site that sits to the west of the site.
9. View from Lorne Road looking west towards the site

Key plan with photo locations
As can be seen from the on-site photographs, the building is a large rectilinear mass with a prominent horizontality, accentuated by ribbon windows and the cantilevered mass to the front of the building. This is broken by the five vertical circulation cores located around the perimeter of the building.

The windows (which are currently mainly boarded up for security reasons) are fitted with red coloured metal frames. The majority of the building is faced in a yellow/brown coloured brick. The only parts of the building which are an exception to this are the façade of the lower ground floor level which is faced in pre-cast concrete panels and the elevation to the top floor plant rooms which is red coloured louvres.

Internally the building is structurally sound, but in a state of dereliction. It is inhabited by feral pigeons and has also been broken into a number of times over the years since it fell into disuse. Aside from needing a full strip-out and thought clean inside and out, the building is generally in good condition.

Photography Key
1 View along the south border of the site
2 View from the roof terrace on level 3
3 View of the back facade (west) of the building. The lower portion is faced in pre-cast concrete panels.
4 Internal view of the existing vehicle maintenance shed at the west of the site
5 Internal view of the existing car park on level -2
6 Internal view of the canteen on level 3 top floor of the building
7 Internal view of the existing sorting office on level 1
8 View of the vehicle loading area on level -1
9 View of office on level 1
10 View of circulation core on the north facade which breaks up the horizontality

(Level -2) Key plan with external photo locations
Public consultation

A public consultation event was held on the 19th of May 2014 (daytime and evening event) where the scheme was presented to attending members of the public in Alliston Gardens Community Centre. The consultation boards were left on display in the community centre for those unable to attend the event.

The public consultation was advertised in the local paper and on the County Council website. A leaflet drop to 1700 local residents and businesses in the vicinity of the site also occurred.

Responses were gathered from all those attending the consultation event and electronic and postal address were provided for all other responses.

All responses received, either at the event or via email/post were collated and reviewed, and where possible concerns/ideas and suggestions were taken on board and addressed in this planning submission.

The impact of the feedback from the consultation on the scheme design is detailed on the following page of this report.

Refer to the Statement of Community Engagement for full details of the consultation, responses received and their impact on the scheme.
2.6 Consultation Response

A summary of the main issues raised at the public consultation, and the subsequent design responses are as follows:

Issues Raised
1. Traffic / on-site parking space provision
2. School pick-up/drop-off zone
3. Location of proposed new site access on northern boundary
4. Lack of car parking for office use (if included in the scheme)

Design Responses
1. The number of on-site parking spaces has been increased to 127.
2. Drop-off areas have been enlarged to ensure all parents/carers are able to drive onto the school site to pick-up or drop-off their children at school and will not stop on the public highway.
3. New pedestrian site access to the north has been relocated to mitigate the neighbours living in Alliston Gardens concerns of increased pedestrian and vehicular movement.
4. Office use has been reconsidered and removed from the proposal.
3.0 Design Strategy + Concept

The strategy for the re-use of the building and development of the site can be summarised in the following key elements and is illustrated opposite:

1. The sensitive refurbishment of the building and creation of new public realm which seeks to respect and enhance the setting of the Conservation Area and adjacent Listed Buildings.
2. Creation of a new landscaped public plaza space and active frontage at the front of the building adjacent to Barrack Road.
3. Provision of all uses within the mass of the existing building structure.
4. All uses are separate with their own entrances off the main plaza space with secure ‘air lock’ access into the primary and secondary schools.
5. Insertion of new windows into the building facade, as required to provide adequate natural light into the building, as well as replacement of all existing windows and doors.
6. The infilling of the top floor courtyard to create a new 5 court sports hall space and addition of mezzanine floors in existing double height spaces.
7. Improvement to the thermal performance of the existing building fabric and provision of on site renewable energy technology such as photovoltaic panels.
8. Demolition of the transport shed to the rear of the site to make way for external play and social space and sports courts for the school.
9. Improvement of pedestrian safety on Barrack Road through the provision of a new crossing/traffic light system.
10. Provision of adequate on-site car parking and on-site pupil drop-off/pick-up space for the school.

Amount

The building contains the following facilities and uses:

- Educational Facility: Primary School (420 place), Secondary School (1500 place) & 6th Form (300 place) - 23,485m$^2$ (inc. plant + parking)
- Nursery - 175m$^2$
- Cafe - 165m$^2$
- Gym - 1300m$^2$
- Residential units (2x 1bed flats, 5x 2bed flats) - 725m$^2$

The ‘Elements’ Concept

All uses have their own entrance off the main public plaza at the front of the building and are separated from the other uses.

The secondary school & 6th form take up the majority of the building, with the 6th form accommodation located on the top floor of the building. The primary school is in a linear form along the south side of the building, mainly over two levels, level 0 and level -1.

The nursery and cafe are located at the ground floor level directly off the plaza. The gym is at first floor level and takes up the full width of the front of the building and the residential units are at second floor level, with their own outdoor amenity space provided through use of the existing external terrace.
The secondary school and 6th form are based on the adjacencies and areas as set out in Building Bulletins (BB) 98 and 103. There is no specialist educational bias, but areas should be provided that allow for each core subject to achieve educational excellence.

The secondary school has its own main office and entrance/reception with air-lock arrangement at the front of the school off the shared plaza gathering space on Barrack Road. Access is provided to external play space from the building and alternative entrances for pupils to enter the schoolsite at the beginning and end of the school day.

The school will cater for key stage 3 & 4 pupils (11-16) as well as 6th form (16-18). All teaching spaces will be arranged by subject. The 6th form accommodation should be provided separately (located on the top floor of the building) and provide a more adult learning environment.

**Design principles**

The building design is aspirational and provides an uplifting learning environment whilst ensuring value for money is achieved across the scheme through an efficient building layout and standardisation of design. The design is based on current Building Bulletin requirements and best design practice as set in the EFA generic design brief and Department of Education’s standard designs.

Building environmental performance is in line with the current Building Bulletin documents. The introduction of natural light and ventilation will be maximised. Renewable energies will be introduced where possible.

It is NCC policy that all new build schools have a sprinkler system and therefore this must be provided.

The building must be secure and is designed to Secure By Design standards. An internal security ‘air lock’ arrangement is provided at the main entrances for both the primary and secondary schools.

The existing concrete structure and structural grid of the former sorting office building is utilised in the spatial arrangement of the school and retained and expressed as a design aesthetic. The existing finish and internal layout are re-used as much as possible.

The 6.5m floor-to-floor heights of the existing building are utilised at full height for specialist, large teaching rooms (such as art, science & DT) and performance spaces. The high ceilings also allow for the insertion of new lightweight mezzanine floors within the existing building to form double height spaces, which should be utilised, to ensure all general teaching classrooms have external windows for natural light and ventilation.

The existing building has a very deep plan and new voids will need to be introduced through the building section to bring natural light into the heart of the space. These light wells will be used to create a diversity of space and architectural quality to the building.

It is accepted that there will be large circulation areas within the building due to its size and deep plan format. These spaces can provide for open learning, break-out and social areas within the school and should be of a minimum specification compared to teaching spaces, but are ideal for use as group learning and activity zones.

### Secondary School + 6th Form

#### Design and Access Statement

**Architecture Initiative**
3.1 Secondary School + 6th Form
(Continued...)

Catering
A large hot meals catering kitchen will be provided to serve both the primary and secondary schools, with servery openings into the hall of the primary school and secondary school dining area. The secondary school cookery classrooms can include associated restaurant style facilities which could be used for servicing the wider educational establishment.

Parking/drop-off
A controlled and supervised pupil drop-off/pick-up area is provided on site to ensure parents do not stop on the roads surrounding the school to drop off children. All pedestrian/bicycle/vehicular routes on the school site are clearly defined. Access will be required for site maintenance, kitchen deliveries and for emergency vehicles and compliant levels of bicycle and vehicular parking are provided on site. Refer to the parking section of this document for further details.

Inclusion and special needs
All areas, both internal and external, must be designed to accommodate disabled users, including wheelchair bound and hearing and visually impaired. Building Bulletins provide detailed guidance. Features will include hearing loop, colour contrasts, etc.

External space / Sports
External play space is provided for both the primary and secondary schools. Due to the size of the school site, grass pitches will not be provided on site; the school will make use of the nearby sports pitches at ‘The Racecourse’.

The 5 court sports hall is positioned at the top floor of the building, a new construction within the existing courtyard space. Changing rooms are provided at this level as well as an activity gym.

The arrangement of the existing building lends itself for the creation of external teaching/social/garden space on the top floor by utilising the existing external terraces. The design and use of these spaces will be for the future academy sponsor to decide.

Community Use
The school design enhances the role of the school as a community learning centre and resource. In addition to the essential requirements for statutory education provision, the building could facilitate out of hours and community use of the facilities.
Primary School

The required accommodation is set out in the Government Guidance document Building Bulletin (BB) 99 Briefing Framework for Primary Schools, as well as recent BB 103 guidance.

The primary school design is based on the adjacencies and areas as set out BB 99. There is a slight reduction in room areas in line with current EFA guidance. A separate full cook kitchen will not be provided for the primary school, nor an ICT room, as the current and future intent will be to provide portable ICT equipment in primary schools and to provide hot school meals via the kitchen facilities in the secondary school.

The primary school is to have its own main entrance/reception and office with air-lock arrangement at the front of the school off of the shared gathering space, but must also provide for access to external play space from the building and alternative entrances for pupils to enter the school/site at the beginning and end of the school day.

The school will cater for Reception year, key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils (5-11). Year groups are in paired classrooms and direct external covered play space is provided for reception year.
3.3 Complementary Uses

Nursery

The nursery, for children up to four years old, would be run separately from the primary school and can be operated outside of the management of the wider site but will have an intrinsic educational link to the school. BS99 gives area guidelines for nursery schools.

The nursery includes a main nursery space as well as support accommodation such as staff office, kitchenette, WC's and stores. It also includes a covered external play space, as is required to enable indoor to outdoor activities.

The plan layout shown is for illustrative purposes only. The nursery provider will be responsible for determining the exact internal arrangement of rooms and fit out of the space.

Cafe

It is envisaged that the cafe will be used throughout the day and will assist in ensuring the building has an active frontage on Barrack Road, providing a meeting point for both the building users and local community.

The plan layout shown is for illustrative purposes only. The cafe provider will be responsible for the internal arrangement and fit out of the space.
Complementary Uses

Gym

The benefit of accommodating a separate gym in the building is that it can be used by both the school and the local community. The school’s indoor and outdoor sports facilities combined with the gym create a generous sport and fitness facility to enable the school to meet its well being agenda.

The layout shown for the gym is indicative. The final layout and design will be established by the third party business which will run it.

The gym has its own entrance off of the main plaza space, with a reception lift and stair up to the first floor where there the gym is located. The first floor gym extends to 1300m² which allows for a variety of activities including resistance, cardiovascular and free weights areas, as well as studios for use by classes and other activities.
3.3 Complementary Uses

Residential

A residential provision is included in the mixed use facility. The inclusion of residential units in the development assists in creating a mixed-use facility and maintaining 'eyes-on-the-street', improving building security through the addition of 24 hour uses.

The flats are located on the second floor and have their own shared entrance off the public plaza space, with a lift and stair. Separate cycle and bin storage is also provided.

Seven flats are proposed; two 1 bed and five 2 bed. Each has their own private outdoor amenity space. All are designed to current space standards.

- **Flat 1**: 2 Bed 3 Person, 75m²
- **Flat 2**: 1 Bed 2 Person, 54m²
- **Flat 3**: 2 Bed 3 Person, 70m²
- **Flat 4**: 2 Bed 3 Person, 75m²
- **Flat 5**: 2 Bed 3 Person, 70m²
- **Flat 6**: 1 Bed 2 Person, 54m²
- **Flat 7**: 2 Bed 3 Person, 76m²

**Key**
- Bedroom
- Kitchen/Living
- Store
- W.C.
- Circulation