

School Boundaries Guidance



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Introduction

This guidance has been produced by Essex Landscape Design and Gill Wynn Williams Associates under a steering group including learning services, Urban Design, Asset Management, Investments and Insurance, Capital Programme and Building Development.

School boundary treatments whether including fencing, gates, walls, railings or hedges are important elements of the school site. Boundary treatments contribute to visitors' first impressions of the site and in security terms, they are also the first line of protection for the school.

They serve a number of functions:

- They delineate the legal boundary between the school and neighbouring properties or land
- They emphasise that the visitor is moving from a public space into a more controlled space, that of the school site.
- In areas of risk, they may constitute a physical barrier which deters unauthorised persons from gaining access to the site.

When considering the maintenance or enhancement of boundary treatments, it is important to balance the need to keep out unauthorised persons with a consideration of the fact that schools are facilities which serve the local community.

Factors influencing boundary choice

Schools change their boundary treatment in response to a number of factors. Existing boundaries may have fallen into disrepair, security requirements may change or the school may decide that the existing boundary is not presenting the best public face to their premises. For new schools, the boundary treatment will be designed as part of the whole scheme and consideration of the neighbouring land uses and the character of the location will have an influence on the design of the boundaries.

Boundaries may be walls, railings, fencing, hedges or a combination of features. Heights may vary and entrances for pedestrians and vehicles need to be considered. This guidance aims to help schools make a choice of boundary treatment that is most appropriate for their site and circumstances.

When choosing a new boundary treatment, there are a number of factors to consider. These will vary from school to school and are connected to the location and priorities of the school. The following factors may have an influence on the choice.

Location – consider the style of boundary that will be suitable for your location. Requirements for rural schools may be very different for a school in a built up area. The age and style of the school buildings may provide a pointer to the type of design that would be most suitable for the boundary.



Walton Oak Primary, Walton-on-Thames School Bespoke Gates

Design and appearance – the DfES ‘Schools for the Future – School Grounds’ guidance (1) lists a number of common design issues. Amongst these is the creation of ‘A positive, welcoming and inspiring sense of place....for everyone, which reflects and contributes to a school’s identity.’

The Guidance also promotes the idea that the school grounds should:

- ‘Reflect local distinctiveness’
- ‘Reflect the ethos and culture of the school through colour, texture, materials and shapes’
- ‘Be creative in the location and type of boundaries and space dividers’

Security– is the premises reliant on the boundary to provide additional security? Is the security requirement the same around the whole of the boundary or does it vary? How important is security in comparison with other factors such as appearance? Should parts of the school grounds be screened to give privacy to users? The choice of entrance gates may also be influenced by security requirements.

(1) 'Schools for the Future, Designing School Grounds', DfES, Published by TSO, 2006

'As part of creating a positive image of the school grounds, the boundary type can have a great influence. The school boundary is usually the first impression that visitors will get of a school and when the opportunity arises to change the boundary treatment this can be taken in to consideration when making choices about the type of boundary, its height and style.'

Planning requirements – planning permission will be required for fences, walls or railings over 1.0m high where they are adjacent to the highway or 2.0m high elsewhere on the school site. If the boundary treatment is adjacent to a highway the highways authority should be consulted prior to the submission of a planning application. If the school is in a conservation area or the school buildings are listed then there may be additional planning requirements for approval of the boundary design. Proposals for school boundaries will also be considered by planning authorities where they are part of a larger proposal

Cost– boundary treatments vary in cost and Section 4 of this Guidance gives an indication of the relative cost of different boundary types.

Maintenance – choosing a particular type of boundary treatment may have maintenance implications for instance: walls are generally low maintenance; timber fences will require treatment (painting or staining) and replacement of deteriorating wood over the course of their life.

For each boundary project a combination of factors will apply. When considering the type of boundary treatment it is worth taking time to consult with the site users and other stakeholders and prepare a brief for the type of boundary that you require.



Sandringham Primary School, Newham. Decorative mild steel railings

Writing a brief for the school boundaries

These aspects should be considered:

1. What are the existing boundary treatments, how do they vary around the school premises and are they adequate in terms of security / height / appearance?
2. Which features of the existing boundary are good, which are bad?
3. Are there too many different types of fence / railings/ wall which make it difficult to maintain the boundaries and lead to a lack of clarity in the definition of the site?
4. Are the boundaries marked on the ground in the position of the school's legal boundary or not? Does this matter in terms of site management?
5. Does the style of the boundary reflect the character of the school and the ethos that the school wants to present?
6. Is there a need to change the boundary because of changes to the use of the grounds? For example, the repositioning of a football pitch may result in balls being kicked out of the school site and higher fencing may be required behind the goals or the introduction of an early years area may require security and privacy.
7. When planning a new school is there a brief from the Local Education Authority providing guidance on suitable boundary heights?
8. Are there any planning requirements which need to be taken in to account – for instance, is the school a listed building or in a conservation area? Are there any trees which might be affected by proposed boundary changes? Does the height of the proposed boundary treatment require planning permission?
9. How will the school's neighbours be affected by the boundary changes? There is legislation under the Party Wall Act which may apply if boundary changes affect neighbouring properties.

Answering these types of questions should help in making a brief for the boundary. In Section 5 case studies for a number of schools are given with examples of briefs drawn up for their boundary treatments.



Great Dunmow School, Essex. Planting and weald mesh fencing along boundary

Making a choice

The table below summarises the main types of boundary treatment available to schools, their advantages and disadvantages and comparative cost. Illustrations of the different boundary treatments are shown below.

The comparative costs are shown for a 1.8m boundary treatment with £ being the cheapest and £££££ being the most expensive. Each boundary type has been given a sustainability rating. This has been based on the ratings given in the 'Green Guide to Specification' (2), with an 'A' rating being the most sustainable of the common boundary types and a C rating being the least sustainable.


Illustration	Boundary Type	Advantages	Disadvantage	Cost	Longevity	Sustainability
	Bespoke fencing or railings (Bruce Williams, Havant Park, Havant, Hampshire)	Designed to the school's specification, unique and eye catching. Ability to give the school identity. Can be an opportunity to involve an artist in designing boundaries and entrances.	Can be slow to achieve – a designer has to be commissioned and the boundary treatment specially fabricated. Maintenance will depend on the design.	£££ to £££££ Depends on design.	Depends on design	A / B depends on design



Illustration	Boundary Type	Advantages	Disadvantage	Cost	Longevity	Sustainability
	Metal Vertical bar railings (Bishops Park College, Clacton-on-sea, Essex)	Good choice available from manufacturers. Classic and contemporary designs. Good visibility through into site. Can be difficult to climb. Low maintenance if specified with galvanised coating. Railings over 1.8m are not easy to climb. Robust railings are difficult to bend and break.	Do not provide privacy. At heights below 1.8m may be climbable.	£££	Over 50 years, if maintained	B
	Welded mesh fencing (James Hornsby High School, Basildon, Essex)	Good level of security. Low maintenance if specified with galvanised coating before painting. Appearance is good at any height. Can be used as ball stop fencing up to 5.0m high. Good visibility through mesh. Robust alternative to chain link. Can be combined with additional security measures to top of fence for locations where security is paramount.	Poor level of privacy. At heights below 1.8m may be climbable.	££ to £££	Over 50 years, if maintained	B



Illustration	Boundary Type	Advantages	Disadvantage	Cost	Longevity	Sustainability
	Palisade security fencing (Sandringham Primary School, Newham, London)	Good level of security. Low maintenance if specified with galvanised coating before painting.	Industrial appearance and associated with high security locations such as factories, railway lines, military sites. Poor visibility through fence if pales are close together to prevent climbing.	££	Over 50 years, if maintained	B
	Combination of low wall and railings (St Nicholas School, Raywreth, Essex)	A traditional and robust boundary treatment. Low maintenance. Creates attractive school entrance	Do not provide privacy. At heights below 1.8m may be climbable. If security is a priority then the wall should not provide a foothold for climbing the railings	££££	Over 50 years, if maintained	C



Illustration	Boundary Type	Advantages	Disadvantage	Cost	Longevity	Sustainability
	<p>Combination of railings and wall panels</p> <p>(Rivenhall Primary School, Essex)</p>	Provides identity rather than privacy	At heights below 1.8m may be climbable.	£££ to £££££	Over 50 years, if maintained	C
	<p>Timber fencing</p> <p>Messing-cum-Inworth Primary School, Colchester, Essex)</p>	Good level of privacy and economic to install.	Provides a potential surface for graffiti Domestic larch lap fencing is not usually strong enough for use on a school site – a close boarded or timber palisade fence usually has a longer life.	£ to ££	Over 15 years, if maintained. Ensure suitable timber with a certificate of treatment for 20 years life is used.	A




Illustration	Boundary Type	Advantages	Disadvantage	Cost	Longevity	Sustainability
	Chain link fencing Meadgate Primary School, Chelmsford, Essex)	Good visibility and can be erected as ball stop fencing up to 5.0m height	At heights below 1.8m may be climbable. Relatively high maintenance. Vulnerable to damage and fire.	££	Less than 20 years in most circumstances before at least part of the fencing has to be replaced.	A
	Hedges Rivenhall Primary School, Essex)	Educational and wildlife benefit. May a suitable choice for rural localities Can be maintained to achieve a very good level of privacy. Thorny plants will deter intruders. Pleasing appearance and can be used in combination with other boundary treatments. Can help contribute to biodiversity targets throughout the county	Will not be suitable for locations where high security is required unless in combination with other boundary treatment. Maintenance requirements can be high if a formal clipped hedge is required. Hedges take time to grow and thicken to provide a good boundary.	£	indefinite if maintained in a healthy condition.	A

Illustration	Boundary Type	Advantages	Disadvantage	Cost	Longevity	Sustainability
	Hedges / fencing (Moulsham High School, Chelmsford, Essex)	A combination of hedges and fencing can provide security with the added benefit of screening, deterring climbing of the fence and enhancement of the school site through planting.	Avoid species such as leylandii (cypress) which are very fast growing and will require a high level of maintenance	£ to £££ Depends on design.	Indefinite if maintained well	A/B depending on fence type

(2) The Green Guide to Specification' Jane Anderson and David Shiers, Blackwell Science Ltd

Other points to consider

For each site the boundary treatments may vary around the school grounds. If different types are to be used around the grounds then it is important to consider how the boundaries will look when combined and whether there are any options for unifying the appearance e.g. choosing the same colour for vertical bar railings at the front of the school and welded mesh around the playground.

Transitions between different types of boundaries can often be the place where intruders will try to break into the premises e.g. by

getting a foothold on a low wall to help climb a fence, and these need to be carefully considered to make sure that they are secure, if that is the aim of the boundary.

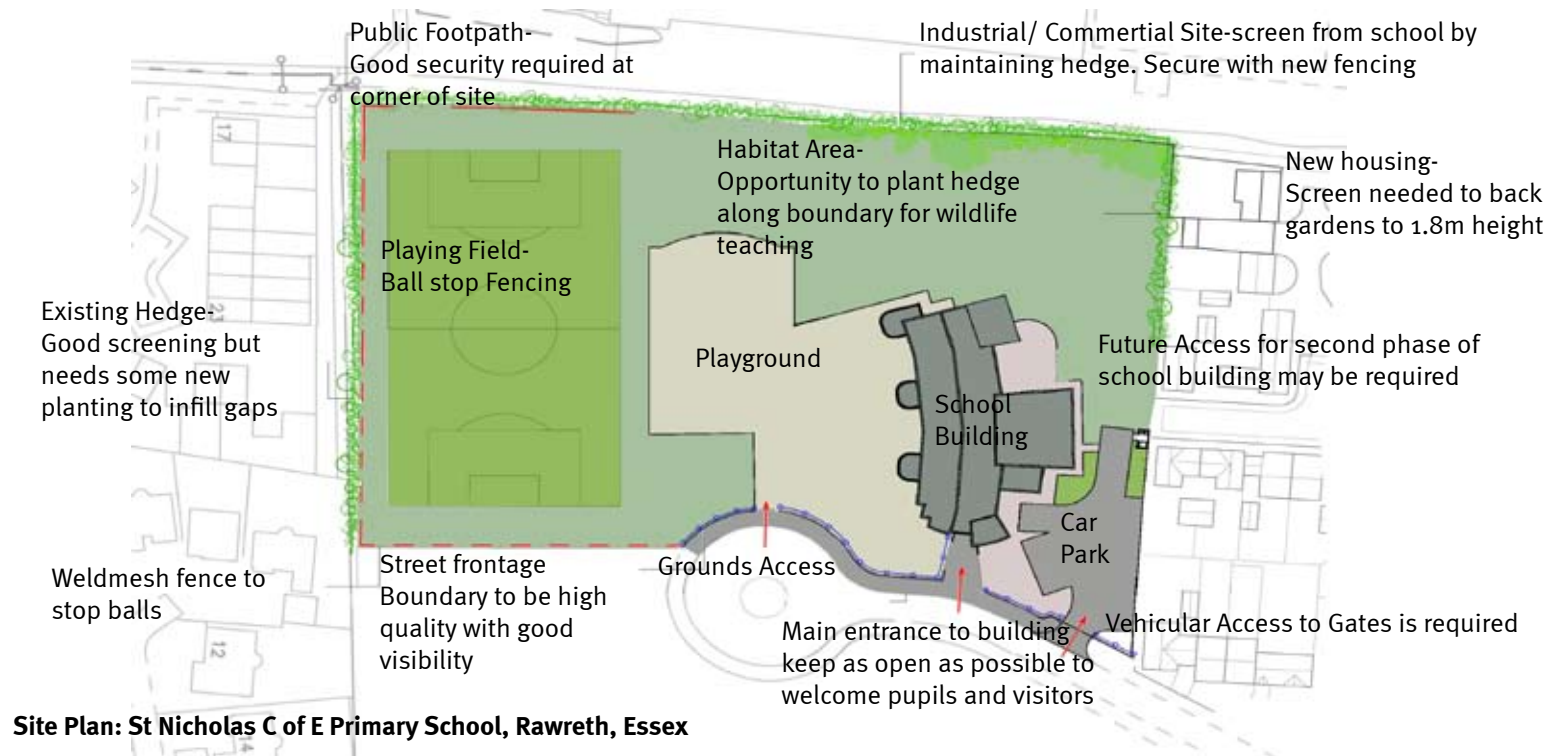
Gates are an important element of the boundary design – both from a visual and security point of view. Many schools choose to include electrical locking systems with self closing gates to improve security.

Case Studies

The following case studies show how a new school, rural school, an urban school and a suburban school have chosen and established their boundaries.

St Nicholas Primary School, Rawreth, Essex New School

The brief for the boundaries at this new primary school was drawn up as part of the design process for the whole school. The context varies around the site with boundaries adjoining a road, a new residential development, a warehouse site, an existing footpath and a public open space. Planning consent for the boundaries was sought as part of the application for the new school.



The brief for this school site was as follows:

- to make the premises welcoming but easy to secure
- to create a functional playing field area where balls were not easily kicked out of the site
- to maintain existing hedgerows which gave screening and privacy to the playing fields and which provided a wildlife habitat
- to screen the service areas of the site from residential properties and provide privacy to both the neighbours and the school
- The choices which were made for the boundaries were:

Residential boundary – close boarded timber fencing to 1.8m height to give privacy to gardens and screen the school car park, delivery access and recycling store. Planting was included to soften the appearance of the fence and contribute to the setting for the school's habitat area.

Road boundary – the school appears welcoming due to the good access and visibility of the boundary choice along the road. Low walls with a traditional vertical bar railing above give good views through to the school grounds and provide a robust boundary to the street. The low wall helps to prevent litter blowing in to the school grounds.

Public open space boundary – as this part of the grounds contains the grass playing fields and a robust welded mesh sports fencing was chosen for the boundary. Views across the public open space to a local windmill have been retained as the fence is easy to see through.

Warehouse boundary – the existing hedgerow and trees were maintained to screen the views towards the warehouse. Additional welded mesh fencing was installed for security.

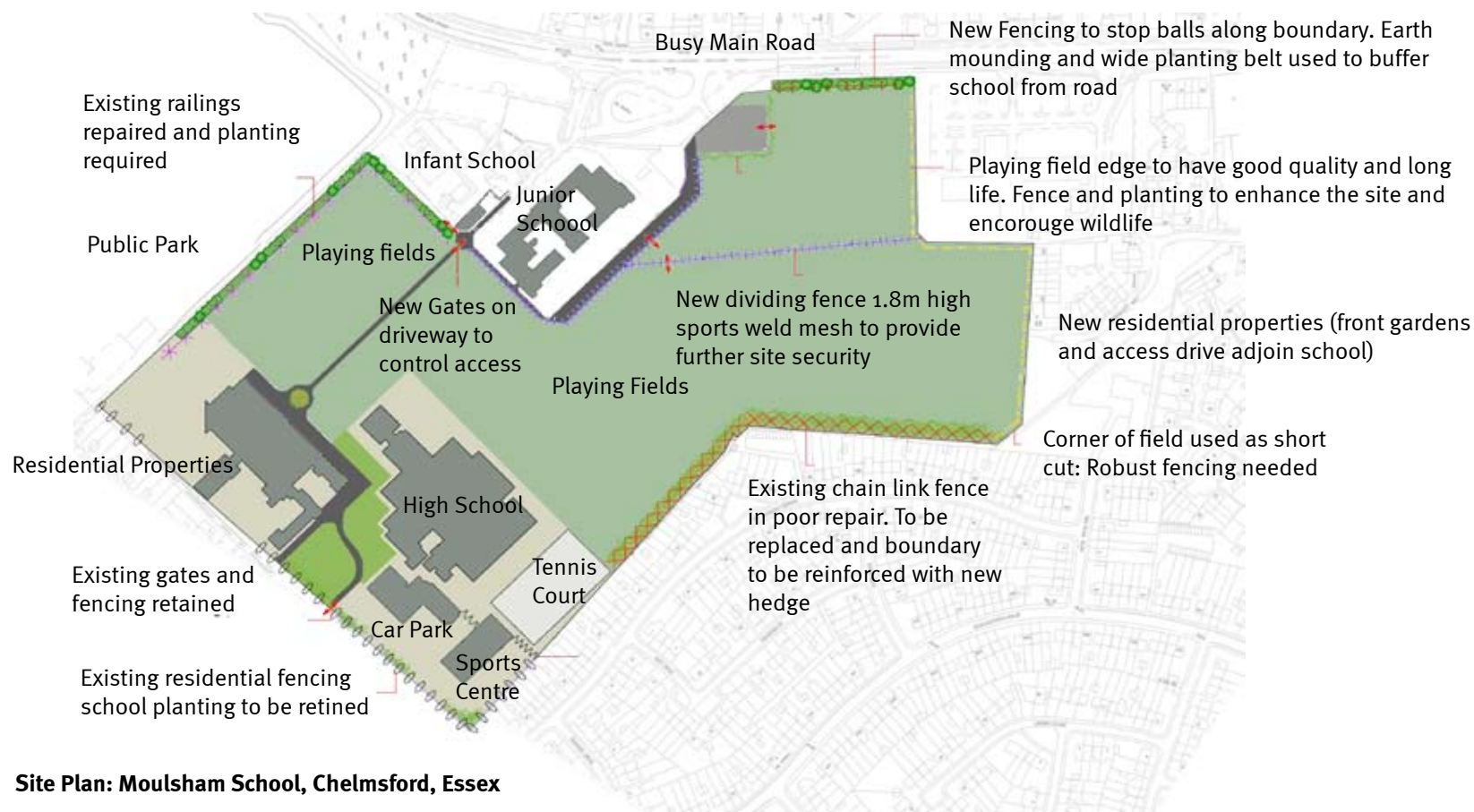
Entrances – the entrances have been carefully designed to give good security without detracting from the overall welcoming appearance of the school. The school took the decision to use the front of their new building as part of the boundary line and it is possible to walk straight from the street up to the front doors. To each side of the main entrance the boundary railings have been returned to the building to create a secure frontage. Bollards have been installed to prevent cars from driving up to the building.



Moulsham Schools, Chelmsford, Essex Suburban School

The Moulsham school campus has three schools and a leisure centre which is open to the public outside of school hours. The schools are

bounded by residential areas, a further education college, a busy ring road and a public open space. A major improvement programme for the playing fields and building works at the secondary school presented an opportunity for the schools to review their boundary requirements.



The brief for the Moulsham schools site was to;

- solve existing health and safety problems which had arisen from open boundaries and fencing which was easy to vandalise
- create a unified style to the school boundaries
- assist in management of the school grounds after hours when trespassing had been a major problem
- save and refurbish existing boundary treatments, where possible
- re-establish boundaries with residential properties where informal entrances had been established onto the school grounds
- prevent casual public use of the grounds as a cut through and informal footpath to local shops
- to screen traffic on the busy main road adjacent to the junior school
- allow the schools to maintain security when the leisure centre was open after school hours

The schools use the opportunity to unify the style of their boundary treatments. The junior school and secondary school playing field boundaries were re established with a welded mesh sports fence which was used at 3.0m height along the road and residential boundary and 2.0m height elsewhere on the site. New railings were erected within the site to define the boundaries between the schools and existing railings were refurbished to match.

The junior school has a long boundary with a busy main road and in addition to the new fencing, a mound with tree and shrub planting has been established on the school site. In time this will screen the playing fields from the road and provide a buffer to the sound of the traffic.

The secondary school also chose to reinforce their boundaries with planting. Problems with residential properties creating accesses onto the site were solved by the installation of a new fence to the residential boundaries and planting a new native hedgerow along the boundary line. Thorny plants were included in the hedge mix for this boundary to deter access to the site.

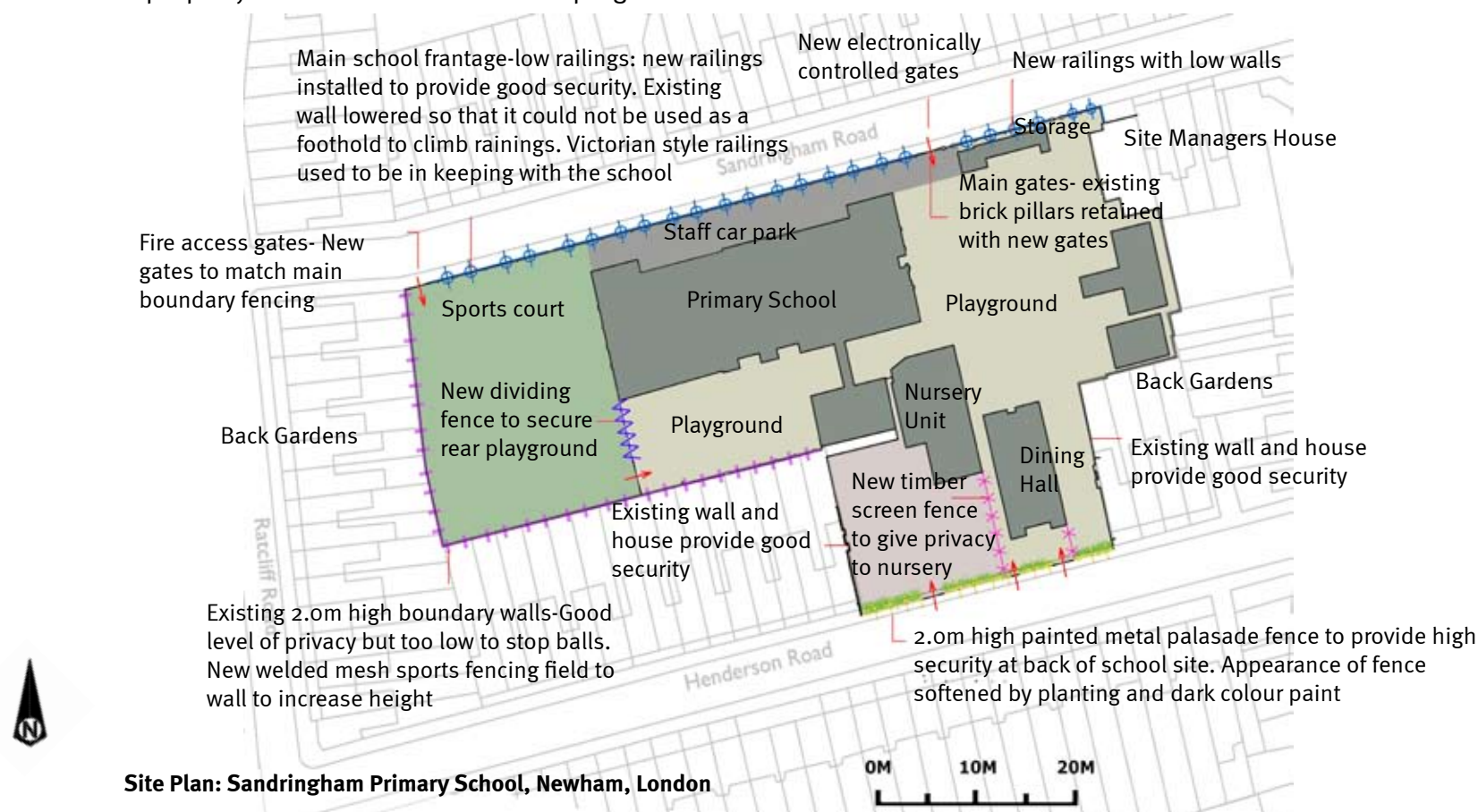
Separate internal fences allow for the leisure centre site to be kept open outside school hours and during the school holidays. Planning consent was required for the new boundary works.



Sandringham Primary School, Newham Urban School

Sandringham Primary School is surrounded by residential streets with gardens backing on to the site. There is a nursery unit on site. Security was an issue with out of hours trespass onto the site and vandalism of school property. The school commenced a programme

of boundary improvements which have resulted in a well presented site and have greatly reduced their security problems. The main school building is Victorian and classified as being of local interest by the planning authority. The planning authority required the school to choose boundary treatments to their road frontage which would be in keeping with the style and age of the building.



The brief for the Sandringham Primary School site was to;

- solve trespassing and vandalism problems
- comply with the planning requirement for a suitable choice of boundary treatment to the street frontage
- save and refurbish existing boundary treatments, where possible
- control access to the school during school hours
- stop balls from being lost from the playgrounds into neighbours gardens
- create a welcoming and tidy site

The school used this opportunity to choose boundary treatments which would satisfy their brief and give a facelift to the school at the same time.

- Existing boundary walls were kept, where possible as they provided good privacy to neighbours and the school. The school

redecorated the walls and used them to display art work by the pupils.

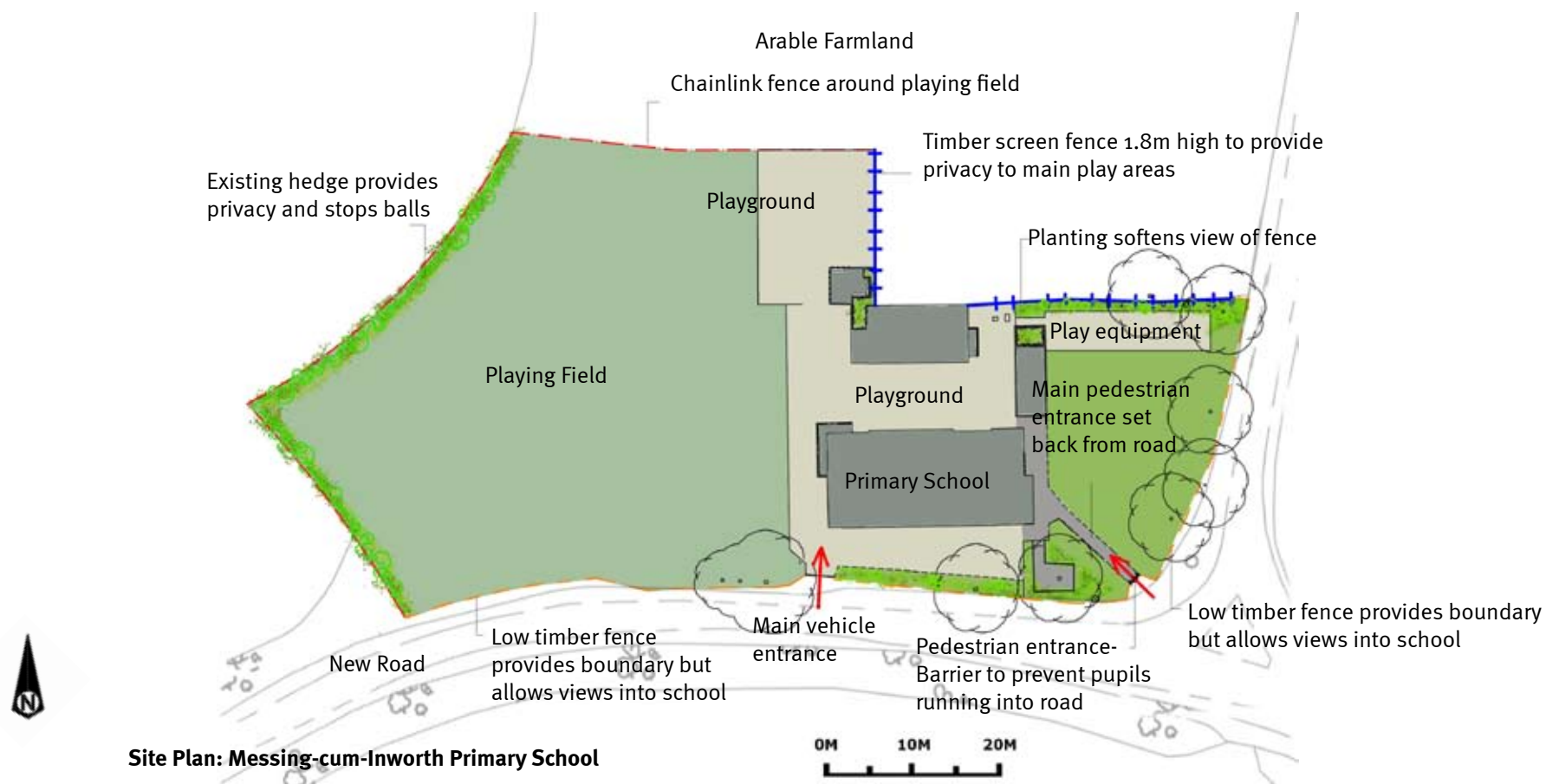
- Where walls were not high enough to prevent balls being thrown or kicked over, new dark coloured welded mesh sports fencing was added to the top of the walls.
- At the back of the school and around the nursery unit, dark coloured palisade fencing was erected in combination with planting for added interest and security. Double gates were installed to allow maintenance access into the nursery.
- The main school frontage was transformed by a project which remodelled an existing boundary wall, kept the Victorian features of the wall and entrances but also included new Victorian style railings and electrically operated gates with an entry system. The scheme improved visibility in to the site. The comparative height of the wall and railings was carefully considered so that the wall did not provide a foothold for climbing the railings.
- A new entrance system was installed at the main gates with an intercom connected to the school reception and an electrically controlled gate.
- Separate internal fences were erected to help manage the different areas of the site and provide additional security.
- Planning consent was required for the works.



Messsing cum Inworth Primary School, Essex Rural School

Messing cum Inworth Primary School is a Victorian school, surrounded by countryside on the edge of a small village. The school has chosen to keep its boundaries low key and wherever possible

they have used a combination of hedges and fencing to define their boundaries. Recent work to extend and improve the playground areas gave an opportunity for the school to develop their pedestrian entrance. Although the school is situated on a quiet country lane, the road becomes very busy at drop off and pick up times and the school wanted to redesign their entrance to keep vehicles and pedestrians separate.



- The school boundaries have been established over time rather than as one project and include:
- Hedges and chainlink fencing around the playing field
- Low timber fencing and gates for the front of the school. The school chose to extend this fencing along their road boundary to provide continuity of appearance and a clear boundary line. The timber fencing is preservative treated but unstained for a natural appearance which has blended in with the surrounding countryside.
- Pedestrian guard rail positioned opposite the main entrance to prevent children straying in out the road
- Close boarded timber fencing to the playground to provide privacy



Appendix I

Help with School boundaries

These are some of the organisations that may be able to provide help and support for school boundary projects:

Essex County Council www.essexcc.gov.uk

Minerals and waste planning duty officer

mineralsandwasteDC@essex.gov.uk 01245 435555

Schools, Children and Families Directorate Tel: 08457 430430

Public Arts Team www.the-edi.co.uk

County Insurance Advice Tel: (01245) 431482

District Council Planning Departments

The Planning Portal

Many planning authorities now accept applications online via the planning portal

www.planningportal.gov.uk

The Landscape Institute

www.l-i.org.uk

Lists all registered landscape architects

The Department for Children, Schools and Families

Publications include ‘School Grounds – A Guide to Good Practice’ and ‘Schools for the Future, Designing School Grounds’ both available from The Stationery Office (www.tso.co.uk)

www.teachernet.gov.uk

Learning through Landscapes (LTL)

www.ltl.org.uk

LTL operates a members advice service which can put schools in touch with school grounds professionals in their area.

RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors)

www.rics.org.uk

Lists all registered chartered surveyors

Secured by Design

www.securedbydesign.com

Service from the police giving design advice on security matters

Arts Council for England

www.arts.org.uk

The arts council has regional offices which can help with finding a local artist for a bespoke project

Axis Arts

www.axisartists.org.uk

An arts organisation listing artists on a database

BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers)

www.btcv.org.uk

Local BTCV offices will provide a specialist support service for undertaking conservation projects, this could include boundary hedges and planting

Wildlife Trusts

www.wildlifetrusts.org

Local wildlife trusts offer support to schools undertaking projects which benefit wildlife.

Appendix II

The Planning Process

The installation of a new boundary may require planning consent. Even if an existing fence is being replaced, planning consent may be needed before the work takes place (for instance if the fence is being replaced with a higher boundary treatment or if the premises are in a conservation area).

Planning applications can be made to the County Council, if the land in question is owned by the County Council. In other cases (e.g. at Foundation, Voluntary Controlled, and Voluntary Aided Schools) it is normally still permissible to make the application to the County Council (to check this, schools should contact the County Council's Planning Services helpline, as detailed in appendix 1).

Schools should ask the local planning authority whether planning permission will be required for their boundary changes and, if consent is required, make an application.

Advice on making a planning application can be obtained from the local authority web site or by contacting the authority by telephone or in person. If a landscape architect, architect or building surveyor is commissioned to manage the fencing project then they will be able to advise on the planning process and assist in making the application.

To make an application a planning application form and certificates will need to be completed; scale plans provided showing the location of the site and details for the proposed boundaries submitted to explain the proposals. A planning application will also need to be accompanied by a design and access statement. Guidance of these can be found at www.cabe.org.uk under 'design and access statements-how to write, read and use them'.

Once an application has been registered with the planning authority then it will be advertised and neighbours will be contacted and made aware of the proposals. There is then a 21 day consultation period for the public to come forward with any concerns or objections.

Planning applications usually take 8 weeks to be determined by the local authority and schools should make allowance in their timescale for a boundary project for the planning process to run its course.

If the application is granted permission there may be conditions attached to the permission. These conditions will be a requirement of implementing the scheme and the school will need to adhere to the conditions. Typical conditions may concern the style and colours of the materials used and impose a time limit on the planning consent.

If you would like further advice on the planning process please refer to the contact details in Appendix I

This booklet is issued by

Essex County Council Landscape Department
You can contact us in the following ways:

By Post

Landscape Department, E Block 3rd Floor, County Hall,
Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1QH

By Telephone

0845 603 7632

By Fax

01245 437213

By email

edi@essex.gov.uk

Visit our website:

www.essexcc.gov.uk

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