

Planning Committee

17 October 2007

**Development by the
County Council**



Report of Rod Lugg, Head of Environment and Planning

Purpose of the report: To enable the Committee to determine applications for planning permission which have been received in accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992.

Derwentside District: Provision of Sure Start Children's Centre, Benfieldside Primary School, Blackhill, Consett. (Regulation 3)

Introduction

- 1 The Sure Start Children's Centre initiative aims to provide day care centres in local communities to ensure that children and their parents have access to childcare and education facilities. As part of the initiative it is proposed to provide a children's centre for 0-5 year olds at Benfieldside Primary School. The location of the facility on the site is intended to establish close links with the school and promote integration between early years' childcare and formal curriculum education.

Proposal

- 2 Planning permission is being sought for a single storey building on a grassed area to the south west of the existing school building used for outdoor play purposes by the school nursery unit (see attached plan). The facility would provide two multi-purpose rooms, crèche, nursery and meeting room, toy store, office, kitchen, toilets and storage. The proposed building would measure a maximum 28m long by 16m wide and would extend to a height of 3.4m. External elevations would be finished in a beige coloured cement render bordered by blue engineering brickwork and light coloured panels. Windows and doors would be framed in light grey powder coated aluminium. The building would have a flat aluminium roof. Three small play areas would be provided around the building to cater for different age groups, one to the north west (61 square metres), one to the west (88 square metres) that would result in the loss of a number of trees and one to the south (52 square metres). A painted steel framed canopy measuring approximately 3 by 5 metres would extend over part of each play area.
- 3 Separate from the proposed Sure Start facility, but included as part of the planning application, it is proposed to replace the existing gas meter housing located to the north of the school buildings. A new structure measuring 2.2 x 2 x 2.8 metres would be constructed in brickwork, with two louvre doors and a flat aluminium roof.
- 4 The proposed development of the Sure Start centre will require the relocation of the school nursery outdoor play area and this is to be provided to the north west of the proposed building on land that forms part of the school playing field. The new nursery play area would include a sandpit and large grassed area with a range of features including benches and a climbing wall. Two existing steel storage containers towards the southern boundary of the site are to be moved further north within the new nursery outdoor play area. It is proposed to surround the whole site including the relocated nursery outdoor play area with 1.8m high paladin fencing.

- 5 Due to varying ground levels across the site a series of earthworks are necessary to create a level platform for the proposed building and outdoor play areas. As a result, and to allow for the construction of a retaining wall, existing tree planting and shrubbery along the south and west boundaries would need to be removed.
- 6 Vehicular and pedestrian access to the site would remain unchanged although the existing car park would be reconfigured to provide accessible parking. A disabled access ramp to the Sure Start site is already in place.
- 7 A maximum of 9 Sure Start staff would be employed at the building. Anticipated operating times are 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday. Most parents are expected to arrive with their children on foot from neighbouring housing areas.

Views received

- 8 Derwentside District Council has no objection to the proposal subject to the Highways Authority being satisfied with on site parking provision.
- 9 Sport England does not wish to comment on the application.
- 10 The application has been advertised on site and the occupiers of neighbouring properties notified. Three letters of objection have been received from neighbouring properties on Moorlands Crescent and Benfieldside Road. The following issues are highlighted:
 - a. The proposal will give rise to increased noise and disturbance and litter.
 - b. The school is subject to trespass and vandalism and the location and (flat roof) design of the building will exacerbate this and affect neighbouring properties.
 - c. The proposed building will cause the loss of natural light to the kitchen and dining room of an adjacent property.
 - d. Loss of privacy to neighbouring properties.
 - e. Extra traffic would cause increased disruption, inconvenience and potential danger around a school that is already dangerously congested at school drop off and pick up times.
 - f. The building could be better located elsewhere on the site where more space is available and where it relates better to surrounding development.
 - g. Tree planting previously justified as essential landscape cover to enhance the appearance of the site is now to be removed and reflects the double standards of the authority.

Comment: The Police Architectural Liaison Officer was consulted during the design process for the development and fencing, access and CCTV provision in the scheme takes account of security requirements. Amenity and traffic implications of the scheme are considered in

paragraphs 12 -16. The location for the proposed Sure Start centre was chosen to provide a fully integrated nursery service with close working links with the school. Re-positioning of the centre on another part of the school site would make this difficult to achieve in physical and education terms.

Planning comment

- 11 The proposed Sure Start building would provide a nursery/community facility on an established school site and would be acceptable in principle in this location. The key planning considerations are its integration into its surroundings and the affect on the amenities of nearby properties. Policy GDP1 (General Development Principles) and Policy TR2 (Parking, Access and Servicing) of the Derwentside District Local Plan are relevant planning policies.

Design

- 12 Benfieldside Primary School consists of a 19th Century stone building fronting Moorlands Road with a large extension to the rear at a much lower level constructed during the 1990's. The extension was built in stone from buildings on the site that were demolished as part of the school rationalisation at the time. The proposed building would be located on the lower level adjacent to the school extension and would have a contemporary design. Although it would contrast with the stone building, it would be a modest and subordinate structure of subdued colour that is screened from surrounding streets and can be acceptably accommodated on the site in design terms.

Residential amenity

- 13 The application site lies adjacent to residential properties on Moorlands Crescent to the south. These would be located approximately 27m away from the proposed building. Given the distances involved, the single storey nature of the building and its position at the foot of an embankment in relation to these properties, it is not considered that it would have negative amenity impact on these occupiers. It is proposed to remove existing shrubs along the rear garden boundary of the houses but this area would be replanted following re-grading of the embankment and a 1.8m high paladin fence installed on the boundary to help screen the development.
- 14 In contrast, the proposed building would be close to the property to the south west on Benfieldside Road. A section of the southern elevation would be located directly opposite the residential property at a distance of 6-9 metres at its closest point. In addition the existing ground level would be raised by some 600-700 millimetres to create level foundations and would result in the proposed single storey building standing approximately 2m above the height of the existing stone boundary wall. Although the building would be most imposing at this

point, windows on the elevation closest to the neighbouring property would be at a low level with obscure glass to help maintain privacy. Although the structure would be seen above the boundary wall and would increase the sense of enclosure around the property, it is not anticipated that it would have a significant affect on natural light as the property is north facing on this side and the proposed building is single storey.

- 15 A number of semi mature trees are to be felled to make way for an external play area further along the boundary wall with the neighbouring property. The loss of the trees would be unfortunate and would create more open views but would not have significant residential amenity implications.
- 16 A further property to the west of the proposed development site would be located just over 26m away from the western edge of the proposed building. The property is at a lower level to the development site but would relate acceptably to the proposed building. Existing shrubs along the garden boundary are to be removed to make way for the retaining wall and newly graded embankment but would be replaced once works are completed. Land to the north of this house intended for outdoor play purposes is already in use as playing field. Noise levels in this area and those associated with the development in general are not expected to increase significantly given that the affected parts of the school site are already used for play purposes and times of use would not extend beyond 6pm.
- 17 With regards to the proposed gas meter housing, this would be situated in the same location as the current structure already in place to the north of the school building. The replacement structure, in terms of its small size, scale and location would not negatively impact on the streetscape or the neighbouring property on Moorlands Road.

Traffic and accessibility

- 18 There are no plans to create additional car parking spaces to cater for staff at the Sure Start facility. Currently car parking provision is slightly greater than the maximum figure set out in DCC Accessibility and Parking Guidelines and takes into account the additional members of staff associated with the Sure Start facility. The Head of Highway Management has no objections to the proposals but requests that should the application be approved a travel plan be submitted within six months of occupation of the building and that cycle parking be provided in order to encourage sustainable travel modes to and from the site.

Sport and recreation

- 19 The relocation of the nursery outdoor play area would mean that an 11m wide section of the school playing field would be lost to accommodate the proposed building. However the playing field is not

large enough to accommodate a playing pitch of 0.4 hectares and as such raises no issues from Sport England's perspective. Play space throughout the site as a result of the development would still meet educational requirements.

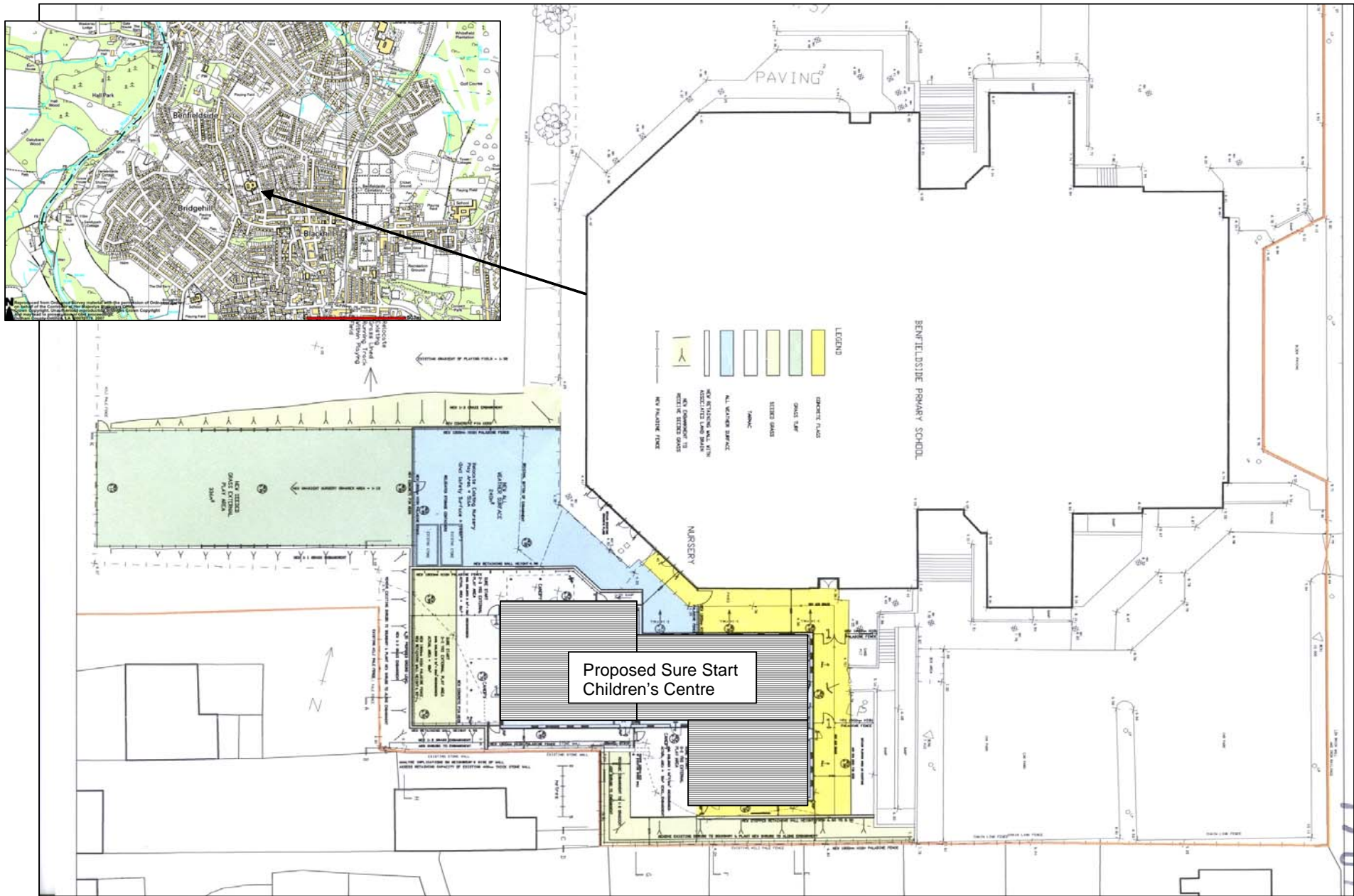
Recommendation and Reasons

- 20 The proposed Sure Start children's centre is intended to provide local pre-school childcare in the Benfieldside/Blackhill area. The scheme involves the development of a small part of the school grounds and would promote integration of early years' childcare and formal curriculum education. In physical terms the development can be satisfactorily accommodated without undue detriment to the amenities of the area. I therefore **recommend** that planning permission be granted for the development subject to appropriate conditions for the following reasons:
- (i) The development would accord with Policies GDP1 and TR2 of the Derwentside District Local Plan and would have no material conflict with other development plan policies.
 - (ii) The proposal in terms of its size, location and appearance would relate acceptably to surrounding development and would not adversely affect the amenities of the area.

No departure

Background Papers: Application, consultations and responses, site location plans.

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