

**Planning Committee**

**18 December 2007**

**Development by the  
County Council**



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**Report of Rod Lugg, Head of Environment and Planning**

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**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.**

**Sedgfield Borough:** Proposed new Sure Start Childrens Centre and link to existing school building, Fishburn Primary School (Regulation 3)

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## **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 day care and family health and support services, in line with Sure Start objectives. As part of the ongoing Sure Start Phase II programme it is proposed to provide a new children's centre for 0-5 year olds at Fishburn Primary School. The siting 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 The proposal involves the construction of a single storey rectangular Sure Start building (27.5m long, 18m wide and 5.5m to ridgeline) on land to the east of the existing school. The building would incorporate three separate nursery areas, 2 meeting rooms, toilets and baby changing facilities, toy storage space, buggy park, lobby space, office/reception, 2 kitchens and a laundry. External elevations would be finished in a combination of red brickwork, cream coloured rendered panels and turquoise blocks. The shallow pitch roof would be formed from standing seam aluminium, with flat faced composite fascia panels. Windows and glazed doors would be constructed using an aluminium glazing system with blue frames. A link walkway connecting the Sure Start Centre with the existing school building would be positioned on the western elevation. This would be constructed in red brickwork and would have a grey coloured aluminium roof.
- 3 Three play areas (0-2 years, 2-3 years and 3-5 years) separated by 1.5m high paladine fencing would be positioned to the south and east of the building, and would use a mixture of hard and soft landscaping. The Sure Start building would be enclosed by a 1.8m high paladine fence and hedging to the north, south and east. The existing primary school yard would face the building to the west.
- 4 The existing vehicular access to the school along East View would be used to serve the development. The existing car park would be marginally extended to the north west and remarked to accommodate 19 spaces (including 1 disabled space). The existing footpath in front of properties on East View would be extended to the edge of the car park and a pedestrian gate positioned adjacent to the existing vehicular gate allowing pedestrian access to the site. A further footpath would be constructed along the edge of the school playing field running in an easterly direction toward the Sure Start building. This would be separated from the school yard and play facilities by a gate and small section of fence to provide secure pedestrian access to the proposed building. A cycle storage shelter with space for 10 bicycles would be positioned to the west of the car park.

- 5 A total of 7 Sure Start staff (5 full time and 2 part time) 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.

### **Consultations and Representations**

- 6 Sedgefield Borough Council recommend that prior to making a decision on the proposal the County Council should:

- Undertake a sequential test to establish whether there are any more suitable sites within the village limits that can reasonably accommodate the facility.

*Comment: The applicant has stated that a key requirement of the brief for the Sure Start Centre is a location in close proximity to the school and alternative locations within the village were not preferred. It was originally proposed to locate the Sure Start Centre on the area occupied by the existing school car park, however this would have resulted in the loss of a small area of playing field. The proposed location, with a link corridor to the school building, was preferred by the school and by Sure Start.*

*A letter was sent to Sedgefield Borough Council on 23 November 2007 asking whether it considered any alternative sites within Fishburn to be more suitable for the development. No reply has been received to date.*

- Ensure a comprehensive landscaping scheme is incorporated into the proposal to screen the development from the east.
- Recommend that particular attention be paid to the design of the boundary treatments to the site and its impact on the surrounding area, with no details of this fencing shown on submitted plans. It is considered that this matter should be dealt with by way of a planning condition, given the limited details shown on submitted plans.

*Comment: These details can be covered by conditions should planning permission be granted.*

- 7 Fishburn Parish Council welcomes the provision of a Sure Start Centre in the village but has grave concerns about traffic problems in the area surrounding the Primary School and the proposed Sure Start Centre. Parked cars block the junction between East View and the B1278 restricting the view when turning right at the junction and it is feared that the proposal will contribute further towards these problems. It is suggested that the highway issues need to be investigated and that traffic calming measures on Salters Lane and a traffic mirror opposite the junction would help to alleviate the problem.

*Comment: The Head of Highway Management accepts there are existing traffic problems in Fishburn village but states that traffic calming measures on the B1278 would not be appropriate due to the nature of the road and its present level of use and that traffic mirrors*

are not authorised traffic signs and can lead to more accidents. I have advised the Parish Council of these findings.

8 The application has been advertised on site and neighbouring residents notified. Two representations have been received, one sought clarification and assurances on drainage arrangements and details have been provided in response to the issues raised. One letter formally objects to the proposal on the following grounds:

- The access on East View would lead to problems of noise, dirt and disruption, particularly during the construction phase. This would significantly affect residents that work night shifts living in close proximity to the site. It is suggested that a construction access may be more appropriate through Greenside Close and adjacent agricultural land to the south east of the site.

*Comment: The construction phase of the development would last for 23 weeks. Part of the agricultural land to the south east of the site is in private ownership, making a proposed access in this area more problematic.*

- The road in East View is in poor condition and parked cars are in danger of being hit by school related traffic.

*Comment: The Head of Highway Management has not raised any issues in relation to the poor condition of the road in East View.*

- Consideration should be given to the possibility of an alternative pedestrian entrance, as the current entrance raises amenity issues for residents of East View.

*Comment: Pedestrian access to the existing Primary School is currently taken through East View on an adopted footpath and would be difficult to reposition due to the location of the building. The proposed Sure Start Centre would be open from 8am-6pm and is expecting a relatively small number of visitors to come and go throughout the day.*

- The gates to the school car park are locked outside of school hours which does not allow the residents of East View to turn their cars around. The hedge surrounding the mesh fencing in front of the school has not been allowed to grow to screen the fence from properties on East View. These issues were apparently agreed prior to planning permission being granted for the fence and gates.

*Comment: The County Planning Authority has no record of any agreement made to keep the school gates open when planning permission was granted to replace the fence and gates. However it was expected that the shrubs at the front of the school would be allowed to grow back on completion of the fence to provide an appropriate landscape context. This is being allowed to happen.*

- There is no evidence to date to say that Sure Start has any benefits to its users.

## Planning Comment

### Planning Policy

- 9 The proposed building would provide a nursery/community facility at an established school. The eastern edge of the Sure Start site falls outside the defined settlement boundary of Fishburn but it is functionally related to the school and surrounding built development and has limited impact on the open countryside. The development is therefore considered acceptable in principle in this location. The key planning considerations in this case are the integration of the building into its surroundings, the affect on the amenities of nearby residents and access provision. Policy L11 (Development of New or Improved Leisure and Community Buildings), Policy D1 (General Principles for the layout and Design of New Developments) and Policy D2 (Design for People) of the Sedgefield Borough Local Plan are relevant planning policies.

### Design

- 10 Fishburn Primary School is a single storey building of red brick construction. The proposed Sure Start building would occupy a grassed area to the rear of the existing school site and whilst not corresponding directly with the existing building in design terms would relate acceptably in terms of scale, form and appearance to the existing building and surrounding area. The building would be relatively low lying in large grounds and generally set away from surrounding properties. Seven trees would need to be removed to facilitate the development but a tree survey submitted as part of the proposal suggests that many of these are in poor condition and all could be removed. New trees would be planted along the boundary of the school's playing field to the north of the Sure Start building.

### Residential Amenity

- 11 The closest residential properties to the proposed building lie approximately 27 metres to the south on Greenside Close. The rear elevations of 2 properties within the cul-de-sac would face the proposed Sure Start building but it would be set behind the line of the school and perimeter fence and hedging would provide screening. Given the single storey nature of the building and its position, it is not therefore considered that the amenity of adjacent residents would be adversely affected. There would be some additional activities generated from the play area on this part of the site including that arising from the relocated nursery play space. However this would be supervised and of limited duration during the daytime.
- 12 Other properties on East View to the west of the school site would be located adjacent to the vehicular and pedestrian access and car park serving the school and proposed Sure Start Centre. Residents of these properties currently experience some amenity issues, particularly at

peak times when parents drop off or collect children from the school. The Sure Start Centre would be open from 8am until 6pm and is not expected to attract a high number of visitors nor experience peak times for dropping off and collecting children as the school does. Sure Start anticipate that the majority of users would access the facility on foot and footpaths are to be provided and extended for these users. It is therefore not considered that use of the existing access in association with the proposed Sure Start Centre would significantly impact upon residential amenity in this area.

## Highways

- 13 The school's existing car park would be extended and re-marked to accommodate 19 parking spaces (including 1 disabled space). This represents an increase of 5 spaces on the existing level of provision (14 spaces) and would exceed the maximum level defined in the County Council's Accessibility and Parking Guidelines by approximately 3-4 spaces. The car parking arrangements have been amended since the application was first submitted when no increase in parking provision at the site was intended. However given the existing parking issues in the area associated with the school, this would be beneficial in this instance.
- 14 A travel plan for Fishburn Primary School is in place and the school and the County Council's Travel Planning Team are in the process of implementing recommendations as funding becomes available. The school have installed a footpath running along the side of the vehicular access to the school and linking with the main entrance to the school building, this has ensured that pedestrians no longer walk on the road and remain separated from vehicles. A survey undertaken as part of the school travel plan identified that over 80% of pupils walk to school and home from school, and that approximately 73% of pupils live under half a kilometre travelling distance to school. There is a school crossing patrol.
- 15 The proposed Sure Start Centre would serve the wards of New Trimdon and Trimdon Grange, Fishburn and Old Trimdon, a maximum distance of approximately 2.5 miles away. However it is anticipated that the majority of users would live close enough to access the centre on foot. Sure Start is unable to provide full details of the proposed level of daily use nevertheless, of the three crèche areas within the proposed building the 3-5 years would have a maximum occupancy of 24 children, the 2-3 years 8 children and the 0-2 years 6 children. It is expected that the rooms would rarely achieve maximum capacity. One consulting room would be provided that is unlikely to be used by more than one healthcare professional visiting at any one time. It is anticipated that approximately 15 vehicles would access the Sure Start Centre per day, mainly for dropping off and picking up children at off peak times for activities such as breakfast and after work clubs. No estimate of cycle use is available.

- 16 It is acknowledged that there are existing traffic problems in the area close to the school, associated with speeding motorists on the B1278 and the layout and proximity of the junction to East View in relation to the crossroads to the south. Whilst these issues may be exacerbated by peak time parking around the school when parents drop off or collect children, it is considered that the proposed Sure Start Centre would not worsen existing problems significantly. No personal injury accidents have occurred in proximity to the site in the last ten years. The Head of Highway Management has no objection to the proposal.

### **Recommendation and Reasons**

- 17 The proposal would fulfil a local need for pre-school childcare and provide a base for co-ordinated provision of services related to parenting and children in Fishburn. The building would be located to the rear of the existing school site, partly on a grassed area and partly on agricultural land and can be satisfactorily accommodated without having significant visual, residential amenity or traffic impacts.
- 18 I therefore **recommend** that planning permission be granted for the development subject to conditions relating to external materials and features, landscaping and drainage for the following reasons:
- i. The development would accord with Policies L11, D1 and D2 of the Sedgefield Borough Local Plan and would have no material conflict with other development plan policies.
  - ii. The proposed school can be satisfactorily accommodated on the site in terms of its location, size, layout, appearance, access and parking and would relate acceptably to the surrounding area in terms of visual and residential amenity and traffic impacts.

### **No departure**

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

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