

Introduction

- 1 In order to create additional storage space for outdoor equipment Timothy Hackworth Primary School has installed two steel containers on the site. One has been placed on the infant playground (Container 1) and the second (Container 2) on the main school playground (see attached plan). The placement of the containers was drawn to the attention of the planning authority following a complaint and the school was informed that these works needed planning consent. This application seeks to retain the storage containers.

The Development

- 2 Container 1 (2.75m in height, 4.8m in length, 2.4m in width) abuts a steel mesh fence on the southern boundary of the playground and is painted blue. It contains outdoor play equipment such as slides, bicycles and go karts. Container 2 sits to the west of Container 1 inside a low fence that separates the infant and junior playgrounds and against a 2.5m high brick boundary wall. It measures 2.75m in height, 6.05m in length and 2.4m in width and is coloured green. The container is used to store caretaker's equipment such as wheelbarrows and salt.

Consultations and Representations

- 3 Sedgefield Borough Council (consulted 2 April 2008) view is not yet available.
- 4 Shildon Town Council (consulted 2 April 2008) has not commented.
- 5 The application has been advertised on site and adjacent properties along Oxford Street were notified. Five letters of objection have been received from local residents regarding the development and highlight the following concerns:
 - i) The containers are not in keeping with the architecture of the school and make the school playground resemble a building site.
 - ii) The containers are unsightly and inappropriate to their location.
 - iii) They are a health and safety risk to young children. The heavy doors could become dangerous in high winds, children could become trapped inside and the area around the containers is used to store waste materials.
 - iv) The containers would attract thieves to the area.
 - v) The flat roofs of the containers would encourage trespassing and climbing and be a target for vandalism.
 - vi) Outdoor space would be lost.

Planning Comment

- 6 The development raises issues relating to the visual and residential amenity of adjoining residents. Policy D1 of the Sedgefield Borough Local Plan relating to Design Principles is of relevance.
- 7 Timothy Hackworth School is situated in a residential area in the south of Shildon. It comprises of two early 20th century buildings interspersed by large tarmac play areas to the east and west of the main junior school building. Site levels slope gently downwards from north to south. The site is bordered to the north by properties on Oxford Street and there is further housing to the west on Byerley Road. Playing fields lie to the east and the new Shildon Sure Start Centre sits immediately to the south.

Residential Amenity

- 8 Although steel containers have limited visual appeal they represent a functional and robust solution to storage needs and are a well established feature of many school sites. The containers sit towards the south of the school grounds on an area of the site which was formerly used as a car park. Whilst accepting that they are somewhat incongruous features in the open school yard, they are set against the southern boundary of the site and are partly inside the building line of the infant school. The containers cannot be easily seen in close views from surrounding public areas and in the wider visual context do not have an adverse impact upon the appearance of the area.
- 9 The containers are partially overlooked at a distance of 100 – 105 metres from properties on Oxford Street. Although these properties are at a slightly elevated position, the northern boundary wall of the school and the positioning of the infant school building inhibit ground floor views. It is therefore not considered that the containers have a direct impact on the residential amenity of the Oxford Street residents.
- 10 Whilst acknowledging that residents have concerns regarding wider health and security matters these are essentially management issues. The County Council's Health and Safety Unit has been consulted on the application and has no objections to the retention of the containers. The flat roofs of the structures are not felt to be an inherent attraction for climbing or vandalism and the Durham Constabulary Architectural Liaison Officer has no objections to the siting of the containers.

Recommendation and Reasons

- 11 The containers have been installed to increase outside storage capacity at the site and represent a storage solution that is favoured by many schools. The school regrets that the facilities were provided without the benefit of planning permission but is seeking to regularise the position. It wants to retain the containers in the locations shown to meet operational requirements. Although the containers are visible to some surrounding occupiers they have limited overall effect in planning terms on the

appearance and residential amenity of the area. I therefore **recommend** that:

- (i) Planning permission be granted for the following reason, subject to relevant conditions.
 - The containers by reason of their size, purpose and siting do not significantly detract from the appearance of the locality or the amenities of surrounding residents. The development accords with Policy D1 of the Sedgefield Borough Local Plan.
- (ii) In view of the circumstances that have led to the submission of this planning application:
 - The school be advised of the Planning Committee's disappointment and concern that the containers were installed without the benefit of planning permission and reminded of the need to notify the planning authority at the earliest opportunity about intended developments on the site.
 - A Planning Information Note be produced covering the use of steel storage containers and related structures and equipment on school sites so that schools are aware of planning requirements when considering their storage options.

No departure

Background Papers:

Application, consultations and responses, site location plans.

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Local Members:	Councillors D Hancock and G Huntington	

Proposed retention of two storage containers, Timothy Hackworth Primary School, Byerley Road, Shildon

