

**Planning Committee**

**16 December 2008**

**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.**

**Easington District:** Provision of a multi-use games area and associated works to the north east side of the school building, Easington Colliery Primary School, Easington Colliery (Regulation 3).

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## **Introduction**

- 1 Easington Colliery Primary School was constructed in 1999 and is one of the largest schools of its type in the County with over 470 pupils on the roll. In 2005, a Sure Start building was added to the west of the school building. Although the school has sufficient external play space to meet statutory minimum standards, it would like to create an additional play area to relieve the pressure on existing facilities and segregate formal play areas for the different year groups. This would also be available for community use principally by primary school aged children involved with the extended school club. The development would be part funded by the local Primary Care Trust as part of a programme to help improve the chronic health problems identified within the village.

## **The Proposal**

- 2 It is proposed to construct a multi-use games area (MUGA) on a raised grassed area to the east of the school building (see attached plan). The MUGA (30 x 15 metres) would have a surface of red and green porous bitumen macadam with markings for tennis, football and netball in white, blue and yellow thermoplastic paint. It would be surrounded by a 1.2 metres high green powder coated mesh fence, with 2 metres high fencing to the rear of goal areas at its northern and southern ends. A 4 x 4 metres compound would also be created at the southern end for the storage of equipment and would be surrounded by 2 metres high mesh fencing. The MUGA would have a 1 metre cross fall in a north south direction.
- 3 The proposals also include a 2 metres wide standing area for spectators along the long sides of the MUGA. The eastern side would incorporate a retaining wall with built in seating and an area of planting to the rear. Other external works include the diversion of an existing footpath that currently crosses the area to a route around the proposed MUGA. A section of 1.8 metres high palisade fencing that currently runs from the northern boundary fence to the north eastern corner of the school building would also be re-positioned to make way for the proposed MUGA.

## **Consultations and Representations**

- 4 District of Easington Council has no objections in principle to the proposal but raised concerns regarding the hours of opening (originally proposed until 2000 hours) and suggested that the activities at the site should run no later than 1800 hours given the proximity of the MUGA to residential properties. It was also suggested that greater emphasis be placed on landscaping the site in order to enhance the overall scheme and to create screening with the adjacent neighbouring residents. In

addition, the Council advised that if floodlighting was to be planned in the future, careful consideration would need to be given to nearby residents and a restriction placed on hours of use.

*Comment: The MUGA would be used by pupils at the school during school hours. It was also intended to be made available for use by the after school club which currently runs until 2000 hours, daylight permitting. However the head teacher is agreeable to reducing the hours of usage to 1800 hours and this can be controlled through condition. A 1.8 metres belt of planting is proposed along the north and east sides of the MUGA. No floodlighting is included in the scheme.*

- 5 Easington Colliery Parish Council, whilst not offering particular comments or objections to the scheme, requested that a site visit be held between the residents, Parish, District and County Councils to discuss the details of the application given that there was some local concern about the proposals. The Parish Council considered that a site visit would be an appropriate way to deal with these issues prior to a formal Planning Committee meeting.

*Comment: In response to the request for a site visit, it was explained to the Parish Council that consultation, neighbour notification, reporting and Committee procedures provided the most appropriate means of dealing with planning concerns. The Parish Council was also informed that the school had been asked to consider whether any other options were available to overcome potential concerns but these were ruled out for various reasons (explained in paragraph 14 below). A separate site meeting in advance of the Planning Committee was therefore not likely to change any elements of the proposals and the school wished for its application to be considered on its planning merits. The Parish Council, whilst still feeling a site visit would have been valuable, accepted this explanation but wished its views to be expressed at Committee.*

- 6 Sport England asked to be consulted on this proposal although there was no statutory requirement to do so (no loss of playing field as part of the proposals). Nevertheless, it objects to the proposals because it considers that there is no evidence to indicate that an appropriate design process had been undertaken to examine the need for the MUGA, potential locations and the types of sports to be accommodated. Sport England also considers that its location makes it impossible for floodlighting to be installed in future and that it is its policy to object to such proposals in general.

*Comment: See paragraph 10 below explaining the purpose and function of the MUGA. Paragraphs 11 and 14 provide further details regarding its location.*

- 7 Environment Agency has no objections to the proposals but provided standing advice with regards to surface water drainage issues.

- 8 The application was advertised on site and surrounding residents were notified. 3 letters and a petition with 21 signatures were received from neighbouring residents of Whickham Street and St Nicholas Terrace objecting to the scheme. These raise the following concerns:
- The proposed location of the MUGA is considered to be in the worst possible place for the residents of Whickham Street and St Nicholas Terrace due to its close proximity to properties.
  - The location and height of the fencing is considered to be unsightly and would be similar to looking out onto a prison.
  - The noise coming from the site would be far too loud and would disturb residents working shifts and young children going to sleep.
  - There is a strong likelihood that gangs of youths would be attracted to the site which in turn would bring problems of alcohol, drugs and litter. An existing problem with litter in the area has already been identified.
  - There are existing problems with children using the area where the proposed MUGA is to be placed after school hours and this has resulted in damage to resident's property.
  - General feeling that the effect of the proposals on the residents has not been properly considered.
  - There are far better alternative locations for the MUGA on the site which would not cause friction with the residents.

*Comment: Paragraphs 12 and 13 below provide details of the effects of the proposals on residential amenity. Information on the management and security of the site are outlined in paragraph 11.*

## **Planning Comment**

### Planning Policy

- 9 The proposal would involve the provision of improved sports and recreational facilities on a school site and would be acceptable in principle in this location. Policy 1 (General Principles of Development) and Policy 89 (Leisure and Community Buildings and Facilities) of the District of Easington Local Plan are of relevance.

### Sport and Recreation

- 10 The site of the proposed MUGA is currently an informal landscaped area that is used for soft play purposes on an occasional basis. The space has limits on the way it can be used and for how long throughout the year. The MUGA is intended to increase the opportunities for play by pupils, without reducing levels of provision on other parts of the school grounds. The MUGA has been designed to fit into the space available and is smaller than the school would ideally wish for and in terms of Sport England size recommendations. However, it would provide a large enough space for formal games for the younger year groups, and would be available for informal usage during breaks and as a play area for younger children in the wider community.

- 11 The location of the MUGA adjacent to the school building is considered to be an important part of the proposals by the school as it would allow its use to be supervised at all times. A caretaker would be on hand after school hours to ensure that the site is being used appropriately by those involved with the school club or other groups. A booking system would be put in place to use the MUGA and if any groups are identified as causing problems they would not be allowed to use the facility in future. The school grounds are locked and secured at night and unauthorised access to the MUGA is not anticipated.

#### Amenity Issues

- 12 The proposal involves an open use with associated mesh fencing. This would generally be lower than, and largely screened by, existing 1.8 metres high palisade fencing running along the boundary of the site. The only section that would rise above the boundary fencing would be at the north end of the MUGA, opposite properties along Whickham Street, where an 8 metres wide section of 2 metres high ball stop fencing is to be installed behind the goal area. The southern end of the MUGA would be approximately 1 metre below existing ground levels and the 2 metres high fencing around the storage compound and to the rear of the goals would be set away from the boundary. All of the new fencing would be coloured green and it is not anticipated that the proposals would have a negative affect on the visual amenity of neighbouring residents or the general area. A small area of existing shrub planting would be removed but a more extensive replacement planting scheme is proposed.
- 13 Some additional noise would be experienced by surrounding residents as a result of the development. The closest properties are just over 11 metres away along St Nicholas Terrace to the east of the site and those along Whickham Street are approximately 15 metres away. However the use would be restricted from 0900 to 1800 hours, daylight permitting, and for most of that time activities would be school related and already take place on the site. There is also community use of the school premises outside of school hours at present. The change in noise levels is therefore not expected to be so significant as to have a detrimental impact on the amenity of residents. The proposed hours of use have been reduced from what was originally intended and a time limit of up to 1800 hours is considered to strike a reasonable balance between the needs of the school and residents.

#### Alternative Locations

- 14 The school has looked at other possible locations for the MUGA but these were not considered viable options. Placing it on the site of the car park (to the south east of the school site) would be too costly in terms of having to re-design and reposition the car park. The current hard surfaced play area and grass surrounds to the south of the school were considered inappropriate because this is already a heavily used area that could not easily be divided. The playing fields to the west of the school were deemed too remote to allow adequate supervision of

the use of the site. Locating the MUGA to the east of the school building is considered to be an appropriate use of underutilised space.

#### Access

- 15 The proposals would have no impact on vehicular or pedestrian access points onto the highway. The diversion of the footpath within the school grounds is minor in nature and would be access compliant for disabled use, as would all access points leading into the MUGA.

#### Recommendation and Reasons

- 16 The proposals would provide enhanced recreational opportunities for pupils within the school as well as the local community. Having considered the scheme and its likely impacts, I am of the view that it can be acceptably accommodated on the site in planning terms. Subject, therefore, to conditions to control hours of operation of the facility and landscaping, I **recommend** that planning permission be granted for the development for the following reason:
- The proposed MUGA in terms of its size, location, appearance and use would relate acceptably to the site and surrounding area and would not have a significant impact upon visual and residential amenity, in accordance with Policies 1 and 89 of the District of Easington Local Plan.

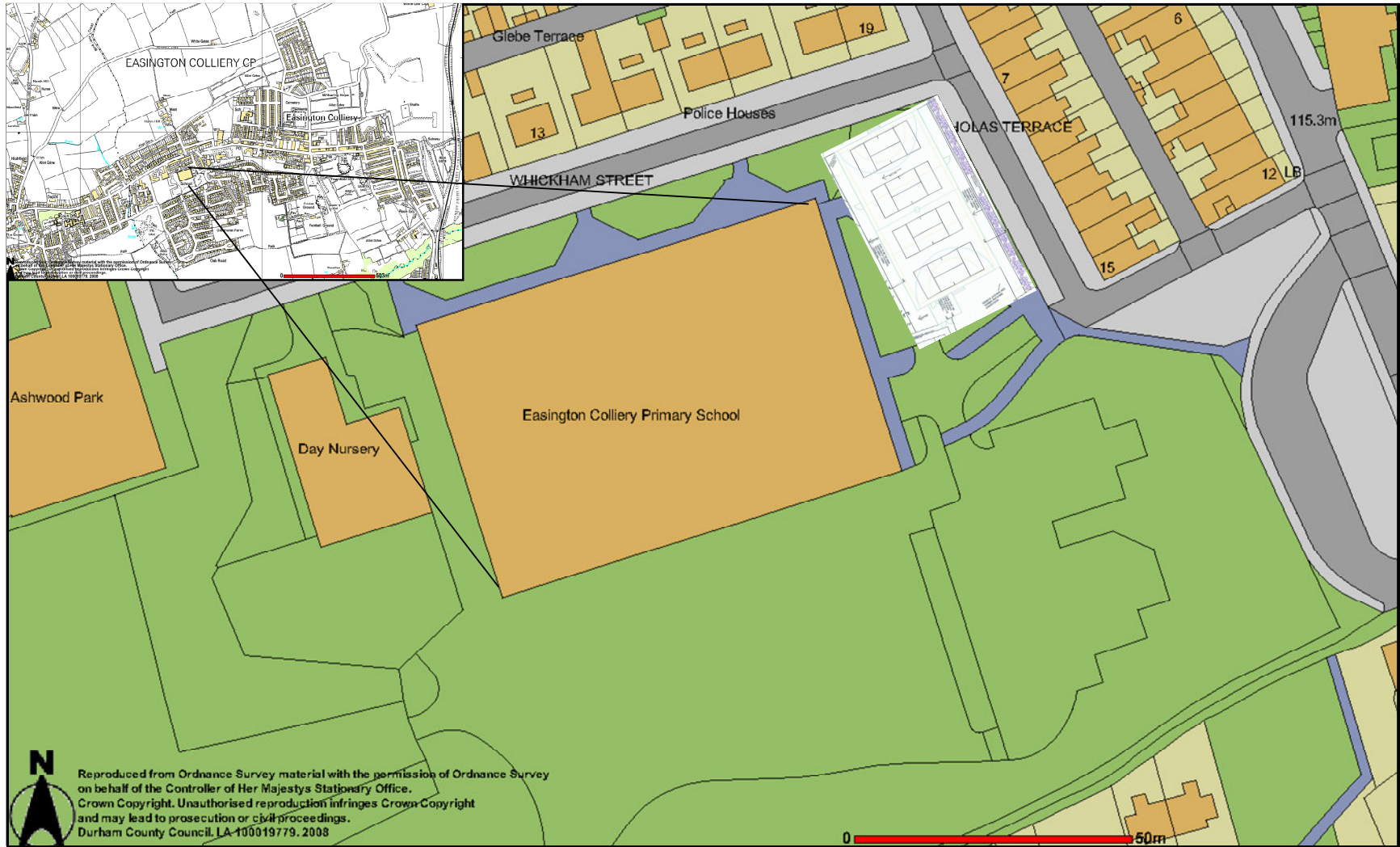
#### No Departure

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

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**Contact: John Byers Tel 0191 383 3408**  
**Local Members: Councillors Burnip and Boyes**

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