

**Planning Committee**

**18 March 2009**

**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:** Proposed erection of new secondary school, sports facility, demolition of existing buildings and associated external works, Shotton Hall School, Passfield Way, Peterlee (Regulation 3).

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## **Introduction**

- 1 Building Schools for the Future (BSF) is a Government initiative to transform secondary education, by renewing or refurbishing schools, over the next 10 to 15 years to create first class schools that meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century needs. The scheme also seeks to ensure that the new schools will be at the heart of local communities, providing opportunities for family and lifelong learning, community, cultural and sporting activities.
- 2 BSF is split into four phases in County Durham. The first phase covers secondary schools in East Durham and Sedgefield Village and includes nine schools that are to be developed in two stages. Three 'sample scheme' schools, Easington Community Science College, Sedgefield Community College and Shotton Hall School are initially intended for redevelopment. In parallel with the latter development, it is also proposed to merge the neighbouring Shotton Hall Infants and Junior Schools into a new primary school.
- 3 This report relates to the proposed development of the new Shotton Hall School for secondary education. It is followed by related reports for the other schools. The planning applications have been submitted by the Council's private sector BSF partner Inspired Spaces that would construct and manage 3 of the schools that are to be rebuilt under Private Finance Initiative (PFI) arrangements. The fourth school at Easington would be constructed by the same consortium on a design and build basis and handed over to the education authority on completion. Subject to the receipt of necessary approvals it is expected that the new schools would be constructed over a period of approximately 18 months and would be available for occupation between September – November 2010.

## **The Site**

- 4 Shotton Hall School is located in extensive grounds to the south west of Peterlee and covers an area of over 15 hectares. The existing school buildings (approximately 10,800m<sup>2</sup> floor space) were constructed in the 1970's and comprise of a main two/three storey block and series of single storey blocks and demountables. The school buildings are situated on the eastern side of the site with playing fields to the south east and west within a heavily engineered topography that accommodates a series of level differences.
- 5 Access to the school is gained from Waveney Road, a residential estate road to the north east that also provides the main vehicular and pedestrian route for Shotton Infants and Junior Schools to the north east of the secondary school. An existing bus drop-off and turning area is located adjacent to Passfield Way to the north. The school currently caters for just over 1000 pupils and there are approximately 107 full time and 23 part time staff, with a number of agency staff also visiting the premises.

## The Proposal

- 6 The proposal involves the provision of a three and part four storey school building of largely flat roof appearance (8,442m<sup>2</sup> floor space) on the playing fields area to the north west of the existing school. The building would be orientated to present its main frontage to Passfield Way where a new vehicle and pedestrian entrance to the site is to be created. The main entrance would be located towards the east side of the building adjacent to a performance hall that is intended to reflect and symbolise the school's specialism in performing arts. Office and administrative space and an open dining / social area would be located off the main entrance. A three storey teaching wing (54 metres by 18 metres wide) would extend west from the main entrance and would include a Learning Resource Centre within a two storey projection close to the main entrance. An additional teaching wing and the sports block wing would extend south from the main entrance and dining area. The teaching wing would be arranged over three storeys and measure 35 metres in length by 18 metres wide. The sports block and related changing facilities and activity hall would be built into an embankment at lower ground floor level. This wing would measure 43 metres long by 18 metres wide and would be part two and three storeys in height from lower ground level. The maximum roof height of the whole building would be 12.2 metres.
- 7 The building would be constructed in a mix of external materials. The performance hall along the Passfield Way frontage, would be articulated by the use of metal panels on a curved façade with school signage overlaid in relief and the adjacent main entrance would comprise of a glazed curtain walling system with associated school graphics. The teaching block would consist of a charcoal brick plinth with smooth render and occasional seams of contrasting coloured render on the upper storeys punctuated by a series of aluminium framed windows on each floor. These elevations would be interposed by a curtain walling system usually located at access and egress points to the building. The sports block would consist of composite cladding panels over a charcoal brick plinth. The roofs would be standing seam aluminium set at a slight angle and hidden for the most part behind a low parapet.
- 8 The proposals include a stand alone energy centre building to the east of the main school. This would house a biodiesel combined heat and power unit and a rain water harvesting tank and is intended to be shared with the proposed primary school. Other works within the grounds include the formation of 4 grass playing pitches (one to the west of the proposed building and the remaining to the south east of the site) and retention of 8 existing pitches. Training and exercise grids, synthetic surfaced training strip for sprint and jumping events, and hard surfaced games court with rebound fencing are also proposed. A shared performance space with tiered seating located within an open ended court yard to the east of the building would complement the performance hall and an outdoor dining and hardstanding area with canopies to provide shelter would extend from the south of the building.

- 9 Existing tree and hedge planting along the site boundary would be largely retained and consolidated by new structure planting and wild meadow strips would be planted around the margins of the playing fields. The distinctive cluster of mature trees immediately to the south of the proposed building would remain as an important landscape feature. Hard landscaping would predominate in areas around the building and would include an extensive plaza, 'Peterlee Square', on the approach to the main entrance and informal courtyards between the teaching wings. The site would be secured by a mix of existing fencing and new metal railings/mesh fencing of up to 2 metres high.
- 10 Vehicular access to the site would be gained from a new entrance along Passfield Way and would involve the removal of the existing bus turning circle. Service deliveries would continue to use the Waveney Road access point. 99 formal car parking spaces including 4 accessible bays (an increase of 23 on the original scheme) and 4 bus spaces would be formed to the north west of the school building.
- 11 Footpaths and cycleways adjacent to the main access and three segregated pedestrian routes from Durham Way and Waveney Road would allow pedestrian and cycle access and these would be suitably lit. Cycle shelters and stands would be provided in two locations accommodating a total of 100 cycles.

### **Consultations and Representations**

- 12 District of Easington Council supports the scheme in principle subject to the County Council giving due consideration to imposing the following conditions:
  - a. Hours of construction should be limited to Monday to Friday 8am until 6pm and Saturday 8am until 1pm and at no other times;
  - b. Wheel washing facilities should be available and used by all construction traffic exiting the site;
  - c. At least 10% of the energy supply should come from decentralised and renewable or low carbon sources, unless, having regard to the type of development involved and its design, this is not feasible or viable.

*Comment: The detailed control of construction activities is not primarily a planning consideration although suitable conditions could be imposed. However, the applicant would prefer more flexible arrangements of 7.30am to 6pm weekdays, 8am to 4pm Saturdays and Sundays by prior agreement to meet contract requirements. An environmental management plan would be put in place by the contractor to minimise disturbance and disruption on site. The school is designed to achieve the requirements for renewable energy supply.*

- 13 Peterlee Town Council (consulted 8 January 2009) has not commented.
- 14 The Environment Agency has no objection to the proposal subject to the imposition of two conditions relating to surface water drainage, including the submission of a scheme for the site based on sustainable drainage principles.

*Comment: The suggested conditions would be attached should planning permission be granted.*

- 15 Sport England notes that the playing fields that would be lost would be replaced by those of equivalent number and quality and therefore offers no objection to the proposal subject to conditions requiring ground condition assessments, design specifications and maintenance details of external play facilities and a community use agreement to ensure that these are made available for community use.

*Comment: The suggested conditions would be attached should planning permission be granted.*

- 16 The application has been advertised on site, in the press and neighbouring residents bordering the site were notified by letter. The applicant also undertook a publicity exercise as the proposal was being developed that included a public meeting and exhibition of the scheme in November 2008. The exhibition resulted in 9 feedback sheets being submitted that were largely complimentary of the scheme and raised a number of non-planning issues. However points relating to access arrangements and the lack of drop off/pick up facilities included with the plans were highlighted as problematic.

- 17 The Peterlee Labour Party also wrote to the County Council at this time raising concerns over access arrangements at Waveney Road for the proposed new secondary and primary schools and the removal of drop-off facilities at Passfield Way. There were concerns that the large number of vehicles would cause pollution, nuisance and act as a danger to pedestrians. Whilst the County Council's policy on discouraging use of the private car was acknowledged, it was felt this was a long term aim and that an urgent review of the current problems would need to be undertaken.

*Comment: The BSF Project Director responded directly to this letter highlighting the proposed new access arrangements for the secondary school which would take pressure off the Waveney Road access. A subsequent meeting was held with the Peterlee Labour Party group with representatives from the BSF and Highways teams in attendance. A number of requests were put forward for inclusion within the proposed schemes and these were subsequently assessed by the Head of Highway Management. The findings of each request were as follows:*

- (i) *Provision of hard paving verges along Passfield Way: This was considered to be too costly to accommodate a short term problem during school opening and closing periods. Provision of this facility would encourage parking of this nature which would create a hazard whilst vehicles pull off and onto the carriageway.*
- (ii) *Drop off / parking loop near the new entrance to the secondary school: It is considered that such a loop would interfere with the new access point proposed in this area. The police have also advised that 'School Keep Clear' markings and waiting restrictions be imposed in the vicinity of the new school entrance. Past experience has shown that provision of drop off facilities such as this encourages car travel and gives rise to a*

*free-for-all amongst parents, which in turn leads to the requirement for staff on traffic control duties to be employed.*

- (iii) *Parking control measures on Waveney Road: 'School Keep Clear' markings are desirable. However further parking restrictions would have implications for residents who have legitimate needs for parking along this road.*

*Highways issues are discussed further in paragraphs 32-36 of the report.*

- 18 In response to the planning notification, 2 letters have been received raising similar traffic related concerns, namely:
- Parking in the area of the Shotton Hall school sites is already very congested and the plans have not addressed this issue. There is limited parking on the sites themselves and the lay-by along Passfield Way, which currently keeps some cars off the road, is to be removed. There are concerns that traffic in the area especially on Passfield Way and adjoining roads near the school would become extremely congested.
  - There is no clear plan to provide solutions to the traffic problems that exist along Passfield Way. This includes the parking of parents' vehicles on grass verges, cycle ways and footpaths on both sides of the road which present an obstruction to other road users during school start and finish times, not to mention the obvious damage to landscaping. In addition Passfield Way is one of the main exit routes to the A19 South and is frequently used by all types of emergency vehicles.
  - The problem of school runs requires more in depth planning and permanent solutions that can be properly controlled.

## **Planning Comment**

### Policies

- 19 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that if regard is to be had to the Development Plan for the purpose of determining planning applications, decisions must be made in accordance with the Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 20 The proposed school would be located on an established school site within the settlement boundary of Peterlee. The site is not allocated for any specific purpose within the District of Easington Local Plan but Policy 89 makes provision for the development of new leisure, sports and community facilities within existing settlements. Policy 90 states that development which would result in the loss of an area of outdoor sports facilities will only be permitted if this results in the provision of alternative or enhanced outdoor sports provision. Policy 93 encourages the development of new arts facilities venues for the performance of the arts within an existing settlement. Policy 1 relating to the general principles of design and layout of new development, Policy 35 relating to the impact of development and Policies 36 and 37 concerning access and parking provision respectively are also of relevance.

- 21 In terms of sustainable development, Policy 38 of the North East Regional Spatial Strategy (July 2008) encourages planning proposals to achieve high energy efficiency and minimise consumption in terms of energy efficiency best practice and BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) rating. Policy 38 also requires major developments to incorporate a minimum 10% of energy supply from renewable sources.
- 22 Having regard to the above framework it is considered that continued education use is acceptable in principle in this location and the proposals would accord with relevant development plan policies.

#### Design and Layout

- 23 The proposed new school would replace existing buildings that are lacking in design quality. Consequently they make a limited contribution to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- 24 The position of the proposed school on the northern playing fields was partly dictated by the need to maintain the existing school during the development phase. However it is in line with planning brief guidance that indicated that the new school should capitalise on its location on a key gateway approach to the town and present a strong orientation to Passfield Way. Its location at this part of the site also provides the opportunity where appropriate for shared use of facilities by the proposed secondary and primary schools.
- 25 In terms of detailed design, the proposed scheme generally responds well to the opportunities that are present on the northern part of the site. This is a large area and the Passfield Way frontage can accommodate a building of 3/4 storeys and of this significance in terms of scale and massing. The contemporary design would provide a suitable positive statement and the treatment of the main entrance area and performance hall would provide a civic presence and community focus to the main building. The brick faced / rendered classroom wings to the west and south would have a more uniform appearance. However these would be punctuated by variations in glazing patterns, appropriate detailing and differences in the height and depth of the building especially on the south elevation.

#### Residential Amenity

- 26 The site is directly bordered by residential properties to the south and east and there is further residential development separated from the site by Durham Way to the west and Passfield Way to the north. The proposal would generally be further away from neighbouring houses than the existing school buildings. The closest properties would be in Lorimers Close to the north, beyond Passfield Way, at a distance of approximately 130 metres. Housing to the west would be approximately 150 metres away at higher levels and housing to the south would also be in an elevated position at distances of almost 300 metres. Although the proposed building would be somewhat imposing along the frontage of the site, given the building to building distances, orientations and extent of intervening screen planting on the site and adjacent land, it is not

considered that the new school building would adversely affect the amenities and privacy of neighbouring residential occupiers.

- 27 Although the location and use of external spaces, including formal and informal play areas and car parking areas would have some potential to generate noise and disturbance at certain times, these would also be sited away from neighbouring properties and would be managed overall throughout the school day. The location of new playing pitches would largely be on the footprint of the existing school buildings and would improve the overall amenity situation for properties close by on Severn Close. There would be no change to the playing field layout on the south side of the site. It is proposed to resurface the tennis courts in this area and provide associated mesh rebound fencing. As this area is located on lower lying ground enclosed by embankments to the south and west, the distances of the nearest properties to the courts (170 metres to the south east, 160 metres to the north east and over 250 metres to the west) are considered to be sufficiently large enough so as to ensure residential amenity would not be compromised.

#### Sport and Recreation

- 28 The school would incorporate sufficient outdoor play space to meet statutory education requirements. The loss of playing fields arising from the location of the new school building would be compensated for and there would be a net increase in the number of playing pitches on the site (2,810m<sup>2</sup> increase in the overall size of playing field area) with improved facilities associated with the resurfacing of the tennis courts. It is the intention of the school to encourage community use of its facilities and external play areas would be made available for this purpose as well as the performance hall. Subject to appropriate planning conditions to ensure that the required standard of facilities are provided and made available for use by the wider community, the formal recreation elements of the scheme are considered acceptable.

#### Nature Conservation, Landscape and Archaeology

- 29 The proposals have been the subject of various surveys and assessments to ensure that key elements of the site character and natural environment are protected and where possible enhanced by the development. Protected species surveys have been undertaken. Nothing was found on the secondary school site, although it was considered that the neighbouring Infants and Junior school may be used by bats for foraging and roosting. As a result appropriate mitigation measures would be put in place including the incorporation of bat bricks within the proposed secondary school building to enable any species that are identified to access the site more easily.
- 30 Most of the tree cover save for a cluster just south of the proposed new school building, exists along the boundary of the site. Whilst this is not particularly extensive new planting proposals are intended to strengthen all boundaries and provide a suitable landscape context to the building and external spaces and activity areas. The creation of meadow strips along embankment areas would also increase the biodiversity of the site.



- 31 An archaeological assessment and geophysical survey were undertaken on account of the fact that the school site lies within an area that may present archaeological potential. Results from these surveys suggest that the grounds have already been largely disturbed due to the installation of clay drains and cut and fill works undertaken during the formation of playing fields.

#### Traffic, Access and Parking

- 32 The local road network serving the school is of a satisfactory standard but like most schools, Shotton Hall has existing traffic and parking issues at certain times of the day. The school currently obtains its vehicular access via Waveney Road. Pedestrian access is gained from Waveney Road and Passfield Way where there is a bus parking area. Waveney Road also serves the Infants and Junior Schools and is subject to severe traffic congestion at times. There is also a considerable amount of parental parking on the verges on both sides of Passfield Way and within the bus parking area in the morning and afternoon that causes some damage to the landscaping and obstruction to other road users.
- 33 The proposed creation of a new access on Passfield Way would spread the impact of school traffic more evenly between the two entry points (Waveney Road would continue to be used for primary school purposes and services). In addition pedestrian accesses from the south, east and west of the site would be enhanced or created to encourage pupils to walk or cycle from these directions and the school travel plan would be revised to take account of the new arrangements.
- 34 A number of highway management works would also be carried out including applying 'School Keep Clear' markings around the new access points to discourage on street parking around the entrances and erection of pedestrian guardrails. A 'prohibition of waiting' restriction would also be applied to cover the area between the new Passfield Way access and the mini-roundabout junction with Durham Way.
- 35 It is recognised that despite these measures, some parents would continue to drop off and pick up their children along the public highway. It is not County Council policy to provide dedicated facilities to encourage this activity. Additional car parking areas and lay-bys can require a large land take and can create rather than alleviate congestion and pedestrian hazards. There are also significant cost implications to providing such facilities to deal with an issue that occurs at a short period of time during the day.
- 36 The proposed solution to reducing congestion lies in encouraging parents to spread the points of drop off and pick up over a wider area (as part of a 'park and walk' scheme). The existing highways network around the school can adequately cater for this and the proposals have increased the number of pedestrian routes into the new school from each direction to facilitate this option. It is also proposed to implement a communication plan before the new schools open to advise parents

of these arrangements and encourage different practices to be adopted to reduce congestion on both Passfield Way and Waveney Road.

- 37 The proposed level of car parking on the site would largely reflect the existing position. Following an amendment to the car park layout (to accommodate an additional 23 spaces), 95 formal car parking spaces and 4 accessible bays are intended. This would exceed the recommended maximum figure for school use in the County Council's 'Accessibility and Parking Guidelines' but is considered necessary to deal efficiently with the existing and anticipated demand for school and community use and minimise overspill parking on surrounding streets. It is therefore considered that these circumstances justify the additional parking requirements in excess of the guidelines. Cycle parking spaces, based on a figure of 10% of the total pupil role, would also be provided (100 spaces in total). The Head of Highway Management Services has no objection to the proposals subject to the implementation of the intended traffic management measures as part of the scheme.

### Sustainability

- 38 Sustainable development principles have been embedded within the scheme and the detailed design would be subject to a BREEAM schools assessment. The building is expected to achieve a BREEAM score of 'excellent' for its environmental performance and would incorporate a range of sustainable features and measures to minimise its environmental impact. These include a biodiesel combined heat and power unit, which would help the school achieve at least 10 per cent of its energy requirements from renewable sources. The building layout and orientation would be designed to maximise natural light and ventilation where possible and reduce excessive solar gain or heat loss. Rain water harvesting and water efficient fittings and supply systems would be used to help reduce water demand. Landscape and ecological proposals within the grounds would protect the natural environment and enhance its ecological potential and transport related measures reflect the desire to encourage more sustainable travel choices.

### Conclusion

- 39 The proposed new school is intended to replace existing school buildings as part of the national programme for Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and create a development that can meet modern educational and community needs. It would be located on part of the playing field of a large school site and redevelopment for education purposes is acceptable in principle in planning policy terms.
- 40 The design and layout of the proposed building would make a positive contribution to the character, appearance and status of the site and the important western approach into Peterlee. The size and location of the building and associated external works would raise no significant new amenity issues for neighbouring residents. The principal source of local concern involves traffic and car parking. In this respect the scheme would represent an improvement on existing access arrangements and provides a level of off site parking that is intended to

meet the school's operational needs. The package of highway works are geared overall towards encouraging less reliance on the private car in line with wider health and sustainability objectives. On balance therefore, it is considered that the proposal provides an appropriate and acceptable response to local school related traffic issues.

### **Recommendation and Reasons**

- 41 I therefore **recommend** that planning permission be granted for the development subject to appropriate conditions covering landscaping, materials, playing field formation, community use of facilities, surface water drainage, vehicular access, preparation of a school travel plan, traffic management measures, and other structures and external works for the following reasons:
- a. The proposed school can be satisfactorily accommodated 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 in accordance with Policies 1, 35, 36 and 37 of the District of Easington Local Plan.
  - b. The proposed development would have an acceptable impact on the level of playing field and open space provision on the site and within the local area, and would enhance the quality of outdoor sports provision available in accordance with Policy 90 of the District of Easington Local Plan.
  - c. The proposed school is a replacement for existing school buildings on the site and would contribute to the improvement of community facilities within Peterlee in accordance with Policy 89 and 93 of the District of Easington Local Plan.

### **No departure**

**Background Papers:** Application, consultations and responses, site location plans on file 928/5/112(7).

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