

Easington District: Provision of new primary school and associated external works, Shotton Hall Infants and Junior Schools, Waveney Road, Passfield Way, Peterlee (Regulation 3).

Introduction

- 1 Shotton Hall Infants and Junior Schools lie adjacent to Shotton Hall School which is to be rebuilt as part of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. It is proposed to merge the schools into a new primary school in association with the neighbouring redevelopment.
- 2 The proposal is intended to improve primary school education on the site and the physical and functional links between the schools, including access to the wide range of facilities that would be available within the secondary school development. Both schools would be built and managed by the County Council's private sector development partner under PFI arrangements. Subject to necessary permissions being in place and no unforeseen construction delays it is anticipated that these would be available for occupation by the beginning of November 2010.

The Site

- 3 Shotton Hall Infants and Junior Schools are situated to the south west of Peterlee on a 2.8 hectares site. The existing school buildings were constructed in the 1970s. The Infants school is located in the north east corner of the site and is made up of four single storey blocks linked by corridors. The Junior school is a part single / two storey building positioned to the south west, adjacent to the adjoining secondary school site but at a lower level. A shared playing field separates the two schools which have a combined floor space of approximately 2,725 square metres.
- 4 Vehicular access to the schools is gained from Waveney Road, a residential estate lying to the east of the site that also serves the secondary school. There are currently 110 pupils at the Infants school (ages 4 to 7 years) and 232 at the Junior school (ages 8 to 11 years). Approximately 21 full time staff and 45 part time staff are employed at both schools, with visits from a number of additional agency staff.

The Proposal

- 5 The proposal involves the merger of the Infant and Junior Schools to create a single Primary School on the site that would provide space for 360 pupils. This would be located to the north-west of the existing junior school on part of the playground and playing field. The proposed building would provide 2,250 m² of floorspace in a linear and inclusive form running parallel to Passfield Way. The building would be 89 metres long by 30 metres at its widest point and would have a maximum roof height of 8.4 metres (whilst the pitched roof over the teaching wing would measure 6 metres in height).

- 6 The accommodation would comprise of a single storey teaching wing and double height element at its western end that would house the sport/dining area and community halls. The main entrance and arrival space would be located on the south side of the building adjacent to the halls. This area would be signposted by a feature wall projecting south from the building that would display the name of the school.
- 7 The administration block which would include a 20 place pre-school nursery and a room for community use would be located east of the main entrance to the south of the building.
- 8 The main teaching wing would extend eastwards from the entrance and would be made up of a series of 'class bases' running along the northern and southern sides of the building off an extended circulation space. This would include a library section, food bay and exhibition spaces but is also intended to form part of the learning environment and could be adapted as required by the school. Each class base would also have direct access to the outside, allowing this space to be used as an extended learning zone.
- 9 In terms of external design, the main feature of the building would be the solid rectangular form of the hall and dining space. This would be expressed using a palette of contrasting smooth and course bricks. The remaining section of the building would have a horizontal emphasis and would be constructed in a mix of black bricks and smooth coloured render with large aluminium framed windows along the main elevations of the teaching wing. This pattern would be punctuated by heavy brick door surrounds to the classroom entrances and the pronounced curved projection of the administration, community and 20 spaces pre - school block located adjacent to the main entrance.
- 10 The building would have variable height mono pitched aluminium standing seam roofs over the teaching wing. This would incorporate a bank of high level windows on its north side to bring natural light into the central space of the building. The lower roof would also deliberately oversail the building at its eastern end to create a sheltered external area.
- 11 Works within the grounds include the formation of 2 natural turf playing pitches (located to the east of the proposed building) and a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) on an existing tarmac yard to the south east of the proposed school. Other outdoor facilities include the creation of tarmac and bark play areas, bordered by planting and class gardens, and seating/dining picnic area. Existing tree and hedge planting along the site boundary to the north and south would be retained and reinforced particularly along the pedestrian access route and proposed car parking area to the south of the school. A seasonally mown meadow area and enclosed pond to replace a small pond adjacent to the Infants School would also to be created in this general vicinity.

- 12 Vehicular access to the site would continue to be gained from Waveney Road but would follow the access road currently used by the secondary school. This would allow cars to be segregated from pedestrians using the access route that currently leads to the Junior School that would be adapted and enhanced for this purpose. A maintenance access between the proposed new secondary school and primary school would also be provided but this would be gated and its use controlled.
- 13 A car park providing 35 spaces including 3 disabled bays would be formed to the south west of the school building. A cycle and buggy shelter off this area would also be created with space for up to 20 cycles.

Consultations and Representations

- 14 District of Easington Council supports the scheme in principle subject to the County Council giving due consideration to imposing the following conditions:
- Hours of construction should be limited to Monday to Friday 8am until 6pm and Saturday 8am until 1pm and at no other times;
 - Wheel washing facilities should be available and used by all construction traffic exiting the site;
 - A bat risk assessment should be carried out on the primary school before demolition takes place and any necessary mitigation measures identified;
 - 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. Further proposed nature conservation assessments are discussed in paragraphs 29 and 30 below. The school is designed to achieve the requirements for renewable energy supply.

- 15 Peterlee Town Council (consulted 8 January 2009) has not commented.
- 16 The Environment Agency does not object to the proposal subject to a condition regulating the agreement of surface water drainage for the site based on sustainable drainage principles.

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

- 17 Sport England 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.

- 18 The application has been advertised on site and in the press. Residents bordering the site were notified by letter. No representations have been received as a result. The applicant also undertook some public consultation as the proposal was being developed, that included a public meeting in December 2008. Two response sheets were completed that raised several queries about the layout and design of internal and external spaces. The following access related issues were also made:

- The entrance to the school continues to be through a housing estate as opposed to Waveney Road;
- No pedestrian link between the proposed primary and secondary schools;
- No car parking or waiting facility for parents collecting / dropping off children at school.

Comment: Highway management issues are dealt with in paragraphs 32, 33 and 34 below.

Planning Comment

Policies

- 19 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that where 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 and continued education use is acceptable in principle in this location. The site is not allocated for any specific purpose within the District of Easington Local Plan but Policy 89 of the Local Plan 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 1 relating to general principles covering the location, design and layout of new development, Policy 35 relating to the impact of development and Policies 36 and 37 relating to design for access and parking 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.

Design and Layout

- 22 The proposed school would replace existing buildings of 1970s school design on either side of the site that are undistinguished but not prominent.
- 23 The position of the proposed school to the north-west of the site is dictated by the need to continue use of the existing schools during the construction phase and the desire to strengthen links with the proposed secondary school including the increased opportunity for shared use of facilities.
- 24 Within this framework the proposed scheme would respond well to its surroundings. Although the proposed building has the potential to be overpowered by the more dominant secondary school to the west, the school would have its own definition and contrasting design. Moreover, its single storey scale would reflect the needs of the primary school age user group and maintain a required sense of proportion. From a detailed design perspective the boxed double height appearance of the hall and adjacent entrance would provide a point of focus and arrival from the main pedestrian route and car park in its use of detail and glazing within the main teaching wing. Full height brickwork around entrances and breaks in the roof profile would combine with extended glazed access to reduce the horizontal emphasis of the building. These would be interspersed by strips of different coloured render to define the various class bases and create added visual interest and a point of reference for pupils.
- 25 Although the proposed school would be relatively close to Passfield Way it would not be prominent along this route, due to the presence of a mature planting belt along the northern boundary which screens views into the school. The school would also be at a lower level than the adjacent secondary school site. The main orientation and public aspect of the building is towards the south and south east where it has visual links with more modestly scaled residential development. It is considered overall that the design approach would enable the Infant and Junior schools to be successfully consolidated within the proposed building in a manner that provides a sense of identity and presence and appropriate integration with its wider surroundings.

Residential Amenity

- 26 The site is directly bordered by residential development to the east and north east off Waveney Road and there are properties to the north across Passfield Way and south east on Severn Drive. The repositioning of the school on the western side of the site would largely improve the relationship to neighbouring properties. The closest properties to the proposed building would be on Waveney Road at a distance of approximately 100 metres and these currently lie within 20-30 metres of the Infants school buildings. The new school building would be largely single storey with an east west layout that presents an end elevation of reduced bulk when viewed from the east. Given these factors and its separation from neighbouring properties it would not give rise to any adverse amenity impacts.
- 27 Levels of external activity on the east side of the site would also be limited and intermittent following relocation of the playing fields and would not give rise to undue disturbance to residents.

Sport and Recreation

- 28 The development would incorporate sufficient outdoor play space to meet statutory primary school requirements. There would be a small reduction in the overall size of the playing field area (6565m² to 5600m²) but sufficient space would be available to create junior size football pitches. The resurfacing of a school yard to create a MUGA to the south west of the proposed building would also represent an improvement to local play provision. 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. 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 and Landscape

- 29 The site has been the subject of various surveys and assessments to ensure that key elements of its natural environment are protected and where possible enhanced by the development. A preliminary ecological survey undertaken in October 2008 highlighted that there was a strong possibility of a bat roost underneath hanging tiles on part of the Junior School building. This instigated a more detailed appraisal of the site in January 2009 to determine the suitability of both schools as a bat habitat (a European protected species) and to undertake a preliminary search for evidence of their presence. The potential for other parts of the site to support other protected species was also considered particularly in respect of Great Crested Newts with the small pond adjacent to the Infants School. The findings of the appraisal are not conclusive because the appropriate time of year for undertaking surveys of bats and Great Crested Newts is during the late spring and summer months. However mitigation measures and further

surveys proposed within the appraisal provide an indication of steps that need to be carried out during the construction of the new school building and prior to demolition of old buildings.

- 30 The prescribed works put forward involve undertaking survey work in summer 2009 and the installation of a series of bat boxes within the new primary school building. Application would also need to be made to Natural England for a licence to demolish the school buildings should a bat roost be found and demolition would then need to be carried out strictly in accordance with its guidelines in order to prevent harm to bats. Should Great Crested Newts be found in the pond adjacent to the Infants School during the summer survey consideration would need to be given its retention and enhancement or the translocation of newts to the new pond nearby under licence. In any event, for the duration of construction and demolition works, an exclusion fence would be erected around the site of the pond.
- 31 Most of the tree cover along the boundaries of the site would be retained along with areas of hedgerow. New planting areas of a more formal nature would be interwoven between the building, external spaces and access areas. This would include trees and hedging along the pedestrian route and the car park to enhance the approach to the building and wild flower margins to improve the habitat potential of the site.

Traffic, Access and Parking

- 32 The existing Infants and Junior Schools currently share vehicular and pedestrian access off Waveney Road. There is severe traffic congestion around school drop off and pick up times, along with a considerable amount of parental parking. This causes obstruction to residents who live on this road as well as creating a hazard to pedestrians. As part of the proposals for the secondary school it is intended to create a new access from Passfield Way. This would separate the two school accesses and spread the traffic impact more evenly.
- 33 A survey undertaken as part of the travel plan for the Infants School indicated that 45 per cent of pupils walked, 53 per cent were taken by car and 2 per cent used public transport. The survey for the Junior School showed that 56 per cent walked to school, 41 per cent travelled by car, 2 per cent used a taxi and a further 1 per cent cycled. The majority of pupils live within the surrounding housing estates and this is reflected in the figures that show that around half of all pupils arrive by foot. Only a small number come from further afield, such as Horden, Wingate and Wheatley Hill areas and the number of car journeys therefore points to a significant percentage of locally generated trips. The enhanced pedestrian routes to the school including separation of vehicles and pedestrians within the grounds and provision of cycle parking and waiting areas are intended to facilitate and encourage non car use and this would be promoted in an updated school travel plan.

- 34 Other steps to discourage car borne traffic involve the application of 'School Keep Clear' markings around the vehicular entrance to the school. The use of further parking restrictions in this area have been discounted as they would restrict the legitimate needs of residents for on street parking during non-peak periods and are deemed inappropriate. Despite these measures it is acknowledged that some parents will continue to drop off and pick up their children by car and park close to the school. Nevertheless, the provision of parental parking is not considered to be appropriate as it would only facilitate increased car use and compromise travel plan options. The cost implications of providing additional parking both in terms of construction, maintenance and health and safety could also be significant.
- 35 The proposed level of car parking on the site (35 formal car parking spaces including disabled bays) would exceed the recommended maximum figure for school use in the County Council's 'Accessibility and Parking Guidelines' (25 spaces) but reflects existing on site parking and there are other nursery and community uses taking place during the day. Given the location of the school and the need to contain operational parking within the site this is considered to represent an appropriate approach. The Head of Highway Management considers that the highway implications of the proposed development are acceptable.

Sustainability

- 36 Sustainable development principles have been embedded within the scheme and the detailed design would be subject to a BREEAM schools assessment. The school building would have shared use of the combined heat and power unit. This is to be installed immediately to the west as part of the proposed secondary school development and would help the school achieve at least 10 per cent of its energy requirements from renewable sources. The building layout and orientation is also intended to maximise natural light and ventilation where possible and reduce excessive solar gain or heat loss. Landscape and ecological proposals within the grounds would protect the natural environment and enhance its ecological potential and the transport related works are intended to promote more sustainable travel choices.

Conclusion

- 37 The proposed new school is intended to consolidate and enhance primary school provision on the site as part of a wider development to improve the physical links and educational collaboration with the neighbouring secondary school that is to be rebuilt. The proposed primary school would be provided in a form that sits comfortably on the site in a visually pleasing manner and that pays reference to and respect for surrounding development in design and amenity terms.

- 38 The proposal would meet play space requirements and although further ecological work is needed to update the position regarding the presence of protected species, mitigation methods and strategies would be put in place to safeguard these as appropriate. The proposed arrangements for access and parking would represent an improvement on existing conditions and help to reduce pressure around the site access in association with the secondary school relocation. These steps would also be consistent with overall policy objectives to encourage alternative means of travel other than by car where possible.

Recommendations and Reasons

- 39 I therefore **recommend** that planning permission be granted for the development subject to appropriate conditions covering landscaping, nature conservation interests, including a requirement for further surveys, 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 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 of the District of Easington Local Plan.

No departure

Background Papers: Application, consultations and responses, site location plans on file 928/5/112(6).

Contact:	John Byers	Tel: 0191 383 3408
Local Members:	Councillors L O'Donnell and J Maslin	
