

Easington District: Provision of new 2 storey school building with part demolition and alterations to existing school buildings, Easington Community Science College, Stockton Road, Easington Village (Regulation 3)

Introduction

- 1 Easington Community Science College is one of three sample schools currently proposed for re-modelling or re-building under the 'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) National Programme. The school is in need of updating to meet 21st century educational standards and the County Council and its development partner is seeking to achieve this aim in a redevelopment involving part demolition, refurbishment and new building construction.

Site and Proposal

- 2 The school site is located in large grounds (9.8 hectares) with a marked west east fall on the southern edge of Easington Village. The site is bordered by residential properties to the north, east and west and there is open land to the south. The northern boundary of the site adjoins the Easington Village Conservation Area.
- 3 The existing school buildings (8,083m² floorspace) comprise a mix of one/two storey classrooms positioned centrally within the site that were constructed during the period 1973 to 1991. A sports hall denotes the southern building limit and a music studio constructed in 2004 as part of the classrooms of the future programme lies to the north of the main complex.
- 4 The proposal involves the demolition of most of the older buildings on the site (4,545m² floorspace), retention and refurbishment of the 1990's classrooms, sports hall and later music studio and erection of a new building (3,683m² floorspace) and associated works. When operational the school is expected to cater for 750 pupils within the 11-16 age range.
 - i) **New Build**
- 5 The new building (123m long, 26m wide and 8.2m high) would be constructed on the western edge of the existing school complex to the north and west of the sports hall and 'H' block classroom respectively. It would be a curved, two storey structure with a single storey element on its northern section where the main entrance to the school would be located. This building would be primarily used for science and technology purposes and would incorporate the school kitchen and dining hall.
- 6 The building would have a mono pitched roof that extends over a covered walkway on its eastern side. The external elevations would consist of a mixture of blockwork, curtain walling, render and cladded panels with an aluminium standing seam roof. The proposed colour palette has been selected to correspond to natural materials within the

surrounding environment and would consist principally of cream, light green and brown tones.

ii) Refurbishment

- 7 The 'H' Block classroom is a single storey building with buff blockwork, and cream coloured metal pitched roof. The central link section of this building would be removed as part of the development to create separate classrooms that would be refurbished and rendered to correspond with the new building. The music studio is a two storey structure with a mono pitched roof. The external elevations consist of a mix of light grey blockwork and profiled metal cladding with two large areas of curtain walling on its east and west sides. External works to this building would involve the installation of infill panels within the curtain walling and the addition of windows on the north elevation. Minimal change to the external appearance of the sports hall is intended.

iii) External Works

- 8 A range of external works are proposed including the creation of a biomass boiler compound within a service yard positioned to the rear of the new building and sports hall and a 2m high feature steel fence and gates between the new building and music studio. A covered walkway would link the pupil entrance on the eastern elevation of the new building to the two entrances on the refurbished 'H' block buildings and a performance space with seating steps and stage would be formed to the north of this. Other hard landscaping includes a paved concourse and five house gardens with raised timber beds. The school's existing 2m high galvanised boundary fencing would be retained.
- 9 The main new element of sports provision would be the creation of a multi use games area (MUGA) to the north of the school buildings, that would incorporate three 5 a side football pitches. This would be enclosed by 3m high court fencing but would not be floodlit. A storage container for sports equipment would be positioned directly to the south of the MUGA. The existing playing fields to the east and south of the school buildings would be unaffected by the development but one grass playing pitch to the west of the school buildings designated for use as a construction compound would be replaced on cessation of building works.
- 10 The site has a well established belt of tree planting especially on the western and southern boundaries which is to be retained. Additional tree planting would be provided surrounding the vehicular access and car parking areas and a wild meadow planting area is intended between buildings and playing fields to help separate these uses. A secure science garden, of an allotment nature, would be created on the southern part of the site to the south east of the sports hall that would incorporate a storage container and polytunnel. This would be enclosed by 2m high metal railings/mesh type fence.
- 11 The existing vehicular access to the site from Stockton Road would be retained and upgraded as part of the development, together with the dedicated bus drop off point and turning area to the north of the proposed new building. The scheme has been revised to provide 77

car parking spaces (from 55 spaces), including 3 disabled bays, within a staff car park to the east of the music studio and a smaller parking area to the west of the proposed new building. 75 sheltered cycle parking spaces would also be provided at 3 points. Pedestrian access to the site would be gained from footpaths on either side of the vehicular access to Stockton Road and an existing footpath/cycleway across the southern part of the playing fields that links to Thorpe Road.

Consultations and Representations

- 12 Easington District Council supports the proposal in principle and suggests a range of conditions to control construction related activities and ensure the use of 10% energy from decentralised and renewable or low-carbon sources.

Comment: The detailed control of construction activities is not primarily a planning consideration although suitable conditions could be imposed. Contractors would work to a project management plan setting out good practice measures to minimise disturbance and disruption from the site. The school is designed to achieve the requirements for renewable energy supply.

- 13 Easington Village Parish Council does not object to the overall application, but is concerned by the reduction of car parking spaces from 70 to 55 and fears this may lead to indiscriminate parking both on and off the site. It advises that there is already a congestion problem around the school entrance gates at start/finish times and any further parking in this vicinity can only intensify the problem. Any benefits gained by the pedestrian access at Thorpe Road may well be cancelled out by this omission. The Parish Council considers that there is sufficient space on site to create a larger car park and believes that a drop off zone for parents could be provided to the south of the bus turning area. The Council also believes that the school's location within the village infrastructure does not lend itself to good and safe access and a comprehensive study on safe routes to the school should be undertaken, due to the substandard condition of roads, paths and the lack of footpaths.

Comment: The main traffic implications of the scheme are considered in paragraphs 29-33. The proposed car parking provision has been increased to reflect the existing on site provision. It is not the policy of the Authority to provide space within the school grounds for parents to drop off or collect pupils. This encourages parent traffic and adds to internal movements increasing potential pedestrian/vehicular conflict. The school travel plan included an assessment of safer routes to the school and the recent footpath/cycleway from Thorpe Road was one measure arising out of this.

- 14 Sport England raise no objection subject to the imposition of planning conditions covering the quality of playing pitches, details of the design and layout of the MUGA and provision of a community use agreement to ensure that the new facilities are made available for community use.

Comment: The suggested conditions can be attached to any planning permission granted.

- 15 The Environment Agency considers the development acceptable subject to conditions requiring the provision of oil interceptors from car parks and hardstandings, approval of a scheme for surface water drainage works and the provision and management of a buffer zone along Thorpe Burn. Informatives relating to the use of sustainable drainage techniques and the retention of a ditch to the west of the site are also suggested.

Comment: The suggested conditions can be attached to any planning permission granted.

- 16 The application has been advertised on site and in the press and neighbouring residential properties notified. The proposals were also the subject of an earlier community consultation exercise by the applicant, including a public exhibition at the school in November 2008. 13 letters were received from neighbouring residents in response to the planning notification. These raise the following issues and concerns:

- Concern about the proposed siting of the science garden and lack of detail about what this would involve. This would be immediately to the rear of properties on Nursery Gardens and only a chain linked fence and boundary hedge, which loses its foliage in the winter months, would separate this area from properties. Residents have had past experience of hearing bad language from pupils within this part of the grounds and objects being thrown at properties.
- The proposed use of the science garden for allotment type use, including a chicken run, would attract vermin, foul smells and noise. This facility should be positioned elsewhere on the site away from residential properties such as in the area to the west of the existing playing court where it could be better screened. No consideration has been given to neighbouring residents of Nursery Gardens in the proposed siting of this facility.
- Uniformed fencing or planting of trees along the school boundary with Nursery Gardens would help the residents enormously.
- Sufficient space is needed to allow maintenance of the hedge adjacent to the science garden in order to retain the quality environment it provides for wildlife, including nesting birds. Regular visits by groups of pupils would place stress on the hedge as a wildlife habitat.
- It is unclear what size the polytunnel or storage container would be in terms of height. Residents are concerned that if these structures were too high and too close to the hedge they may result in loss of privacy, overshadowing and potential loss of outlook.
- High winds are experienced in the Autumn and Winter months and the hedge creates an excellent windbreak. The garden is too exposed for polytunnels.
- Trees on the northern part of the site are of a height and width that affect light to neighbouring residential properties. The spread of branches encourage pupils to scale the trees to access residential

properties and take a short cut to the village green. This is undesirable on many levels but particularly on health and safety grounds and may involve a child being impaled on the security fence. It is suggested that amendments are made to the tree survey to take into account these concerns.

- It is questioned whether car parking provision at the new school is adequate. At present the area from the Half Moon to the entrance to Tudor Grange is highly congested when parents are dropping off or waiting to collect children from school. Sufficient car parking must be provided on site to accommodate all staff, workmen, school governors, parents etc so that existing parking problems along Stockton Road will in no way be compounded by the new development.

Comment: The applicant has agreed to amend details of the proposed science garden in response to residents' concerns. No chickens or other livestock would be kept in this area. Additional planting would be provided along the boundary between properties in Nursery Gardens and the science garden to enhance screening. The polytunnel and storage container would be single storey in height and the need to agree details of the size and siting of these within the science garden layout would be covered by planning conditions.

The County Council's arboricultural officer has recommended that trees on the northern part of the site be pruned and the school has agreed to arrange to have these works carried out.

A separate temporary car park would be provided by the contractors for construction workers. It is acknowledged that some congestion occurs on Stockton Road at school opening and closing times. However the redevelopment should not generate any additional traffic. It has been recommended by the Head of Highway Management that 'School Keep Clear' markings are added in the vicinity of the Stockton Road entrance, which should help control congestion.

Planning Comment

Planning Policy

- 17 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.
- 18 The proposed school would be located on an established school site within the settlement boundary of Easington and continued education use is acceptable in principle in this location. This 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 1 covers

general principles of design and layout of new development and Policy 22 relates to the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas. Policy 35 relating to design, layout and impact of development and Policies 36 and 37 concerning access and parking provision are also of relevance.

- 19 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

- 20 The existing school lies in a shallow bowl topographically and the existing buildings are largely undistinguished and unassuming. Within the constraints imposed by the need for partial refurbishment the proposed development would create buildings and spaces that fit naturally within the landscape of the site. The new building would cut into existing levels and the main entrance would be a clearly defined focal point on the approach from Stockton Road. The curved structure would respond well to the contours and its scale, height and the muted tones of the materials would reinforce its subtle integration. The building would partially enclose the refurbished classrooms and the proposed feature fence and walkways would provide visual links to retained buildings.
- 21 In terms of wider integration the site is situated between the Easington Village Conservation Area to the north and an area of open countryside located to the south. Because the new and remodelled buildings would be contained around the footprint of existing structures and would be of comparable height and scale the development would not intrude on the setting or appearance of the Conservation Area or alter the semi-rural feel of the southern part of the site.

Residential Amenity

- 22 The school site is bordered by residential development on three sides. The closest properties in Nursery Gardens to the south east would be approximately 36m away from the existing 'H' block building and 56m from the proposed new building. Properties on South Side to the north of the site would lie approximately 138m from the proposed new building and 82m from the existing music studio. Properties to the west on Stockton Road sit above the school and would be positioned approximately 150m away from the proposed new building. Having regard to these relationships and the scale of buildings and existence of boundary planting, it is not considered that the new and refurbished buildings would have any direct residential amenity implications.

- 23 The car park and MUGA would be close to the northern boundary but would replace existing buildings and hardsurfaced play areas and no floodlighting is proposed. The nearest residential properties would be approximately 50m away but it is not considered that these activities would have significant new impacts for residents.
- 24 Use of the proposed science garden adjacent to 3 properties in Nursery Gardens has been amended in response to residents' concerns and additional planting is proposed. It is not considered that use of this area for outdoor teaching purposes is unacceptable in amenity terms.

Sport and Recreation

- 25 The school would incorporate sufficient outdoor play space to meet statutory education requirements. Five tennis courts would be lost to the north of the existing sports hall but these are in poor condition and not in regular use and there would be a net increase in sports facilities and playing pitches on the site. The school encourages community use of its facilities and external play areas would be made available for this purpose as well as the existing sports 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

- 26 The proposals have been the subject of various surveys and assessments to ensure that key elements of the site's natural environment are protected and where possible enhanced by the development. Protected species surveys have been undertaken and nothing of significance was recorded.
- 27 Existing tree cover is largely concentrated around the boundary of the site and between playing pitches and provides a strong structural planting framework. New areas of hard and soft landscaping would be incorporated within the proposed development to strengthen and enhance circulation routes and provide a suitable landscape context to buildings and external spaces.
- 28 The school lies within an area that may have archaeological potential. The County Council's Archaeologist has no objections to the proposal subject to a requirement for a watching brief when undertaking ground works within undisturbed areas within the playing fields and the submission of a mitigation strategy. This is a particular requirement in relation to the formation of the sustainable drainage attenuation area and 1.8m diameter pipe along the boundary of the cricket field on the southern part of the site.

Traffic, Access and Parking

- 29 The new school would have less floorspace than currently exists and pupil numbers are expected to decline slightly in future; the school's

current capacity is 990 and there are 784 pupils in attendance. The new school is intended to accommodate 750 pupils. It is therefore not expected that there would be additional traffic generation from formal school activities. The existing vehicular access to the school would be retained and improved as part of the proposal. This would be widened and a raised crossing point provided to facilitate safer pedestrian movements. Pedestrian routes into the site from the main entrance would also be strengthened and the existing pedestrian access from Thorpe Road would be retained. This is a 3m wide tarmac track lit from overhead lanterns on lighting columns.

- 30 A travel survey undertaken during preparation of the travel plan indicated that 49% of pupils travelled to and from school by school bus, 22% walked, 12% used public transport, 15% travelled by car and cycling was negligible. This also showed that the majority of pupils attending the school come from the surrounding villages of Horden, Hawthorn, South Hetton and Murton, using 6 school buses. An additional privately funded coach brings children from Easington Colliery who are not eligible for free transport to school. This reflects the high percentage of pupils travelling by school bus and public transport.
- 31 87 full time staff and 24 part time staff are employed at the school and a number of agency staff visit the premises on a regular basis. Car parking provision at the new school would increase from 72 spaces (2 disabled spaces) to 77 spaces (3 disabled spaces). These would be for use by staff and visitors only. The proposed level of car parking provision would exceed the recommended standard within the Accessibility and Parking Guidelines (50 spaces). However it would only represent a minor increase on existing levels and the space would also be available for community users of the site. The contained nature of the site and surrounding on street parking issues also make it vital that operational requirements are appropriately met. 75 cycle parking spaces and 7 bus parking spaces (an increase of 3 on current levels) would be provided. During the construction phase contractors would operate from a separate car park within their compound area on the western part of the site.
- 32 It is acknowledged that some parents park on the highway surrounding the Stockton Road entrance and Thorpe Road pedestrian access for short periods to collect/drop off children, causing some congestion at these times. However the provision of facilities for parents to collect/drop off their children within the school site or on the adjacent highway would be at odds with transport policy objectives to discourage car use and education protocols. The addition of 'school keep clear' markings and the implementation and management of travel plan proposals to encourage alternative modes of travel is considered to represent the best approach to this issue.
- 33 The Head of Highway Management considers the proposal to be acceptable in highway safety terms.

Sustainability

- 34 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 'very good' for its environmental performance. 10% of energy on the site would be generated from renewable sources and the buildings would be designed and adapted where possible to maximise natural light and ventilation where possible and reduce excessive solar gain and heat loss. Rainwater harvesting and water efficient fittings and supply systems would be used to help reduce water demand and heating would be from a biomass boiler. Landscape and ecological proposals within the grounds would protect the natural environment and enhance its ecological potential and transport related measures are intended to manage access.

Conclusion

- 35 The proposed development would provide an enhanced educational facility on the Easington school site, in line with BSF programme objectives and would accord with planning policy.
- 36 From a detailed perspective the proposed new building would respond well to the site and the surrounding area and re-modelling works to existing buildings would improve their appearance and function. The relationship of the building and external spaces and activities to surrounding residential properties would be acceptable in amenity terms and raise no substantive new issues.
- 37 The site access onto Stockton Road is not ideal but the development would not generate additional traffic and amendments to the junction, internal circulation and car parking area are intended. Additional signage on the highway would also help to keep access points clear and an alternative pedestrian route is available from Thorpe Road. These measures would help to reduce general congestion around the school during drop off and pick up times and have the support of the Head of Highway Management.

Recommendation and Reasons

- 38 Having weighed the planning and highways implications of the scheme I **recommend** that planning permission be granted for the proposed new school for the reasons stated below, subject to conditions relating to building, landscaping and external works details, agreements and mitigation measures to ensure that the development is provided to the required standard.
- a) The proposed school building and external works can be appropriately accommodated on the site in terms of size, siting, design, layout, appearance and highway safety and would meet the needs of users and relate satisfactorily to the surrounding area in visual and residential amenity terms in accordance with Policies 1, 35, 36 and 37 of the Easington District 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 Policies 89 and 90 of the District of Easington Local Plan.

- c) The proposal would not have an adverse impact upon the setting and appearance of the Easington Village Conservation Area in accordance with Policy 22 of the District of Easington Local Plan.

No departure

Background Papers: Application, consultations and responses, site location plans on file 928/5/46(17)

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