

Sedgefield Borough: Proposed demolition of existing school buildings and construction of new 2 storey school building and associated site alterations, Sedgefield Community College, Hawthorn Road, Sedgefield (Regulation 3).

Introduction

- 1 Sedgefield Community College is the third sample school proposed for remodelling or rebuilding under the Phase 1 'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) Programme in Durham. The Sedgefield redevelopment is a private finance initiative (PFI) scheme involving the provision of a new school building on the site and remodelling the remaining part of the grounds.

Site and Proposal

- 2 The school is located on a 13 hectares site on the eastern edge of Sedgefield village. The site is bordered by residential properties to the west and south, Hardwick Primary School with an industrial estate adjoining the site boundary to the north west and open farmland lies to the north and east. A cemetery and allotments are positioned to the immediate south west of the site.
- 3 The existing school accommodation (approximately 8,767m² floorspace) consists of a four storey main block dating from 1956 with associated one/two storey teaching areas of CLASP type construction built in the 1970's. Several temporary classrooms are also on site together with farm buildings to the east. All of the existing buildings apart from the farm would be removed as part of the development.
- 4 The proposed replacement school would provide 7,467m² of new floorspace and is intended to cater for 850 pupils of 11–16 years age.
- 5 The building (maximum length of 94m, width of 65m and height of 10m) would comprise of a two storey block of broadly rectangular shape on a north south axis positioned to the south east of existing buildings. It would have a curved sedum (green) roof with overhanging canopies supported by feature columns above the staff and visitor entrance to the north and pupil entrance to the south of the building. The external elevations would consist of a mixture of blockwork, render, curtain walling, metal louvers, ceramic granite rainscreen and translucent and composite cladded panels. Windows would be constructed from aluminium. The proposed colour palette has been selected to correspond to natural materials within the surrounding environment that would consist principally of cream and light brown tones. The overall design intends to create a flexible 'heart' space behind the main entrance points in the central section of the building from which other learning spaces flow and are accessed at ground floor and first floor levels.
- 6 Associated structures include a combined heat and power (CHP) cylinder and chimney (maximum height 15m), and prefabricated energy centre buildings of composite metal cladding construction positioned to the east of the new building within an enclosed service area.

- 7 The school enjoys Sports College status and contains a good range of playing fields and synthetic outdoor play facilities including floodlit tennis courts and multi use games area (MUGA). The existing floodlit synthetic turf pitch (STP) to the north west of the school site would be retained as part of the proposal together with three existing football pitches to the east. An existing MUGA to the west of the new building would also be retained. A new volleyball court to the south of this, three floodlit tennis courts to the west and a further sports pitch on the area currently occupied by existing school buildings would also be provided. Additional facilities linked to the school's farm would be provided in a fenced area to the south of the farm. These would include a repositioned greenhouse and polytunnels, agricultural strips and agroforestry paddock. Existing agricultural paddocks on the south of the site would also be retained, although the most westerly of these would be used as a compound and car park by contractors during the construction phase.
- 8 Vehicle access to the school is currently obtained from Chestnut Road to the north west of the site and there is an existing bus drop off / turning area and pedestrian access to the south off Butterwick Road. It is intended to significantly upgrade bus provision arrangements by creating an access into the site from the turning area and the formation of a new bus turning circle and ten parking spaces, immediately to the south of the new building. This would also serve as an access for the service yard to the east of the new building. The existing vehicular access from Chestnut Road would be used for staff and visitor purposes and would lead to a new car park incorporating 63 spaces (including 3 disabled bays), to the west of the proposed new building. An existing unmarked car park that provides approximately 40 spaces to the north of the Chestnut Road access would be retained. 100 cycle parking spaces would also be provided to the west of the sports hall section of the new building and along the driveway from the Chestnut Road access to the north of the proposed new car park.

Consultations and Representations

- 9 Sedgefield Borough Council supports the proposal, but has requested that:
- Tree works to the rear of Elm Avenue be kept to a minimum to maximise screening between residential properties and the proposed tennis courts;
 - A detailed lighting scheme for the proposed floodlit tennis courts be prepared to ensure light spillage is minimised and restriction controlling hours of usage of the proposed floodlit tennis courts be prepared to protect the amenity of neighbouring residents;
 - Construction works be phased to minimise disturbance to neighbouring residential properties.

The Borough Council's Development Control Committee also wished to forward the concerns of a member of the public who spoke at the Committee on behalf of 26 elderly residents living in an aged persons development adjacent to the site. These related to noise and disturbance, parking and security concerns associated with the existing school.

Borough Council members agreed that residents only parking should be considered in front of the bungalows to alleviate the stress of elderly residents and that managers at the school should be alerted to the plight of residents.

Comment: The 3 issues raised by the Borough Council would be covered by conditions should planning permission be granted for the development. Residents parking would be difficult to justify and implement in highway terms but the concerns of residents can be passed to the school management.

- 10 Sedgefield Town Council (consulted 08 January 2009) has not commented on the proposal.
- 11 Sport England raises no statutory objection subject to the imposition of suggested conditions covering the quality of playing pitches, details of the design and layout of the tennis courts and provision of a community use agreement to ensure that the new facilities are made available for community use. However a non-statutory technical objection is raised about the lack of storage space for sports equipment at the school. The scheme only provides a storage area of 10% which is below the recommended guidance of at least 12.5% of the sports hall floor area. Sport England believe this is insufficient and may have a negative impact upon community use of facilities.
Comment: The suggested conditions would be attached should planning permission be granted. The applicant considers that the space provided is sufficient for the intended nature and level of use.
- 12 The Environment Agency has no objections to the nature and level of the proposal provided conditions are attached to any consent requiring the provision of oil interceptors from car parks and hardstandings and approval of a scheme for surface water drainage works, incorporating a sustainable drainage approach.
Comment: The suggested conditions would be attached should planning permission be granted.
- 13 The Police Architectural Liaison Officer (consulted 15 January 2009) has not yet commented on the proposal.
- 14 The application has been advertised on site and in the press and neighbouring residential properties notified. The proposals were also the subject of an applicant led public exhibition at the school in November 2008. Four emails and one letter were received from or on behalf of nearby residents and the Sedgefield Village Residents Forum in response to the planning notification. These raise the following issues and concerns:
 - The position of the proposed bus drop off and pick up facility has changed from what was indicated on plans previously shown to residents. It was originally shown as heading in a line northwards from the existing bus turning circle on Butterwick Road but now heads in a north easterly line within the site. Residents are concerned that this change was introduced at a late stage without public display and will do little to reduce overall noise levels from

vehicles and pupils as it brings the facility closer to properties on Butterwick Road and will be at an elevated position. This will be significantly detrimental to the visual aspects from the south of the site and if buses are parked during school hours will be further detrimental to the aspect from Butterwick Road. It is arguable whether proposed tree screening would hide this eyesore. The previously proposed siting of this facility was more beneficial to neighbouring residents as it is further away from properties on Butterwick Road and less visually intrusive when viewed from the site boundaries.

- School buses accessing Butterwick Road from the Lane have to make a large swing to turn the corner, often narrowly missing the house on this corner.
- Buses using the existing bus turning circle cause considerable nuisance to neighbouring residents, often mounting the kerb and destroying turf outside properties on St Edmunds Green and requiring residents to reverse or park their cars to allow buses to pass at narrow points on Butterwick Road. Ample space for buses exiting the school should be provided to minimise such damage.
- The bus drop off/collect point is not being relocated and is a missed opportunity to address an on-going problem. Bus movements through St Edmunds Green, and through the village along the Lane and Hawthorn Road have been of concern for years. It has previously been acknowledged that in the event of a new build school a road access via the industrial estate would be explored as a viable alternative to access through the village.
- No information has been supplied about how many companies would service the school, Butterwick Road is a narrow country road and is unsuitable for heavy traffic.
- Residents are concerned about construction traffic passing along Butterwick Road and how the road would accommodate these vehicles and the amount of traffic. This would give rise to noise, congestion and would present a danger to young children. Problems would be compounded by snow and ice in the winter, mud on the road and dust from vehicles.
- Proposed use of the farm access track off Butterwick Road is unclear. Residents would not want this to be used as an access for construction vehicles. The proposed gate to be installed on this track should be immediately adjacent to Butterwick Road to clearly indicate that the track forms part of the school premises and thus avoiding the use of the track by undesirables who have parked there in the past.
- The existing post and wire fence along the Butterwick Road boundary of the school site is in poor condition and considered to be beyond repair. The existing hedge to the east should be continued and residents should be kept informed of the developer's intended boundary treatment.
- Livestock has frequently escaped from the paddock to the south of the school site and residents have had to shepherd animals back into this area. This can cause a hazard on the road and damage to gardens. Phone calls to the school have not improved this situation.

- The proposed compound area to the south of the site, adjacent to Butterwick Road should be fully restored as agricultural land on completion of the development.
- A dilapidated electricity transformer building close to the southern boundary of the school is frequently used by truants to hide, it is recommended this structure be removed, relocated or restored.
- 24 hour security should be provided on the site during the construction phase as there could well be an incidence of thefts in the immediate area once the build commences.
- The proposed new building would be closer to housing on the 'Trees Estate' in particular to elderly accommodation. This is of great concern and with the area of land available to the school it is felt it would have been prudent to move any build as far from residential properties as possible.
- Residents are concerned about light pollution from the school, both during and after construction, affecting properties on Butterwick Road. High leakages of light would be unwelcome to those living around the site.
- Prior to demolition of the existing school buildings, there will be two large buildings on the site, together with areas of hard landscaping. The school site slopes down to Butterwick Road and St Edmunds Green. During periods of heavy rain, residents are concerned that run off may flow down the slope to residential areas, with potential flooding implications.
- The new building should have been positioned and orientated for sound building reasons ie. access, light, wind etc, not for divisive reasons such as the pupils wanting to feel ownership.

15 A meeting was held between 3 elderly residents of Chestnut Road and planning officers in January 2009, during which the following issues were raised. Residents requested that these be relayed to the Committee.

- Noise from deliveries to both the Community College and adjacent Hardwick Primary School, sometimes as early as 3am.
- Traffic congestion around both school entrances at school opening and closing times and at lunchtimes.
- Concern that if sufficient car parking was not provided on the site unauthorised car parking may occur on Chestnut Road and worsen congestion.
- Residents are unhappy about the floodlit playing pitch to the rear of their properties, floodlighting is used until 11pm at night and users often collect escaped balls from residents' gardens without permission.
- Residents feel they were not properly consulted on the planning application for the floodlit playing pitch (determined by Sedgefield Borough Council) and that their comments were not considered when this was determined.
- The access gate at the Chestnut Road entrance to Sedgefield Community College is left unlocked, this encourages youths to congregate in the school's car park to the rear of their properties and frequent incidents of anti social behaviour have occurred.

Comment: The amenity implications of the proposal are considered in paragraphs 22 and 23.

A lockable gate would be positioned at the Chestnut Road entrance and this would help to restrict unauthorised access. Some service vehicles would also utilise the southern access from Butterwick Road, removing some of this traffic from the Chestnut Road access.

The bus drop off/collection point is positioned as close as possible to the school building to facilitate easy access for the pupils that are bussed in. Its siting within the grounds should encourage pupils not to congregate on Butterwick Road.

The existing route along the Lane and Butterwick Road can satisfactorily accommodate the school bus traffic and is recommended by the police. Bringing buses further east via Hawthorn Road, Chestnut Road and past the entrance to the Primary School is undesirable in highway terms.

Access via the industrial estate was considered, but discounted due to the undesirable mix of school and industrial traffic and would be a remote route even if the connection was possible.

The existing paddock area to the south of the site to be used temporarily as the contractors compound would be fully restored to agricultural use on completion of the development. The existing post and wire fence surrounding the paddock would be repaired to ensure it is fully enclosed. No additional hedging is proposed along the southern boundary. The applicant is investigating whether it is possible to remove the existing electricity building on the southern boundary of the site and if not it would be secured. During the construction phase contractors would adhere to a project management plan setting out good practice measures in relation to site safety, traffic management, noise control and other construction hazards. Internal haul roads would be swept regularly to reduce the likelihood of mud being transferred to the highway.

Planning Comment

Policies

- 16 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.
- 17 The proposed school would be located on an established school site that is immediately outside the settlement boundary of Sedgefield as defined in the Sedgefield Borough Local Plan. The playing fields surrounding the existing school buildings are designated as open space under Policy L5 of the Local Plan. Continued education use is acceptable in principle in this location. The site has no other allocations or designations in the Local Plan and needs to be viewed in the light of Policy L11 which seeks to encourage improvements to community facilities, Policy D1 which sets out criteria for the layout and design of new developments within the Borough and Policy D3 relates to access requirements for new developments.

- 18 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

- 19 The existing school is located on a large site with a varied character that reflects its position within the settlement. The area occupied by buildings and playing fields to the north has stronger functional links with the surrounding urban form presented by adjacent residential development, the primary school and industrial estate to the west and north. The area to the south and east of the school buildings includes farm buildings and open fields and relates more to the semi rural setting provided by the adjacent cemetery and open countryside to the east and north east.
- 20 The proposed development generally respects the setting of the site providing a building of largely two storey height that has regard to the scale of neighbouring housing and maintains areas of open space to the north and east that achieve an appropriate transition to surrounding open land. Although the position of the building is partly dictated by operational requirements associated with the need to retain existing buildings until the development is complete, it is also intended to reflect the main catchment areas of Sedgefield and surrounding villages to the east and north.
- 21 From a detailed design perspective the proposed building would be set back on a plateau with a strong north south orientation intended to facilitate easy access from the different routes into the site. The concentration of all activities within a single structure and around a central core area would mean that the building would have a large and somewhat uniform appearance. However this would be broken up by strong glazed entrance features and by contrasting bands of materials and detailing to elevations. The use of sedum on the curved roof would help to dampen down its expanse and link the building to the natural environment. This relationship would be further strengthened by the building's low lying position with the landscape overall and its horizontal emphasis. Overall therefore it is considered that the building provides an appropriate design response to its setting and would have a positive impact on its surroundings.

Residential Amenity

- 22 The repositioning of the school on the site would have limited new residential amenity implications. The closest properties to the proposed building would be located at a lower level approximately 120m to the south on St Edmunds Green. Properties on Elm Avenue would be located approximately 134m to the west. Having regard to the two storey nature of the building, the distances involved and topography there would be no direct impacts of an adverse nature. Indeed most properties on Elm Avenue would have a more open aspect following removal of the existing buildings.

- 23 The reorganisation of external activities on the site would have some amenity implications particularly in relation to the proposed floodlit tennis courts. These would come within 25m of the closest residential properties on Elm Avenue and would require the removal of some trees. However they would be orientated in a 'side on' north south direction in relation to properties and partially screened by retained boundary planting. Should planning permission be granted for the development, conditions relating to the use of the courts and proposed floodlights would be attached to ensure they do not have a significant impact upon the amenity of neighbouring residents and to ensure that an appropriate level of screening is maintained. The existing floodlit STP to the north west of the site is set away from residential property and would not raise any new amenity impacts.

Sport and Recreation

- 24 The school is a sports college and has a well developed community use of its facilities. The proposed school building would be constructed largely on an area currently occupied by a sports pitch and three floodlit tennis courts. The tennis courts would be replaced on an area to the west of the site and the sports pitch on the area currently occupied by the school buildings to the north. Other existing outdoor sports facilities at the school would be upgraded and enhanced as part of the proposal. The development would incorporate sufficient outdoor space to meet education and Sport England requirements with continued provision for community use. Subject to appropriate planning conditions to ensure that these facilities are provided, the formal recreation elements of the scheme are considered acceptable.

Nature Conservation, Landscape and Archaeology

- 25 There are no nature conservation designations affecting the site and 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.
- 26 Existing tree cover is largely concentrated around the boundary of the site and is not well established apart from on the south east boundary. However there is extensive hedge planting along the site boundaries. Significant new structural planting is proposed around the paddock area on Butterwick Road and tree planting is also proposed along the bus and pedestrian routes into the site.
- 27 Nothing of archaeological interest has been identified on the site and the County Council's Archaeologist offers no objections to the proposal.

Traffic, Access and Parking

- 28 The proposal would reduce the current floorspace of the school although pupil numbers are expected to remain approximately the same, decreasing slightly from 877 to 850. It is therefore not expected that the development would increase school related traffic flows in the area.

- 29 Due to its rural location the school has a higher than average number of pupils using bus transport. This was recorded at approximately 60% in a survey carried out in 2006 to inform the school's travel plan. 8 school buses and 4 minibuses currently serve the site from surrounding villages using the bus set down area which is poorly configured and some distance from the classrooms. The new southern access would considerably improve the arrangements for bus access and parking and service vehicles. 10 designated bus parking spaces around a spacious turning area would be provided. The existing access from Chestnut Road would accommodate staff, visitors and users of the community facilities and a separate pedestrian and cycle thoroughfare would also be provided in this location. It is accepted that the Chestnut Road access is busy at school start and finish times as children at the Secondary School and Primary School are dropped off and picked up. However, these periods of congestion are relatively short and are manageable in highway terms. It is intended that traffic calming measures and no waiting restriction would be installed around the Chestnut Road access point, to improve highway safety and reduce traffic congestion from parked vehicles close to the school entrance. The school gates would also be lockable to control access.
- 30 The school would employ 79 full time staff and 44 part time staff and a number of agency staff would also visit the premises on a regular basis, approximately 100 car parking spaces would be available on site. The proposal would therefore exceed the specified level within the County Council's Accessibility and Car Parking Guidelines (51 spaces). However part of this provision would utilise an existing car park area (up to 40 spaces) to the north west of the site that is well positioned in relation to the site access, MUGA and sports facilities. Existing use of the school's facilities generates a high demand for car parking and there are 64 spaces currently available on the site. This is often insufficient to meet school and community demand putting pressure on surrounding residential streets. The proposed level of car parking provision would help to address these issues. 100 cycle parking spaces would also be provided in 2 locations on the site. This is considered acceptable from a highway perspective and the Head of Highway Management has raised no objections to the scheme.

Sustainability

- 31 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' (72%) for its environmental performance and would incorporate a range of sustainable features and measures to minimise its environmental impact, 10% of energy on the site would be generated from renewable sources. These would include a sedum roof, a bio-diesel heating system, drainage pond and permeable paving to assist with surface water run off. The proposed new building layout would be designed to maximise natural light and ventilation where possible and reduce excessive solar gain and heat loss. 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

- 32 The proposal would provide an educational facility within Sedgefield Village in line with the BSF programme and planning policy objectives for sustainable development and enhanced community facilities. The principal planning considerations therefore relate to the detailed integration of the scheme on the site and within its surroundings.
- 33 In this respect the proposed new building would respond well to the opportunities and constraints provided for redevelopment and would provide a design solution that would respect and enhance the character and appearance of the neighbouring area. The proposal can also be satisfactorily accommodated in residential amenity terms and with regard to recreation provision and the natural environment of the site.
- 34 Whilst there are some resident concerns about traffic generation and access, these matters have been properly considered and the scheme would represent a significant improvement on existing conditions and is acceptable in this respect.

Recommendation and Reasons

- 35 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 L11 and D1 of the Sedgefield Borough Local Plan.
 - b) The proposed development would not significantly 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 L11 of the Sedgefield Borough Local Plan.
 - c) The proposed development would be satisfactorily accommodated in highway safety terms, without adding to existing congestion problems within the village and would encourage travel to the school by more sustainable modes and by public transport, in accordance with Policies D1 and D3 of the Sedgefield Borough Local Plan.

No departure

Background Papers: Application, consultations and responses, site location plans on file 928/7/45(9).

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