

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL  
DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE  
TUESDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2000 AT 10.30 AM**

**THREE RIVERS DISTRICT**

**PROPOSED SPORTS HALL AND RELATED DEVELOPMENT  
BREAKESPEARE SCHOOL, GALLOWS HILL LANE, ABBOTS LANGLEY**

*Report of the Director of Environment*

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Local Member : P V Goggins

**1. Purpose of Report**

To consider a planning application for a new sports hall and related development at Breakespeare School, Gallows Hill Lane, Abbots Langley (reference 8/469-00).

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 Breakespeare School is a special school for pupils aged 3-19 years with severe learning difficulties and often physical disabilities too. All indoor physical education activities at present have to take place in the school hall, which has no special facilities and is also used for music and as a dining room. The school needs a separate sports hall facility, but, as it could only be provided through lottery funding, any such hall would also have to be made available for community use. A previous application for such development on the site was withdrawn following objections on grounds of its location, size and impact on the surrounding area.
- 2.2 The current planning application was submitted in April 2000. It proposes a sports hall, with toilets and changing facilities, a soft play room and storage facilities to be built in the northeastern corner of the site. The nearest part of the building would be just over 2 metres from the front boundary with Gallows Hill Lane and 14 metres from the rear boundary of the adjacent houses. Its lower walls (up to six metres) would be brick faced, with white metal cladding above, and a dark grey metal roof. The ridge height of the main sports hall, which would be the part of the building furthest from the road, would be just under 8 metres above ground level, and there would be lower mono-pitched roofs over the rest of the building. There would be a new contractors' access which would be retained after completion of the development for emergency and delivery purposes only. The application indicates the loss of a silver birch, a cherry and six other smaller trees.

- 2.3 Three Rivers District Council raises no objections subject to certain matters of detail. Abbots Langley Parish Council objects for a number of reasons including location of the building, loss of trees, position of emergency access and lack of parking making it unsuitable for general public use. There are no objections from statutory undertakers, although the Environment Agency asks for a condition requiring the prior approval of surface water source control measures. The Highway Authority has no objection, subject to the provision of specified pedestrian visibility splays. Six representations have been received from members of the public, including four objections from adjoining residents in Popes Road and one from a resident in Greenways. The objections relate to the location, height and design of the sports hall, the loss of trees, noise and traffic problems associated with community use, exacerbation of local flooding problems and putting forward various restrictions on the hours of construction working.
- 2.4 The report considers the main planning issues raised by the application and which need to be taken into account in its determination, namely: the location, design and impact of the sports hall; the extent and implications of community use; and any traffic and parking issues.

### 3. **Conclusions**

The report concludes that the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission for the proposed sports hall at Breakespeare School, subject to conditions including surface water drainage, amendments to details of the design, pedestrian visibility splays, tree planting, a 1.5 metres wide protection zone along the front boundary hedge, and restrictions on the hours of construction working, community use of the sports hall and use of the new access and adjacent tarmac area.

## 1. **Description of the site and proposed development**

- 1.1 Background to the application - Breakspeare School (current pupil roll 63) is a special school for pupils aged from three to nineteen years with severe learning difficulties; additionally some pupils may also have severe physical difficulties and challenging behaviour. It occupies the site and buildings of a former primary school, so it is not purpose built for the needs of this type of pupil. The accommodation comprises seven classrooms (one of which is in a separate mobile unit), a multipurpose hall, a kitchen and ancillary facilities for staff and pupils. A change in level between different parts of the building presents practical problems for the many wheelchair-bound pupils.
- 1.2 The school lacks adequate indoor sports facilities, the hall also having to be used for music activities and as a dining room. In 1998 a planning application was submitted for a sports hall and other development at the front of the site. The siting and design of the proposed building was extremely controversial, and the applicant was urged to consider an alternative location more central within the site. The application was eventually withdrawn in February 1999 to enable the school to reconsider the scheme in the context of its other long term development needs.
- 1.3 Meanwhile the school urgently needed additional classroom accommodation, and in January this year, following consideration of the application by the Development Control Sub-Committee, planning permission for a single mobile classroom was granted for a limited two year period. The reason for the short period was that the unit was to be erected in one of the possible locations for a sports hall and the Sub-Committee did not wish the mobile unit to pre-empt any decision on the sports hall.
- 1.4 The application site - The school is situated on the south side of Gallows Hill Lane and to the west of the centre of Abbots Langley. There is a large area of public open space with a car park on the opposite side of the road and mainly housing development adjoining the other three sides of the school site.
- 1.5 There is a close boarded fence, backed in some cases by a line of conifers or other single trees, along the eastern boundary of the site, where the rear gardens of the houses in Popes Road are quite short (less than 15 metres). The houses to the south in Greenways have generally longer rear gardens (over 45 metres) and are screened by deciduous trees and other vegetation. The western side of the site is itself more wooded, forming a pleasant feature and giving the school a shaded facility in summer. There is a well established hedge along the Gallows Hill Lane boundary, behind which the ground falls away slightly into the school site and on the other side is a tarmac footpath separated from the roadway by a narrow grass verge.
- 1.6 The school buildings are all single storey and generally grey in colour, including vertical concrete panelling. There is an in-and-out system for vehicles off Gallows Hill Lane, and a small car park with twelve bays marked out at the front of the site. When this is full, staff and visitors use the parish council's car park across the road. The minibuses and taxis bringing pupils to and from the school of necessity have to park within the school grounds.
- 1.7 The planning application was submitted in mid April. It proposes a building of some 630 square metres, providing a sports hall, changing facilities, storage and a soft play

room. The hall would be on the southern side of the building furthest from the road, with most of the other facilities along the northern side. The front of the building would be just over two metres from the front boundary with Gallows Hill Lane and fourteen metres from the rear boundaries of the adjacent houses in Popes Road. Its walls would be mainly brick faced (yellow stock multi), with white metal cladding at the upper levels (above about six metres), and a dark grey metal roof. The ridge height of the main sports hall would be just under 8 metres above ground level, and there would be lower tiered monopitched roofs over the rest of the building, 6.25 metres over the back part and at the front some 5.4 metres high over the soft play area and 4.25 metres high over the rest. Perspective drawings have been provided of the proposed development as it would appear from Gallows Hill Lane and the car park opposite the school.

- 1.8 No additional parking would be provided, but there would be a new contractors' access off Gallows Hill Lane, which would be retained after completion of the development for emergency, delivery and grounds maintenance purposes only. The development would involve the loss of a large silver birch tree, a cherry tree and six other smaller trees; one new tree is proposed.
- 1.9 The supporting statement explains the changes which have been made compared with the previous application and the reasons for the proposed location within the site and why other potential locations have been rejected. The statement is attached to this report as appendix A.

## 2. Consultations and publicity

- 2.1 Three Rivers District Council, Abbots Langley Parish Council, statutory undertakers, the Highway Authority and the Built Environment Advisory and Management Service (BEAMS) were consulted on the application. Publicity for it was by means of notices in the local press and on the site, and neighbour notification letters were sent to nineteen addresses around the site.
- 3.2 Three Rivers District Council raises no objections subject to:
- the retention of the existing roadside hedge and its protection during construction works;
  - consideration of using bricks of a red/orange colour rather than the proposed yellow;
  - the roofing material being a more appropriate colour and not grey;
  - the use of the building being as defined in the supporting statement and a restriction placed on the days when non-school activities can take place;
  - a generous landscaping scheme including additional planting on the eastern boundary to screen the development;
  - the use of the tarmac area and the access to it being used strictly in accordance with the submitted details;
  - appropriate security gates to the tarmac area.
- 2.3 Abbots Langley Parish Council considers the development to be inappropriate in the area particularly the position of the changing room and toilet facilities, is concerned at the loss of trees and the position of the emergency access which could be dangerous, would have no objection to a more suitable building in a different location within the

site and if it was for school use only, and considers there to be insufficient parking for general public use. The Parish Council is also concerned about increased use of its Manor House car park by the school and its visitors.

- 2.4 There are no objections from statutory undertakers, although the Environment Agency asks for a condition requiring the prior approval of surface water source control measures.
- 2.5 The County Council as Highway Authority has no objection subject to the provision of specified pedestrian visibility splays for the new access.
- 2.6 BEAMS' advice is that the proposals are generally satisfactory, although reservations are expressed about (a) the interruptions to the roof silhouette on the Gallows Hill Lane elevation caused by the height of the soft play room and (b) the prominent new entrance porch with its pitched roof feature which "jars" somewhat with the design of the existing and new roof forms.
- 2.7 Public representations - six letters have been received from members of the public, including five objections from adjoining residents in Popes Road and one from a resident in Greenways. The objections relate to the location, height and design of the sports hall, the loss of trees, noise and traffic problems associated with community use, exacerbation of local flooding problems and requiring varying restrictions on the hours of construction working. Further details are set out as appendix B to this report.

### 3 **Planning considerations**

- 3.1 Development Plan provisions - The application site is located within the specified settlement of Abbots Langley and, on the proposals map of both the adopted District Local Plan and the deposit version of the District Plan Review, is not subject to any specific policy or proposal.
- 3.2 The relevant policies of the adopted Development Plan are:
- County Structure Plan - policy 13 (education and training), 25 (car parking), 42 (tree and hedge cover) and 47 (sporting, recreation and other leisure uses);
  - District Local Plan (adopted) - policy R6 (private sports facilities), R8 (multiple use of recreational activities) and AP1 (Abbots Langley).
- 3.3 In addition the relevant policies in the deposit version of the emerging District Local Plan Review are: GEN1 (general location of development), GEN3 (compliance with design and access standards), N6 (water supply and sewerage infrastructure), N11 (noise pollution), N12-14 (trees, hedgerows and replacement planting), D6 (landscaping), D9 (facilities access for disabled), T8 (car parking provision), L2 (dual and multiple use of sports facilities) and L3 (built sports development).
- 3.2 Further development for education purposes on an existing school site is acceptable in principle in land use planning terms. The main issues to be considered in the determination of the application are:
- the design, appearance and impact of the sports hall;

- extent and implications of possible community use;
- any parking or highways implications.

- 3.5 Design, appearance and impact of the sports hall - The proposed building would undoubtedly be a significant feature in the local scene, in views along Gallows Hill Lane, from the car park and public open space opposite and from the adjacent houses in Popes Road. As well as being the largest and tallest building in the area, its metal pitched roofs would contrast with the flat roofs of the other school buildings and would be some 3 metres higher than the pitched tiled roofs of the adjacent houses.
- 3.6 However, the building would be some 6 metres further from the side boundary of the site than was proposed in the previous application, making the main part of the building (i.e. excluding the rear store) an overall distance of 32 metres from the back walls of the Popes Road houses. For residential development the District Council's guideline is that a minimum distance of 28 metres should be achieved between two-storey development but more where it is higher than this. Although the sports hall would be taller than a normal two-storey house, there would be no problems of loss of privacy or overlooking, as there would be no windows in the elevation facing the adjacent houses.
- 3.7 The lower walls of the building would be a light-coloured yellow stock multi brickwork. Although the nearest houses are either white rendered or built of red-brown bricks, there is no predominant local colour to suggest that the proposed bricks would be inappropriate. Moreover, the existing school buildings, although of different materials, are also essentially light in colour.
- 3.8 The extent of the impact of the new building on the immediate street scene would be considerably affected by whether it would be possible to retain the boundary hedge. The applicant is confident that this would be possible, but there has to be some doubt about it, given the way in which the land falls away on the school side of the hedge and that the building itself would come to within just over two metres of the centre line of the hedge with almost another metre's width of hard surfacing around it. Landscape advice is that there should be a two metre wide protection zone along the hedge during construction works.
- 3.9 Whilst the applicant could be asked to move the building back further from the front boundary, it is not clear that this would be practicable even if there were to be some modification to its internal layout. However, if the hedge did not survive and there was insufficient land remaining on which to replace it, then the impact of the building immediately next to Gallows Hill Lane would be unacceptable.
- 3.10 There are two other points of detail. Firstly, the position of the soft play room, with its higher roof height compared with that of the other accommodation on that side of the building, gives the roof line a somewhat disjointed appearance. Whilst it would be better if this were omitted or reduced to the level of the adjoining roof, this would severely limit its usefulness as it is designed to allow children of impaired mobility or senses to acclimatise themselves to the height and use of a stair within a padded environment so that they will not injure themselves if they fall. Secondly, the design of the front entrance porch is rather 'fussy' and it would be worth investigating further to see whether it could be simplified.

- 3.11 The most noticeable tree loss from outside the site would be that of the large silver birch tree, but this is not a particularly long-lived species anyway. There is also neighbour concern about the loss of the cherry tree whose branches overhang the footprint of the building. However, rather than attempt to save it, it is suggested that a replacement tree be provided in this area. All the other trees to be lost are relatively small, many of them saplings. Such is the size of the proposed building and the nature of its immediate surroundings (mainly hard surfacing) that there are no real opportunities for additional tree planting, desirable though that might be, especially adjacent to the building's front entrance.
- 3.12 For a commentary on the possible alternative locations for the sports hall, see the second and third pages of the applicant's supporting statement appended to this report.
- 3.13 Extent and implications of possible community use - Provision of the sports hall would be partly dependent on a successful bid for lottery funding, for which it is normally a requirement that such facilities should be available for wider community use. In this case the school's intention is that out of normal school hours, the sports hall would be available for local disabled individuals and groups rather than for general community use. In any case the hall would be only the size of a single badminton court, so relatively few people would be likely to be involved at any one time. According to the supporting statement, the hall would not be let for general social activities involving large numbers of people. A condition limiting out of school hours use of the hall to disabled groups and individuals and social activities directly related to the school could be imposed.
- 3.14 Highway, access and parking considerations - A new access for the contractors (but to be retained for limited use after completion of the building works) is the only change proposed to the existing access and parking arrangements at the site. The new sports hall would make no difference to existing traffic generation and parking requirements during the school day. With twelve parking pays marked out and space for other vehicles to park at the front of the site, the on-site parking provision is also likely to be adequate for any out-of-hours use of the sports hall.
- 3.15 Therefore, there is no reason why there should not be a condition requiring there to be no use of the additional access and no parking on the adjacent tarmac area at the back of the sports hall other than by grounds maintenance, delivery and emergency vehicles and requiring the gates there normally to be kept shut. This would be in addition to the condition about the pedestrian visibility splays required by the Highway Authority.

#### 4. **Financial implications**

There are none for this Committee.

#### 5. **Conclusions**

- 5.1 In terms of the visual amenity of the surrounding area, the sports hall is not in the best possible location within the site. However, there are a number of physical constraints as far as the school is concerned, related both to the physical characteristics of the site

and to the needs and limitations of its pupils, such that the proposed location is the only practicable one.

- 5.2 Therefore, it is important that everything is done to minimise the impact of the development, particularly to ensure retention of the front boundary hedge and investigate whether the simplification of the front entrance porch is achievable.
- 5.3 The community use of the building is not intended to be extensive, nor, from the size of the hall, could it be used for events involving large numbers of people. Nevertheless in order to protect the immediate neighbours from the potentially adverse effects on their amenity of unrestricted use, out of hours use of the hall could be limited to other disabled groups and individuals. As far as the school's use is concerned, the proposed development has no significant traffic or parking implications, but again, in order to protect the amenity of adjoining residents, use of the new access should be limited and no parking normally allowed on the tarmac area at the rear of the building.

*Background material used by the author in compiling this report*

Application documents i.e. application form dated 19.4.00, supporting statement, six drawings numbered 348/LP/1250, MTS-986, 348/200, 348/201, 348/100, 348/101 and two A3 sized perspective drawings;

Consultation responses and representations received;

Three Rivers District Local Plan, adopted 1993, and District Local Plan Review, deposit draft 1998;

Report to Environment Cases Sub-Committee 25 January 2000, item 1.

**Proposed sports hall and related development  
Breakespeare School, Gallows Hill Lane, Abbots Langley (application 8/469-00)  
Appendix A - Supporting statement submitted with the application**

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**Proposed sports hall and related development**  
**Breakspeare School, Gallows Hill Lane, Abbots Langley (application 8/469-00)**  
**Appendix B - Summary of public representations received**

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Culliton - dislikes tactical manoeuvring for location of sports hall by siting of temporary classroom - new access should be for strictly emergency use only - should be no hiring out for use in evenings and weekends (noise and parking implications for neighbours) - winter cherry should be protected and not lost as it will hide an ugly brick flank wall - already local flooding problems so surface water should be to off-site drainage and not via soakaways - contractors should use existing school access - site deliveries should be outside hours of travel to and from school and times of heavy traffic - contractors vehicles should use Manor House car park rather than surrounding roads or land r/o Popes Road houses - hours of working should be 8am-5.30pm on weekdays only - contractors compound should be sited well away from Popes Road houses. i.e. No objection subject to resolution of these issues.

Drake - sports hall would be a change of use - would be tallest building on the site - would overshadow adjacent gardens - eyesore from Gallows Hill Lane approach to village and from car park opposite - potential traffic and noise nuisance.

Hankin - new access would remove high bank protecting footpath and school hedge from speeding traffic and will create potential security problem for adjacent houses - area adjacent to new access should not be used for car parking after construction - garden fences should be protected from potential damage by tractors and grass cutters - environmental impact: loss of section of mature hedge, two trees and five saplings - construction hours should be limited to 8am-6pm on weekdays and 10am-4pm on Saturdays, with protection measures against dust and dirt - non school use should finish by 10pm, should be no intrusive floodlighting at the rear and should be limited to disabled people only.

Harper - object totally - design and location of sports hall is completely unacceptable & unsympathetic to neighbours & surrounding area - size & materials totally out of keeping with existing school buildings & surroundings - proximity to site boundary appear to destroy building line - loss of outlook - should be no community use: would compromise security & privacy of adj residents, noise & lighting intrusion, traffic & pollution - removal of hawthorn hedge for new access will endanger security - no need for the facility - potential danger from proximity of new crossover to three others - adverse effect on water table and increased flooding risk - environmental impact of loss of trees, including cherry & large silver birch, with only one replacement tree - both cherries should be retained and several mature trees planted . The existing hall should be converted for PE use and single storey dining room built in this location - siting of building is entirely at cost of other people and none to school. If permitted: overall height of building should be lowered - more suitable materials should be used, including a tiled rather than metal roof - hours of construction should exclude weekends and bank holidays and confined to winter months only - should be no parking on tarmac area adj to new emergency access and gates should be 2.4 m high and kept locked - should be fast growing hedge planted along boundary with Popes Road houses - sports hall should be used during school hours only. i.e. sports hall should be lower, built elsewhere on the site and its use restricted to Breakspeare children only.

Cont.

Harris - no objection to proposed siting *but*: should be no building work at weekends, no public use, new access should be for construction & emergency use only, should be screen planting for adj houses, land r/o the building should not be used for parking.

Lazarus - objects to anything more than one storey high - no boundary indicated r/o nos. 12 & 14 Greenway and concerned that extns to no 14 suggest that both properties are to be incorporated into school premises at some stage.