

EAST HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT

**PROPOSED REBUILDING
JENYNS FIRST SCHOOL, BRAUGHING**

Report of the Director of Environment

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Local Member : J M Pitman

1. Purpose of Report

To consider a planning application for the rebuilding of Jenyns First School in Braughing (application reference 3/780-01)

2. Summary

- 2.1 The existing buildings of Jenyns First School are out-of-date and unsuited to modern education requirements. Up-grading these buildings would not be a satisfactory solution and only a new school building would overcome the deficiencies. There is no reason why this cannot be done on the existing site, although its slope imposes certain limitations on what is possible. Two applications were submitted originally and consultations and publicity were carried out on that basis, but one application was subsequently withdrawn.
- 2.2 The application under consideration proposes a new single storey building at the top (eastern) end of the site, with a new vehicular access from Uplands involving a circuitous route from The Street via Green Lane. The building would be constructed with traditional facing brickwork but with a modern metal roof. There would be some loss of existing trees. Sufficient on-site parking would be provided for staff and visitors. There would be some access for parents, and service and delivery vehicles would also be able to enter and turn round within the site. Only full-sized coaches would have to stop outside the site.
- 2.3 East Hertfordshire District Council objects to the application on grounds of the proposed development being contrary to its policy for rural areas and the likely traffic congestion on local roads. Braughing Parish Council objects mainly on traffic and parking grounds, but also objects strongly to the metal roof. The County Council as Highway Authority has no objection, subject to a number of conditions. There are no objections from any of the statutory undertakers. Sport England would like to see the playing field area levelled. The Built Environment Advisory Management Service recommends approval subject to conditions. Twelve letters of representation have

been received, expressing a variety of opinions for and against the two schemes for which application at that stage had been made; there was no consensus view.

- 2.4 Certain discrepancies are apparent on some of the drawings and a consistent set is still awaited from the applicant at the time of writing. In addition, certain details of the proposed development and of its impact on existing features of the site have yet to be clarified.
- 2.5 The report considers the main issues raised by the application i.e. land use considerations and justification for the proposed development, design of the building and landscaping, pedestrian and vehicular access, on-site parking and turning facilities and traffic and highway implications.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 In general terms it is anticipated that any potential problems arising from uncertainty over some of the details of the proposed development could be overcome by minor amendments to the scheme including the possibility of additional landscaping and/or by conditions.
- 3.2 The building design is acceptable in principle, and its metal roof would enable a reduction in the height and hence visual impact of the building. Some tree loss could be avoided by repositioning the proposed development within the site, but otherwise the landscaping scheme suggests a significant amount of new tree planting to compensate for lost vegetation and provide an appropriate setting for the new school. The main disadvantage of the proposed development would be the additional traffic using Green Lane and Uplands and the parking which would occur outside the entrance there at either end of the school day, but these would be of short duration and within the capacity of the local highway network.
- 3.3 The report concludes that, provided the details and additional information still to be submitted by the applicant are satisfactory, the Director of the Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission subject to conditions including pedestrian access, cycle storage, parking, off-site highway measures, a school transport plan, the contractors working arrangements including hours of working and implementation of the landscaping scheme.

1. Description of the site and proposed development

- 1.1 Background and application site - Jenyns First School (for pupils aged up to 9 years old) currently has a roll of ninety-seven pupils, with an admission limit of seventeen pupils a year and a total staff of seventeen i.e. six teachers, five support staff, five dinner staff/cooks and a caretaker. The school occupies a range of buildings on different levels dating from the nineteenth century. The toilets are in a separate block and there are also two single mobile classroom units. The site, which is surrounded by housing, is fairly centrally located within the village and partially overlaps with the conservation area. There is vehicular access into the playground at the extreme western end of the site near the ford by the junction of Ford Street and The Street, which is where most parents park to drop off and pick up their children. Pedestrian entrance to the buildings is from The Street. Behind the school buildings is an elongated grass play area sloping up to Uplands, a cul-de-sac extension of Green Lane off The Street.
- 1.2 The Local Education Authority considers that the existing buildings are inadequate for current and future education requirements, and so embarked on the development of plans for the school's rebuilding in consultation with the local community. This involved meetings with the Parish Council and an exhibition of proposals as they stood in October 1999. For a long time there were two proposals, but local opinion was divided as to which was preferable, one scheme requiring a steep bank along The Street to be cut into with the loss of a number of trees, and the other scheme involving a circuitous route through residential roads to a new access from Uplands. (A petition containing ninety-four signatures from residents of Green Lane and Uplands objecting strongly to the latter was submitted at an earlier stage).
- 1.3 Initially, therefore, two planning applications were submitted, one for a single storey scheme with access from Uplands and the second for a two-storey scheme with access off The Street. Part way through the process the application for the latter scheme was withdrawn, and so there is now only one application to be considered by this Committee and with which the remainder of this report deals. However, Members should be aware that the new school would not occupy the whole of its existing site. There is another application for development on the remainder of the site, which has been submitted to East Hertfordshire District Council for its determination and which proposes the conversion and extension of the existing school buildings to form four residential units, garages and a new access road from Uplands.
- 1.4 The planning application for the new school was submitted in late April. It proposes a new single storey school building at the top (eastern) end of the site, with a car park and vehicle turning area on one side and a hard play area and playing field area on its other side.
- 1.5 The curved school building would provide four classrooms (giving a capacity for a school roll of 120 pupils), a hall and library area, together with staff accommodation, kitchen and other ancillary facilities. The walls would be of red multi-facing brickwork with rendered surrounds to the aluminium-framed windows and stained timber panels. The low profile roof would be of grey metal with standing seams. Illustrative perspective drawings of the scheme have also been supplied.

- 1.6 Pedestrian and vehicle entrances to the site would be separate, with, due to the slope of the land, steps down from the pathway to the school building. A ramped path would also be provided. The vehicle turning area would include an extended layby, which would provide a drop-off/pick-up area for up to three parents' cars at a time and would also be used by delivery and service vehicles. The car park beyond would have spaces for seventeen vehicles.
- 1.7 Outside the site there is currently no footway along Uplands on the school side of the road, and a new one would be provided for the length of the site. The traffic study prepared by the Wormald Burrows Partnership which accompanies the application also suggests certain measures, mainly road markings, to mitigate the impact of the additional traffic on Green Lane itself and at its junction with The Street. In the supporting statement the applicant undertakes, if planning permission is granted, to implement these measures and to make £5,000 available for a period of ten years for any other off-site measures which may prove desirable. It also refers to the production of a school transport plan.
- 1.8 The development would involve the loss of a number of existing trees and at least a length of well-established hedge. An outline landscaping scheme forms part of the application. It indicates provision for considerable tree planting within the upper part of the site, both around the building itself as well as around the hard play and parking areas.
- 1.9 The applicant has yet to clarify the gross amounts of material which would need to be moved in terms of removal from the site and/or importation to it. The supporting statement with the application referred to a surplus of material to be removed *from* the site, whilst more recently reference has been made to the development involving a net *importation* of 830 cubic metres of soil. At the time of writing this report there are differences of detail between some of the submitted drawings, which remain to be clarified. A consistent set of drawings is still awaited, including details of the school's front elevation and making clear the extent of tree and hedge loss in relation to the building itself and the overall site layout as well as to footway works adjacent to the highway outside the boundary of the school site. Amendments to the layout have been requested (see later paragraphs 3.13 and 3.15), as has a fully detailed landscaping scheme.

2. Consultations and publicity

- 2.1 Consultations were carried out with East Hertfordshire District Council, Braughing Parish Council, the Highway Authority, statutory undertakers, Sport England and the Built Environment Advisory Management Service (BEAMS). Publicity was by means of notices on site and in the local press, and neighbour notification letters were sent to those living at twenty-one addresses around the site.
- 2.2 East Hertfordshire District Council considered the application at a meeting on 22 August 2001. The District Council objects to the application on two grounds. There is inadequate justification for the development, which would be on a green field site in the rural area beyond the Green Belt and would be harmful to it. The development

would also be likely to result in traffic congestion in local roads to the detriment of highway safety and local amenity.

- 2.3 Braughing Parish Council objects to the application because of the extra traffic problems in Uplands/Green Lane, the loss of parking spaces involved and the lack of provision for coach turning. It objects most strongly to the metal roof as not being compatible with any surrounding buildings. It refers to the need for the footpath to be upgraded and would like assurance over the funding of the necessary highway improvements.
- 2.4 The County Council as Highway Authority has no objection to the application but recommends a number of conditions including visibility splay for the vehicular access, provision for pedestrians, off-site highway works, cycle storage provision, a school travel plan and construction parking.
- 2.5 Other consultation responses - No objections have been raised by any of the statutory undertakers from whom responses have been received. Sport England has commented on the slope of the playing field area and the desirability of this being levelled if it is to be used in any way for team games; it would like to see the area marked out as a pitch and made available for after-school and wider community activities. BEAMS recommends approval of the application, subject to conditions about materials and a landscaping scheme. Internal consultations confirmed no need for any further archaeological work, as an evaluation of the site had been carried out in July 1999 and this had indicated that no significant archaeological deposits or structures were likely to be present there.
- 2.6 Public representations - Twelve letters have been received from the local community, comprising one from the Braughing Society, one from the Rural Enterprise Project and ten from individuals. However, at the stage when these letters were written, there were two planning applications for alternative schemes and so many responses were on that basis i.e. expressing a preference for one scheme or the other, liking neither and/or wanting the existing school buildings to be retained or believing that the over-riding need was for a new school regardless of which scheme it was. In relation to this particular scheme comments were made criticising the design of the building and about the traffic and parking problems along the access route and outside the site. There were also more general comments about the value of any new school as a potential community resource.
- 2.7 Although not submitted directly in response to this application, the Committee's attention is drawn to the petition referred to at the end of paragraph 1.2.

3. Planning considerations

- 3.1 According to the proposals map of the adopted District Local Plan, the site lies in the rural area beyond the Green Belt and within a landscape conservation area. Only a very small part of the site adjacent to The Street lies within the village conservation area and an area of archaeological significance. In the deposit version of the emerging District Local Plan the only designation covering the site is that it is identified as

“existing playing fields/open space/recreation area” making it subject to policy LRC1 which relates to the retention of such facilities.

3.2 The relevant policies of the Development Plan are:

- County Structure Plan - policies 13 (education and training), 25 (car parking), 41 (tree and hedge cover) and 43 (landscape conservation areas);
- East Hertfordshire District Local Plan (adopted) - RA3 (rural areas beyond the Green Belt), RA11 (landscape development areas), BE8 (landscaping), M7 and 8 (car parking);
- East Hertfordshire District Local Plan (emerging) - GBC6 (rural areas beyond the Green Belt), TR4 (green transport plans), TR5 & 6 (car parking), TR13 (cycling facilities for non residential development), ENV1 (layout and design), ENV5 (landscaping), ENV18 (protection of existing hedgerows and trees), LRC1 (sport and recreation facilities), OSV1 (category I villages) and OSV9 (village shops, community and leisure facilities).

3.3 The main issues to be considered in the determination of this application are:

- land use considerations and justification
- design of the building
- pedestrian access
- landscaping
- on-site parking and turning facilities
- highway implications.

3.4 Land use considerations and justification - The application involves the redevelopment for the same use of an existing developed site with the village of Braughing. The school provides a facility for the village and, being only a first school, its location within an area of housing development is entirely appropriate.

3.5 The existing school buildings are outdated and not well suited to modern education requirements. Refurbishing and extending them would not be a satisfactory response to the situation. It would still leave a number of problems including those associated with split-level buildings and the security risks from the variety of entrances, as well as involving major disruption to the school while the building work was taking place. The provision of replacement new accommodation is the only realistic solution.

3.6 Demolishing the existing school buildings and rebuilding them in situ would be impractical in terms of disruption to the school, as it would involve its relocation to temporary accommodation for the duration of the building works. It would also mean the loss of the existing buildings, which are valued by many people as part of the village scene.

3.7 In these circumstances, therefore, the only approach is for the new school building to be located elsewhere within the existing site. Although this means the loss of part of the school field and to that extent a loss of openness, a significant area of grass play space would remain. Any harm resulting from a local loss of openness is considered to be outweighed by the benefit to the local community of having new school premises better suited to modern education needs than are those of the existing school.

- 3.8 Levelling the grass play area and marking it out, as advocated by Sport England, for better school and community use would impose additional costs. For formal team games the school football team has access to the village recreation ground about 300 metres from the school. As far as the community is concerned, it is understood that there would be no change from the existing situation, as there is no formal community use at present.
- 3.9 Design - The proposed building would be large in terms of its footprint compared with the surrounding residential properties and, because of its position on sloping land, it would be potentially visible from a distance on the far side of the Quin valley. At the time of writing this report a drawing showing the main eastern elevation of the building is still awaited. However, in principle both its curved design and the low pitch of its roof would help to reduce its apparent bulk and visibility. A high level lantern light would also break up the expanse of the roof on its western elevation.
- 3.10 There is a variety of building styles and materials used on the other buildings around the site and in the village generally. In this situation the proposed multi-red facing brickwork for the walls of the new building would not be inappropriate, dependent on the details of the other external finishing materials, the colours of which are not specified in the application. Whilst the use of a standing seam metal roof would be novel within the village, it has the advantage of allowing a far lower pitch than could be achieved for a building of this size if slates or tiles of any kind were to be used. However, it would appear less “tin-like” if a colour other than the proposed grey were used. The details of the external materials, therefore, still need to be clarified and should be agreed before the application is determined.
- 3.11 Landscaping - At a very early stage in the scheme’s development, the applicant was advised that the layout should enable the retention of existing trees, including those along the eastern boundary which would provide an amenity screen between the new development and the adjacent houses. It is, therefore, regrettable that despite assurances that these trees would all be retained, when an accurate site survey drawing was provided, it became clear that these four trees would after all be lost. This would appear unnecessary, given the size of the site, and so the applicant has been asked to investigate the possibility of retaining at least three of, if not all, these trees by moving the development westwards.
- 3.12 In mitigation of the impact of the proposed development, the outline landscaping scheme indicates considerable new tree planting around the site. Whilst this appears adequate in principle, it will also need to take full account of the effect of the footway outside the school site on the existing boundary vegetation once that has been clarified (see paras 3.13 and 3.14). Before planning permission is granted, therefore, a fully detailed scheme would be needed in order to ensure that the necessary high standard of landscaping would be achieved.
- 3.13 Pedestrian access - The layout makes provision for two points of pedestrian access to the site from Uplands, one separate from but immediately adjacent to the main vehicular access at the eastern corner of the site and the other further to the west, leading to the school’s hard play area. Outside the site a new footway is proposed along the northern side of Uplands. The submitted drawing indicates retention of the

existing hedge together with a road of adequate width (5.4 metres), and it was on this basis that the Highway Authority had no objection.

- 3.14 However, it now appears that the drawing may have been misleading and that, to achieve the necessary road width, construction of the new footway, preferably two metres wide, would require removal of at least part of the existing boundary hedge and trees. At the time of writing this report, the situation has still to be clarified.
- 3.15 Parking and on-site turning facilities - The provision of a seventeen-space car park within the site, with three more spaces available within the drop-off zone, should be more than adequate in terms of staff and normal visitor parking requirements. It is only for special events, whether school-related or for the wider community, that the parking provision would be inadequate. The hard play area could not be used for overspill parking at such times, as it has no vehicular access. However, parking outside the site on such occasions would not be a frequent occurrence. Meanwhile the layout of the main car park needs amending to include sufficient manoeuvring room for all parking spaces, because at present reversing out of three of the spaces would be very difficult.
- 3.16 The circulatory system would enable normal delivery and service vehicles to enter and turn round within the site, although it would not be able to accommodate full size coaches. Therefore the coach which takes pupils to their weekly swimming lessons would still need to stop at the entrance to Green Hill Close. The Parish Council suggests that a coach/bus layby should be incorporated into the layout at the western end of the site within that part of the existing site which is the subject of the separate residential application. However, the Highway Authority does not consider this to be necessary.
- 3.17 Unlike the situation at most primary school sites in the County, the site layout also accepts that parents should be able to drive into the site through its inclusion of the drop-off zone accommodating three cars at a time by the internal circulatory system. However, this would be a limited facility and many parents would still need to stop elsewhere outside the site (see following paragraphs).
- 3.18 Other highway implications - The school draws its pupils from a fairly wide rural area, and a survey by the applicant's traffic consultants found that up to thirty-three parents' cars may be parked outside the existing school at any one time at the start of the school day.
- 3.19 It is, therefore, expected that some parents would continue to park as at present down by the ford and along the main road through the village, from where the children would need to walk up through Greenhill Close either to the pedestrian entrance leading into the school's hard play area or continuing on to the entrance adjacent to the main vehicular access. Other people could be expected to park around the amenity green in Green Lane and in Uplands, including using whatever spaces are available within the residents' parking bays. Although objections to this have been received from local residents and the Parish Council, the arrangements are acceptable to the Highway Authority provided that there is proper provision for pedestrians including a footway along the north side of Uplands outside the site, a link pathway to the school's hard play area and a guard-rail outside the entrance. These could be secured by condition.

- 3.20 Vehicular access to the site would be by a somewhat tortuous route via a cul-de-sac system of roads from The Street via Green Lane and its extension, Uplands. However, the two bends in Green Lane, one a right angle and the other of forty-five degrees, tend to slow traffic down because of uncertain priorities and restricted visibility. Traffic movements along Green Lane to its junction with The Street would increase significantly, perhaps in the morning peak hour from an existing 52 movements to a total of between 130 and 148 movements (including the additional traffic related to the residential conversion of the existing school buildings) according to the applicant's traffic consultants. Although the additional traffic would be concentrated into a short period of perhaps twenty minutes, a total increase of 96 movements is not considered great in highway terms and would be within acceptable environmental limits for such residential roads.
- 3.21 In order to mitigate the impact of the development, the applicant's traffic consultants identified a package of measures around the junction of Green Lane with The Street and related to the right angle bend in The Street. The Highway Authority recommends that the implementation of these be secured by condition as part of any planning permission granted. It also recommends that more be done to discourage so many people from driving to the school, including the provision of a secure covered facility for the storage of at least eight cycles and that a school transport plan should be in place before the new school building is first occupied. The latter has the potential for making a significant contribution to limiting the impact of the additional traffic on the residential roads leading to the site, through its approach to reducing the number of car journeys and the way in which parents access the site. In order for there to be confidence that a condition in respect of such a plan could be met, it is suggested that, before the application is determined, there should be a clear programme for its preparation and a commitment to achieving it.
- 3.22 As construction traffic would also be using Green Lane for access to the site, it would be important that working hours are controlled and that proper provision is made for all contractors vehicles to park within the site, such that no unnecessary nuisance or inconvenience is caused to nearby residents. A condition covering these matters would need to be attached to any planning permission granted.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The existing school buildings are out of date and unsuited to modern education requirements. Up-grading these buildings would not be satisfactory and only a new school building would overcome the deficiencies. The existing site is sufficiently large to enable the provision of a new school and ancillary facilities including hard and soft play areas and parking, whilst still leaving some surplus land for incorporation into a scheme for converting the existing school buildings to residential use.
- 4.2 The proposed site layout needs to be amended to enable the retention of at least three of the four trees along the eastern boundary and to provide adequate manoeuvring room for all car parking spaces. One elevation drawing is still awaited, but the design of the new school is acceptable in principle, albeit its metal roof would not be typical of the area and its precise finish and colour would be important in minimising its

impact. The details of all the external materials still need to be submitted in order to ensure their compatibility and a satisfactory appearance to the development.

- 4.3 Similarly full details are still needed of the landscaping proposals in order to ensure that a satisfactory scheme would be achieved, including treatment of the boundary along Uplands. The applicant will not be in a position to submit these details until he has clarified the relationship between the proposed footway along the north side of Uplands and the existing vegetation there.
- 4.4 The amount of on-site parking and the circulatory provision is adequate for all but school coaches and the occasional school event or out-of-hours activity. Residents along the vehicular access route in Green Lane and Uplands would undoubtedly notice an increase in traffic at either end of the school day, but the capacity of these roads is sufficient to accommodate it. A programme for the preparation of a school transport plan is needed in order to ensure that one is in place before the new school premises are occupied.
- 4.5 Thus, before the application can be determined, the following are needed: an amended site layout to minimise the loss of existing trees and with adequate manoeuvring room for all car parking spaces; clarification of the footway along Uplands in relation to existing boundary vegetation and of gross materials movements involved in carrying out the proposed development; details of the fourth elevation, all external materials, all landscaping works including maintenance provision and a programme for the preparation of a school transport plan. Provided all these submissions are satisfactory, there is no reason why planning permission should not then be granted subject to conditions covering pedestrian access, cycle storage, car parking, off-site highway measures, a school transport plan, the contractors working arrangements including hours of working and implementation of the landscaping scheme.

5. Financial implications

There are none for this Committee

Background material used by the author in compiling this report

Application documents i.e. application form dated 20 April 2001, supporting statement and five drawings numbered 123/OS/00/B, 123/SUR/01/A, 123/PL/02/B, 123/PL/01/A and 123/L/902/B; also three illustrative perspective drawings numbered JFSS1 to JFSS3; also Report on Access Arrangements and Study dated April 2001 prepared by the Wormald Burrows Partnership;

Consultation responses and representations received;

Hertfordshire County Structure Plan Review, adopted April 1998;

East Hertfordshire Local Plan First Review adopted March 1993, with Alterations adopted December 1999; also Second Review, deposit version dated December 2000, published June 2001.