

WATFORD BOROUGH

**PROPOSED NEW NURSERY AND CHILDCARE CENTRE
EASTBURY ROAD, WATFORD**

Report of the Director of Environment

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Local Member: S Giles-Medhurst

1. Purpose of Report

To consider a planning application for a new nursery and childcare centre on the existing Oxhey Nursery site in Eastbury Road, Watford (reference 9/865-01).

2. Summary

- 2.1 There is currently a thirty-place nursery on the application site, accommodated in a small building at one end of the site. This site, together with another site just over a kilometre away in Oaklands Avenue, North Oxhey, forms Oxhey Nursery School. In January 2001 the County Council's Executive Committee authorised the Director of Education to implement the consolidation of Oxhey Nursery School on to the Eastbury Road site with an extended range of day care and community facilities. The Oaklands Avenue site would then become surplus to the Council's requirements and the land sold.
- 2.2 In December 2001 an application was submitted for the redevelopment of the Eastbury Road site with a much larger building designed to accommodate two forty-place nursery classes (one in the morning and another in the afternoon) with facilities for extended day care for twenty-four three and four year olds and a separate day care facility for twenty-five two and three year olds.
- 2.3 Watford Borough Council has commented and suggests amendments, but has no objection subject to a number of conditions. The Highway Authority has no objection, subject to certain conditions. Neither statutory undertaker who responded to the consultation has any objection, although Transco requires further details from the applicant before work is started. Three representations have been received from individual members of the public, concerned mainly about traffic and parking congestion in Longcroft, and two from the local residents' association which would like more extensive community facilities included within the development.
- 2.4 The report considers the main issues raised by the application: appearance of the development including design of the building, visual impact and landscaping

provisions; archaeology; highway implications including traffic generation, parking provision and access details; and community use and related aspects.

3. **Conclusions**

The report concludes that the Director of the Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission subject to conditions covering archaeology, fencing, access and parking details, contractors working arrangements (including access and hours), parking provision, cycle storage provision, landscaping, school transport plan, hours of external lighting and community use. Advice should also be appended about water usage, prior contact with Transco, prior Highway Authority agreement for works on the public highway and additional information relating to the preparation of the school transport plan.

1. Description of the site and proposed development

- 1.1 Background - Oxhey Nursery School currently operates from two sites i.e. the application site in Eastbury Road, Watford, and a separate site just over a kilometre away in Oaklands Avenue, North Oxhey. In 1999-2000 the Local Education Authority held discussions and consultations about the possible consolidation of the school onto a single site, with the provision there of additional services. In January 2001 the County Council's Executive Committee authorised the Director of Education to implement the consolidation of Oxhey Nursery School on to the Eastbury Road site with an extended range of day care and community facilities, following which the Oaklands Avenue site would become surplus to the County Council's requirements and the land sold.
- 1.2 Later that year an application was made and planning permission granted for a mobile classroom unit to be erected on the Oaklands Avenue site for a period of two terms to accommodate the Eastbury Road nursery classes while the latter site was undergoing redevelopment.
- 1.3 The application site (some 0.36 hectares) lies within a residential area and fronts the A4125, a busy road linking Bushey Arches with both South Oxhey and the A404 at Northwood. The ground is level, and the site, which contains a number of trees, is bounded by a good hedge on its three public sides. The existing nursery school building occupies a corner of the site adjacent to the three-storey flats, but, being dark stained timber with a flat roof, the building is scarcely visible to people walking or driving along Eastbury Road. In front of the site there is a grass verge (part of the highway) with more trees. The site currently has no parking provision and a single pedestrian access from Eastbury Road, where there is space for one car to park in front of the gates. There is also a bus stop and layby in front of the site. Longcroft is a long cul-de-sac, parts of which run along two sides of the site. A three-storey block of flats overlooks the site from the north, and parking provision for these and other two-storey flats nearby is in garage blocks and residents parking bays.
- 1.4 The planning application was received in early December 2001. It proposes replacement of the existing 180 square metre flat-roofed building by a pitched roof building of some 770 square metres located close to the existing front boundary and requiring removal of the front hedge. The walls would be of orange facing brickwork with recessed coursing and panels of differently coloured render finish including recessed geometrical shapes and green roller/sliding shutters over the storage areas at the front of the building. The ridgeline of the grey tiled roof would be approximately 6.1m high, with velux rooflights in both long elevations. In addition to administrative and ancillary facilities the accommodation would comprise four main elements: a nursery school base for forty three- and four-year old children, an extended day-care base for twenty-four similarly aged children, a toddlers and younger threes base for twenty-five children aged eighteen months to three years and a multi-purpose room. The latter would serve during the day as the school's dining room, but could be available for outside community uses at other times provided that the users were considered compatible with the main user.
- 1.5 Outside the building the nursery school hard and soft play areas would be at one end and a toddlers and younger threes play area, linked to a larger multi-purpose play area, at the other end. Pedestrian access would be only at the side from Longcroft, and

vehicular access would be at the rear from Longcroft, through a residents parking bay and involving the loss probably of two or three spaces, leading directly to a line of twenty-seven parking spaces and delivery area within the site. A six-stand covered cycle rack would also be provided. A total of twelve trees would be removed, together with the front hedge, leaving only two trees at the side (southwestern end) of the site and two at the front. The existing highway verge would be incorporated into the site and an emergency access for statutory undertakers requiring access to their services beneath this area would be provided from the corner by the junction of Longcroft with Eastbury Road.

- 1.6 The application includes details of hard and soft landscaping proposals. The latter makes provision for six new trees and for shrub planting within the rear parking area as well as along two sides of the building and along the front of the site. The application refers to 1.8 metres high dark green weld mesh fencing, 1.8 metres high rendered masonry wall and 1.8 and 1.2 metres high log fencing, but the drawings do not make clear exactly where all this would go and there are no other details.
- 1.7 The extended day care facilities would be open from 8am to 6pm, with the two nursery classes operating from 9am to 11.30am and from 1pm to 3.30pm. Overall the maximum number of children in the building would be eighty-nine, with a maximum of seventeen staff during the main part of the day from 9am to 3.30pm. The parking provision of twenty-seven spaces is explained as comprising ten for staff, thirteen for day-care parents and four for nursery parents. The supporting statement refers to a school transport plan being provided, but there are no details of any programme for its preparation.

2. Consultations and publicity

- 2.1 Consultations were carried out with Watford Borough Council, the Highway Authority and statutory undertakers. Publicity was by means of notices in the local press and on site, and neighbour notification letters were sent to those living at forty-six addresses around the site.
- 2.5 Watford Borough Council comments that the street lighting in Longcroft is substandard and should be improved. It suggests four amendments: the emergency statutory undertakers access is not acceptable, a pram crossing over Longcroft is needed for the pedestrian entrance, replacement parking spaces could be needed in Longcroft (i.e. following a survey to assess the impact of the development) and the site exit needs to be redesigned to accommodate emergency and refuse vehicles. It then goes on to suggest fifteen conditions including construction hours of working; prior approval of materials, fencing, landscaping, lighting, wheel-washing, refuse stores, access road and cycle store; a programme of archaeological work; and implementation of all these elements.
- 2.6 The County Council as Highway Authority has no objection subject to conditions requiring prior approval of the detailed design of the permanent access and arrangements for construction vehicle movements, construction works not to interfere with the public highway, closure and reinstatement of the access on to Eastbury Road, internal layout to enable delivery and refuse vehicles to turn within the site and the pedestrian access to be designed and constructed to current County Council standards.

- 2.7 Statutory undertakers - Two responses have been received. Transco advises that it has plant in the vicinity and so the applicant should provide further details to the company before starting work. Thames Water has no sewerage objection but suggests that as “the proposed development is likely to be a substantial user of water measures should be incorporated into its construction and operation for the efficient use of water”. No response was received from other statutory undertakers consulted, including the Environment Agency and Three Valleys Water.
- 2.5 Public representations - Three individual letters have been received. Two were mainly concerned about existing parking problems and suggested that additional residents parking should be provided; one also raised concern over the implications of congestion outside the site on access for emergency vehicles and elderly residents in electric wheelchairs. The third was an enquiry about private access through the site and was passed to the applicant for a response. Letters, with copies of various other correspondence and a petition addressed to Watford Borough Council, were also received from both the secretary and the chairman of the Rookery Tenants and Residents Association. Their main concern was over the need for better community facilities in the area and the limited provision made for this within the current application.

3. **Planning considerations**

- 3.1 The application site lies within a primarily residential area and is subject to no other specific policy or proposal according to the proposals map of the adopted District Local Plan.
- 3.2 The relevant policies of the Development Plan are:
- County Structure Plan - policies 1 (sustainable development), 13 (education and training), 22 (reduction of travel need & car usage), 23 (networks & facilities for non-motorised transport & buses), 25 (car parking) and 38 (critical capital and other important environmental assets);
 - Watford District Local Plan (adopted version) - SE1 (environmental impact), SE9-10 (trees, woodland and hedgerows), SE11 (landscaping), SE15 (archaeology), SE16 (standards of design), T3 (transport and new development), T6 (cycle facilities), T8 (access and servicing), T9 (car parking), H8 (non residential proposals in residential areas), CS1 (accessibility) and CS2 (crèches and day nurseries);
 - Watford District Local Plan (emerging) - U1 (design), U19 (archaeology), T4 (transport and new development), T9 (cycle parking standards), T17 (access and servicing), T18 (car parking), CS1 (location of facilities), CS2 (existing facilities), CS3 (loss of community facilities) and CS4 (access to community facilities)
- 3.3 The main issues raised by the proposed development are considered to be:
- appearance of the development including design of the building, visual impact and landscaping provisions;
 - highway implications including traffic generation, parking provision and access details;
 - archaeology;
 - community use.

- 3.4 Appearance of the development - With the loss of the grass verge, the frontage hedge and a number of trees, the new pitched roof building would be much more prominent than the existing nursery which, at ground level, is hardly visible from outside the site. The location of the new building at the front of the site, its size and design including its use of coloured panels (and roller / sliding shutters at the front) will also make it stand out in the street scene. The use of bright colours may, however, be considered appropriate to its proposed use by very young children, and no objections to its design have been received. Unfortunately the limited size of the site and the amount of development to be accommodated leave little room for significant landscape planting and that which is proposed has not been designed to screen the building. There is still a possibility that the fencing to be erected could reduce its impact, but that will depend on the details and those have not yet been submitted.
- 3.5 Highway implications - The existing thirty-place nursery classes are to be replaced by forty-place classes and extended day care facilities for a further forty-nine children. However, compared with one existing off-road parking space, provision is to be made for twenty-seven cars to be parked within the site and, with no access of any kind from Eastbury Road, people would be far less likely to park there than they are now. Although more nursery children than currently will be arriving and leaving all at the same time, the arrival and departure of those attending for day care are likely to occur at other times and to be spread over a longer period. The Highway Authority notes no on-street parking problems associated with the existing nursery function, and not all the residents parking bays in Longcroft were seen to be occupied during the middle of the day. There is still some doubt as to whether the site layout and design of the vehicular access will enable large vehicles, such as emergency and delivery vehicles to turn round within the site and then to exit safely on to Longcroft without mounting the opposite kerb, therefore more detailed layout drawings are required. As regards the emergency access for statutory undertakers, the Highway Authority has no objection to this, as it is likely to be used only rarely and is better segregated from the other activities on the site, but it agrees that there should be dropped kerbs in Longcroft opposite the pedestrian entrance into the site.
- 3.5 Archaeology - The application site is not within any area of archaeological significance as defined on the district local plan proposals map. However, the site is located in the close vicinity of four sites of Neolithic and Mesolithic occupation and/or flint working, and there has also been the spot find of a Roman coin in the area. The County's Planning Archaeologist considers there is a reasonable likelihood of significant archaeological remains being present. He recommends a condition requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a previously approved written scheme of archaeological investigation, with provision made for the archaeological evaluation of the site before the commencement of development and for such appropriate mitigation measures as the evaluation may indicate to be necessary. The applicant is aware of this requirement and is taking steps to commission the work.
- 3.6 Community uses - This is not strictly a planning matter, but has been raised by the local residents' association. The scope for such outside use during the time the centre is operating would be limited, particularly as the multi-purpose room will be needed as the centre's dining room. In any case, any significant day-time use could give rise to other traffic and parking concerns. The use made of the facility outside the centre's operating hours is a matter for the applicant, but again there could be concern, particularly if it involved the external multi-purpose play area, because of the potential impact on

adjoining residents. An hours of use condition is, therefore, suggested (see also paragraph 3.10 below). As regards the suggestion that the community use facility should be increased in size, the site is not big enough to accommodate anything larger.

- 3.7 Other issues - *Lighting*: unless columns more than four metres are involved, then lighting within the site would be covered by the County Council's permitted development rights. However, a condition limiting the hours of use could be appropriate.
- 3.8 *Highway verge*: The applicant will need to secure a stopping up order before the verge can be incorporated into the site. This is a separate procedure and cannot be promoted unless and until planning permission has been granted.
- 3.9 *Vehicular access*: The proposed access from the residents parking area in Longcroft involves land outside the applicant's control and cannot be achieved without agreement having been reached with Watford Borough Council as owner of the land. As this could in turn involve negotiations related to community use of the building, this reinforces the need for an hours of use condition designed to protect the amenity of nearby residents from any potentially adverse impact which could arise from use.

4. **Financial implications**

There are none for this Committee

5. **Conclusions**

- 5.1 The proposed development represents a far more intensive use of the site than that currently existing, in terms of the amount of physical development, numbers of people involved, hours and extent of operation (i.e. longer hours and not confined to term time only). The development will also have a greater visual impact, with limited opportunities for screening. However, it is a community facility appropriate within a residential area. Therefore, given the subjectivity of design considerations and the provision to be made for absorbing the parking generation within the site so as neither to obstruct the public highway nor inconvenience local residents, it is concluded that there is no reason why planning permission should be withheld.
- 5.2 However, any planning permission granted should be subject to conditions requiring the prior approval of a number of matters including a written scheme of archaeological investigation, fencing details, access details (permanent, contractors and kerb set-downs for pedestrian access) and internal parking/manoeuvring arrangements and a programme for the preparation of a school transport plan such that an approved plan will be in place by the end of the first term of occupation of the new premises. The parking spaces would all need to be marked out and a minimum of six covered cycle stands provided before the premises were first occupied. Other conditions should cover the contractors working arrangements including hours of working, implementation of the landscaping scheme with a five year programme of maintenance and hours of use of external lighting and of the premises for community activities. Any planning permission would also need to include advice about the efficient use of water, the need for prior applicant contact with Transco, the need for Highway Authority agreement for works to the

public highway and additional information relating to the preparation of the school transport plan.

Background material used by the author in compiling this report

Application documents i.e. application form dated 27 November 2001, supporting statement and the following eight drawings numbered 515/A/01, 515/A/02, 7248/1/B, 515/A/03, 515/A/04, 515/A/05, 515/L/901/1 and 515/L/902, together with two A4 photocopy sheets showing the Vekso-Taulov Tokyo single sided cycle shelter and Publicus bicycle stand;

Consultation responses and public representations received;

Hertfordshire County Structure Plan Review 1991-2011, adopted April 1996;

Watford District Local Plan 1993, adopted April 1996;

Watford District Plan 2000, deposit draft May 2000.