

**EAST HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT**

**PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF SINGLE MOBILE CLASSROOM UNIT AND  
REPLACEMENT WITH A NEW DOUBLE MOBILE CLASSROOM UNIT AT  
THUNDRIDGE C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL, ERMINE STREET,  
THUNDRIDGE.**

Report of the Director of Environment

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Local Member: D Beatty.

**1. Purpose of Report**

To consider planning application ref 3/1260-03 for the demolition of a single mobile classroom unit and replacement with a double mobile classroom unit at Thundridge C of E Primary School, Ermine Street, Thundridge.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 The school currently has 64 pupils, which is gradually set to rise and expected to peak at 84 pupils in 4 years time. Nursery and reception children currently occupy a single mobile classroom which has been on site for some 25 years, whilst years 5 and 6 are currently taught in an undersized classroom. From September, the number of pupils in years 5 and 6 will increase and the current classroom will be significantly deficient in size. Therefore there is an urgent need to provide the school with an additional full sized classroom. It should be noted that the existing mobile has already been removed from the site for health and safety reasons.
- 2.2 The new mobile building would be required for 5 years. Most children in the village walk to school, although some children from outlying areas are brought by car.
- 2.3 Two letters of objection have been received raising concerns relating to adverse visual impact on amenity, traffic issues, the increase in pupil numbers and their allocation to this school.
- 2.4 The school site is situated within the Green Belt and a Conservation Area. Whilst the mobile classroom represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt, it is considered that very special circumstances exist to justify the development. It is considered that the proposed double mobile classroom would have no additional adverse

impact on the character or appearance of the Conservation Area above the original mobile unit. There have been concerns raised with regards to the increase in pupil numbers and the highway implications of traffic at the start and end of the school day. This can be mitigated through the requirement to produce a School Travel Plan.

### **3. Conclusion**

- 3.1 Given that the original mobile classroom has already been removed, there is a need to at least replace it with a unit of a similar size. The report concludes that the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant a temporary planning permission for the proposed development for five years subject to conditions requiring the submission of a programme for implementation of a School Travel Plan within three months of planning permission being granted and the Travel Plan being submitted within twelve months thereafter, the colour of the mobile classroom, additional planting and restricting the hours of working required to erect the classroom.
- 3.2 However, given the existing capacity issues at the school, the length of time that the original single mobile classroom has been on site and its location in the Conservation Area, should planning permission be granted, the Director of Children, Schools and Families should be advised that any further extension of time for mobile accommodation is unlikely to be considered favourably and that he should consider the longer term accommodation needs of the school which are in keeping with its setting.

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

- 1.1 The village of Thundridge lies to the north of Ware and is situated within the Green Belt and the Thundridge Conservation Area. The school site lies on the western edge of the village adjacent to and east of the A10.
- 1.2 The school currently has 64 pupils, with a capacity for 84 and an admission limit of 12. Whilst there are no proposals to increase this admissions limit, forecast numbers for future years are set to rise to 73 pupils in 2003/4 with an expected peak of 84 in 2006/7, after which the numbers are likely to fall again. Nursery and reception children currently occupy a single mobile classroom, whilst Years 5 and 6 are currently taught in an undersized classroom. From September, the number of pupils in years 5 and 6 will increase and the current classroom will be significantly deficient in size, therefore there is an urgent need to provide the school with an additional full sized classroom.
- 1.3 The proposed development includes the demolition of the existing single mobile classroom (which has already taken place due to health and safety reasons) and its replacement with a double mobile classroom. The new building would be occupied by Key Stage One children, with the foundation class in one room and Years 1 and 2 in the other. Years 5 and 6 would move into the current Year 1/2 room and the undersized classroom would be used as an ICT/science/technology resource room. The new mobile building would be required for 5 years. The mobile classroom would be located on a similar site to the original mobile unit, at the rear of the school to the south west of the main building. The proposed site lies at the bottom of land sloping away from No.'s 3 -13 Ermine Street and a steep embankment sloping down away from the A10.
- 1.4 The school currently has 8.6 full time equivalent staff, with the maximum number of staff on site at any one time being 14. The school has 11 marked out parking bays. Most children in the village walk to school, although some children from outlying areas are brought in by car.

## **2. Consultations**

- 2.1 Consultations were carried out with East Hertfordshire District Council, Thundridge Parish Council, Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority and The Built Environment Advisory and Management Service (BEAMS).
- 2.2 East Hertfordshire District Council: No objection to this proposal.
- 2.3 Thundridge Parish Council: No response.

2.4 Highway Authority: No objection subject to the imposition of conditions relating to the implementation of a School Travel Plan.

2.6 A total of 21 properties were consulted on the application and 2 letters were received objecting to the application. The main issues of concern can be summarised as:

- traffic generation and parking problems;
- impact on visual amenity;
- the need for the mobile at this school.

### **3. Planning Considerations**

3.1 The principal issues to be taken into account in determining this application are:-

- the need for the mobile at this school;
- development within the Green Belt;
- development within a Conservation Area;
- adverse impact on visual amenity;
- traffic generation and parking problems;

#### Need.

3.2 Thundridge School has an annual admission limit of 12, which has been the same for many years. The school has not and does not propose to increase its admission capacity however, younger year groups are larger and will work through the school, with projections indicating that the school will be at capacity in 2006/7 with 84 pupils. The current classroom for the older children is already undersized and this situation will be exacerbated during the 2003/4 school year. DfES Design Bulletin 82 states that classrooms should have 2m<sup>2</sup> per pupil. If the school did not provide alternative accommodation for its older pupils, they would have only 1.6m<sup>2</sup> per pupil. Were the top years of the school to be full, there would only be 1.33m<sup>2</sup> per pupil.

3.3 The school is becoming more popular and current space is now seriously deficient for the pupil numbers in September 2003. Concerns have been raised that pupils attending the school come from outside the village. Admission rules allow parents to send their children to the school of their choice as long as places are available. Criteria, such as geographical proximity, do not come into play until there are more applicants than places. The Local Education Authority (LEA) cannot direct children to an under-subscribed school unless places are unavailable at the parents' preferred school. Therefore the mobile is required in order that the County Council can fulfil its obligations to

parents wishing to send their children to the school and sustain a village facility.

#### Green Belt.

- 3.4 The village of Thundridge lies to the north of Ware and is situated in the Metropolitan Green Belt. Buildings even of a temporary nature on existing school sites are not identified within the categories of development regarded as appropriate within the Green Belt (Policies RA2 of the Adopted East Herts Local Plan and GBC2 and 3 of the Deposit Draft District Local Plan, Second Review).
- 3.5 The siting of the mobile classroom within the school site is such that the visual impact on the Green Belt setting would be minimal. The proposed new double mobile unit would replace a single one in the same location. Although the new mobile unit would be larger than the former single mobile, it would be 30cm lower. The sloping nature of the school site means that the mobile is located on ground below the height of surrounding land to the south and west of the school site. Vegetation surrounding the site adjacent to the A10 and to the south provides partial screening, therefore the new unit is likely to be less visible than the original unit from the surrounding landscape.
- 3.6 In these circumstances it is concluded that the limited impact that the proposed development would cause to the Green Belt is outweighed by the special circumstances justified by educational need, particularly given the temporary and replacement nature of the proposal.

#### Conservation Area.

- 3.7 This application proposes development within a Conservation Area (Adopted District Plan Policy 18 and Deposit Draft Policy BH4). The original mobile classroom is old and falling into disrepair and makes no material contribution to the Conservation Area (Adopted District Plan Policy 18 and Deposit Draft Policy BH6). As the proposed mobile would be lower in height and in a better state of repair it is considered that it would have no additional detrimental impact on the appearance and character of the Conservation Area. East Herts District Council have raised no objection to the proposal.

#### View/Amenity.

- 3.8 Two objections have been received on the grounds of visual amenity from occupiers of nearby houses. The new mobile unit, whilst larger in size and with a larger portion of mobile being visible to the rear of No.'s 5 and 7 Ermine Street, will not be located closer (currently at approximately 24.5m) to any residential properties than the original. Given the state and height of the original mobile, the surrounding vegetation and the difference in height and sloping ground, it is considered that any additional visual impact will be minimal.

- 3.9 The applicant has indicated that additional planting to increase screening for the unit from those properties most affected on Ermine Street could be provided. This could be covered by condition if planning permission is granted.

#### Highway Considerations.

- 3.10 An objection has been received with regard to the current traffic and parking situation and the increase in pupil numbers that could be catered for at the school. Paragraph 3.3 addresses the question of school admissions. Whilst it is acknowledged that Ermine Street is a narrow highway, the potential increase in the school roll would not take it above its admissions capacity. Whilst it is acknowledged that some of the additional children will come from outside the village it is not considered that this will have a significant impact. The Highway Authority have raised no objection in principle to the proposal, subject to the imposition of conditions relating to a School Travel Plan.
- 3.10 Such a requirement would help to reduce congestion in the long term. This requirement helps to meet the aims of the County Council's sustainable transport policies and policies TR3 and TR4 of the District Local Plan Review, Deposit Draft.
- 3.11 The A10 currently provides a deterrent to children walking from the west of the trunk road. Once the new by-pass is completed it is expected that more children from this part of the village will walk to school.

#### **4. Conclusions**

- 4.1 Whilst the school lies in a small village and a restricted site area, the current admission numbers and legislative requirements mean that there is an essential need for this additional teaching space. It is considered that the limited additional impact that the proposed development would cause to the Green Belt as compared to the original mobile classroom is outweighed by the very special circumstances justified by educational need and the temporary nature of the proposals.
- 4.2 It is acknowledged that a limited number of adjoining properties would have an increased view of the mobile classroom compared to the original unit. However, this would be ameliorated, as the replacement unit would be lower than the original building. Additional planting would help to provide additional screening.
- 4.3 The increase in numbers of cars caused by this proposal would be limited, and therefore the Highway Authority considers that any detrimental impact can be off set by the implementation of a School Travel Plan.

- 4.3 Given that the original mobile classroom has already been removed, there is a need to at least replace it with a unit of a similar size. The report concludes that the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant a temporary planning permission for the proposed development for five years subject to conditions requiring the submission of a programme for implementation of a School Travel Plan within three months of planning permission being granted and the Travel Plan being submitted within twelve months thereafter, the colour of the mobile classroom, additional planting and restricting the hours of working required to erect the classroom.
- 4.4 However, given the existing capacity issues at the school, the length of time that the original single mobile classroom has been on site and its location in the Conservation Area, should planning permission be granted, the Director of Children, Schools and Families should be advised that any further extension of time for mobile accommodation is unlikely to be considered favourably and that he should consider the longer term accommodation needs of the school which are in keeping with its setting.

## **5. Financial implications**

- 5.1 There are none for this committee to consider.

### **Background information used by the author in compiling this report**

Planning application reference 3/1260-03 (*and accompanying statements and plans*)

Consultation responses and representations received in response to planning application ref 3/1260-03.

Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991-2011, adopted April 1998;

The East Hertfordshire Local Plan 1986-2001 (with Alterations) adopted December 1999;

The East Herts Local Plan Second Review (Deposit Version - December 2000).