

WATFORD BOROUGH

APPLICATION FOR ALTERATIONS TO STORAGE BUILDING, ERECTION OF DECKING AND RAILINGS AND CREATION OF A BALL PARK INCLUDING ERECTION OF WELD MESH FENCING AND TWO LIGHTING COLUMNS, ALTERATIONS TO BOUNDARY WALL AND CREATION OF NEW VEHICULAR ACCESS, AT CENTRAL PRIMARY SCHOOL, DERBY ROAD, WATFORD.

Report of the Director of Environment

Author:- Katharine Ingram, Tel: 01992 556254

Local Member:- S Giles-Medhurst

1. Purpose of Report

To consider planning application ref. 9/0559-03 for alterations to storage building, erection of decking and railings and creation of a ball park including erection of weld mesh fencing and two lighting columns, alterations to boundary wall and creation of new vehicular access, at Central Primary School, Derby Road, Watford.

2. Summary

- 2.1 This application seeks permission for a number of alterations to the school site, including the creation of a ball park for use by the school and the local community. In order to create the ball park the main vehicular entrance on Stanley Road would be replaced by a wall and pedestrian gate, with a new vehicular entrance being knocked through the boundary wall further along Stanley Road. 3.65m high weld mesh fencing would be erected to enclose the ball park and secure it from the rest of the site. The park would be lit by two new 6m high lighting columns.
- 2.2 Elsewhere on site it is proposed to infill the open sides of a storage shed to provide a secure storage facility, and to erect fencing to separate the 'new' car park from the existing playground, maximising the available play area. Permission is also sought for a raised area of decking to cover an existing flight of steps outside the Early Years Unit.

- 2.3 The aims of the proposals are threefold;
- to improve the security of the site and thus deter trespassing and vandalism;
 - to improve the school's sports facilities and maximise the available play area to assist with delivering the sports curriculum;
 - to provide a community play facility for use by local groups to facilitate management of out of school hours users.

2.4 The main issues surrounding the application relate to the impact on the character and setting of a listed building, management and supervision of the ball park and community users, the impact on local amenity in terms of noise and light pollution out of school hours, and the visual impact of the scheme, particularly in view of the residential and architecturally significant nature of the area. Other issues are the potential for traffic generation, the pressure this would place on the available parking, and the perceived accident hazard of relocating the main access closer to the junction of Grosvenor Road and Stanley Road. The potential usefulness of the ball park in view of its small size has also been questioned by objectors.

3. Conclusion

The report concludes that the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the imposition of conditions regarding the hours of use, regulation of the floodlighting, maintenance of the visibility to the new access and prior approval of a management scheme and fencing type for the ball park and coping design for the boundary wall. The approved management scheme would include plans for traffic management in the event of the ball park being rented out and use of the ball park would be subject to the management scheme being approved by the local planning authority. Permission for the Early Years decking should be subject to approval of design alterations that will safeguard the security of the adjoining property.

1. Description of the site and proposed development

- 1.1 Central Primary School is located on a restricted site within the central ward of Watford and suffers from trespassing and vandalism. The main block of the school is a Grade II listed building and is at the centre of a triangular area of residential development encompassing Gladstone, Grosvenor and Derby Road.
- 1.2 The school is bounded on three sides by residential properties, which abut the school's south eastern boundary, and are separated from the north east and north western site boundaries by narrow roads. The Newton Price Centre is located in the northern corner of the site and is available for school use during school hours, and managed community groups outside school hours. A 'pocket park' with permanent play equipment for young children is located in the eastern part of the site adjacent to Stanley Road and opposite the Early Years' Unit. This is open to the school during the day and to the public after school hours and has gates that can be locked to join it to or separate it from the rest of the playground.
- 1.3 In order to create the ball park the existing vehicle entrance to the site from Stanley Road would be infilled with a weld mesh pedestrian gate and a brick wall that would match the existing boundary wall. The railings that currently top the boundary wall would be removed, the wall height would be increased to around 1.9m and the wall finished with new copings to match those existing elsewhere on site. 3.65m weld mesh fencing would be erected inside one section of the boundary wall and across the on-site car park, and another gate and section of railings would be erected inside the site to completely separate the ball park from the rest of the site.
- 1.4 A new vehicular access would be knocked through the boundary wall to allow access from Stanley Road to the existing car parking spaces around the Newton Price Centre. More parking spaces would also be marked out in this area and the new access would re-use the existing double gates. The boundary wall either side of the gates would be lowered in height and topped with new railings to allow visibility for drivers using the access. The location of the new access has been designed so as to fall between two holly trees on site and thus minimise disturbance to them. A small tree, planted in the pavement by Watford Borough Council as part of a scheme of amenity improvements to the area, would have to be removed to make way for the new access. It is proposed that a replacement tree be planted in the pavement outside the old vehicle entrance/new pedestrian entrance.
- 1.5 It is proposed to fence off the rear of the existing but so-called 'new' car park with gates relocated from elsewhere on site and new railings to match the gates, to both maximise the available playground area and to improve child safety.

1.6 Outside the Early Years' Unit at the southern end of the school site, it is proposed to erect an area of decking to cover the existing steps at a raised level. The decking would extend from the steps to the boundary fence to create a large, railed platform, accessible by the existing ramp.

2. Consultations

2.1 Watford Borough Council have no objection to the scheme subject to the imposition of planning conditions regarding hours of construction, hours of operation including the use of floodlighting no later than 8pm, control of light spillage onto Stanley Road, and safeguarding of the adjoining property next to the proposed decking area. They also recommend that a planning condition is attached to the permission requiring that the operation of the ball park should not commence until a suitable management and maintenance strategy is in place.

2.2 Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority: subject to adequate visibility being maintained around the proposed new vehicle access, the Highway Authority do not wish to restrict the grant of permission but urge the preparation of a school travel plan.

2.3 Local Member: has expressed his full support for the proposed developments.

2.4 Built Environment Advisory and Management Service (BEAMS): Recommend approval of the proposals subject to clarification of the design of the proposed wall copings to ensure that they match those existing, and a different type of weld mesh fencing being used that would have a hook rather than screw fixing and therefore be less visually intrusive.

2.5 English Heritage: Response currently awaited.

2.6 A total of 21 properties were consulted on the application and 36 letters objecting to the application were received. The main issues of concern can be summarised as:

- inadequate supervision of ball park leading to disorder and antisocial behaviour;
- the impact on rural amenity of the increased noise outside school hours, intrusiveness of floodlighting and the visual impact of the fencing, with particular regard to the architectural significance and residential nature of the area;
- increased traffic pressures and parking problems;
- increased traffic accident hazard caused by moving the vehicle entrance closer to the junction of Stanley and Grosvenor Roads;

- the small size of the ball park compromising its suitability for organised sports.

3. Planning Considerations

3.1 The relevant development plan policies are:

- Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991-2011 (Adopted April 1998) - Policy 1 (Sustainable Development), Policy 4 (Town Centres), Policy 47 (Sporting, Recreation and other Leisure Facilities).
- Watford District Local Plan 1993 (Adopted June 1996) - Policy SE1 (Environmental Impact), Policy SE13 (Character of Special Buildings), Policy SE16 (Standard of Design), Policy H7 (Conversion Mix), Policy H8 (Non-Residential Proposals in Residential Areas), Policy L6 (Sports/Recreation Provision), Policy L7 (Dual Use/Joint Provision), Policy CS3 (Redundant Schools).
- Watford District Plan 2000, Draft for Deposit May 2000 - Policy SE1 (Sustainable Development), Policy SE29 (Replacement Trees), Policy SE30 (Protection of Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows), Policy SE33 (Landscape Character Assessment), Policy U1 (Standard of Design), Policy U3 (Integration of Character), Policy U9 (Setting), Policy CS1 (Location of Facilities), Policy CS2 (Existing Facilities), Policy L1 (Leisure Strategy),
- Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Watford District Plan Draft for Deposit May 2000 - SPG19 (Noise Attenuation Guidelines)

3.2 The triangular area of residential development encompassing Gladstone, Grosvenor and Derby Road is designated as a specific Policy Area in the Watford District Local Plan 1993. As such, residential development in the area is subject to specific and stringent restrictions, but this Policy Area status does not appear in the Draft Deposit of the Watford District Plan 2000.

3.3 The Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review and the adopted and draft versions of the Watford District Local Plan all contain multiple references to both development of community facilities and development in the vicinity of a listed building. In general, the former is encouraged in principle, but with the proviso that development should not be at the expense of local and architectural amenity.

3.4 The principal issues to be taken into account in determining this application are;

- impact of development on character of area and setting of a listed building;
- road safety, increase in traffic generation and parking pressure;
- impact on local amenity of noise, lighting and fencing;

- management and supervision of the ball park;
- size and use of the park.

Listed building and character of area

- 3.5 Policy SE13 of the Watford Local District Plan 1993 and Policy U9 of the Draft Watford District Plan 2000 both relate to development that would adversely affect the character or setting of a listed building.
- 3.6 Although the proposals would have a significant visual impact on the locality, neither the decking nor the ball park would directly obscure the original school building, as their proposed locations are in front of later extensions to the building. BEAMS had no objections to the proposals provided that a slightly different design of weld mesh fencing is used and the new copings match those existing on site. According to the BEAMS website, the status of Central Primary as a listed building is due to its northern façade, which faces Derby Road on the opposite side of the school. This would be unaffected by the proposals. Implementation of the development would, in any case, be subject to approval of listed building consent.

Traffic and parking

- 3.7 The developers do not anticipate that creating the ball park will cause any significant increase in traffic generation or parking pressure. The school has stated that, at present, they do not intend to lease the ball park to specific groups, but rather to make it available to current casual users of the site. If this level of use were to change in future, significant traffic and parking pressures would be a likely result and conditions of any permission regarding its management would need to take account of this.
- 3.8 Although the ball park would be built on an area currently designated as car park, it is intended that almost as many new spaces will be created next to it around the Newton Price Centre, however no exact figures have been provided. The new spaces will be accessible through the new vehicular entrance. The school have been in touch with Parking Services at Watford Borough Council and have arranged for some of the local parking bay stay limits to be extended, allowing peripatetic staff to use them and relieve pressure on on-site parking during school hours. This arrangement is independent of this planning application.
- 3.9 Prior to their assessment of the application, Hertfordshire County Council as Highways Authority were made fully aware of residents concerns regarding the Grosvenor Road/Stanley Road junction. The reporting engineer stated that he was *"satisfied that... the geometry of the junction will ensure that the speed of traffic entering Stanley Road will be slow. Consequently the access will still be of sufficient distance away from the junction to provide adequate time for drivers... (to) take the appropriate action"*. After consultation with the developers, the

development plans were altered to ensure adequate visibility for drivers exiting through the new vehicle gates.

Management of the Ball Park

- 3.10 It is anticipated that, if permitted, approval of a detailed management scheme would be a condition of the permission. The Neighbourhood Policy and Projects Team at Watford Borough Council, the Manager of the Newton Price Centre and the leader of the Local Residents' Association have all pledged to support and assist the management and supervision of the ball park.

Noise

- 3.11 Section 19 of the Draft Watford District Plan 2000 Supplementary Planning Guidance defines noise sensitive development as including housing. Policy SE17 of the Draft Watford District Plan 2000 states that "*Planning permission will not normally be granted for a noisy development in a noise sensitive area. In exceptional cases where a use is granted mitigating measures will need to be implemented to ensure noise pollution or loss of amenity within that area is kept to a minimum.*" The lower half of the ball park (except at the pedestrian access point) would be behind a brick wall, which would help to shield the properties opposite. Limiting the hours of use of the ball park to 8.00pm should ensure that the proposal does not have an unacceptable impact upon the adjoining residential amenity. The proposal is also intended to help manage existing unauthorised use of the playground and so would introduce management of an existing problem.

Floodlighting

- 3.12 Policy U1 of the Draft Watford District Plan 2000 states that proposals should "*minimise the light pollution generated*". This is a development of Policy SE16 of the adopted Plan, which says that: "*Development proposals will be assessed in relation to the lighting pollution generated*". The proposed floodlighting has shields and reflectors that would be angled so as to minimise the amount of light that would spill into Stanley Road. The manufacturers have provided specific analyses of the site that indicate that less than 1 luminance would reach the properties opposite, taking account of reflections from surrounding surfaces. There is already a streetlight in the pavement outside the proposed ball park location. This still leaves the question of whether introducing floodlighting to the area would be appropriate given its nature and character. However, the proposed floodlights would be painted black to match the existing railings on site and their period of use could be limited by a planning condition.

Fencing

- 3.13 The principal aim of the fencing is to improve security at the site and as such is in accordance with Policy SE16 (Standard of Design) of the Watford District Local Plan 1993 and Draft Deposit 2000. In the 2000 Draft Deposit version however, the policy also states that *"the Council will expect all new developments...(to) be sympathetic to the character of the surrounding area"* and that *"proposals will be assessed in relation to: ...the impact on the street scene and character of the surrounding area."* The Derby Road side of the main block of Central Primary School is a Grade II listed. The weld mesh design of the fencing proposed around the ball park is not in keeping with that already on the school site, although it would be painted black to match the existing railings. BEAMS have recommended that a slightly different design of weld mesh fencing is used that will be less visually intrusive by virtue of having no visible screws. The lower half of the fencing would be screened by the boundary wall, which would be raised to an average height of 1.92m. However, above this height the weld mesh fencing would protrude above the wall by 1.73m to bring it to the same height as the existing wall outside the shed.
- 3.14 Creation of the new vehicular access would involve substantial alterations to the original boundary wall, including construction of 2 new brick piers, but the railings used would match the existing railings. Similarly, elsewhere on site, the gates and fencing that are proposed would either match or re-use existing gates and railings.

Size of playing area

- 3.15 Concern was raised by a local resident that the ball park would not be of a sufficient area to make its creation worthwhile. At just over 18m² any formal playing pitch would have to be dramatically scaled down before it could be marked out and this would compromise the potential for renting the facility to organised sports groups. However, this part of the school grounds is currently used for informal ball games and fencing it off from the car park around the Newton Price Centre would only serve to maximise the available playing space. As an informal play space the park would provide a very flexible facility for both the school and local community. It is worth noting that part of the funding for the project has been provided by Sport England in recognition of the difficulties that the school faces in meeting National Curriculum standards for sport.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The objections that were raised by local residents with respect to noise, lighting, traffic and parking can be mitigated by the imposition of planning conditions that limit the periods of use of the park. Evidence has also been presented to show that the ball park will be useable for a variety of activities, despite its size, and the Highways Authority are

satisfied that the development will not cause an increased traffic accident hazard.

- 4.2 Adequate management and supervision of the ball park is vital to its long term sustainability and community benefit. Practical support and assistance with management and supervision of the park has been offered from a number of sources, and the project seems to represent a significant step forward in terms of managing the security issues that the school has. The current status quo of misuse of the site and police intervention is undesirable and unstable. If permitted, the conditions of the permission should ensure that the good intentions on which the project has been based would be both strengthened and formalised to maintain the future management of the site.
- 4.3 The visual detriment to the site that the development would cause remains as a significant adverse impact of the proposal. Crucially, BEAMS were satisfied that the detriment that the project would cause was not great enough to warrant its refusal, provided a few design alterations were incorporated. The weld mesh fencing and the lighting columns are the most visually intrusive aspects of the ball park project and the decking would also detract from the architecture of the school and surrounding properties. However, the façade of principal architectural value faces Derby Road on the opposite side of the school and this would be unaffected by the proposals.
- 4.4 Overall, the benefits to the community and particularly to the school outweigh the objections to introducing a development of this nature into the area. As such, the report concludes that the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the imposition of conditions regarding the hours of use, regulation of the floodlighting, maintenance of the visibility to the new access and approval of a management scheme and fencing type for the ball park and coping design for the boundary wall. The approved management scheme would include plans for traffic management in the event of the ball park being rented out and use of the ball park would be subject to the management scheme being approved by the local planning authority. Permission for the Early Years decking should be subject to approval of design alterations that will safeguard the security of the adjoining property.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 Planning applications should be determined on the basis of material planning considerations, and not on the basis of their financial implications for the County Council. However, it is a requirement of the County Council to advise all Committees of the financial implications that may arise from their decisions.
- 5.2 If a planning application is refused or is not determined within a specific period, the applicant has a right of appeal. Any appeal would result in

additional costs, which in part can be met from existing budget provisions. However, a major public inquiry may give rise to significant costs for which there is no specific budget provision. If the County Council refuses an application without reasonable planning grounds on which to base its decision, it may be liable to pay the costs of the applicant in contesting the appeal.

Background information used by the author in compiling this report

Planning application reference 9/0559-03

Consultation responses and representations received in response to planning application ref. 9/0559-03

Hertfordshire County Structure Plan Review 1991-2011

Watford District Local Plan 1993, adopted June 1996

Watford District Plan 2000, Draft for Deposit May 2000