

BROXBOURNE BOROUGH

**PROPOSED EXTENSIONS TO SCHOOL BUILDINGS, COMMUNAL USE
FLOODLIT ASTROTURF PITCH, NEW INTERNAL ROADWAY AND USE
OF TENNIS COURTS FOR CAR PARKING at TURNFORD SCHOOL, MILL
LANE, CHESHUNT**

Report of the Director of Environment

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Local Member:- M O'Neill

1. Purpose of Report

To consider planning application ref. 7/0516-03 for proposed extensions to school buildings, communal use floodlit astroturf pitch, new internal roadway and use of tennis courts for car parking at Turnford School, Mill Lane, Cheshunt.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Turnford School is located in the Green Belt on the eastern edge of Cheshunt. The school site is accessed from Mill Lane at the northwest corner of the site.
- 2.2 There are currently four secondary schools serving the Cheshunt area, namely St Mary's High School, Cheshunt School, Goffs School and Turnford School. Since May 2000 the County Council has been in consultation with the Borough Council and the Cheshunt community regarding a strategy for the development of secondary education in Cheshunt. The proposals sought to provide 25 forms of entry (FE) in the four existing schools.
- 2.3 This planning application seeks permission to expand Turnford School to provide sufficient accommodation for a 6FE school. The application proposes a two-storey extension to the art and technology block, a single storey extension to the music and drama block, a single story extension to the gymnasium, and a single storey extension to the main block.
- 2.4 The planning application includes the provision of a community use floodlit astroturf pitch. The pitch would be large enough for a full size hockey/football pitch, or three five-a-side pitches. The lighting columns would stand 12 metres in height.

- 2.5 The application proposes constructing a new internal roadway linking the school frontage area to the existing tennis courts at the rear of the school building. Fifty parking spaces would be marked out on the existing tennis courts, which would increase overall parking at the school to 86 spaces. A new cycle store would also be provided. A copy of a School Travel Plan has been submitted with the application.
- 2.6 The main issues raised by this application and considered in this report are Green Belt Policy, location and design of buildings, additional car parking and internal roadway and provision of a floodlit astroturf pitch.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The report finds that harm caused to the Green Belt is outweighed by the educational need for the development so the exception to Green Belt policy is justified. Nevertheless the application should be referred to the First Secretary of State in accordance with departure procedures.
- 3.2 The report concludes that the location and the design of the new extensions are considered to be suitable. Car parking provision would be increased to a more suitable number, and the provision of the landscaping scheme is acceptable subject to certain modifications.
- 3.3 It is considered that the provision of the internal road is acceptable following details submitted by the applicant on managing the opening and closing of the road.
- 3.4 The report concludes that, subject to the Secretary of State not wishing to intervene, the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission subject to conditions to include provision for car parking, contractors working arrangements, implementation of a revised landscape scheme, hours of use for the astroturf pitch, hours of use for the internal road, details of external materials to be submitted and approved, lighting to the astroturf pitch to be positioned so that the light points downwards and away from the rail infrastructure, details of the lighting of the roadway to be agreed, protection of the hedge along the northern boundary of the site during construction works, screen trees to be maintained to protect the amenity of residential houses in Elm Drive, details of surface water control measures, details of surface water drainage measures, and within nine months of the granting of permission for the extensions of the school building a School Travel Plan shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

1. Description of the site and proposed development

- 1.1 Turnford School is located in the Green Belt on the eastern edge of Cheshunt. The school site is accessed from Mill Lane at the northwest corner of the site.
- 1.2 The site is bounded to the west by the rear gardens of the residential properties in Elm Drive. Brooklands School, the properties in Stains Close, and industrial works form the southern boundary of the site. To the north of the site lies 'The Nightleys' recreation ground, and to the east lies a railway line. The land to the east of the railway line is a Ramsar site and a component site of the Turnford & Cheshunt Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and Lee Valley Special Protection Area (SPA).
- 1.3 The school currently has 947 pupils, and a total of 93 full-time equivalent teaching and non-teaching staff. The maximum number of staff on site at any one time is approximately 84.
- 1.4 Two planning applications were submitted for the proposal to expand Turnford School. The first application ref. 7/0516-03 is the one considered by this report. The second application ref. 7/0567-03 related to the initial enabling works, to be carried out in August 2003, to facilitate the construction of this scheme, and involved:
 - a) the relocation of two double mobile classroom units to a location east of the science block for the duration of the building contract (these units would then be removed at the end of the construction programme);
 - b) reversal of traffic flows at the existing entrance and exit, and remodelling of the frontage area to provide parking for 22 cars (including 6 disabled bays) and two school minibuses;
 - c) An extension to the existing hardplay area.

No objections were received to the second application for enabling works therefore it was granted permission under delegated authority.

- 1.5 This planning application seeks permission to expand Turnford School to provide sufficient accommodation for 6FE. The application proposes:
 - a) a two storey extension to the art and technology block to provide 2 food technology rooms, 1 textiles room, 1 graphics room, 4 art rooms and ancillary accommodation;
 - b) a single storey extension to the music and drama block to provide additional music and drama rooms, together with a control room, store and office;
 - c) a single storey extension to the gymnasium to provide a store;
 - d) a single storey extension to the main block to provide two new offices.

- 1.6 The proposal involves the construction of a new internal roadway linking the school frontage to the existing tennis courts at the rear of the school building. The school currently has parking provision for 58 cars. It is proposed that 50 car parking spaces be marked out on the existing tennis courts to create a new rear car park. Following the remodelling of the school frontage and the construction of an additional 50 spaces at the rear of the school, overall parking provision would be increased to 86 spaces. The creation of the internal roadway would result in the loss of five trees. A new cycle storage area would be created outside the reception area.
- 1.7 The proposal includes the construction of a floodlit artificial turf pitch. The pitch would be large enough to enable full size football/hockey pitches to be marked out, and it would also be able to be divided up into three five-a-side football areas. The pitch enclosure would be formed by a 3-metre high weldmesh fence. Floodlighting would be provided by four 12 metre high columns along each side (8 in total).
- 1.8 The proposed location for the astroturf pitch is the northeast corner of the site. This area has been selected to minimise impact on existing grass pitches, and is the location furthest from residential properties.
- 1.9 The artificial turf pitch would be available for community use until 10pm on weekdays, and until 7pm on the weekend. The existing on-site swimming pool and gymnasium are currently available for community use.
- 1.10 The overall scheme would result in the loss of 8 trees. A landscape scheme has been submitted which provides for replacement tree planting.

2. Consultations

- 2.1 Broxbourne Borough Council has the following comment to make:
 - screen trees should be maintained to protect the amenity of the residential houses in Elm Drive;
 - there should be conditions relating to the floodlighting limiting the degree of luminance and hours of use.
- 2.2 The County Council as Highway Authority have no objection in principle to the proposal, however the School Travel Plan accompanying the application needs attention in a number of areas and the Travel Plan will need to be amended and resubmitted. The Highway Authority therefore require a condition stating that within 9 months of the granting of permission for the extensions of the school buildings a School Travel Plan shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

2.3 The Environment Agency has no objection, in principle, to the proposed development, provided that the following conditions are imposed:

- Surface water drainage works shall be carried out in accordance with details which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority before development commences;
- Surface water source control measures shall be carried out in accordance with details that shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority before development commences.

These conditions are to prevent the increased risk of flooding and to improve water quality.

2.4 Sport England comment that having seen the existing and proposed pitch layouts they are satisfied that the proposal constitutes an outdoor sports facility where the benefits to the development of sport outweighs the detriment caused by the loss of playing fields. The proposal therefore meets exception E5 of Sport England's policy "A Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England" (1997).

In strategic terms, works with the Facilities Planning Model does not identify this part of Hertfordshire as a priority for additional STP (Synthetic Turf Pitch) provision but it is accepted that the facility is part of the school's development towards Specialist Sports College status, and would also benefit the local community.

2.5 Network Rail make the following comment:

- suitable fencing be erected to the astroturf pitch in order to prevent stray balls ending up on the railway;
- lighting to the astroturf pitch must be positioned that the lights point downwards and away from the Rail Infrastructure.

2.6 English Nature have responded, as the lake to the east of the railway line and close to the proposed development is both a Ramsar site and a component site of the Turnford and Cheshunt Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Lee Valley SPA, on the three following areas:

a) English Nature's advice under Regulation 48 of The Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994, as amended:

The proposed works are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site for the nature conservation interest features for which the Lee Valley SPA was classified. However it is the opinion of English Nature that the proposed works would not be likely to have a significant effect upon the interest features for which the SPA was designated, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. English Nature is also satisfied that the additional Ramsar interest features will not be adversely affected.

b) Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as incorporated by the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000

English Nature is satisfied that the proposed operations will not damage any of the features by reason of which the SSSI is of special interest.

c) Protected species

If protected species are known or are suspected to be present, an ecological survey should be provided by the applicant.

2.7 Thames Water has no objection.

2.8 Transco confirm that the company has plant that may be affected by these works.

2.9 Lee Valley Regional Park Authority raise no objection subject to:

- the use of fittings for the floodlighting of the astroturf area designed to avoid light spill onto surrounding areas
- the protection of the hedge along the northern boundary of the site during construction works.

2.10 Local Member has no objection to providing the facilities that the school needs but has raised concern over the use of the school facilities out of school hours and the security issue that this brings. The Local Member does not wish to see the proposed car park available for public use and is opposed to the location of the proposed internal roadway.

2.11 A total of 41 properties were consulted on the application, with 10 letters objecting to the application. A petition of 136 signatures was received objecting to the astroturf pitch and internal road aspects of the proposal. The main issues of concern can be summarised as:

- the proposed construction of an internal roadway near to the rear of the properties on Elm Drive. Residents are concerned that they would suffer noise and light pollution, and fumes from cars;
- the noise and light from the proposed astroturf pitch, and the associated traffic out of school hours;
- security concerns over the use of the communal pitch until 10pm;
- additional traffic associated with the school extension.

3. Planning Considerations

3.1 The application site lies within the Green Belt as defined on the proposals map of the Development Plan. The relevant Development Plan policies are:

- County Structure Plan – policies 1(Sustainable Development), 13 (Education & Training), 5 (Green Belt), 22 (Reduction of travel need & car usage), 25 (car parking)
 - Broxbourne Borough Plan (adopted) – policies GBC3 (Green Belt)
 - Broxbourne Borough Plan (emerging) – policies GBC2 (Development within the Metropolitan Green Belt)
- 3.2 The principal issues to be taken into account in determining this application are:-
- Green Belt
 - Construction of an internal road and additional car parking
 - Design and Visual Impact
 - Landscape
 - Ecological survey
- 3.3 Green Belt
 School buildings, even on existing school sites, are not included within the categories of development regarded as appropriate within the Green Belt. Such buildings are therefore unacceptable unless any harm to the Green Belt is outweighed by other considerations. Turnford School is located in the Green Belt on the eastern edge of Cheshunt.
- 3.4 There are currently four schools serving the Cheshunt area, namely St Mary's School, Cheshunt School, Goffs School and Turnford School. Since May 2000, the County Council has been in consultation with the Borough Council and the Cheshunt community regarding a strategy for the expansion of secondary school capacity in the Cheshunt area to meet the increase in pupil numbers due to growth and continuing demographic changes which project the school roll to increase to 4135 in 2006. Continued house building in the Cheshunt area is expected to further increase pupil numbers.
- 3.5 In light of this situation, the County Council has adopted a development strategy to increase secondary school capacity in Cheshunt to 25 FE. This will result in all four secondary schools being 6 or 8 FE, and as such will all be of equal breadth and balance in curriculum provision and performance.
- 3.6 In 2001 and 2002, admissions to Turnford School were 163 and 166 respectively, which means that the school has been operating at 5.5 FE recently. In September 2003, 185 pupils will be admitted. As a 6 FE school with a long-term admission limit of 180, Turnford would have an ultimate capacity of 1080 pupils.

- 3.7 Due to the need to expand secondary school capacity in Cheshunt it is considered that an educational need for the extensions to the school building has been demonstrated and outweighs the harm which the development would cause in the Green Belt.
- 3.8 The proposed astroturf pitch is located at the northeast corner of the site. It is considered that the proposal does not prejudice the purposes of including land within the Green Belt as defined in Planning Policy Guidance 2 – Green Belts (PPG2). Paragraph 1.6 of PPG2 states that the use of land in Green Belts has a positive role to play in fulfilling objectives, one of which is ‘to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas’.
- 3.9 The astroturf pitch would be available for public use until 10pm on weekday evenings and until 7pm on Saturdays and Sundays. The floodlights would be turned on only as and when they are needed, and would be switched off as soon as play finishes and the pitch and school site is secured. The floodlights could be directed down onto the pitch to prevent light spill onto adjacent areas. The applicants have commissioned an ecologist to carry out studies to determine the presence of reptile and bat species that could be affected by the proposed lighting. The results of this survey are reported in Paras 3.25-3.27.
- 3.10 Turnford School has a strong sporting tradition which includes winning the 1998 Under 19’s Schools FA Cup. The school has developed an extensive community use programme of its facilities. In 1999, a Community Sports Manager was appointed with a brief to develop community use of the school. The school is currently preparing a bid for Sports College status, which it hopes to attain in 2004.
- 3.11 Due to the low lying ground, and high water table, the grass pitches are often unplayable. This severely limits their use for both school curriculum and community purposes. The proposed artificial turf pitch would provide a playable surface all year round.
- 3.12 A number of residents have raised concern that the proposed community use of the astroturf pitch would allow access to the school grounds until late at night and would therefore be detrimental to the security of the school and neighbouring properties. In response to these concerns the school has appointed an assistant caretaker who would be on-site from 6pm until the site closes each evening, as would the Community Sports Manager who runs the evening hiring of the school facilities.
- 3.13 Over recent years the school has installed fencing, cctv, improved lighting and extended hours of occupation. These measures have contributed to reducing crime on-site. The school expansion plan now includes fencing those boundaries not currently fenced to provide increased security both for the school and its neighbours. The fencing

would be no higher than 2 metres and as such would be permitted development.

3.14 Construction of an internal roadway and additional car parking

The proposal involves the construction of an internal roadway linking the school frontage area to the existing tennis courts at the rear of the school building. This road would be constructed on the western side of the site between the school building and the rear of the properties on Elm Drive. Fifty parking spaces would be marked out on the existing tennis courts, which would increase overall parking at the school to 86 spaces. A new cycle store would also be provided.

3.15 A petition objecting to the construction of the internal roadway was received expressing concern over noise, disruption and pollution. Following objections, the route of the proposed internal roadway was amended so that it runs closer to the school building than originally planned. To minimise the impact of the road on the amenity of local residents, the applicants have proposed to introduce a gateway at the northern end of the internal roadway. This would be kept locked in the evenings and at weekends unless there is a special event at the school (e.g. open evening, performance). Community users using the school facilities would be expected to use the frontage car parking and the hard play area next to the gymnasium/swimming pool out of school hours. The proposed car park on the current tennis court area would not be accessible to community users of the gymnasium, swimming pool or proposed artificial turf pitch.

3.16 Local residents have raised concern over light pollution from the proposed internal roadway. The applicant states that the proposed lighting would be activated by sensors in the evening, but would be switched off by a cutout set to an appropriate time. Conversely in the mornings, the lighting would be switched on at a set time and would be switched off by sensors. Lighting columns could be positioned and directed in such a way as to minimise impact on residential properties.

3.17 Four trees would be lost as a result of the new route. The submitted landscape scheme would provide replacement tree planting. Additional trees would be planted within the proposed new car park to soften the hard area.

3.18 Having considered the measures proposed to minimise the impact of the internal roadway on neighbouring properties, it is considered that this aspect of the proposal should be granted. Conditions could be placed on the planning permission to ensure that the area is managed in accordance with the detail received.

3.19 Design and visual impact

The proposed extension to the Technology and Art Block would be constructed with a facing brick to complement the existing with timber

cladding at the 1st floor level. The roof would be a standing seam roof in a 'wave' profile.

- 3.20 The Music and Drama extension would be constructed with facing brick and a standing seam pitch roof to match the existing. The construction of this extension would result in the loss of three large silver birch trees. The submitted landscape scheme makes provision for replacement tree planting.
- 3.21 The Office and Gym Stores extensions would be constructed with facing brick to match the existing and a flat asphalt roof.
- 3.22 Details of all colours and finishes have yet to be confirmed by the applicant and would need to be agreed prior to construction. The site has a certain amount of screening from trees when viewed from the properties on Elm Drive. It is considered the proposed extensions are located in the most suitable areas to minimise visual intrusion and impact on the Green Belt and school playing fields.
- 3.23 Landscape
A landscaping scheme has been submitted which makes provision for additional tree planting and shrub beds. The proposal involves the removal of 8 trees. To compensate for this it is proposed that extensive additional tree planting take place. It is proposed to plant 18 trees in and around the proposed rear car park to help screen the area from nearby residential properties. The landscape scheme also makes provision for reinforcement of the eastern boundary hedgerow.
- 3.24 Subject to minor amendments the landscape scheme is considered acceptable.
- 3.25 Ecological survey
A reptile and bat survey has been undertaken as requested by English Nature. The survey has failed to locate any evidence of a reptile population or bat roost on the site.
- 3.26 The survey concludes that although grass snakes are particularly mobile animals and could conceivably occur anywhere throughout the Lee Valley, the lack of habitat would confine any transient individual to the perimeter of the site where it would not be affected by the proposed development works.
- 3.27 Although bats may change roost sites according to the different seasons and throughout time, there was no evidence to indicate their presence and a simple precautionary inspection prior to the commencement of the development is considered to represent sufficient follow-up survey effort in respect of this matter.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The report finds that harm caused to the Green Belt is outweighed by the educational need for the development so the exception to Green Belt policy is justified. Nevertheless the application should be referred to the First Secretary of State in accordance with departure procedures.
- 4.2 The report concludes that the location and the design of the new extensions are considered to be suitable. Car parking provision would be increased to a more suitable number, and the provision of the landscaping scheme is acceptable subject to certain modifications.
- 4.3 It is considered that the provision of the internal road is acceptable following details submitted by the applicant on managing the opening and closing of the road.
- 4.4 The report concludes that, subject to the Secretary of State not wishing to intervene, the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission subject to conditions to include provision for car parking, contractors working arrangements, implementation of a revised landscape scheme, hours of use for the astroturf pitch, hours of use for the internal road, details of external materials to be submitted and approved, lighting to the astroturf pitch to be positioned so that the light points downwards and away from the rail infrastructure, details of the lighting of the roadway to be agreed, protection of the hedge along the northern boundary of the site during construction works, screen trees to be maintained to protect the amenity of residential houses in Elm Drive, details of surface water control measures, details of surface water drainage measures, and within nine months of the granting of permission for the extensions of the school building a School Travel Plan shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 There are none for this committee.

Background information used by the author in compiling this report

Planning application reference 7/0516-03

Consultation responses and representations received in response to planning application ref. 7/0516-03

Hertfordshire County Structure Plan Review 1991-2011

Broxbourne Borough Council Local Plan, adopted 1994

Broxbourne Borough Council Emerging Plan

Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (Green Belt)