

HERTSMERE BOROUGH

**PROPOSED SINGLE STOREY CLASSROOM BLOCK AND LINK
CORRIDORS, AND THE CREATION OF A HARD PLAY AREA AT
FALCONER SCHOOL, FALCONER ROAD, BUSHEY.**

Report of the Director of Environment

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Local Member:- Michael Colne.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider planning application ref. 0/1288-03 for a single storey classroom block and link corridors at Falconer School, Falconer Road, Bushey.

2. Summary

2.1 Falconer School is a 60-place school for secondary school boys who have emotional behavioural difficulties. This planning application proposes to construct a two-classroom extension with a link to the main school building and the Chimneys building. The extension would comprise two 36m² classrooms with associated storage provision and a small office. The planned form of the new building is to ensure that the shape of the classrooms and the position of the office are consistent with the needs of management of children with emotional behavioural difficulties. The new building has been designed to be sympathetic to the surrounding buildings with regard to materials used, roof pitch, and windows. This new building will not result in an increase in pupil numbers at the school.

2.2 The school is based in a former sanatorium, which is not designed for its current use. Inadequacies were highlighted in the 1997 and 2001 Ofsted inspections. Five out of ten classrooms were below recommended sizes. It is proposed that the double mobile building currently in a poor state of repair be removed upon completion of the new permanent building. The area where the mobile was located will be resurfaced to create a safe hard play area. It is intended to undertake the construction of the two-classroom extension during phase II of the current refurbishment scheme (granted planning permission in April 2003). This would alleviate the nuisance factor to residents in Falconer Road as the duration of the temporary access and compound arrangements would not increase.

- 2.3 Objections have been received from two neighbours and a preliminary officer objection has been received from Hertsmere Borough. The neighbour objections relate to the existing management of the site, detriment to the landscape and wildlife. The District Council has objected on the grounds of Green Belt and design issues.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Whilst the proposed classroom block represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt in principle, it is considered that very special circumstances exist to justify this development. Furthermore, the impact upon the Green Belt setting is considered minimal. The proposed new block is considered to be well designed to respect and enhance the character and appearance of its Conservation Area setting. The management of the site is not a material consideration in the determination of this planning application. The site is not subject to any wildlife designations, and the landscape impact is considered to be acceptable in light of existing development on the site and the landscaping scheme proposed through a previous planning application (0/0169-03).
- 3.2 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 including the commencement of development, details of materials including window frames, submission of a landscaping scheme, hours of delivery and construction working, completion of the duration of the temporary access and the submission of a School Transport Plan.

1. Description of the site and proposed development

- 1.1 Falconer School is a 60-place school for secondary school boys who have emotional behavioural difficulties. There are currently 59 pupils on the school roll, with 12 full-time and 4 part-time teaching staff. There are also 13 full-time and 18 part-time support staff. This new building would not result in an increase in pupil numbers at the school.
- 1.2 The school is located in the Bushey Conservation Area and the Green Belt. To the north the site adjoins open countryside, to the south and east it adjoins the main urban area of Bushey and to the west is adjacent to Bushey Hall School to the west (a large developed site made up of a number of large school buildings). The school is based in a former sanatorium, which is not designed for its current use. Inadequacies were highlighted in the 1997 and 2001 Ofsted inspections. Five out of ten classrooms were below recommended sizes.
- 1.3 The proposed development comprises a two-classroom extension linked to the main school building and the Chimneys building. The extension would be located between the two existing buildings and comprise two 36m² classrooms with associated storage provision and a small office. A link corridor would link the new building with the Chimneys building and the main building therefore providing a covered walkway between all three buildings. The form of the new building is to ensure that the shape of the classrooms and the position of the office are consistent with the needs of management of children with emotional behavioural difficulties. The office is required to monitor the movement of children. The new building has been designed to be sympathetic to the surrounding buildings with regard to materials used, roof pitch, and windows.
- 1.4 The double mobile building situated in front of the site would be removed upon completion of the proposed new building. The area where the mobile was located would be resurfaced to create a safe hard play area. It is intended to undertake the construction of the two-classroom extension during phase II of the current refurbishment scheme (granted planning permission in April 2003). This would alleviate the nuisance factor to residents in Falconer Road as the duration of the temporary access and compound arrangements would not increase. The proposed development does not require the removal of any trees.

2. Consultations

- 2.1 Hertsmere Borough Council: awaiting final comments, following a preliminary officer objection relating to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

2.2 The County Council as Highway Authority: no objection subject to the submission of a School Transport Plan.

2.3 BEAMS: no objection.

2.4 A total of 23 properties were consulted on the application, with 2 letters received objecting to the application. The main issues of concern can be summarised as:

- existing site management issues;
- provision of the hard play area;
- loss of green space and wildlife habitat;
- creation of pollution.

3. Planning Considerations

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

- Green Belt;
- Conservation Area and detailed design issues;
- loss of green space;
- provision of the hard play area.

Green Belt.

3.2 School buildings are not included within the categories of development regarded as appropriate within the Green Belt. Such development is not acceptable unless harm to the Green Belt and any other harm is outweighed by other considerations (Structure Plan Policy 5, Adopted Local Plan Policy C1).

3.3 Falconer School is a special school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (an EBD School). The demand for EBD schools is extremely high and all special needs schools for this group of children are operating at full capacity, with waiting lists for children living within the catchment area. It would not be possible to relocate the children into nearby mainstream schools or other EBD schools in the area. There is a serious shortage of adequately sized classrooms at the school as highlighted in Ofsted inspections in 1997 and 2001.

3.4 The mobile classroom provides the best teaching space in terms of size and configuration of classroom compared to most other classrooms in the school building. The current mobile classroom is in a poor state of repair and needs to be replaced. The alternative to maintaining the current level of provision at Falconer School would mean that school could be placed in Special Measures with accompanying pressure to close the school. Were the school to close, the 60 children would be placed out of the County causing

considerable disruption to their parents. Therefore, the provision of new teaching space to replace the existing double mobile to maintain the quality of space is essential. In general, where longer-term needs are identified, well-designed permanent accommodation is considered more appropriate to temporary facilities, particularly within school settings in a conservation area.

- 3.5 The applicant has stated that ground levels and siting of the main school building does not make it feasible to extend the existing building therefore this is the reason for the new classroom block, rather than extending the existing building. The link is considered necessary as the school premises ideally need to be self-contained rather than having pupils travelling between the Chimneys and the main school building.
- 3.6 Falconer School is located within a Major Developed Site within the Green Belt (Adopted Local Plan Policy C18) but is omitted from the envelope designated as appropriate for in-fill development under local plan Policy C18. The Falconer School site adjoins Falconer Road to the east (which forms part of the main urban area of Bushey) and Bushey Hall School to the west (a large developed site made up of a number of large school buildings). The Falconer School site is made up the main school building and the Chimneys building located 15m to the north. The proposed double classroom block would be located between the two buildings linked to each by the corridor. The proposed new block and corridor are single storey and located in an area where it is considered that there would be a minimal impact on the Green Belt setting. All the surrounding school buildings are considerably larger than that proposed. The slightly shallower and lower roof pitch ensures the new extension would be lower than the surrounding buildings. The location of the proposed development means it is surrounded by built form on all four sides. The proposed development is of a similar size to the mobile to be removed.
- 3.7 In these circumstances it is concluded that given the limited impact that the proposed development would have on the Green Belt, any harm is outweighed by the special circumstances justified by educational need.

Conservation Area and Design.

- 3.8 Falconer School is located in the Bushey Conservation Area. It is considered that, given its condition, the current mobile classroom does not contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (Local Plan Policy E19). Replacing this mobile with a well-designed permanent structure would be an improvement to the Conservation Area (Local Plan Policy E22). The new building has been designed to be sympathetic to the surrounding buildings with the use of similar materials and design features. The new building blends with the old buildings whilst not creating a precise copy. A feature of the old buildings is its dormer windows. A single dormer window in the roof has been incorporated as a design feature to provide light into the

office. The proposed link is essential to manage pupil movement between the two buildings, which has been difficult in the past.

- 3.9 The walls would be finished in red multi-facing brickwork to match the existing. The windows and external doors would be powder-coated aluminium double-glazed. The roof would use red plain tiles to match existing. If planning permission is granted, the finishing materials proposed for the building should be approved by condition before commencement of development, as these are an important element of the scheme (Local Plan Policy E25). It is considered that the proposed new extension and corridor link would be in keeping with the character of the existing two buildings on the site and given the removal of the mobile classroom, it will improve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Landscape.

- 3.10 There has been an objection on landscape grounds to this proposal. A landscaping scheme was been submitted as part the previous planning permission at the site. The scheme will provide tree cover along the western boundary of the school site where the builders compound currently lies, to screen the new proposal from properties on Falconer Road. The application submitted proposes to submit a further landscaping scheme, which can be controlled by condition.

Green Space and Wildlife.

- 3.11 An objection has been received with regard to the loss of green space at the site, particularly in relation to the damage to wildlife. The proposed development does propose the loss of a small amount green space at the site. The green space at the school site is not subject to any wildlife designations and is unlikely to be of significant ecological value. The ecological value of the school site is likely to be enhanced by the planting proposed as part of the previous planning application, and could be further supplemented by a scheme required to be submitted as part of this application. It is considered that given that the existing green space provision on the school site, the small loss is considered acceptable.
- 3.12 An option to mitigate the loss of green space at the site would be to turf the area from which the double mobile would be removed. However, the provision of new hard-play space is required as the only existing hard play area is also currently the only car parking area. There is no separation of children and cars which makes Health and Safety difficult to administer. This space also needs to be visible for the teaching staff to effectively monitor the pupils. It is important therefore, that a dedicated hard play space is provided for the pupils.

Highways.

- 3.13 No objections have been raised on highway grounds to the proposal by the Highway Authority, subject to the imposition of conditions relating to

the submission and implementation of a School Transport Plan. A condition could be attached to any planning permission to reflect this requirement.

Site Management.

- 3.14 An objection has been raised with regard to the existing management of the school site and concerns that the proposal would lead to an increase in pupil and staff numbers and a consequent increase in management problems. The proposed development would not exacerbate those matters raised in the objection, given that there is not proposed to be any increase in pupil numbers or any loss of parking space.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 Whilst the proposed development does represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt, it is considered that given the nature of the school and the demand for Emotional Behavioural Difficulty places in the County that very special circumstances have been demonstrated that outweigh harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Furthermore, the location of the proposed development within the school site in relation to the larger surrounding buildings, together with the removal of the mobile classroom means the impact on the Green Belt setting is considered minimal.
- 4.2 The proposed development has been carefully designed both in terms of structure and finishing materials to complement the existing buildings. The proposed development is considered to improve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area by enabling the removal of the existing mobile classroom. It is considered that the planting as part of planning permission 0/0169-03, together with a suitable landscaping scheme (which could be required by condition) and the removal of the mobile classroom will considerably enhance the amenity of the site.
- 4.3 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 including the commencement of development, details of materials (including window frames), submission of a further landscaping scheme, hours of delivery and construction working, completion of the duration of the temporary access and the submission of a School Transport Plan.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 There are none for this committee.

Background information used by the author in compiling this report

Planning application reference 0/1288-03 (and accompanying statements and plans)

Consultation responses and representations received in response to planning application ref 0/1288-03.

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

Hertsmere Borough Local Plan through to 2011, adopted May 2003