

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT

**PROPOSED TWO STOREY AND SINGLE STOREY TEACHING BLOCKS,
THREE TENNIS/NETBALL COURTS WITH FENCING AT KNIGHTS
TEMPLAR SCHOOL, PARK STREET, BALDOCK.**

Report of the Director of Environment

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Local Member:- L Kercher

1. Purpose of Report

To consider planning application ref. 1/1444-02 for a two-storey and a single-storey teaching blocks, three tennis/netball courts with fencing at Knights Templar School, Park Street, Baldock.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Knights Templar School is situated on the western side of Baldock on Park Street/Weston Way. Residential properties are located around the north, east and southern boundaries of the school. Car access into the school is from Park Street, which runs along the north and eastern boundaries of the site. A bus turning facility is located directly off Weston Way, which runs along the western boundary of the site.
- 2.2 On 22nd April 2002, the County Council authorised the publication of a statutory notice concerning the closure of Norton School from 31st August 2002 and the expansion of Fearnhill, The Highfield and Knights Templar Schools.
- 2.3 Hertfordshire School Organisation Committee approved the closure of Norton School on 11 June 2002, and it was agreed that the three remaining schools in that area would be expanded by one additional form of entry from September 2003. Pupils starting their secondary school careers and those commencing GCSE studies from September 2002 have already been located at one of the three remaining schools in order to minimise disruption to their education. Temporary mobile classrooms were located at Knights Templar School in the summer of 2002 to provide accommodation for these additional pupils until such a time as permanent accommodation can be provided.
- 2.4 In September 2002 a planning application was submitted for development at Knights Templar School. The proposal comprises an extension to the recently completed two-storey classroom block behind the bus circulation area off

Weston Way, which would provide eight classrooms, four offices and toilet facilities. A single storey block is also proposed to the south-east of the main school building and would provide two additional technology rooms. The new block would be partially located on land currently laid out as tennis courts therefore three replacement tennis courts are proposed on land next to the sports hall on the western side of Weston Way. The construction of the new blocks would allow the removal of the two mobile classrooms from their current location on the car park to the east of Weston Way.

- 2.5 North Hertfordshire District Council have no objection to the proposed development, but urge the County Council to increase the number of car parking spaces within the school site, and that thought be given to the traffic implications in terms of safe and convenient pedestrian and vehicular activity into and out of the school site, and along roads leading to and from its pedestrian and vehicular entrances. The Highways Authority does not wish to restrict the granting of planning permission. There have been no objections from statutory undertakers whose responses have been received so far. Three letters have been received from members of the public who are concerned about traffic and safety along Park Street.
- 2.6 The main issues raised by this application and considered within the report are location and design of the new classroom blocks, traffic and highway implications, car parking provision, visual impact and landscape proposals.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The report concludes that design and location of the proposed new two-storey block and single storey block, along with the kitchen extension, is considered to be satisfactory. The proposed buildings would be constructed using material to match the recently completed classroom block.
- 3.2 The amount of onsite parking is considered to be adequate following the applicant's agreement to continue to use the overspill car park, which is located at the rear of the site. Sixth formers need to be discouraged from driving to the school. The preparation and implementation of a School Travel Plan will address this issue before the development is first occupied. The contractors working arrangements need to be managed so that they do not obstruct or adversely affect the public highway.
- 3.3 The report concludes that the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission for the proposed development subject to certain conditions to include implementation of landscape scheme, provision and marking out of all car park spaces, contractors working arrangements, and the approval and implementation of a School Travel Plan that is acceptable to the Highways Authority.

1. Background Information

- 1.1 On 22 April 2002, the County Council authorised the publication of a statutory notice concerning the closure of Norton School from 31 August 2002 and the expansion of Fearnhill, The Highfield and Knights Templar Schools. It also resolved to use the capital receipts from the sale of the Norton School site to fund replacement accommodation at the three secondary schools.
- 1.2 Norton School had experienced difficulties over the last few years, and had been identified by Ofsted as requiring special measures. Due to a high turnover of staff, the school was unable to improve its performance. Alternative options to open a new school on the existing site, or for the Church of England to open a school there were considered, but rejected as they would be unable to deliver the educational improvements required within an appropriate timescale.
- 1.3 The Hertfordshire School Organisation Committee approved the closure of Norton School on 11 June 2002. The Committee also agreed that the three remaining schools in the area – Fearnhill, The Highfield and Knights Templar – each be expanded by one additional form of entry from September 2003. This planning application relates to development necessary to implement that decision.
- 1.4 In order to minimise the disruption to those children starting their secondary school careers and those commencing GCSE studies, prospective and former Norton School pupils who are currently in year 7 and year 10 have been relocated to the other three schools as from September 2002. These pupils are currently accommodated in temporary mobile classrooms until such a time as they can be accommodated within permanent extensions. The Norton School will continue to be used during the academic year 2002/3 for other school years.
- 1.5 Two double mobile units were located at Knights Templar School during the summer of 2002, and were located on the car park fronting Weston Way. These provide temporary accommodation for the 80 children who started at the school in September 2002, pending the construction of purpose built extensions to the school.

2. Description of site and proposed development

- 2.1 Knights Templar School is situated on the western side of Baldock on Park Street/Weston Way. Residential properties are located around the north, east and south boundaries of the school. Access into the school is from Park Street, which runs along the north and eastern boundaries of the site. A bus turning facility is located directly off Weston Way, which forms the western boundary.
- 2.2 Access from Letchworth is via the A505 Baldock Road from the west, or Norton Road, from the north-west, which provide easy routes from both north

and south Letchworth. A further route exists from south Letchworth via Baldock Lane, which joins Weston Way, south of the school.

- 2.3 Main accesses into the school are via Park Street, which is a minor access road of varying width. Separate gates are in place for the main car park (access and egress), the overspill car park, and a pedestrian access. A bus turning facility is located away from the main entrance into the school, and is accessed off Weston Way and has a capacity to hold a number of queuing buses. Parents dropping off children in cars also use the facility, which can occasionally obstruct bus-turning movements. The traffic consultant's report recommended improvements to the coach turning area, however, the applicant states that there is no money identified in the project budget to carry out improvements at this stage. The School Travel Plan would be able to address this issue in future and possibly form a bid for future capital funding to finance the improvements.
- 2.4 The planning application proposes an extension to the recently completed two-storey block behind the bus circulation area off Weston Way. The accommodation would provide eight classrooms, four offices and toilets. The proposed classroom block would be constructed to match the existing building which is of a buff colour facing brick and a felt roof. A single storey block is also proposed to the south-east of the main school building, partially located on land currently laid out as tennis courts. This would provide two additional technology rooms, and would be faced with a yellow brick to match existing elevations. The proposal also includes a small extension to the existing canteen kitchen to accommodate an additional sink, cupboard and freezer unit.
- 2.5 Three replacement tennis courts are proposed on playing field land next to the sports hall on the western side of Weston Way. The courts would be hard surfaced and surrounded by mesh fencing 2.7 metres in height. The courts have been laid out so that a further three could be added at a later date should funding become available. This would ensure that all the school's provision would be laid out in one area, and would facilitate use by the local community. It is possible that planning permission might be sought for floodlighting at some point in the future. The tennis courts would be placed partly on a hockey pitch and work on redesigning the layout of the sport pitches in this area, in order to relocate the hockey pitch, is ongoing.
- 2.6 Should planning permission be granted, the two mobile classrooms recently located on the Weston Way car park would be removed. The area would be formally marked out for car parking which would then provide the school with a total of 132 parking spaces. This total includes spaces provided outside the sports hall. The sport hall has a total of 40 car parking spaces and has a day time demand of 15 spaces, therefore 25 of these spaces would be available to the school. In addition to this, the tennis court area at the rear of the school is currently used as a temporary overspill car park, and provides approximately 32 car parking spaces. The applicant has confirmed that this area would continue to be used for car parking on a medium term basis, therefore increasing provision on site to 164. In accordance with the Supplementary Planning Guidance 'Car Parking Provision at New Development' the

maximum standard for the school is approximately 190 spaces, and guidance states that maximum standards should be used as a starting point for progressive reductions in on-site provision.

3. Consultations

- 3.1 North Hertfordshire District Council has no objection to the permanent classroom accommodation, 3 new tennis courts and associated fencing at Knights Templar School, but request that the County Council be urged to increase the number of car parking spaces within the school site to produce a total that more closely reflects the requirement based upon its own Car Parking Standards and that more thought should be given to the traffic implications of the expanded school in terms of safe and convenient pedestrian and vehicular activity into and out of the school site, and along the roads leading to and from its pedestrian and vehicular entrances.
- 3.2 Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation has no objection to the proposal.
- 3.3 The County Council as Highway Authority does not wish to restrict the grant of planning permission.
- 3.4 Landscape The development is acceptable on landscape grounds on condition that some additional tree planting is undertaken to offset tree removal, and some adjustments are made to the planting proposals.
- 3.5 Sport England does not wish to object to the proposed classroom blocks. Sport England comment that the provision of the three tennis courts would constitute an outdoor sport facility that would be sufficiently beneficial to the development of sport, as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of playing field, subject to the following requirements:
 - the courts are made available to the public in out-of-school hours, in conjunction with the adjacent dual use sport centre;
 - the courts are constructed to technical specifications to meet Sport England standards;
 - preferably the courts being floodlit and subject to an hours of use condition extending use to 9pm or 10pm weekdays;
 - the grass hockey pitch, which is affected by the proposal, is satisfactorily relocated within the existing playing field, in order to maintain existing grass pitch provision at the school.
- 3.6 Transco confirms that the company have plant in the vicinity, which may be affected by this proposal.
- 3.7 A total of 49 properties were consulted on the application, with 4 letters being received. The letters do not object to the built development aspect of the scheme but highlight concern over traffic and safety in Park Street.

4. Planning Considerations

4.1 The relevant development plan policies are:

- County Structure Plan – policies 1 (Sustainable Development), 13 (Education and Training), 22 (Reduction of travel need & car usage), 23 (Networks and Facilities for non-motorised transport & buses) and 25 (Car Parking).
- North Hertfordshire District Local Plan – policies 21 (Landscape and Open Space Patterns in Towns),

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

- impact of additional traffic movements on the highway network, together with car and cycle parking provision;
- design of the building;
- visual impact and landscaping;
- location of tennis courts.

4.3 Highway Implications

Following final reallocation, 166 pupils from Norton School will be transferred to Knights Templar. The study by the Highways Consultants states that the number of these additional pupils expected to walk or cycle to the school is expected to be around 68, with the remaining 98 expected to use car or bus transport. At usage rates of 40-70%, the number of pupils likely to use bus services will be between 39 and 69 pupils. The resulting car trips would amount to between 29 and 59 pupils, which would equate to between 19 and 39 additional cars at the school.

4.4 Current car parking levels are well below the maximum permitted standards. The application provides for a total of 132 car parking spaces. This includes the 25 spaces that are available for school use at the adjacent sport hall car park. The tennis court area at the rear of the school is currently used as an overspill car park and provides approximately 32 spaces. The current condition of this area makes it unsuitable for use as a sport facility and in order to provide additional parking spaces on site the applicant has confirmed that this area will continue to be used for car parking in the medium term. This would raise the total of car parking spaces to a more acceptable 164 spaces. However, the County Council as Planning Authority would encourage proposals to come forward for permanent car parking in this area.

4.5 The existing turning facility off Weston Way is used predominantly by buses with the numbers of cars using the area varying from day to day. This area is generally used for approximately 40 droppings off by car in the morning, and in

the region of 5-10 vehicles during afternoon collection times. A number of parents make use of the new sport centre car park opposite, which has a large car park with capacity for more vehicles, and others use the main school car park to the rear of the school off Park Street. Many pupils are dropped off and collected along Weston Way. The parking area located on the playground to the front of the school is not permitted for use as a dropping/collecting point. Pupils are able to cross Weston Way at designated points relatively safely as traffic-calming measures keep traffic speeds low. The consultant's report suggests that the sport centre car park could be used as a facility for pupil collections. This would allow cars to be segregated from the main bus turning movements, and would also assist in preventing the main cause of traffic flow problems which is parents stopping on Weston Way.

- 4.6 The transport consultant's report states that the results of monitoring, which is ongoing, will assess the capacity of the existing facilities in order to determine what further action may be needed. However the report concludes that the existing formally designated parking facilities are likely to be very inadequate, hence the importance of the continued use of the rear overspill car park.
- 4.7 Residents of Park Street have voiced their concerns about the impact the increase in school numbers will have on Park Street. They state that Park Street is too narrow, has poor visibility, suffers from speeding motorists and has no footpath to protect school pupils and pedestrians from traffic. The residents wish to see traffic calming measures introduced in Park Street and more protection for pedestrians on foot. Whilst it is acknowledged that Park Street has existing traffic problems, and that the existing situation is not satisfactory, the issues in Park Street are not directly linked to this planning application, therefore it is not considered that this application should address this issue. The areas of Park Street that are narrow, have poor visibility and lack footpaths are further down from the school access when approaching from Weston Way. The traffic consultant's report did not highlight the need to address traffic issues in Park Street. A footpath is available from the school entrance down towards Weston Way.
- 4.8 The school has 67 cycle spaces available outside the main school building and the sports hall but around 30 of these spaces remain free every day, therefore there are no proposals to increase cycle provision. The adequacy of cycle provision at the school will be kept under review in the School Travel Plan and action taken to increase provision where necessary.
- 4.9 The school is currently working on the preparation of a School Travel Plan, which is to be completed by January 2003. The establishment of a formal School Travel Plan will allow regular monitoring to take place by means of regular travel questionnaires and surveys. Trends should therefore be picked up and potential problems identified. School Travel Plans will be required for all three schools which are subject to expansion, and they must interact with each other to achieve sustainability of Letchworth and Baldock Secondary Schools as a whole, although each school will need to set its own targets. The traffic consultant's report states that School Travel Plans should be strictly

enforced and will need to be capable of capping any growth in car usage for the foreseeable future.

- 4.10 Should permission be granted, a condition should be imposed to ensure that the contractors working arrangements do not cause any problems for the public highway and that delivery times are limited during the construction phase of the development. The usual times for this are between 8am and 6pm on Mondays to Fridays, and between 9am and 1pm on Saturdays, with none permitted on Sundays and Bank Holidays and, during term time, no such vehicles to enter or leave the site within the period half an hour either side of the start and finish of the school day.
- 4.11 Design of the building
The new two storey block would be an extension to the existing, recently built, two storey block and would be constructed using a buff colour facing brick and would have a timber/metal deck roof finished in felt, to match that of the existing building. The overall design is considered to be acceptable.
- 4.12 The single storey block would also be faced using a buff colour facing brick and would have eternit resoplan composite insulated panels underneath the windows on the east and west elevations. The block would be constructed of materials to match the existing recently built classroom block and the proposed extension to it. The overall design is considered to be acceptable.
- 4.13 The proposed small extension to the kitchen would be constructed using the same material again, and is also considered to be acceptable.
- 4.14 Visual impact and landscaping
The two-storey extension would take the building further out towards residential properties along Mansfield Road. It is not considered that the extension would have a significant adverse impact on the residential amenity of nearby houses as there are a number of sizeable trees near the site boundary to screen views of the new development. It is considered that the extension is located in the best available area.
- 4.15 The new single storey block would be used to accommodate two additional technology rooms. The new block would be most visible from the two nearest houses to the proposed development on Park Street. However, it is not considered that the single storey block would have a significant adverse impact on the residential amenity of nearby houses.
- 4.16 The development itself involves the loss of four trees, although adequate replacements are proposed in the landscaping scheme. Shrub planting is proposed in various places located against windows. However, it is considered that an access strip would be more suitable in these areas. Overall the proposal is acceptable in landscape terms.
- 4.17 Location of tennis courts

It is considered that the proposed location is the most suitable available. Their proximity to the sport centre would allow ease of access for both the school and the general public. The location would also allow the school to have its tennis provision laid out in one area. As the tennis court would be placed on an area currently marked out as a grass hockey pitch, the applicant has agreed to redesign the pitch layouts in this area in order to relocate the hockey pitch elsewhere on site. Work on this is currently ongoing.

- 4.18 Sport England had requested that the tennis courts were floodlit, although there are no proposals to do so at present. Following further consultation with Sport England they have stated that whilst they normally wish to see such facilities floodlit, they are still satisfied that the level of benefit to sport is sufficient to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of playing field, given that the courts will be available for community use outside of school hours. Any forthcoming application for floodlighting would be considered, if and when it is submitted, on its individual planning merits.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Knights Templar is situated on the western side of Baldock. Following the closure of Norton School the Local Education Authority has decided to expand the three remaining schools in the area, Knights Templar being one. This in turn requires the provision of additional built accommodation for the school. The proposed development would extend the built up area of the site.
- 5.2 The proposed two-storey block would match the recently built adjacent block and its design and appearance is considered to be satisfactory. The proposed single storey block would be constructed using materials to match the existing and proposed two-storey block therefore is also considered to be acceptable.
- 5.3 The amount of on-site car parking is considered to be adequate following the applicants' agreement to continue to use the overspill car park, which is located on tennis courts at the rear of the site. Sixth formers need to be discouraged from driving to the school. The School Travel Plan will address these issues before the proposed development is first occupied. The contractors working arrangements need to be managed so that they do not obstruct or adversely affect the public highway.
- 5.4 There is some congestion on Weston Way at either end of the school day. The key to easing the congestion problem outside the site lies in changing people's travel habits and the school's commitment to producing a School Travel Plan is crucial. It is essential that the necessary work has been done and that a plan, setting out appropriate measures and policies, has been submitted for approval and is in place before the new accommodation is occupied.
- 5.5 The report concludes that planning permission be granted. It would need to be subject to suitable conditions including implementation of landscaping scheme, provision and marking out of all car parking spaces, contractors

working arrangements, and the approval and implementation of a School Travel Plan that is acceptable to the Highways Authority.

6. Financial implications

6.1 There are none for this committee.

Background information used by the author in compiling this report

Planning application reference 1/1444-02

Consultation responses and representations received in response to planning application ref. 1/1444-02

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

North Hertfordshire Local Plan, adopted 1996

Supplementary Planning Guidance: Parking Provision at New Development