

3/10/0011/FP – Extension of existing car park and erection of railings to the front of the Leventhorpe Swimming Pool, Cambridge Road, Sawbridgeworth for The Leventhorpe School

Date of Receipt: 21.01.2010

Type: Full - Minor

Parish: SAWBRIDGEWORTH

Ward: SAWBRIDGEWORTH

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:-

1. 3 year time limit (1T12)
2. Tree Retention and Protection (4P05)
3. Landscape Design Proposals (4P12) (insert i, j, k and l)
4. Landscape works Implementation (4P13)

Directives

1. Other Legislation (01OL)

Summary of Reasons for Decision

The proposal has been considered with regard to the policies of the Development Plan (East of England Plan May 2008, Hertfordshire County Structure Plan, Minerals Local Plan, Waste Local Plan and East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007), and in particular GBC1, ENV1, ENV2 and ENV11. The balance of the considerations having regard to those policies and the limited impact that the proposal would have on the Metropolitan Green Belt is that permission should be granted.

_____ (001110FP.FM)

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The application site is shown on the attached OS extract.
- 1.2 The Leventhorpe School is located on the northern edge of the settlement of Sawbridgeworth and is located in the Metropolitan Green Belt. To the south east of the main school building is Leventhorpe Swimming Pool and associated car park.

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- 1.3 This application seeks permission to extend the existing car park sited to the front of Leventhorpe Swimming Pool which is used by The Leventhorpe School and by members of the public attending the swimming pool and gym. Extending the existing car park involves changing the use of the grassed area to the front of the site to provide additional vehicle parking spaces. The layout of the existing car park to the front of the swimming pool will also be redesigned and as a result it is proposed that a total of 25 additional parking spaces would be provided, resulting in a total of 61 spaces on site.
- 1.4 The change of use of the existing green strip, sited between the existing car park and Cambridge Road to accommodate the additional parking spaces would result in the loss of part of the grassed area, three lime trees and an elder tree. This area would be replaced with a tarmac surface, extending the existing car parking area. A strip of grass, approximately 3metres in width would be retained between the existing planting strip and footpath at the front of the Leventhorpe Pool and the front edge of the proposed car parking spaces.
- 1.5 It is noted that additional car parking spaces are to be created on the existing tarmac area to the front of the swimming pool. However, as this only involves re-marking the existing car parking bays, this is not 'development' and as such does not require planning permission.
- 1.6 The proposal also involves removing the existing open rail fencing that borders the front of the site and replacing it with similar open rail fencing, 1.2metres in height, sited 3metres further forward than the existing fencing.

2.0 Site History

- 2.1 There is an extensive planning history to the site, but none relevant to the consideration of this application.

3.0 Consultation Responses

- 3.1 County Highways do not wish to restrict the grant of permission, and they have commented that the proposed parking layout is satisfactory, with no works or alterations to the existing access required.
- 3.2 The Council's Landscape Officer has commented that they recommend refusal of the application. They comment that whilst the loss of some of the grassed area may be acceptable, the loss of such a large area of green space would have a detrimental impact upon the character of the area.

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4.0 Town Council Representations

4.1 Sawbridgeworth Town Council raise no objections to the application.

5.0 Other Representations

5.1 The application has been advertised by way of site notice and neighbour notification. No letters of representation have been received.

6.0 Policy

6.1 The relevant Local Plan policies in this application include the following:-

- GBC1 Development within the Greenbelt
- ENV1 Design and Environmental Quality
- ENV2 Landscaping
- ENV10 Planting New Trees
- ENV11 Protection of Existing Hedgerows and Trees

7.0 Considerations

Principle of development

7.1 The development comprises the material change of use of land, and engineering operations within the Green Belt. This is considered to be inappropriate development and therefore in conflict with policy GBC1 unless there are very special circumstances that outweigh the harm caused by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm. It is therefore necessary to consider whether very special circumstances exist in this case, and to consider whether the development would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would not conflict with the purposes of including land in it.

7.2 With regards to very special circumstances, it is important to note the use of the existing site as an allocated car park, which provides parking facilities for the Leventhorpe Swimming Pool. Therefore the established use of the existing site as a car park is a material consideration that represents a very special circumstance, as does the need to provide for sufficient parking for the use undertaken at the site.

7.3 Currently, as outlined earlier in this report, there are 36 car parking spaces available to the front of the swimming pool building. The application proposes to increase this number to 61 spaces, which is an increase of 25 spaces. Having regard to the floorspace of the existing pool and gym, a maximum of 55-60 car parking spaces should be

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provided in accordance with the Council's adopted car parking standards. This application therefore would address the current shortfall in parking spaces at the site, and whilst the proposed provision would be slightly in excess of the Council's parking standards it should be borne in mind that the car park can be used in connection with the adjacent school, where there is limited parking available and congestion during peak school travel times.

- 7.4 Furthermore, in considering the special circumstances in this case, it should also be noted that the land surrounding the pool is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt, and therefore any such additional parking to be provided in a location which is convenient for the pool, would have to be located within the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- 7.5 Turning to the impact of the development on the character and openness of the Green Belt, it is considered that the retention of the 3metre grass strip to the front of the site, together with the proposed additional planting to replace the loss of the lime trees, would not result in a detrimental visual impact upon the character and appearance of the Metropolitan Green Belt and would not intrude into the openness of the Green Belt. Furthermore, taking into account the use of the existing site as a car park, it is Officers opinion that the proposal would not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt, or the character and appearance of the street scene.
- 7.6 With regards to the proposed 1.2metre high open rail fencing to the front of the site, taking into account the existing open rail fencing that borders the front of the site, together with the modest height and appropriate siting and design of the proposed fencing, Officers do not consider that it would have a harmful impact upon the character and appearance of the street scene or the character and openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt.

Landscaping and Trees

- 7.7 Officers note that the proposal also involves the removal of three lime trees and an elder tree sited on the existing grassed area to the front of the site. Whilst the Landscape Officer initially raised concerns that the loss of these trees, as well as the loss of the grassed area, would have a detrimental impact upon the character of the locality, these trees are not covered by a Tree Preservation Order, and as the site is not located in the Conservation Area, they do not require permission to be removed. Whilst the removal of these trees is regrettable, the application does propose some new tree planting along the sites frontage with Cambridge Road to compensate for the loss of some of the existing trees.

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7.8 The layout of the proposed parking area will retain sufficient space to ensure that the existing lime trees that are sited along the landscaping strip adjacent to the public footpath will not be damaged or their future health affected. Furthermore, the additional trees proposed to the front of the proposed car park area will assist in screening the car park from the surrounding area.

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 Having regard therefore to the above considerations it is considered that the change of use of the existing grassed area to the front of the Leventhorpe Swimming Pool to be used as a parking area would not have a harmful impact on the openness of the Green Belt or the character and appearance of the locality. Together with the very special circumstances outlined earlier in this report, it is considered that a departure from policy is justified in this instance. Accordingly, it is recommended that the application be approved subject to the conditions set out at the commencement of this report.