

5h 3/11/2191/FP – Erection of classroom block and link to Junior School, at Bishop’s Stortford College, Maze Green Road, Bishop’s Stortford, CM23 2PJ for Bishop’s Stortford College

Date of Receipt: 05.01.2012

Type: Full - Minor

Parish: BISHOP’S STORTFORD

Ward: BISHOP’S STORTFORD – SILVERLEYS

RECOMMENDATION:

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

1. Three Year Time Limit (1T12)
2. Approved Plans (2E10) (Insert 10-061-001; 10-061-002; 10-061-003; 10-061-014; 10-061-017; 10-061-019; 10-061-199-D; 10-061-200; 10-061-201; 10-061-203; 10-061-204-B; 10-061-205; 10-061-209; 10-061-209; 10-061-210)
3. Samples of Materials (2E12)
4. Construction Traffic Route (3V26)
5. Prior to the commencement of development, detailed drawings of the proposed fencing for the netball court as indicated on plan no.10-061-209 shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the site in accordance with Policy ENV1 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007.

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 the 'saved' policies of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007 and in particular policies LRC1, ENV1, ENV2, BH6 and TR7) and the National Planning Policy Framework. The balance of the considerations having regard to those policies is that permission should be granted.

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1.0 Background:

- 1.1 This application seeks permission for the erection of a classroom block and link to the Junior School of Bishop's Stortford College. The site is shown on the attached OS extract. The proposed classroom block would be sited 4.3 metres to the south of the existing Junior School block. The main two storey element of the proposed classroom block would be 28 metres in length, 16.6 metres in width, 7 metres in height to the eaves, and 10.6 metres in height to the ridge of the gabled roof form. The proposal also includes a single storey element that protrudes from the west elevation by a depth of 10.2 metres, with an eaves height of 3 metres and a height of 5.8 metres to the ridge of the gabled roof form. A small link is proposed connecting the new classroom block with the Junior School that would measure 2 metres in width and 4.8 metres in height to the ridge.
- 1.2 The proposed classroom block and link is part of a programme of replacement classrooms for those currently housed in temporary accommodation on the existing school campus. The Design and Access Statement supporting this application states that this proposal does not have any impact on pupil numbers and will only provide permanent accommodation in a purposely designed building. The proposal includes the demolition of two buildings, and the replacement of the larger of the two buildings, known as Meadows building, with a new netball court measuring 850m² in area.
- 1.3 The Junior School forms one of the main buildings of Bishop's Stortford College. The college grounds extend to the west, forming a 'green finger' of Metropolitan Green Belt. The majority of the buildings are of historic significance; being located within the Bishops Stortford Conservation Area, and located around the grade II listed Memorial Hall. To the west/ southwest of the historic frontages of the main college buildings lies the Junior School and smaller blocks of class rooms, together with playing fields.

2.0 Site History:

- 2.1 The relevant planning history for the site is as follows:-
- In 1983, planning reference 3/83/1134/FP approved the erection of the new Junior School building.

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- In 2003, planning reference 3/03/2301/FP approved a single storey extension to the Junior School to forming office/waiting area and visitors WC.

3.0 Consultation Responses

- 3.1 The Conservation Officer has commented that the introduction of a two-storey classroom block as an extension to the existing large Junior School block is considered to have a neutral impact when assessed against the existing buildings which are of limited architectural value, in context of the principle heritage asset on site. The Conservation Officer also accepts that the immediate and wider views of the site will be interrupted, but this impact when considered against the long term viable use of the buildings as a Junior School is considered acceptable.
- 3.2 County Highways does not wish to restrict the grant of permission subject to conditions relating to: the control of the deposit of mud, slurry or other debris on the highway during construction and prior submission and approval of details of construction vehicle movements. County Highways have also commented that this application for the construction of additional permanent classroom space largely to replace temporary buildings deep within the school site will not impact upon highway safety of capacity. The scheme does not result in an increase in pupil or staff members and is therefore unlikely to generate additional traffic movements.
- 3.3 Sport England commented that the proposal is principally for a new classroom block which would be sited on an area of open space within Bishops Stortford College's grounds. They understand that the area is designated in the adopted East Herts Local Plan through policy LRC1 for sport and recreation and that the area is therefore protected for this use through this policy. Whilst they have not visited the site, the open space would appear to be partially occupied by trees and they understand that there are significant gradient changes within the open space. Consequently, they are of the view that the open space would not be capable of forming a playing pitch. It would not appear that the site has been used for playing pitches or formal outdoor sport in the past. This area of open space is entirely divorced from the college's playing fields which are located to the west of this part of the college. Consequently, Sport England is not a statutory consultee on this planning application as no existing or former playing field is affected and would instead consider the space to be informal open space. Sport England is only a statutory consultee on land allocated for new playing field provision in a development plan. It is not a statutory consultee on existing open space that is designated for playing fields, sport, recreation etc.

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In terms of Policy LRC1, the development would not appear to be contrary to the policy in terms of loss of school playing fields or the loss of outdoor sports facilities for the reasons set out above. However, they are unable to comment on whether the proposal would accord with the policy in relation to loss of recreation or open space facilities. They have noted that if this proposal is implemented it would allow the temporary classrooms located to the south of the development site to be removed and for this area to be developed for a new netball court. The proposal would be welcomed in this respect as this would provide additional all weather outdoor sports facilities for the college.

As the open space has no existing or previous formal sports use, Sport England would therefore have no objection to this planning application.

3.4 Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre have commented that there are no known ecological restraints.

4.0 Town Council Representations:

4.1 Bishop's Stortford Town Council have commented that they raise no objections to the proposal.

5.0 Other Representations:

5.1 The applications have been advertised by way of press notice, site notice and neighbour notification.

5.2 4 letters of representation have been received which can be summarised as follows:-

- Concern with regards to increase of traffic and hazard to highway use, particularly in Maze Green Road;
- Loss of outlook;
- Overbearing impact;
- Loss of privacy due to overlooking from proposed building and car park;
- Materials unsympathetic to area;
- Noise nuisance caused by car park; and
- Loss of existing green space.

6.0 Policy:

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

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- LRC1 – Sport and Recreation Facilities
- ENV1 – Design and Environmental Quality
- ENV2 – Landscaping
- BH6 – New Developments in Conservation Areas
- TR7 – Car Parking - Standards

7.0 Considerations:

Principle of Development

- 7.1 The application site is located within the built up area of Bishop's Stortford wherein there is no objection in principle to development. However, the proposed development is to be sited on land that has been allocated as policy LRC1 land within the Local Plan. Policy LRC1 states that proposals which will result in the loss of public or private, indoor or outdoor, sports, recreation and open space facilities, or school playing fields, will be refused unless: suitable alternative facilities are provided on site, or in the locality, which are at least equivalent in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility to the ones that would be lost; or it can be demonstrated that the facility is no longer needed and that there is no viable demand for an alternative facility.
- 7.2 This proposal will result in the loss of 590m² of LRC1 land, but results in the creation of 850m² of sport land in the form of a netball court replacing the demolished Meadows building. It is Officers opinion that the quantity and accessibility of this piece of land would be equivalent to that being lost. Officers also agree with the representation made by Sport England that if this proposal is implemented it would allow the temporary classrooms located to the south of the development site to be removed and for this area to be developed currently for a new netball court. The proposal would be welcomed in this respect as this would provide additional all weather outdoor sports facilities for the college. In considering that the piece of LRC1 land to be developed has a minimal use for sport and recreation, and the proposal will provide an improvement to the provision of facilities. Officers therefore recommend that the principle of the development of this land accords with policy LRC1 of the Local Plan.

Size, scale, siting and design

- 7.3 Policy ENV1 states that all development proposals, including extensions to existing buildings, will be expected to be of a high standard of design and layout and to reflect local distinctiveness. To these ends, and particularly in reference to the consideration of the size, scale, siting and

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design of this proposed development, development proposals will be expected to: demonstrate compatibility with the structure and layout of the surrounding area; compliment the existing pattern of plots and buildings (grain of development); relate well to the massing (volume and shape) and height of adjacent buildings and the surrounding townscape; and consider the impact of any loss of open land on the character and appearance of the locality.

- 7.4 The distinctive characteristics of the surrounding area is of a sporadic development of school buildings set within areas of open green space allowing for a mixture of old and new buildings to sit comfortably whilst respecting the open aspects of this part of town. The proposed classroom block and link is to be developed on such an open piece of grass land resulting in the expansion of the massing of the existing Junior School building in what is currently an open aspect.
- 7.5 The Design and Access Statement states that the design aim of this proposal has been to create an articulated design that both reflects the nature of the surrounding buildings whilst minimising the impact of a relatively large volume building using a combination of both traditional and modern materials with a range of roof scapes.
- 7.6 Officers acknowledge the opposing views of the occupants of the neighbouring dwellings that the aesthetic quality of this piece of grass land and the open aspect currently enjoyed will be impaired by the proposed large building, and that the proposed materials, such as the zinc roof, would seem to be out of keeping with the existing school buildings.
- 7.7 Whilst Officers agree that this proposed classroom building will have an impact upon the current open characteristics of the land to the south of the Junior School building, it is considered that its size, scale and siting would not be so harmful as to warrant a refusal of this application. The massing of this building will create a change in character of this part of the school grounds, but although its width and depth will be large, it will be of a height that would create a degree of subservience to the ridge height of the main school building. It is therefore Officer's opinion that whilst this proposal will result in the loss of an open space within the immediate vicinity of the school grounds, it will relate well to the massing of the of the adjacent school buildings, i.e. the Junior School and the sports hall, and compliment the existing pattern of development within the school grounds.
- 7.8 With regard to the design of the proposed building, Officers note that its appearance would be more reflective of the new art department

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developed adjacent to the main entrance of the College under LPA reference 3/07/0680/FP, than the adjoining Junior School building. Whilst the size, scale and siting of the building is considered acceptable, Officers consider that it would be appropriate that, if Members are minded to grant planning permission, a 'samples of materials' condition be imposed to ensure that the materials reflect the surrounding built form. The concern raised by neighbouring residents with regard to the proposed roof materials is noted, and therefore the above condition should allow further consideration of these materials. In summary, subject to the suitability of materials being agreed by a condition of permission, this proposal is considered to be of an acceptable design that would sit comfortably in the surrounding built form.

- 7.9 With regard to the above, Officers recommend that this proposal accords with the design considerations of policy ENV1 of the Local Plan.

Amenity considerations

- 7.10 Policy ENV1 of the Local Plan also states that development proposals will be expected to respect the amenity of occupiers of neighbouring dwellings and those of future occupants and ensure that their environments are not harmed by noise and disturbance or by inadequate daylight, sunlight or privacy or by overshadowing.
- 7.11 Concern has been raised by the occupants of numbers 2, 3 and 4 The Spires, which are located approximately 55 metres to the west of the application site, that the proposed development would result in a loss of privacy, most specifically from the first floor accommodation proposed and from the library.
- 7.12 Whilst Officers agree that this proposal will result in the increase in number of classroom windows facing these adjacent dwellings, when considering the level of overlooking already experienced from the existing school building, the additional five windows is considered minimal. Officers also consider that the distance of approximately 55 metres separating the proposed building and these dwellings is significant enough to negate any harm caused by overlooking/ loss of privacy. With regards to the concerns raised by the occupants of the neighbouring dwellings due to a possible loss of privacy caused by a 'mezzanine' level in the library, Officers wish to clarify that the proposal does not include a mezzanine and the level of overlooking experienced from the ground floor of the library will be minimal.
- 7.13 Concern has also been raised by the occupants of these neighbouring dwellings with regard to poor outlook caused by the development of this

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building. Although it is agreed that the building will change the outlook currently enjoyed from these dwellings, it is Officers recommendation that the size, scale and siting of the proposal could not be considered as detrimental to the enjoyment of these dwellings.

- 7.14 In considering the above it is Officers recommendation that this proposal accords with the amenity considerations of policy ENV1 of the Local Plan.

Conservation considerations

- 7.15 Policy BH6 of the Local Plan states that new developments in Conservation Areas, such as this proposal, will be permitted where they are sympathetic in terms of scale, height, proportion, form, materials, and siting in relation to the general character and appearance of the area or are otherwise of such a quality as to be highly likely to enhance the character and appearance of the area; and those open spaces, trees, and other landscape features materially contributing to the character and appearance of the area are not affected to the significant detriment of that area.
- 7.16 As stated above, the Conservation Officer considers that the introduction of a two-storey classroom block as an extension to the existing large Junior School block is considered to have a neutral impact when assessed against the existing buildings which are of limited architectural value, in the context of the principle heritage asset on site. The Conservation Officer also accepts that the immediate and wider views of the site will be interrupted, however this impact when considered against the long term viable use of the buildings as a Junior School is considered acceptable.
- 7.17 Officers concur with the view of the Conservation Officer and consider that, subject to the choice of materials, the proposal is sympathetic in terms of scale, height, proportion, form and siting in relation to the general character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area. Whilst the siting of the building will result in the interruption of what is currently an open aspect, the degree of harm does not outweigh the benefit gained by the improvement of facilities to the school.
- 7.18 For the above reasons Officers recommend that this proposal accords with policy BH6 of the Local Plan.

Parking and access considerations

- 7.19 It is noted that this proposal does not propose to increase the number of

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pupils currently at the school and therefore the requirements of further parking provision under policy TR7 of the Local Plan is not considered. County Highways concurs with this view by commenting that 'the scheme does not result in an increase in pupil or staff members and is therefore unlikely to generate additional traffic movements'. The accompanying planning application reference 3/11/2192/FP proposes to increase the existing parking area adjacent to the neighbouring dwellings. This matter falls to be considered under this separate application.

Conditions

- 7.20 Together with the standard three year time limit condition for the commencement of development Officers recommend that it is appropriate to include a condition that states that the development should accord with the approved plans.
- 7.21 Officers also consider it appropriate to include a condition that states that samples of external materials of construction for the building hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This condition is necessary in the interest of the appearance of the building and the surrounding built form.
- 7.22 With regard to the conditions as recommended by County Highways, Officers recommend that the condition relating to the construction vehicle movements and access arrangements is both appropriate and necessary in the interest of highway safety.
- 7.23 Finally, with regard to the proposed netball court that is to replace to the lost LRC1 land and the demolished Meadows building, it is considered that it would be appropriate to include a condition requesting further detailed drawings of the proposed fencing surrounding the court prior to the commencement of development. Such a condition would ensure the appearance of the site is enhanced.

8.0 Conclusion:

- 8.1 In conclusion, this proposal will not increase the capacity of the school, but offer more permanent accommodation in replacement of dated temporary classrooms.
- 8.2 Whilst this proposed building will be sited on LRC1 land, the application site does not have value for sport and recreation and the proposal also offers the development of a netball court replacing one of the demolished buildings.
- 8.3 It is also acknowledged that this proposal is for a large school building

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within the Conservation Area, and the outlook from the dwellings to the west of the site will be affected. Notwithstanding the above, Officers consider that this proposed building will relate well to the massing of the adjacent school buildings, i.e. the Junior School and the sports hall, and compliment the existing pattern of development within the school grounds.

- 8.4 Officers also consider that due to the significant distance separating the adjacent dwellings and the proposed building, the amenities of the occupants of these dwellings would not be affected to their detriment.
- 8.5 It is therefore recommended that planning permission be granted.