

5i 3/11/2192/FP – New science classroom and entrance lobby extension to existing Junior School and additional parking at Bishop’s Stortford College, Maze Green Road, Bishop’s Stortford, CM23 2PJ for Bishop’s Stortford College

Date of Receipt: 21.12.2012

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; 10-061-198-A; 10-061-202; 10-061-203; 10-061-204-A; 10-061-206)
3. Samples of Materials (2E12)
4. Hard Surfacing (3V21)
5. Construction Traffic Route (3V26)

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, 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.

_____ (219211FP.SE)

1.0 Background:

- 1.1 This application seeks permission for the erection of a new science classroom and entrance lobby extension, together with additional parking for the Junior School of Bishop’s Stortford College. The site is shown on the attached OS extract. The proposed classroom is to adjoin the north-facing elevation of the Junior School building by a corridor and entrance

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lobby. It is proposed to project 17 metres from the side of the school building and is to be of a fragmented design with the classroom, the entrance and waiting area, and the covered walkway being of varying heights. The highest part of the development is the ridge of the new entrance and waiting area measuring 5.4 metres. This extension is to be developed around the varying contours of the plot resulting in the fragmented approach to design.

- 1.2 The proposed extension 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.
- 1.3 The proposal also includes an extension to the existing parking area adjacent to the access to this part of the College site. The parking area is to accommodate 36 vehicles and is to be sited on an area of grass land 2 metres northwest of the Junior School building and adjacent to the access road.
- 1.4 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 grounds.

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.
- 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 Sport England comment that they have no objection to this planning

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application for the same reasons as set out in their response dated 27th January 2012 to the related planning application for the classroom block on this site (3/11/2191/FP) i.e. the site of the proposed car park would not be defined as a playing field, it is not (and has not been) used for playing pitches or formal sport, the size and slope of the area would restrict the potential for it to be used for sport and the area is divorced from the college's playing fields.

- 3.2 The Conservation Officer has commented that the proposed extension to the existing large Junior School 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 considered that the impact of the car park associated with the proposal has been considered against the immediate and wider setting of Bishop's Stortford College. The provision of a hard standing to accommodate the car parking surface would, in this instance, have little or no further impact on the immediate or wider setting. As with the existing allocated car parking spaces, the car park proposes no additional massing to the existing built form and its construction adjacent to the access street is typical of what would be expected in the urban character of a school and as such the immediate setting. With respect to the wider setting, the car park would have little or no impact due to its location and form.
- 3.3 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; prior submission and approval of details of construction vehicle movements; and the surfacing and layout of the car park. County Highways have also commented that this application for the construction of an extension to the Junior School together with a new formal parking area deep within this existing school site will not impact upon highway safety or capacity. The scheme does not result in an increase in pupil or staff numbers and is therefore unlikely to generate additional traffic movements. However the principle of providing car parking without additional development to justify further provision is contrary to guidance seeking to reduce dependency on the car. The Local Transport Plan puts the onus on organizations to develop travel plans to promote alternative means of travel rather than simply provide extra parking. Nevertheless there are no technical highway reasons to object, access is taken from an existing private driveway with adequate access onto the public highway and the layout of the proposed parking area is acceptable.

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4.0 Town Council Representations:

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

5.0 Other Representations:

5.1 The application has 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:

- 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 of the parking area 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

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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 proposed development of the parking area will result in the loss of 700m² of LRC1 land. Through a consultation with Sport England it is noted, however, that the site of the proposed car park would not be defined as a playing field; it is not (and has not been) used for playing pitches or formal sport; the size and slope of the area would restrict the potential for it to be used for sport and the area is divorced from the college's playing fields. For this reason it is Officers recommendation that since the site could never be used for sport or recreation then the loss of this piece of land would not require replacement with an alternative facility.

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 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 extension is to be developed on a small portion of such an open piece of grass land resulting in the expansion of the massing of the existing Junior School building.
- 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.

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- 7.6 Officers acknowledge the opposing views of the occupants of the neighbouring dwellings that the aesthetic quality of this piece of grass land will be impaired by the proposed extension and car park, and that the proposed materials, such as the zinc roof for the extension, would seem to be out of keeping with the existing school buildings.
- 7.7 Whilst Officers agree that this extension to the Junior School will alter the character of the site, it is considered that the size, scale, siting and design of the extension are acceptable. The fragmented design of the extension would allow for some interest to this side of the building, and the varying heights of the roofs allows for the interpretation of the undulations of the existing grass banks. 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 Officers consider that it would be appropriate that, if Members are minded to approve this application, a 'samples of materials' condition is proposed 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 the acceptability of these materials. In summary, subject to the suitability of materials being agreed by a condition of approval, 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 proposed car park, Officers have taken into consideration the loss of a large area of open grass landscaping and what impact this will have on the character and appearance of the locality. Whilst it is unfortunate to lose such a large area of open space, it is considered that the loss of this particular piece of land would not be harmful to the character and appearance of the school building or that of the locality. It is understood that the distinctive characteristic of the College is the buildings being set in open landscaped grounds, but the siting of the proposed car park will allow for sufficient areas of grass land to be retained.
- 7.10 With regard to the above, Officers recommend that this proposal accords with the design considerations of policy ENV1 of the Local Plan.

Amenity considerations

- 7.11 Policy ENV1 of the Local Plan also states that development proposals

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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.

- 7.12 A number of the neighbouring residents have objected to this proposal on the grounds that the extension of the car park will result in the loss of privacy due to users of the car park being able to look into their dwellings. Whilst Officers agree that the development of this extended car park will allow for an increase of activity, the proposed extended car park will be a minimum of 25 metres from these neighbouring dwellings.
- 7.13 Concerns have also been raised by the occupants of the neighbouring dwellings with regard to the level of harm caused by noise nuisance due to the increase in vehicle movements, including buses. Officers acknowledge this concern, and also acknowledge that this part of the college grounds already experiences a level of car and bus movements due to the siting of the Junior School and the sports hall.
- 7.14 Whilst it is understood that this proposal will result in an increase in car movements, it is considered that the degree of harm to the enjoyment of these neighbouring dwellings by reason of noise nuisance would not be such as to warrant a refusal of the application. This site by the Junior School and the sports hall is already used by cars and buses, which was an established use prior to the construction of these neighbouring dwellings. Although the construction of the car park will intensify this use, it is Officers opinion that given the distance separating the car park and the neighbouring dwellings, the difference in site levels and the size of the car park, the level of nuisance would not result in significant harm to the amenities of the occupiers of nearby properties.
- 7.15 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

- 7.16 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

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that area.

- 7.17 As stated above, the Conservation Officer considers that the proposed extension to the Junior School will not create harm to the significance of the character and appearance of this part of the Bishop's Stortford Conservation Area. Also, the creation of the car park proposes no additional massing to the existing built form and its construction adjacent to the access road is typical of what would be expected in the urban character of a school and as such the immediate setting.
- 7.18 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.
- 7.19 For the above reasons Officers recommend that this proposal accords with policy BH6 of the Local Plan.

Parking and access considerations

- 7.20 It is noted that this proposal does not propose to increase the number of 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'. Whilst the provision of additional parking spaces without justification contradicts sustainable transport ethics, there are no technical highway reasons to object. Having regard to the limited size of the proposed car park (36 spaces), Officers do not consider that the approval of a car park of this size would be prejudicial to the County Councils policy in respect of the provision of car parking.

Conditions

- 7.20 Together with the standard three year time limit condition for the commencement of development Officers recommend 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.

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7.22 With regard to the conditions as recommended by County Highways, Officers recommend that the conditions relating to the construction vehicle movements and access arrangements and the surfacing of the car park are both appropriate and necessary in the interest of highway safety.

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 car park will be sited on LRC1 land, the application site does not have value for sport and recreation due to its topography.

8.3 It is also acknowledged that this proposal is for an extension to a school building within the Conservation Area. Notwithstanding the above Officers consider that this proposed extension will relate well to the massing of the Junior School and adjacent school buildings and compliment the existing pattern of development within the school grounds.

8.4 Officers also consider that due to the distance separating the adjacent dwellings and the proposed car park, together with the difference in land levels, 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.