

DCCW2004/1308/RM - A NEW SECONDARY SCHOOL (1 SINGLE AND TWO 2-STOREY TEACHING BLOCKS) WITH ASSOCIATED SPORTS FIELDS, HARD COURTS, CAR PARKING AND ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPING AT VACANT FIELD, ADJACENT TO THREE ELMS ROAD, NORTH OF BONINGTON DRIVE, WHITECROSS, HEREFORD

**For: Whitecross @ Stepnell per Haverstock Associates,
10 Cliff Road Studios, Cliff Road, London, NW1 9AN**

Date Received: 28th April 2004 Ward: Three Elms Grid Ref: 48841, 41417

Expiry Date: 23rd June 2004

Local Members: Councillors Mrs. P.A. Andrews, Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels and Ms. A.M. Toon

1. Site Description and Proposal

- 1.1 The application site consists of 6.75 hectares of open agricultural land on the western side of Three Elms Road, Hereford. To the east and north the site is bounded by areas of protected open countryside and the Yazor Brook. To the south of the site the established residential areas on Bonington Drive and Pentland Gardens. The site also adjoins the former Bulmers playing field beyond Pentland Gardens.
- 1.2 This application seeks reserved matters approval following the granting of outline planning permission under reference CW2003/2113/O on the 5th January 2004. All matters which include external appearance, means of access, siting, design and landscaping are considered as part of this application given that they were all previously reserved for consideration at the outline stage. The outline planning application was accompanied by an Environmental Statement in accordance with the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (1999) and included a Flood Risk Assessment, Transport Assessment and Planning Statement.
- 1.3 The detailed scheme submitted shows a full site layout with the main school buildings being sited towards the central and northern parts of the application site. Vehicular access is provided off Three Elms Road at only one point and would include a drop-off facility for school buses. Eighty seven car parking spaces are indicated which would be sited on land immediately to the north of Bonington Drive. An all weather football/hockey pitch is also proposed close to the site entrance point adjoining Three Elms Road. The main school complex is split between two linear blocks which are sited approximately 120 metres off the Three Elms Road. This setback position allows for the significant level of services, and potential flood storage area in the northeastern part of the site which adjoins Three Elms Road. The proposed school building are in the main two storeys in height and have been designed and laid out to maximise energy efficiency and sustainability from the development. The proposed buildings will be finished with a mixture of Cedar boarding and through coloured render systems to the walls and will include a Sedum roof (green roof to mitigate the loss of green open

space from the site) and also recycled aluminium standing seam roofing which will contain high insulation values as part of the sustainability agenda.

- 1.4 The main pedestrian and cycle route to the school is located immediately to the north of the all weather football and hockey pitch and is some 140 metres away from the main vehicular access to the site.
- 1.5 The layout of the site enables a significant amount of sport and playing field facilities to provide a buffer between the established residential areas to the south of the site and the main school complex.
- 1.6 The main teaching blocks are arranged as two 'T' shaped buildings to the most northern part of the site and they are largely orientated to make the best use of daylight with maximum potential to control unwanted solar gain. Each educational department would be self-contained and clearly identified through the use of colour and bold signage both inside and outside the buildings. The upper floor levels are largely for practical subjects and rooms would be well lit with studio spaces with high sloping ceilings.
- 1.7 In total the school will provide 900 new spaces for students aged between 11 and 16.

2. Policies

2.1 Planning Policy Guidance:

- PPG1 - General Policy and Principles
- PPG7 - The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development
- PPG13 - Transport
- PPG24 - Planning and Noise

2.2 Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan:

- Policy CTC9 - Development Requirements
- Policy M2 - Mineral Reserves
- Policy LR5 - Public Rights of Way
- Policy A1 - Development on Agricultural Land

2.3 Hereford Local Plan:

- Policy SC6 - Permanent Educational Accommodation
- Policy CAL4 - Agricultural Land
- Policy ENV2 - Flood Storage Areas
- Policy ENV14 - Design
- Policy ENV15 - Access for All
- Policy T11 - Pedestrian Provision
- Policy T12 - Cyclist Provision
- Policy H21 - Compatibility of Non-residential Uses
- Policy NC6 - Criteria for Development Proposals
- Policy NC7 - Development Proposals – Habitat Creation and Enhancement
- Policy NC8 - Protected Species
- Policy NC9 - Infrastructure Works

2.4 Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (Revised Deposit Draft):

Policy S1	-	Sustainable Development
Policy S2	-	Development Requirements
Policy S6	-	Transport
Policy S9	-	Minerals
Policy DR1	-	Design
Policy DR7	-	Flood Risk
Policy DR13	-	Noise
Policy DR14	-	Lighting
Policy T6	-	Walking
Policy T7	-	Cycling
Policy T14	-	School Travel
Policy NC1	-	Nature Conservation and Development
Policy NC8	-	Habitat Creation, Restoration and Enhancement
Policy CF8	-	School Proposals

3. Planning History

- 3.1 CW2002/3051/O Site for the construction of a new high school and associated playing fields - Withdrawn 4th June 2003.
- DCCW2003/2113/O Outline planning permission for the erection of a new school and associated playing fields - Approved 5th January 2004.

4. Consultation Summary

Statutory Consultations

- 4.1 Environment Agency (letter 14th June 2004) - the Agency has some concerns with regard to the details of the submitted scheme which relate to the detailed conditions set out on the outline planning permission.

Officers are currently discussing these issues with the agents and a verbal update will hopefully be given at the meeting.

- 4.2 Welsh Water - have no objection to the grant of planning permission subject to conditions.

Internal Council Advice

- 4.3 Head of Engineering and Transportation - there are no objections to the proposal in principle, however discussions have been ongoing with the applicant's agent with regard to a number of detailed issues associated with this scheme. Discussions with regard to safe pedestrian and cycle access to the site including crossings of Three Elms Road are issues which need to be satisfactorily resolved and concern is also expressed about the potential joint use of the car park of the proposed school with the cricket pitch use on the adjacent Bulmers/Persimmon Homes site which is a considerable distance from the proposed car park location.

It is hoped that an update will be given at the meeting with regard to the latest on these matters.

The proposed development affects Public Footpath HER38 and the following points should be noted. A formal application under the Town and Country Planning Act to divert the footpath will be necessary which is made separately to the application for planning permission. The Public Rights of Way Service has scheduled a meeting with the developers to discuss the proposed route that the diverted path will take. The main feature of discussion will be to minimise the additional distance the public will have to walk around the school site. The proposed diversion may be further than the public will find acceptable. The diversion order process will take around six months to complete and the developers will need to be aware that objections to the proposed route may be raised by the public that require further consideration before a Diversion Order can be confirmed.

The existing right of way should remain open at all times throughout the development. If development works are perceived to be likely to endanger members of the public than a temporary road closure order should be applied for from this department preferably six weeks in advance of works starting.

- 4.4 Minerals and Waste Officer - the site is within the identified sand and gravel deposit of the Proposals Map for the adopted Minerals Local Plan (MLP) and the consultation draft UDP. It is not however a preferred area for extraction in either document. Policy 3 of the MLP also applies and a case could be made for the need for this school as an overriding factor which justifies planning permission being granted. In the circumstances I have no objection to this application.

It is suggested however that conditions are imposed on the approval to ensure no aggregate materials won within the site in connection with the development hereby permitted shall be removed off site. This could have environmental affects which the Local Planning Authority considers would need further assessment. It is also suggested that a condition requiring a waste audit to be undertaken from the site and reference is made to the adjoining Yazor Brook.

- 4.5 Chief Conservation Officer - there are two sets of protected trees which may be affected by this development. The site plan does not clearly identify the protected trees and this should be done to ensure the crown spread of the trees are protected and no hard surfaces are laid within these areas. It is vital that tree protection zones are established around the protected trees and conditions in this respect are suggested as well as potential amendments in the layout of the site to ensure minimum disturbance.

The detail of the application does not address some important nature conservation issues. It is suggested by the Ecologist that the Sedum roof is impregnated with wild flower seed and that bat boxes and bird boxes should also be provided on the site.

In landscaping terms it appears that only shrub planting and hedging is proposed for the northern and western boundaries. It is important that substantial planting including as many trees as possible are established on these boundaries to soften the impact of the security fencing. A landscape plan with all proposed planting is required and it should describe species, sizes and planting numbers in accordance with the Council's standard conditions.

5. Representations

- 5.1 Hereford City Council - no objection, however appropriate no waiting traffic restrictions should be applied to Three Elms Road and the approaches to Bonington Drive.
- 5.2 The Open Spaces Society - whilst it is appreciated that the footpath diversion will not have a great significance compared to the existing footpath alignment, we are uncomfortable that the proposed eastern section of its junction with Three Elms Road is much nearer Yazor Brook than at present line. As it is a flood plain, it would be far more beneficial if the path could be diverted further from the brook nearer the students' entrance off Three Elms Road. There are ramifications of access to the countryside under the Disability Act being so close to the open environment the path surface should be constructed to a high standard devoid of path furniture and suitable for wheelchairs.
- 5.3 The Ramblers' Association - it is noted that the proposed line for the diversion of Footpath 38 does appear to give a better alignment than previously shown, however concerns previously expressed are still relevant. We would request that new safe walking and cycling routes to the new school should be created as part of this application whereby they would be integrated more easily. We would also ask that the developer is aware of a legal requirement to maintain and keep clear a public right of way at all times.
- 5.4 English Nature (Herefordshire and Worcestershire Team) - English Nature does not wish to make any formal representations on this planning application.
- 5.5 Eight letters raising some issues of concern and some points of objection have been received from 35 Bonington Drive, 31 Hilary Drive, 138 Three Elms Road, 50 Bonington Drive, 33 Bonington Drive, 22 Bonington Drive, 96 Three Elms Road and Scope, First Key, Holmer Road, Hereford. The letters raise concerns which can be summarised as follows.
- Strong concerns and points of objection are raised with regard to access and transportation issues to the site. It is questioned that as many as 90% of students walk or cycle to the school and the use of Bonington Drive as a drop-off and pick-up point is a very real concern. With limited on site dropping off facilities, it is highly likely that children will be dropped on Three Elms Road or on Bonington Drive by parents. For the safety of all concerned, a pelican crossing should be required near the school entrance. This would also help slow traffic on this stretch of road. Three Elms Road is particularly busy during peak hours and with a number of children making their way to school strong concerns are expressed about the speed of the road and the ability to put enough safe crossing points to provide access.
 - A number of letters make it clear that there is no objection to the principle of the school building on site but it is the access and potential "rat run" issues which are a key concern.
 - Concerns are also expressed about potential noise and light spill particularly from the all weather pitch is proposed on site which could adversely affect the residential amenity of adjoining properties.

- Suggestions are made that bollards are used to block any access to the school from the potential break through points off Bonington Drive and Hillary Drive.
- Concerns are expressed about the proximity of the boundary of the school on its southern side to existing residential property and an emphasis should be made on new planting to screen the proposed buildings. This would also help buffer noise and light spill from the site.
- Concerns are also expressed about the potential disturbance during construction of such a large development and disturbance which would be caused to adjoining residents during that time.

The full text of these letters can be inspected at Central Planning Services, Blueschool House, Blueschool Street, Hereford and prior to the Sub-Committee meeting.

6. Officers Appraisal

- 6.1 As outline planning permission has already been granted for the principle of this development, the key issues for consideration on this reserved matters application are the siting, design, external appearance, means of access and landscaping issues which this detailed scheme addresses. As well as the reserved matters issues, careful consideration is also required with regard to the impact of the proposed development having regard to its close proximity to existing residential properties to the south of the site.
- 6.2 With regard to siting, design and external appearance, all of these issues have been given careful consideration and have been part of pre-application discussions with the agent prior to submission. It is considered that all these aspects are acceptable and will provide an attractive, educational facility as well as minimise the impact on the surrounding area. The main school building which are two storeys in height are sited towards the centre and northern parts of the application site and are clearly split into two separate elements. The siting of the block which have an almost linear position will also allow for a central courtyard and circulation area which enables effective movement between all of the facilities within the school complex. With creation courtyard landscaping, this should create an attractive environment for all users of the new school.
- 6.3 The design of the building relies heavily on the sustainable principles adopted by the agent following detailed discussions with the Education Directorate, the existing staff and pupils of Whitecross School and the local community. Through the use of coloured render, Cedar cladding and Sedum roofs, it is considered that an attractive and sustainable design has been achieved which should be welcomed by this Authority. Furthermore, when viewed from the areas of open countryside to the north the predominantly green roofs will help minimise the visual impact of the buildings and retain much of the site's existing character and appearance. A condition is suggested to ensure the highest quality materials are used in construction.
- 6.4 The transportation and access issues associated with this scheme are arguably the strongest concern expressed in the letters submitted on this application. As proposed vehicular access to the school site will be obtained from just one position at the site's southeastern corner off Three Elms Road. The new traffic junction would give access to a car park for 87 vehicles and provide drop-off facilities including a bus drop island. The southern boundary of the site as previously mentioned is that closest to private residential properties, however with appropriate boundary treatment and landscaping,

it is not considered the access and drop-off facilities are unacceptable in the position indicated. Some concerns have been expressed by the Transportation Manager with regard to emergency vehicular access to the site should that be necessary and also the capacity of the layout as submitted to accommodate the likely traffic generation indicated in the Transport Assessment. These issues are currently being discussed.

- 6.5 Cycle and pedestrian access to the school site would be provided in a more central location but again it is intended that only one point of access will be provided. Whilst the internal circulation and pedestrian access points within the site are considered acceptable, there is clearly an issue of safe crossing points on Three Elms Road which needs to be addressed. Given that the outline application did not consider transportation issues, this reserved matters proposal must adequately deal with this issue, as this is a strong concern for all parties to address. Again, the Transportation Manager is in discussion with the applicants with regard to two potential safe crossing points for Three Elms Road and this matter must be satisfactorily resolved in order for planning permission to be granted.
- 6.6 Strong concerns have been expressed by residents about potential pedestrian and cycle access off Bonington Drive and the fact that this may encourage a "rat run" to develop. From the school's perspective who would prefer one sole point of access to the site which can be monitored primarily for security reasons. Whilst normally the Local Planning Authority would seek to provide the maximum pedestrian and cyclist access points to a development of this size, the overriding security and safety issue associated with the school use must carry significant weight in this instance and as such it is not intended that any pedestrians or cyclists will access the site from Bonington Drive (to the south) despite the fact that this arguably would be a safer point of entry for those modes of transport.
- 6.7 On balance there is no objection to the principle of the access and transportation issues as set out in this scheme, however it is vitally important that safe pedestrian access is provided on Three Elms Road and that the necessary alterations are made to the car park and dropping off facilities to ensure the site operates effectively.
- 6.8 On the issues of landscaping and ecology, Members will note the Chief Conservation Officer's comments with regard to several trees with specific Tree Preservation Orders. These issues are currently being addressed with the applicant's agent, and it is not considered that they raise insurmountable problems. It would however appear that the tennis courts and netball and basket ball courts will need to be moved further from the site's southern boundary to ensure minimum disturbance to one of the protected trees. It is also considered important by both the school and the Council's Ecologist that nature conservation enhancement should occur from this scheme. Conditions can adequately address this issue in this instance.
- 6.9 On the wider landscaping issues, given the site's prominent location a high quality landscaping scheme is required from this development. Most notably boundary planting will be integral to providing a soft edge when viewed from surrounding areas. With regard to the site's southern boundary, this is particularly important as it will reduce the visual impact of development for the existing residential properties to the south which will provide both visual and assist in noise attenuation, particularly when the sports facilities are in use. Again, a condition can satisfactorily control this issue.

- 6.10 A further concern expressed by local residents relates to potential light spill and noise disturbance from the sports facilities which may also be in use through the weekend and early evening bearing in mind the community aspects of this PFI project. No details have been supplied with regard to potential floodlighting, most notably for the all weather pitch which is in close proximity to both Three Elms Road and residential properties to the south and east of the site. The Council's Environmental Health Officer will consider carefully these issues and planning conditions will be imposed should permission be granted at this time to ensure the minimal disturbance occurs to adjoining properties. With the sports and recreation facilities primarily taking place along the southern boundary and on the western side of the site, this should provide a good buffer between the residential areas and the main hub of the school activity. Officers consider that the site's layout having regard to the constraints associated with the site do achieve the best possible solution in this respect, however conditions will still need to carefully address a number of detailed issues to minimise any associated impact.
- 6.11 At the outline planning stage a Flood Risk Assessment was submitted at the request of the Environment Agency and was also considered by the Council's own Drainage Engineer. As Members will note the Environment Agency have raised some concerns on the detail of this scheme as submitted, and Officers are seeking to address these issues at the present time. It should be noted that there is no objection in principle to the development but it is vitally important that the necessary works are undertaken to ensure the minimum risk of flooding both on the site itself and further along Yazor Brook which runs through the north-eastern corner of the site.
- 6.12 The existing public footpath which runs diagonally across the site will need to be relocated under the relevant legislation and the Council's Public Rights of Way Section are in discussion with the applicants on this matter. The comments of all the consultees in this respect have been noted and this issue should not prevent an approval of this scheme at this time.
- 6.13 In conclusion, it is considered that the scheme as submitted is acceptable in principle subject to the outstanding issues being satisfactorily resolved. Most notably these include the access and transportation issues which are of critical importance having regard to the need for pedestrian and cyclists safety issues to be addressed. Furthermore, the landscape issues associated with the Tree Preservation Order and the additional information required to satisfy the Environment Agency should also be satisfactorily addressed prior to the issuing of a decision but these issues are not considered insurmountable or which would warrant a refusal of the scheme.
- 6.14 In view of the above subject to the receipt of the additional information required and any minor alterations in the layout of the site, Officers recommend this reserved matters application for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Subject to the receipt of further information and any required additional amended plans, Officers named in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers be authorised to approve this reserved matters application following any necessary reconsultation with conditions as considered necessary by Officers.

Decision:

Notes:

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Background Papers

Internal departmental consultation replies.