

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>PLANNING COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>27 JUNE 2012</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<p><b>S120539/CD - AN EXTENSION, PART SINGLE STOREY AND PART DOUBLE STOREY TO EXISTING SCHOOL BUILDING, WITH ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPING AND INCORPORATING AMENDMENTS TO LAYOUT AND APPEARANCE OF EXISTING SCHOOL AT BLACKMARSTON DAY SCHOOL, HONDDU CLOSE, HEREFORD, HR2 7NX</b></p> <p><b>For: Property Services, Herefordshire Council per Amey Consulting, Explorer 2, Fleming Way, Crawley, W Sussex, RH10 9GT</b></p>
<b>WEBSITE LINK:</b>	<a href="http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/housing/planning/58286.aspx?ID=120539&amp;NoSearch=True">http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/housing/planning/58286.aspx?ID=120539&amp;NoSearch=True</a>

**Date Received: 17 February 2012    Ward: St Martins and Hinton    Grid Ref: 350248,238313**  
**Expiry Date: 18 May 2012**

Local Members: Councillors ACR Chappell, R Preece and P Rone

## **1. Site Description and Proposal**

- 1.1 Blackmarston School was built in the late 1990s and provides special needs school provision for the wider Herefordshire community. The school is sited in a primarily residential area to the south of the city, and is accessed via Honddu Close (from Dulas Close to the north and Greencroft / Standale Road to the south).
- 1.2 The school is unusual in its design being octagonal in shape. The building is single storey with all rooms sited around a central atrium / courtyard area. The school building is sited to the east of the application site with car parking to the west of the school building. The land levels then slope considerably westwards towards the dwellings on Stanberrow Road. The schools play area and mobile classrooms are sited to the rear of the main school building (north east).
- 1.3 The application proposes an extension to the school to provide additional classrooms, hygiene facilities, hall and facilities and first floor staff accommodation. The extension projects away from the existing building in a westerly direction and is 70m in length and would run parallel with, and approximately 4m from the existing boundary with Marlbrook School. The first part of the extension would be single storey (5m) in height, rising to 8m for 23m in length before reducing in height. The building has been designed to accommodate a change in levels and as such, although the height reduces, it would continue to be 7m in height (above ground level). One of the key requirements of the school is to have a hall of sufficient height, positioned at the front of the school to assist with the arrival and departure of the children that are brought in by minibus. This hall and associated rooms are located within a part of the

extension that projects in a northerly direction towards the dwellings on Dulas Avenue. This projects forwards by approximately 22m, and would be 8m from the boundary with the adjacent neighbour. This element also has to cope with the changes in levels and as such the eastern section would be approximately 4.5m to eaves height and the western part of the hall would be 7m to eaves height. The plans have been amended to try and address the concerns raised, and part of this forward projection has now been reduced, the plant room roof has been altered to a flat roof, and the wall moved back slightly to increase the planting area. The facing wall of this projection is proposed to be painted with a mural. The remaining building utilises brickwork at lower levels with lightweight panelling and standing seam profiled sheet metal cladding to roof.

- 1.4 The internal road layout will be altered with the 'roundabout' and central parking (12 spaces) retained at the entrance, in a revised form. A 4.5m wide roadway is proposed along the northern boundary of the site leading to a car park accommodating 22 spaces. Planting and landscaping is proposed along the boundaries of the car park and roadway.

## 2. Policies

### 2.1 National Planning Policy Framework:

The following paragraphs (extracts of) are of particular relevance

#### *Paragraph 17*

'always seek to secure high quality design and good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and building'

'take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs'

#### *Paragraph 58*

'... Planning policies and decision should aim to ensure that developments:

- Will function well and add to the quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development; ...
- Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping ...'

#### *Paragraph 72*

'The government attaches great importance to ensuring that sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local Planning Authorities should take a proactive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:

- Give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools; ...'

### 2.2 Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan:

S1	-	Sustainable Development
S2	-	Development Requirements
S6	-	Transport
S11	-	Community Facilities and Services
DR1	-	Design
DR2	-	Land Use and Activity
DR3	-	Movement

DR4	-	Environment
DR14	-	Lighting
T11	-	Parking Provision
T14	-	School Travel
CF5	-	New Community Facilities

- 2.3 The Unitary Development Plan policies together with any relevant supplementary planning documentation can be viewed on the Council's website by using the following link:-

<http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/housing/planning/29815.asp>

### 3. Planning History

- |     |                 |  |
|-----|-----------------|--|
| 3.1 | HC940012JZ      | Construction of new Blackmarston Special School of 1100 sq m floor area associated play areas and vehicular parking and turning facilities. Approved 31 January 1994.  |
| 3.2 | HC940462JZ      | Construction of new Blackmarston Special School of 1100 sq m floor area associated play areas and vehicular parking and turning facilities. Approved 12 December 1994.   |
| 3.3 | DCCW2004/2623/F | Provision of modular building for use as temporary nursery. Council Approved Application 7 September 2004.   |
| 3.4 | DCCW2005/2099/F | Landscaping of existing turfed area between playground and boundary. Approved 12 December 1994.  |
| 3.5 | S100582/CD      | Provision of 1 no. new mobile to provide additional facilities for children with special needs with hygiene room and canopy linking outside space to adjacent mobile. Withdrawn 21 May 2010.                       |
| 3.6 | S101203/CD      | Retention of existing mobile building and provision of 1 no. mobile building and link canopy adjacent to provide additional facilities for children with special needs. Council Approved Application 24 June 2010. |

### 4. Consultation Summary

#### Statutory Consultees

- 4.1 Sport England comments as follows:

The area proposed for the school extension lies adjacent to the boundary with Marlbrook School Playing Field. This boundary means that the area affected by the application is physically and functionally separate from the adjacent playing field and its function is considered to be general open space and landscape area associated with Blackmarston School.... In addition to not affecting the adjacent playing field, or prejudicing its use, the proposed development would also appear not to impact on any other opportunities for sport. This being the case, Sport England does not wish to raise an objection to this application.

#### Internal Council Advice

- 4.2 The Traffic Manager recommends condition and comments that the proposed increase in car parking and minibus parking is considered to be acceptable provision for the proposed development.

- 4.3 The Environmental Health Manager raises no objection to the proposed development but requests conditions in respect of external lighting and hours of working during construction.
- 4.4 The Conservation Manager (Landscape) makes the following comments:

It is a shame that the size of the new building significantly limits the amenity space available to create a high quality landscape setting for this school. The access and car park requirements further reduce the areas available for planting and dominate the front of the site. Proposals for a combination of high quality, varied, hard surface materials could be used to improve the appearance of these areas. There are several trees, including a small woodland area that will be lost during development and the roughly marked up drawing does not represent a thorough tree survey. It is noted that new planting is shown to the boundaries, however for a development such as this I would expect a proposed landscape scheme to be detailed as an integral part of the application.

If this application is to be approved then I request the following conditions are added:

- Tree protection for retained trees in accordance with BS5837:2005 'Trees in relation to construction'.
- A hard and soft landscape scheme.
- Details of the construction and material for the gabion retaining wall and boundary fencing.
- Details of the new play area, including the tree planted sensory area.

## 5. Representations

- 5.1 Hereford City Council make the following comments: We support the principle, however, we are worried about the impact of the increased traffic on the surrounding roads. The new site should also have an adequate screening to prevent overlooking of the neighbouring residential properties.

Amended plans - Although we appreciate the necessity for extension, the plans, as presented, will be too overpowering and will have too great impact over the neighbours.

- 5.2 Letters of objection have been received from:

L V Yarwood, 31, Dulas Avenue  
Mr and Mrs G Jones, 29 Dulas Avenue  
Angela Poyner (adjacent neighbour)

These letters raise the following issues:

- Impact on privacy / overlooking
- Impact on view and loss of light / sunlight / make everything darker
- Object to car park at bottom of garden due to noise and disturbance
- Request fence be erected on boundary with car park
- Additional fencing may be like caging us into our property overlooked by a monstrosity of a building
- May generate more noise / car fumes
- Querying why extension cannot run alongside the side of the building nearest to Marlbrook?

- 5.3 The application has also generated significant amount of support as follows:

32 letters of support from parents / staff / local residents  
24 signatures on copied letters (no addresses)  
9 letters from the children at the school

These letters raise the following issues:

- The school is the only school in Herefordshire that caters for children with special needs both physically and mentally.
- The school was built for 40 pupils and already has over 70 pupils and is 'bursting at the seams'. The pattern for demand will continue to grow.
- There has been / is an increase in children with profound multiple learning and physical learning difficulties that need / require specialist equipment (wheelchairs, walkers, standing frames etc)
- Huge demand for space and lack of availability impacts upon level and quality of care and support to children as well as parents and carers
- Classes are cramped so not all classes have the full range of activities
- Existing portacabins are unsuitable for children and their needs (leaking roofs, uneven floors, temperature of buildings)
- School hall used for many activities, but there is a lack of storage and as such limited on how it can be used.

Examples of some of space issues within the school:

- The school has a large team of dedicated staff.
- Small and inadequate staff room.
- The existing school was built due to problems of overcrowding, lack of space etc, and these problems have re-occurred and we are in the same situation with a desperate need for additional accommodation to house the children that are already in the school.
- Query why other main stream school have had new schools and buildings?
- Refusing planning permission will mean that the children would not receive the education that they are entitled to and families would lose a life line (break for child care).
- Acknowledgement of the help and support that the school gives parents and carers.

5.4 The consultation responses can be viewed on the Council's website by using the following link:-

[www.herefordshire.gov.uk/housing/planning/searchplanningapplications.aspx](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/housing/planning/searchplanningapplications.aspx)

Internet access is available at the Council's Customer Service Centres:-

[www.herefordshire.gov.uk/community\\_and\\_living/consumer\\_advice/41840.asp](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/community_and_living/consumer_advice/41840.asp)

## **6. Officer's Appraisal**

6.1 The key issues for the consideration of this application are:

- The principle of and need for the proposed development
- Design and impact
- Landscaping
- Parking and Highways
- Drainage
- Habitat Regulations

The principle of and need for the proposed development

6.2 Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan Policy CF5 is broadly supportive of development that would result in the provision of new or improved community facilities, including educational facilities, where they are considered to be appropriate in scale to the need of the community and reflect the character of the locality; are located within or around the settlement or area they serve; would not significantly impact upon the amenity of neighbouring residents; and incorporate safe and convenient pedestrian access together with appropriate provision of car and cycle parking and operational space.

- 6.3 Blackmarston School outgrew its original building on Ross Road and the new Blackmarston School opened in 1997. It was designed to accommodate 40 pupils. This need at the time was primarily for children with learning difficulties. The school was designed operationally with this in mind, but now has to cope with many more physical disabilities. The school is currently accommodating around 70 pupils age 2 - 11, and is utilising 3 mobile classrooms located within the playground / outside area. The school is the only primary aged special school in Herefordshire that caters for children with severe and complex learning difficulties and disabilities. There has been a significant increase in the schools population in the last 4 years and national projections suggest continued rises in the births and survival of children with severe and complex learning difficulties and disabilities.
- 6.4 As represented in the significant number of letters received from parents and staff, the school, and its staff are operating with significant limitations in respect of space for teaching, therapies, hygiene rooms and care, storage and many operational restrictions that are hampering the ability of the school to provide appropriate levels of education and care. The lack of space also restricts the school's ability to offer support to parents and carers of the pupils.
- 6.5 Having visited the school, and in taking account the representations from the parents, teachers and governors, it is clear that the school is, without doubt, in need of additional space to provide the facilities that are required to provide the full specialist educational provision to meet the needs of their pupils. The proposed school would provide facilities for 80 pupils, with one additional teacher and three additional support staff.
- 6.6 The school serves the whole of the County, and as such, its location within Hereford City is such that it is central to the wider community that it serves. The present need for a facility of this size is apparent, with the proposed extension providing for the 71 children currently enrolled, plus the ability to take an extra 9. Therefore the extension is responding to an identified need and is not considered to be out of scale given its wide County catchment.

#### Design and impact

- 6.7 In designing this extension there are several key constraints and parameters that needed to be considered. The site itself has a number of constraints, including road access, overlooking, security, site contours and levels, relationships with neighbours and Marlbrook school. There is also a restricted budget and the need to ensure that the works are planned and phased around the operation of the school to ensure continued running in a safe way and not causing distress to pupils.
- 6.8 Notwithstanding the identified and pressing need, it is a requirement of Policy CF5 that the development should not significantly impact upon the amenity of neighbour residents;
- 6.9 As the project has developed there have been several schemes that have been explored and dismissed for sound reasons, including budgetary, land and construction constraints. This included the potential for utilising some land within the Marlbrook school boundary, however this conflicts with the policies and principles in relation to the protection of playing fields and was considered likely to have attracted an objection from Sport England.
- 6.10 The design of the building that is now being considered is such that it meets the requirements and functional needs of the school, meets budgetary constraints and can be built whilst accommodating the existing school. The building is a large building, that is significant in scale and mass, and is some 3m taller than the original school. The bulk and mass of the building has been broken up somewhat by the mix of materials and differences in roof heights, but, nonetheless it is of a considerably different scale than the original building and of the residential properties that surround it.

- 6.11 The key issue is not the detailed design of the building, but the context that it sits within. The existing school sits in a position that is elevated above those of the dwellings that face this application site (Dulas Avenue and Stanberrow Road). The ground (garden) level of number 29 Dulas Avenue is over 2m lower than that of the height of the adjoining land which then rises to the car park of the existing school. Therefore when the site is viewed from the first floor bedrooms of this dwelling, the car parking is at the same level. The boundary of this property is already a substantial and imposing height of almost three metres, over which the parked cars can be viewed. The proposed extension would be sited 8m from the boundary of these dwellings, with a roadway in between. The distance from the rear of number 29 (that has been extended by projecting rearwards) to the wall of the proposed extension would be approximately 20m. The proposed building would be 4.5m to the eaves from the existing raised ground level and over 6m in height rising as the roof slopes away towards the main part of the building to a height of 6.5m (above ground level). The main building being 8m in height (above existing ground level). The close proximity coupled with the scale and mass of the building would represent a development that would be overbearing and intrusive, and that would impact on the living conditions and amenities currently enjoyed by the occupants of these dwellings. Whilst the occupants of number 29 are likely to be most affected, those that reside in numbers 31 and 33 are also likely to be adversely affected due to the proximity, size and scale of the proposed extension.
- 6.12 In order to try and address the concerns raised by officers the plans have been amended. These amendments do go some way to improving the relationship by reducing the extent of the of the hall roof, reducing the plant room roof height and setting back the wall to allow further planting. However, it is your officer's opinion that the proposed extension would still be unacceptable. There is mitigation proposed by way of planting, but this will do little to address the imposing nature of the building, which at this scale and in such close proximity cannot be readily softened. As such, the proposal would fail to comply with the requirements of Policies DR2 and CF5 that seek to ensure that new community facilities would not significantly impact upon the amenity of neighbouring residents.

#### Landscaping

- 6.13 Letters of representation also raise concern about the car park that would be sited on the boundary of the adjacent properties. Whilst no fence is proposed, this is something that could be provided by way of a condition, and which would go some way to protecting the privacy and amenities of neighbours from car park users. Landscaping could, in time, also help to form a more robust boundary. Additional landscaping throughout the site is also proposed, and a comprehensive landscaping scheme could be sought through a condition as recommended by the Council's Landscape Officer and as required by Policy LA6 of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan.

#### Parking and Highways

- 6.14 One of the key considerations raised during the pre-application process was the need to provide sufficient parking for the staff and parents to ensure that parking provision does not spill out onto the adjacent residential roads. The Traffic Manager is satisfied that enough parking has been provided within the site to accommodate the high numbers of staff that are employed at this special school. The majority of children are brought in by minibus from across the County and arrivals and departures are carefully co-ordinated with the school. This reliance upon mini-bus travel was a key consideration in the design of the school, with the hall being located close to the drop off point as children are gathered in the hall to wait for buses and in the mornings. Given the specialist nature of the school, and its large catchment, the use of mini-buses is the most sustainable method of transport for many of the pupils. The proposal would also not result in a practical significant increase in pupils at the school and as such, traffic movements and parking provision is unlikely to impact on highway safety in

accordance with the requirements of Policies DR3 and CF5 of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan.

#### Habitat Regulations Assessment / Drainage

- 6.15 The Council has recently identified an issue regarding phosphate levels in some of its watercourses. These are particularly high in the River Wye and this has significant implications due to its designation as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This designation gives the river European protection and the Council has a legal requirement as a competent authority under the Habitat Regulations to take into account the effects of development on it. This is different from the normal planning position of balancing competing issues or demands and assessing cases whereby impacts can be traded off against each other. The Regulations effectively superimpose on the normal process a structured, precautionary process which must be followed in order that a lawful decision can be reached. Because the cumulative 'in combination' effects of individual small scale schemes need to be assessed as part of that process, the Council must be convinced that the scheme in question will not adversely affect the integrity of the watercourse. If it cannot satisfy itself on that point, the scheme cannot proceed.
- 6.16 The development is likely to increase phosphates entering the Special Area of Conservation, however the recent SIMCAT report from the Environment Agency demonstrates that there is sufficient headroom regarding phosphate levels for this application alone or in combination with other plans and projects, as referred to in the table below, to comply with the Conservation Objectives for the SAC. In the event that Members resolve to approve this application, a formal HRA screening would need to be undertaken. Notwithstanding this, the position is potentially subject to change and if required a further update will be provided at the Committee meeting.

#### Conclusions

- 6.17 There is, without doubt, a need for this school to be extended to provide the additional space for the facilities that are required to provide the full specialist educational provision to meet the needs of pupils. However, there is a need to balance policies that seek to support the needs of this school and its pupils with the policies that seek to protect the amenities of residents and the enjoyment of their properties. In this instance, it is your officer's opinion that, by virtue of its size, scale, siting, proximity and mass this proposed extension would have a significant and detrimental impact on the amenities of the these residents. As such the proposed development is recommended for refusal as it would be contrary to the requirements of Policies CF5 and DR2 of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That planning permission be refused for the following reason:**

- 1. The proposed development, by virtue of its size, scale, mass, siting, proximity to the boundary would have a significant and detrimental impact on the amenities of the adjoining residential properties, contrary to Policies DR2 and CF5 of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan.**



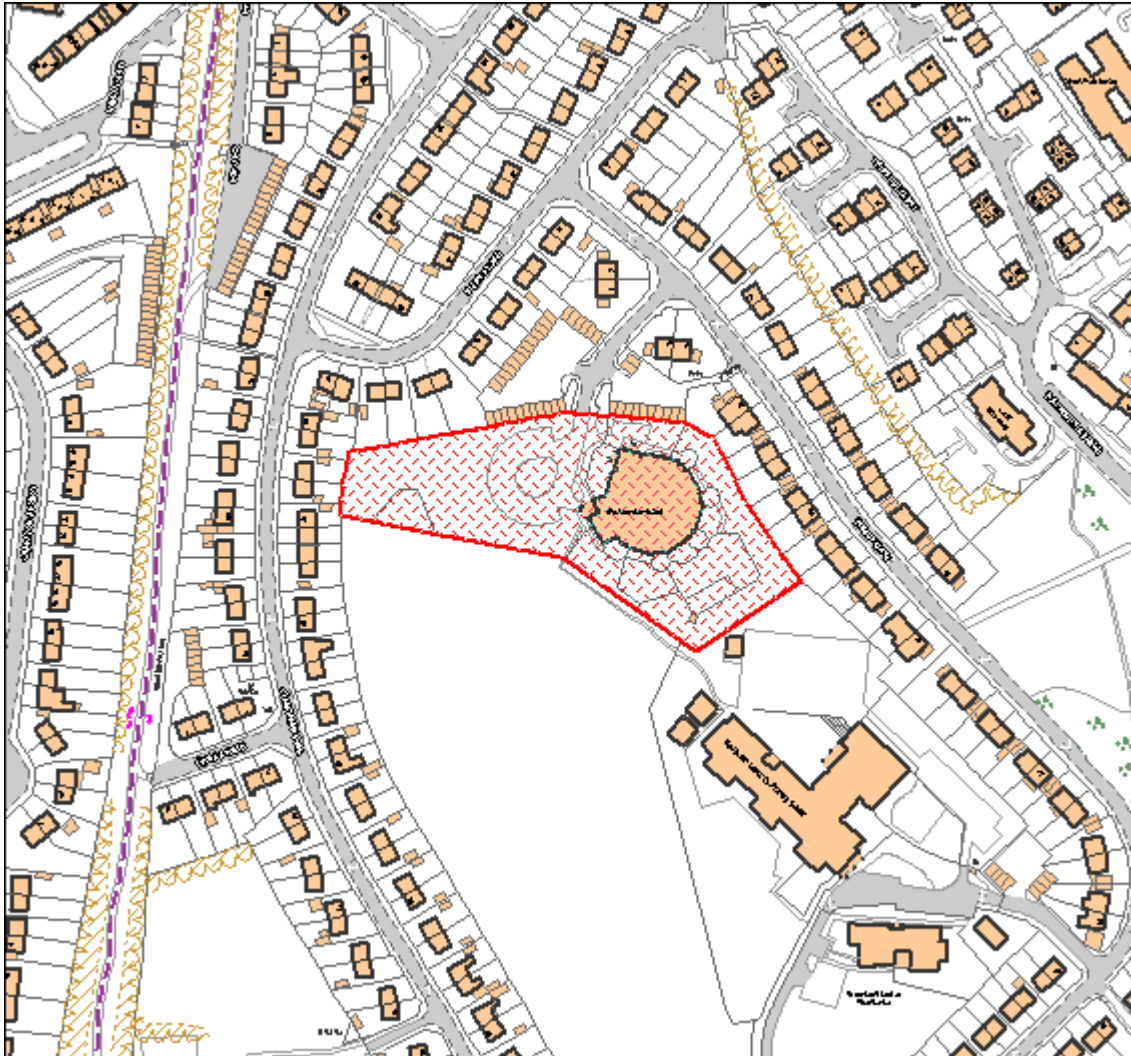
Decision: .....

Notes: .....

.....

**Background Papers**

Internal departmental consultation replies.



This copy has been produced specifically for Planning purposes. No further copies may be made.

**APPLICATION NO:** S/120539/CD

**SITE ADDRESS:** BLACKMARSTON DAY SCHOOL, HONDDU CLOSE, HEREFORD, HR2 7NX

Based upon the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Herefordshire Council. Licence No: 100024168/2005