

Application No: 14/0676C

Location: Sandbach County High School for Girls, Middlewich Road, Sandbach, Sandbach, Cheshire, CW11 3NT

Proposal: 1) Development of a new 6th form building to consolidate all the 6th form teaching facilities into one building; 2) part demolition and refurbishment of existing building G8way1 & G8way2 to improve learning facilities and provide opportunity for G8way2 to provide a wider community resource; and 3) associated public realm works

Applicant: John Leigh, Sandbach High School & Sixth Form Colleg

Expiry Date: 01-May-2014

**SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION – Approve with conditions**

**MAIN ISSUES**

- Principle of Use
- Visual impact on the existing building/facility
- Landscape
- Nature Conservation

**REASON FOR REFERRAL**

The proposals are for small scale major development.

**DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT**

The site is Sandbach High School (for girls) and Sixth Form College is situated to the north of the Middlewich Road in Sandbach. The application site is in two distinct areas, east and west, of the overall campus.

The campus additionally comprises the Leisure Centre and is well within extensive grounds including a playing field.

**DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

This application is for a new build element within the existing school grounds. A dedicated Sixth Form College building is proposed and the re-use the old sixth form building as a new vocation and community building. The provision of the new Sixth Form College would require the removal of a number of portacabins and the re-configuring of the semi permanent building that currently accommodates the sixth form, as well as associated external works to the surrounding school grounds including the provision of additional car parking.

By vacating the Sixth Form uses from this existing building, and through part demolition, and a small extension to the building, a new vocational and community orientated facility would be provided.

This planning application is for the full scheme (phase 1 and 2), however due to the funding process the scheme would be delivered in two phases.

The new Sixth Form building has been designed so to be implemented in two phases. The first phase ensures the provision of a fully functioning / self contained new Sixth Form Hub whilst phase 2 funding is being procured. A phased approach is proposed as it allows for a number of the teaching areas to be decanted from the existing Sixth Form building during the construction process to enable the school to remain operational throughout.

The first phase provides a new build three storey Sixth Form building. This new building aims to bring together essential built elements to help create a dedicated separate three story Sixth Form building. These include social and independent learning spaces as well as a number of the more formal teaching rooms. There is also a degree of internal refurbishment to the existing building and a small extension.

The second phase comprises an extension to the new build three storey Sixth Form providing additional formal teaching spaces. The second phase also comprises of the part demolition of and a new entrance to the old building in the east of the site. Also included in the second phase are the external works and the additional car parking of over 50 new spaces in the east of the site.

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

The site has an extensive history, but none is directly relevant to this proposal.

## **POLICIES**

### **National Planning Policy**

National Planning Policy Framework

### **Local Plan Policy**

GR1 (New Development)

GR2 (Design)

GR4 (Landscaping)

GR6 (Amenity and Health)

GR9 (Access)

NR1 (Trees and Woodlands)

NR4 (Non-statutory sites)

RC2 (Protected Area of Open Space/Recreational Facility)

### **Emerging Local Plan Policy**

SD1 (Sustainable Development)

SD2 (Sustainable Development)

SE1 (Design)  
SE5 (Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland)

**Other Material Considerations - None**

**CONSIDERATIONS (External to Planning) –**

Highways – The improved parking proposals are noted and the existing access operates safely. The Transport Statement is satisfactory and there are no objections to the scheme.

Environmental Health – No objections subject to conditions related to pile foundations, construction hours, travel plan, dust control and contaminated land.

Leisure Services - The leisure service with responsibility for management of the leisure centre is very supportive of the proposed development. In addition to making a positive contribution from an educational perspective, by refocusing the sixth form provision to the opposite end of the site away from the leisure centre entrance this should in turn reduce the volume of daytime school pupil use in this area and therefore support and improve the current access for community leisure users. The management of Sandbach Leisure Centre will shortly transfer to the new Everybody Sport & Recreation Trust and to allow for the continuing success of the leisure centre they will seek assurances that public car parking and access for community users are not adversely affected either during the construction phase (subject to approval of the application) or post completion.

Sport England – No objections as there is an adequate supply of quality playing field and it is not possible to layout a playing pitch in the area proposed for development.

United Utilities – No objections.

**VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL-** Accept that the school requires additional facilities, however, seek assurance that public access and parking for the Leisure Centre will not be reduced or harmed.

**OTHER REPRESENTATIONS –**

Fourteen letters of support have been received on the basis of the need for the enhanced modern facilities at the school. One letter of general observation has been received expressing concern that the new development may impinge on privacy and the need for the school to provide new fencing and boundary treatment.

A local Group, *Middlewich Road Residents Association* have commented that:-

*“1) Residents are concerned about the ongoing intensification of the High School site and the impact that this has had, and is having on the local environment. As such residents do not support any proposals that would result in increased numbers of pupils at the school campus, (as it is considered that this would compound existing problems).*

*2) Residents do not support any proposal that would result in a further vehicular access being provided on Middlewich Road, (as it is considered that this would not solve or reduce existing*

highway problems).

3) Residents do not support proposals to increase the number of car parking spaces on the site, (as this would exacerbate current highway problems). Residents consider that the High School should develop a 'Green Travel Plan' that would reduce vehicular movements to the site. Residents also suggest that the High School should consider 'controlling' car parking on the site, and utilising the existing Platt Avenue vehicular access for some vehicle movements. Residents also suggest the High School should work in partnership with the local authority in relation to car parking.

4) Residents are concerned about any proposal to remove trees and landscaping, (and consider that where trees or shrubs are removed as part of any proposal they should be replaced by other landscaping/trees in a suitable location elsewhere on the site, and that every tree cut down should be replaced by two mature trees elsewhere on the site). Residents also consider that previously removed trees/landscaping should be reinstated. It is noted that it is proposed to remove a copse of mature trees adjacent to the pond. Where mature trees are removed residents are of the view that replacement trees should be similarly 'mature'.

5) Residents are concerned about the very poor appearance of the Middlewich Road frontage of the High School and consider that any proposal for new buildings on the site should be on the basis of new structures of a much higher standard.

6) Residents also suggest that in developing a 'Strategic Masterplan' for the site, that this should include a specific proposal to remove the telecommunications mast from the High School roof, (as residents consider that the mast is unacceptable both in terms of appearance and long term health risk to pupils attending the High School, and residents in the local area, and that if a 'precautionary approach' had been adopted the mast would not have been erected).

7) Residents are concerned about the capacity of the sewerage system in the vicinity and its ability to take additional loading from any new development.

8) Residents would not support any proposal to heat a new building by utilising a biomass boiler.

9) Residents consider that detailed discussions should take place with Sandbach School (boys school) in relation to the operation of a 6th form facility that is provided 'jointly', and that would enable additional numbers of 6th form pupils to be accommodated with a wide range of subjects.

10) Residents also suggest that prior to progressing any new build programme, that the High School fully explores the possibility of utilising other buildings located on Middlewich Road that are currently unoccupied.

11) Residents are aware that planning applications have been approved to greatly increase the number of houses in the area, and that there will inevitably be increased demand for High School places in the future. Residents consider that this increased demand should not be met by increasing capacity at the existing Sandbach High School campus.

*12) Residents are concerned about existing 'signage' at the site and would like to be specifically consulted in relation to any proposals in relation to signage.*

*13) Residents are concerned about the condition of the existing pond and suggest that the 'Cheshire Wildlife Trust' should be consulted by the High School in order that a programme of cleaning and maintenance can be developed and implemented."*

## **APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION – Design & Access Statement**

### **OFFICER APPRAISAL**

#### **Principle of Development**

The application site is located within a settlement and therefore this type of development is acceptable providing it accords with policies GR1, GR2, GR4 and GR6 in the local plan and advice contained within the NPPF. The whole site is protected by Policy RC2, however, a small amount of 0.07 hectares of open space are to be lost to provide the new sixth form building .

This development is acceptable within the context of policy RC2 as it would support and enhance the overall school facility and not impinge on the usable areas of open space. Additionally, Sport England has no objections to the application.

#### **Visual impact**

The proposal is both attractive and functional and would fit with the current building layout. A striking timber cantilever would create a pavilion with a stepped viewing terrace to overlook the playing fields. The new sixth form building was originally proposed with a roof design (overhang) feature that was considered to detract from the overall visual simplicity of the scheme and thus the applicants have revised the drawing to omit this particular feature. The development of the community and vocational building would involve a new entrance and reuse and refurbishment to most recent additions to that building.

It is considered that the revised proposals are much more in keeping with this overall more "suburban" site. The extensions in the east of the site to existing buildings are more modest and would not be readily visible from outside the site as they are at single storey.

There is a very contemporary modern vernacular to the scheme for the new sixth form building that has an attractive palette of materials defined into vertical blocks that would enhance the visual amenity of the overall facility and would have no adverse impact on the existing building or the locality and is in accordance with Local Plan policies GR1 and GR2. The public realm works would also further enhance and create a sense of place by rationalising and zoning the various components on the site.

#### **Amenity**

The proposals are for school related development within a school site and it is not considered that the proposals would breach any concerns in respect of amenity. The new sixth form looks out towards the playing fields and there is no direct overlooking of houses on Middlewich Road as the development would be "side on". The management and the movement of people within the site is an issue that all school environments must continue to monitor within their own day to day routine. Thus, the proposals comply with policy GR6.

### **Landscape and trees**

The Landscape Officer is satisfied that the public realm works are acceptable and suggests that landscape conditions requiring the submission of full hard and soft details are submitted. This alleviates concerns expressed by residents wishing to see replanting that would be carried out as part of the proposals. Conditions are also proposed requiring additional levels information and cross sections to address landscape features. Thus, the application complies with policy NR1.

### **Nature Conservation**

The Nature Conservation Officer has advised that, in terms of Great Crested\_Newts, a number of ponds are present within 250m of the proposed development. A detailed great crested newt survey has not been undertaken therefore presence/absence of breeding great crested newts at these ponds is unknown. The potential habitats offered by the proposed development site are limited in terms of their value. Therefore the potential adverse impacts of the development relate to the risk of individual great crested newts venturing into the site during the construction process. To mitigate this risk the applicant's consultant has suggested a suit of 'Reasonable Avoidance Measures' and it is advised that provided these measures are implemented the risk posed to great crested newts would be avoided and the proposed development would be highly unlikely to result in a breach of the Habitat Regulations. A condition is proposed accordingly.

No evidence of roosting bats was recorded during the submitted survey. Due to the time of year when the survey was undertaken no bat emergence surveys could be completed. However, considering the limited potential of the affected buildings to support roosting bats an adequate level of survey has been completed and no further action in respect of bats is required.

Hedgerows are a Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat and hence a material consideration. The submitted extended phase one habitat survey states that a section of hedgerow will be lost as a result of the proposed development and it should be ensured that this loss is compensated for as part of the detailed condition requiring a landscaping scheme for the site. A condition is also to be attached to safeguard breeding birds:

Badgers and Hedgehogs\_are known to occur within 1km of the school; however no evidence of them was recorded during the submitted surveys. These species are unlikely to be present or significantly affected by the proposed development and no further action is required.

Therefore, with appropriate conditions the application accords with policy NR4.

### **Other matters**

The Residents Association raise a number of issues that are not directly relevant to this application and relate to the overall development strategy for the school. Their concerns regarding landscaping are addressed by condition and United Utilities and the Highways Officer have no objections in respect of drainage and access/car parking respectively.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION**

It would not have any detrimental impact on the existing buildings and the proposals are a positive addition both architecturally and in facility terms for the community of Sandbach. It is therefore considered to be wholly acceptable and in accordance with the relevant policies of the Local Plan and the NPPF.

### **RECOMMENDATION- Approve**

#### **Conditions**

- 1. Full**
- 2. Approved Plans**
- 3. Materials as submitted details.**
- 4. Pile Foundations**
- 5. Hours of construction**
- 6. Travel Plan**
- 7. Dust Control**
- 8. Contamination**
- 9. Landscape scheme**
- 10. Landscape implementation**
- 11. Great crested newts**
- 12. Breeding birds**

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