

Application No: 15/2887C

Location: SANDBACH SCHOOL, CREWE ROAD, SANDBACH, CHESHIRE, CW11 3NS

Proposal: Introduction of approximately 1000LM of fencing in targeted areas across the site and 10no. security gates

Applicant: Deborah Torjussen, Sandbach School

Expiry Date: 21-Aug-2015

SUMMARY:

The site is within the Settlement Zone Line of Sandbach, where there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The fencing and gates would give improved safety and security to the school and its pupils and staff, which weighs in favour of the proposal.

Following the amendments to the style and height of the proposed gates and fencing, the impact on the setting of the listed building is considered to be acceptable.

Subject to conditions, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of its impact upon heritage assets, highway safety, amenity, landscape, trees and design.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve subject to conditions

CALL IN

The application has been called in to Committee on the following grounds:

"In view of the public interest and concern with the proposed installation of 1000m of 6/8ft metal fencing, this application should be considered at a public planning committee meeting rather than simply being delegated to Officers. Members of the public can then observe the democratic process and also make representations to Committee Members as appropriate.

- 1. The living conditions of residents whose properties back onto school grounds to ensure the scheme is not visually obtrusive and does not block natural daylight.*
- 2. The impact on this prominent landmark site with the main block of the school as a designated Grade II listed building and whether the scheme would be visually 'jarring'; this would be in the form of whether the proposal is considered to be sympathetic to*

the character and appearance of the site along with the surrounding areas.. The site's original buildings were designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott.

- 3. The frontage of the school in terms of the school's location on one of the main approaches to our historic market town and also on the amenity of the town as a whole.*

PROPOSAL

The application proposes the erection of fencing and gates in targeted areas across the school site. The fencing and gates would be a mixture of welded mesh panel fencing, architectural fencing, wooden fencing and architectural gates.

Originally the proposal was for more extensive and inappropriate fencing that would have an unacceptable impact on the setting of the Listed Building and would also restrict access for residents of Middlewich Road to maintain their boundaries with the site. Following meetings with the school, Officers and local Ward Members, this has now been addressed.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site comprises the school campus which has several buildings, sports pitches, car parking and other areas of hard standing. Several of the buildings are modern additions to the complex but there are two Grade II Listed Buildings within the site, Grammar School and Grammar School Lodge.

These two buildings were designed by the architect Sir George Gilbert Scott. The Grammar School is described as Victorian Style and the Lodge as Gothic Style. Both are significant heritage assets and their setting is an important consideration.

The site is situated on the western side of Crewe Road, Sandbach and is within the Sandbach Settlement Zone Line.

RELEVANT HISTORY

There are several historic applications on this site, none of which are relevant to this application.

NATIONAL & LOCAL POLICY

National Policy:

The National Planning Policy Framework establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Of particular relevance are paragraphs 128 – 134 inclusive.

Development Plan:

The Development Plan for this area is the adopted Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review 2005, which allocates the site as being within the within Open Countryside.

The relevant Saved Policies are: -

PS4 – Towns
GR1 – New Development
GR2 – Design
GR3 – Density, Housing Mix and Layout
GR4 – Landscaping
GR6 – Amenity and Health
GR9 - Accessibility, Servicing and Parking Provision
GR22 – Open Space Provision
BH4 – Listed Buildings

SPD14 – Trees and Development

The saved Local Plan policies are consistent with the NPPF and should be given full weight.

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version (CELP)

The following are considered relevant material considerations as indications of the emerging strategy:

SD 1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East
SD 2 Sustainable Development Principles
SE 1 Design
SE 4 The Landscape
SE 5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland
PG 1 Overall Development Strategy
SE7 The Historic Environment

CONSULTATIONS:

Town Council 14/07/15:

Object on the following grounds:

- Applicant failed to consult with residents on style, scale and position of proposed fencing.
- Installation of proposed style and colour of fencing along Crewe Road would have a detrimental impact on the iconic view of the school and therefore adversely affect the setting of this listed building.
- Erecting fencing along boundary line will prevent residents accessing and maintaining their own hedging.
- The proposals are out of keeping with the built heritage of the Town.
- Members feel it would be more appropriate and cost effective to review and increase security to the main building, rather than install sections of fencing at various positions along the land boundaries.

At the time of report writing, the Town Council has not commented on the amendments to the proposal, however the Town Clerk has indicated that if necessary they will register a representative to speak for the Town Council at the meeting.

REPRESENTATIONS:

Neighbour notification letters were sent to neighbouring properties and a site notice posted.

On the original proposal fifty four representations were received. These can be viewed in full on the Council website. Thirty one of the representations were in support of the proposal and twenty three objected to it.

Those supporting the proposal made the following observations:

- Need to protect children, staff and the buildings
- Safety of children is paramount
- Danger due to the open nature of the site
- Anyone can gain access to the site
- Most cost effective solution
- The school should not have to prove the need for these measures
- Neighbouring residents should not have access to the school playing fields

Those objecting to the application expressed the following concerns:

- Inappropriate design of fencing and gates to the detriment of the setting of the Listed Building
- Impact on an iconic view
- Ugly and unsightly
- More appropriate for an industrial estate
- Would make the school look like a 'prison camp'
- Would create an adverse impression of 'Crime and Community Safety'
- Damage to trees, wildlife and biodiversity
- Could impact access to emergency services
- Could lead to cars backing up on to Crewe Road
- Feeling of enclosure
- Lack of access to maintain hedges
- Loss of privacy
- Other means would address security at the site
- Ofsted report says that safety at the school is good
- No risk assessment carried out or evidence of incidents relating to security
- Need is not urgent as the situation has existed for many years
- There should be proper supervision by school staff
- Loss of free access to the playing field

Following the submission of the amendments and at the time of report writing, 103 further representations have been received, 101 in favour of the proposal and 2 opposed to it.

Those supporting the proposal state that they believe the measures are necessary to ensure the safety and security of the school, its pupils, staff and the community using it.

One objector refers to loss of privacy. One considers that paranoia is being instilled into the staff and pupils by the many referrals to the school being unsafe without extensive and excessive security measures.

APPRAISAL

The key issues to be considered in the determination of this application are set out below.

Principle of Development

The site lies in the Settlement Zone Line as designated in the adopted Sandbach Borough Local Plan First Review 2005, where there is the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The issue in question is whether this proposal represents sustainable development and whether there are other material considerations associated with this proposal, which are a sufficient material consideration to outweigh the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Sustainability

The National Planning Policy Framework definition of sustainable development is:

“Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don’t mean worse lives for future generations. Development means growth. We must accommodate the new ways by which we will earn our living in a competitive world. We must house a rising population, which is living longer and wants to make new choices. We must respond to the changes that new technologies offer us. Our lives, and the places in which we live them, can be better, but they will certainly be worse if things stagnate. Sustainable development is about change for the better, and not only in our built environment”

There are, however, three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles:

an environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy

an economic role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;

a social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community’s needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and

These roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent.

ENVIRONMENTAL ROLE

Trees and Hedgerows

Several trees within the site are subject to Tree Protection Orders and the Council's Senior Arboricultural Officer has assessed the proposals. Some of the fencing would be in close proximity to trees and it is considered that it would be possible to mitigate this. A condition should be imposed requiring a detailed Construction Method Statement, incorporating a 'no-dig' method statement, to be submitted prior to the commencement of development.

Tree planting is proposed along the pedestrian entrance to the existing car park in order to soften the appearance of the fencing and the size and species of trees should be controlled by condition.

Design & Impact on the Listed Building

As originally submitted, the proposal included several areas of welded mesh panel fencing, 2.4m in height were proposed, in particular to the front of the cricket pitch adjacent to Crewe Road, and this was considered unacceptable by Officers in terms of its impact on the setting of the Listed Building (Heritage Asset).

The setting of heritage assets is defined in the NPPF as *"The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral."* Furthermore Planning Practice Guidance states that:

"A thorough assessment of the impact on setting needs to take into account and be proportionate to, the significance of the heritage asset under consideration and the degree to which proposed changes enhance or detract from that significance and the ability to appreciate it."

The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to visual considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part, the way we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust and vibration from other land uses in the vicinity, and by our understanding of the historic relationship between places. For example, buildings that are in close proximity but are not visible from each other may have a historic or aesthetic connection that amplifies the experience of each.

The contribution that setting makes to the significance of the heritage asset does not depend on there being public rights or an ability to access or experience that setting. This will vary over time and according to circumstance."

Having regard to this guidance and to Policy BH4 of the adopted local plan, officers entered into extensive discussions with the school and local members in order to effect changes to the scheme that would minimise potential impacts on the setting of the listed buildings within the site. The amended scheme was then put forward.

The changes result in the use of 'architectural' fencing on the boundary with the cricket pitch and Crewe Road and on the Lodge driveway and the use of simple 'architectural' design double leaf gates at the main entrance and the entrance to the Lodge.

Adjacent to the existing car park, a pedestrian walkway would be formed using 1.8m welded mesh panel fencing, low level wooden fencing and additional tree planting for screening.

After careful assessment, officers consider that the amendments would ensure that the proposed security measures would render the proposal acceptable. This is having regard to paragraph 134 of the NPPF, as it is considered that it would result in less than substantial harm to the heritage asset when weighed against the public benefits of ensuring the safety and security of the school.

The heights of the proposed fencing are now acceptable, however conditions must be imposed to ensure that the final design and finish of the gates and fences and any associated appurtenances are appropriate to their context.

Highways

New gates would be inserted at the main entrance to the site which would be electronically controlled in order to control access to the site. Discussions have been held with the Highways Development Manager about the new entrance and he considers that the new gates would be acceptable in highway safety terms, subject to them being set in from Crewe Road by a minimum of 12m. This is to ensure that large vehicles such as buses can safely pull off the carriageway in order to wait for access to the school grounds to be allowed. This should be secured by condition.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

The Framework includes a strong presumption in favour of economic growth.

Paragraph 19 states that:

'The Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth'

With regard to the economic role of sustainable development, the proposed development would involve some employment and economic benefits during construction.

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Neighbouring Residential Properties

The original proposals included fencing close up to the boundaries with properties on Middlewich Road. Several local residents expressed concerns about access to the playing fields, in particular to maintain their own boundary treatments and hedges.

Whilst there is no right of access for these residents to the school grounds however the school has now amended the plans to create a gap of 1.5m between the boundaries of these properties and the new fencing. This will allow for maintenance of the boundary treatments at these properties.

A part of the internal pathway is to be moved to allow for public use and the occupier of the neighbouring property has expressed concerns about loss of privacy. This could be done without the benefit of planning permission; however it is recommended that an informative is included in order to advise the school that screening should be provided at this point.

Response to Observations

The representations of the members of the public have been given careful consideration in the assessment of this application including and the issues raised are addressed within the individual sections of the report including the impact on the setting of the listed building, amenity, privacy, safety and security. These issues have all been weighed in the planning balance.

Conclusion – The Planning Balance

The site is within the Settlement Zone Line of Sandbach, where there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The fencing and gates would give improved safety and security to the school and its pupils and staff, which weighs in favour of the proposal.

Following the amendments to the style and height of the proposed gates and fencing, the impact on the setting of the listed building is considered to be acceptable.

Subject to conditions, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of its impact upon heritage assets, highway safety, amenity, landscape, trees and design.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve subject to the following conditions:

In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions / informatives / planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Planning & Enforcement Manager has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Northern Planning Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Time limit
2. Plans
3. Access
4. Gates
5. Details
6. Piers
7. Trees
8. Landscape

