

Application No: 19/2396N

Location: Site of Former Lodgefields School, Lodgefield Drive, Crewe, Cheshire

Proposal: Erection of a new two-storey SEND (Special Education Needs and Disability) school and associated landscaping.

Applicant: Henry Boot Construction Ltd

Expiry Date: 28-Aug-2019

SUMMARY

The proposal relates to the provision of a purpose built school (Axis Academy) to cater for special education needs and disability (SEND) for up to 40 children. It is located in a sustainable urban location and will utilise a vacant, previously used site formerly occupied by Lodgefields County Primary School which was demolished in 2007.

The new school development will meet the identified need for additional special school places within the borough, enabling the needs of pupils to be met locally through the provision of purpose built facilities.

The scheme is of a good quality, contemporary design, which satisfactorily respects the character and appearance of the locality.

The siting of the premises would not adversely affect the residential amenities of nearby dwellings.

The proposal, subject to conditions, would not have an adverse impact upon trees or ecology and also ensure that issues associated with drainage and contaminated land are addressed. Furthermore, it is considered that the anticipated traffic movements resulting from the new school, the proposals would not have harmful in impact on the local highway network in terms of traffic congestion or increased highway safety risks.

For these reasons, the proposals are considered to represent a sustainable form of development in accordance with the relevant requirements of the Development Plan and national planning policy.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve subject to Conditions

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site was formerly occupied by Lodgefields County Primary School, a single storey building that was demolished in 2007. The site comprises a small car park, the footprint of the former school buildings, playgrounds, and the overgrown school playing field which extends to the south and adjoins public open space alongside Wistaston Brook.

The site is located adjacent to a housing estate constructed in the 1970s, and accessed from Coppenhall Lane (A532) to the north via Lodgefields Drive.

Semi-detached and detached bungalows within Sharnbrook Drive back onto the western site boundary. Two storey properties on Lodgefields Drive overlook the site frontage and No.21 Lodgefield Drive adjoins the northern site boundary adjacent to the former school entrance.

A public right of way leading from Coppenhall Lane to the corridor of public open space containing Wistaston Brook runs alongside the eastern site boundary. Beyond this to the east are King George V Playing Fields and Queen's Park Golf Course.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

The proposals relate to the provision of a purpose built school (Axis Academy) to cater for special education needs and disability (SEND) for up to 40 children.

The new school will comprise the erection of a single and part two storey U-shape building located on the footprint of the former primary school. The 2-storey element of the building is located on the eastern side of the site, and away from the existing residential properties which lie to the north and west.

Access for parking, a drop off area, servicing and maintenance vehicles will be from Lodgefields Drive located to the north of the site from a new access point. A one-way system will be provided at the front of the school to provide a drop off area for parents, taxi and mini buses during peak periods. The drop off area will be accessed from the main entrance with vehicles returning to Lodgefields Drive via a proposed exit point located at the north western corner of the site. A separate pedestrian and cycle access will also be provided from Lodgefields Drive.

The former car parking area within the north western corner will be retained, reconfigured and extended along the north and eastern boundaries.

Internally the building will comprise teaching space, therapy space and staff offices to the ground floor. The two storey element will accommodate the main hall and further classrooms. The school is organised around a central corridor, with mainly administrative uses accommodated within the western part of the building adjacent to the boundary with properties of Sharnbrook Drive.

Areas of hard and soft outdoor social and sports space will surround the building including the provision of a Multi Use Games Area (18m x 33m), but which will not be floodlit. The school playing field will also be reinstated for formal sports use.

Proposed landscaping areas, including replacement trees and hedgerow and tree planting along the Lodgefields Drive site frontage. Areas of existing soft landscape around the southern perimeter of the playing field alongside the eastern site boundary will be managed and retained.

RELEVANT HISTORY

P04/1469 - Erection of Children's Play Equipment . Approved
17th January 2005

P03/1498 - Car Park Extension to form 3 spaces. Approved
5th February 2004

P03/0970 - 3 Mobile Classrooms to provide Pre School, Nursery and Out of Hours Clubs.
Approved 30th September 2003

P02/1118 - Single classroom extension to existing school building with 'Home Area' and cloakroom. Approved 20th November 2002

7/17290 - Single mobile classroom. Approved 6th July 1989

POLICIES

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy (CELPS)

MP1 Presumption in favour of sustainable development

PG1 Overall Development Strategy

PG2 Settlement hierarchy

SD1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East

SD2 Sustainable Development Principles

IN 1 Infrastructure

SC1 Leisure and recreation

SC2 Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities

SC3 Health and Wellbeing

SE1 Design

SE2 Efficient Use of Land

SE3 Biodiversity

SE5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodlands

SE6 Green Infrastructure

SE9 Energy Efficient Development

SE12 Pollution, Land contamination and land instability

SE13 Flood risk and water management

CO1 Sustainable Travel and Transport

It should be noted that the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was formally adopted on 27th July 2017. There are however policies within the legacy local plans that still apply and have not yet been replaced. These policies are set out below.

Adopted Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Local Plan

NE.5 (Nature Conservation and Habitats)
NE.9 (Protected Species)
NE.20 (Flood Prevention)
BE.1 (Amenity)
BE.3 (Access and Parking)
BE.4 (Drainage, Utilities and Resources)
TRAN.3 (Pedestrians)
TRAN.5 (Cycling)
TRAN.9 – (Car Parking Standards)
RT1 (Protection of open spaces with recreational or amenity value)

Other Material Considerations

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

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

CONSULTATIONS

Highways - No objection subject to conditions for cycle storage and Submission of Construction Management Plan.

Environmental Health - No objection. Subject to conditions requiring details and implementation of landfill gas mitigation measures, remediation of contamination, detail of any external flood lighting. Informative are also recommended in relation to working hours during construction, details of piling and foundation design, and dust management.

Flood Risk - No objection subject to a conditions requiring development to be carried out in accordance with the approved FRA and details of surface water drainage scheme.

United Utilities - No objection subject to condition requiring implementation of foul and surface drainage scheme.

Sport England - No objection

Cheshire Constabulary - No objection

VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL

Minshull Vernon Parish Council – Support the application.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

5 representations have been received, raising the following points of concern;

- No details of proposed street markings or parking restrictions around the entrance/exit to the site
- Vehicles will leave the site from the exit at the end of the cul-de-sac on the wrong side of the road due to parked vehicles alongside Lodgefields Drive
- the exit gate from the one way system is directly opposite the front of houses of Lodgefields Drive ensuing that vehicles can no longer park on the road directly outside of No.20 (on either side of the road)
- Given limited private driveway parking and to prevent obstruction of traffic from the school, a lay-by parking area should be provided on school side of Lodgefields Drive for sole use of properties opposite
- The turn around and drop off space within the site is very restricted so where will other vehicles wait when dropping off and picking up pupils?
- As traffic levels on the estate will increase, road markings at junctions should be made clearer, particularly at the junction of Lodgefields Drive and Sundale Drive
- Future access to site via Coppenhall Lane will become more problematic with the proposed closure of Sunnybank Road and resulting in increased traffic
- Increased highway safety risks as Lodgefield Drive is narrow and not designed to accommodate vehicle movements from proposed school
- No proposed speed restrictions on Lodgefields Drive
- Removal of trees and shrubs
- Some images submitted with the planning application are inaccurate

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

This previously used and vacant site lies within the within the Crewe settlement limit in a sustainable urban location where there is a presumption in favour of development.

Cheshire East Council has identified the need for additional special school places within the borough to enable the needs of pupils to be met locally. The proposed SEND free school will be delivered by the Department for Education, and operated by YES Trust.

Promoting healthy and safe communities is a key theme of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and of direct relevance to these proposals. In particular Paragraph 94 of the NPPF states that;

“It is important that sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should;

a) Give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications; and

b) Work with schools promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted”.

Furthermore CELPS Policy SC3 states that the Council will create and safeguard opportunities for safe, healthy, fulfilling and active lifestyles by:

'4) improving education and skills training and encourages life-long learning.'

It is therefore considered that the proposed development will secure the provision of a high quality and specialist learning facility, meeting identified local education needs, and thereby meet the aims of Policy SC3 and the NPPF.

Whilst having been disused for several years, the school playing fields are identified as being Protected Open Space within the Local Plan Proposals Map and is covered by Policy RT.1. Paragraph 97 of the NPPF also sets out that existing playing fields should not be built on, unless the "development is for alternative sports and recreational provision the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use".

In this case the siting of the proposed games court (MUGA) will result in a slight encroachment within the playing field. However, with regard to paragraph 97 of the NPPF, Sport England has advised that as the proposals will bring the playing fields back into active use and with the proposed improvement works, will provide multiple benefits for formal sport which would outweigh the loss of the small area of playing field.

Design

Whilst the new school is of part two storey height and of a contemporary, flat roofed appearance, it is of siting and design which would satisfactorily respect its residential context.

The school building is well set back from the site frontage with Lodgefields Drive, which ensures it would not constitute an unduly dominant feature in the street scene.

The use of materials however is particularly important with a building of this scale and its external treatment has been devised to be purposefully simple. In particular, the first floor element will be faced in white render with aim of softening the visual impact of the two storey part of the building, whilst coloured insets to the top of the main hall windows add some colour and interest to the façade. The remainder of the building will be clad in brickwork to reflect the appearance of surrounding properties.

A key design element of the building is the main entrance which will provide an attractive focal point to arrivals to the school from Lodgefields Drive, through the use of high quality materials including powder coated aluminium coloured soffit in the school's colours and fully glazed curtain walling to the entrance.

Care has been taken to ensure that the new school would achieve a satisfactory relationship with existing properties of Lodgefields Drive and Sharnbrook Drive. In particular the massing impact of the building has been reduced through its Western Wing being stepped down to being single storey adjacent to the neighbouring bungalows along Sharnbrook Drive which back onto the site.

It is considered that with the use of good quality materials and provision of effective hard and soft landscaping, the proposed school will create a positive learning environment for pupils

and staff, and the proposals accord with the design objectives of the development plan and of the NPPF.

In summary, the new school is of an acceptable siting and design, and whilst being a prominent feature at the end of Lodgefields Drive would not be detrimental to the character or appearance of the locality.

Ecology

The proposals will result in the loss of a section of semi-improved grassland habitat within the site. However, the Council's Ecologist has advised that the results of the Phase 1 Habitat Survey have demonstrated that the grassland habitat is not to be of Local Wildlife Site quality.

The Council's Ecologist has raised no objections to the scheme subject to conditions being imposed to protect breeding birds during the nesting season, the provision of wildlife sensitive lighting and the incorporation of features within the development to increase biodiversity.

Trees

The site is currently vacant and laid to self seeded shrub and pioneering tree cover. Mature Ash trees are situated adjacent to the western boundary and mature Oaks (Protected by TPO) to the southern boundary.

The proposals are accompanied by an Arboricultural Survey Report and supporting arboricultural information. This report has identified 18 individual trees and 1 group within the application site. A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) affords protection to two Oak trees within the site, (T12 and T13 of the TPO – T9 & T10 of the submitted report). An additional protected Oak (T11 of the original Order) adjacent to T9 & T10 is no longer present.

The Council's Tree Officer concurs that with the findings of the report that the most significant trees to the southern and western boundaries of the site are to be retained with minimal development taking place within the RPA of these trees. It also considered that the proposal will not present any significant implications for existing protected trees. In addition, the trees identified for removal are generally of poor growth habit, are host to tree pests and diseases or inappropriate species.

Consequently the Tree Officer has raised no objection, subject to a condition for the provision of tree protection measures during the construction of the development as set as out in the Arboricultural Report and its supporting information.

Amenity

Saved Policy BE.1 of the Crewe and Nantwich Local Plan requires consideration to be given to neighbouring properties with regard to impact on privacy, loss of light, visual intrusion and pollution.

Whilst the development will result in the re-use of this vacant site, it is not uncommon for schools to be located in residential areas. In this case, given the small number of pupils which will be accommodated, the level of activity and anticipated vehicular movements associated with the new school would be reasonably low, and therefore not result in an unacceptable impact on the amenities of nearby residents in terms of increased levels of noise and disturbance.

Bungalows of Sharnbrook Drive back onto the western boundary and properties of Lodgefields Drive overlook the site frontage, while No.21 Lodgefields Drive adjoins the northern site boundary.

Care has been taken to ensure that the new school building achieves an acceptable relationship with properties of Sharnbrook Drive, as this part of the school building is single storey and sited 10m from the western boundary. As a result distances of around 21m will remain between the rear elevations of existing properties and the western elevation of the school. This ensures that the amenities of adjacent bungalows of Sharnbrook Drive will not be adversely affected in terms of loss of light, outlook or overbearing impact. The layout of the school has ensured that play areas and teaching accommodation are sited away from the western side of the school to minimise any potential noise impact.

The school buildings are set 16m into the site from the Lodgefields Drive. As a result distances of about 31m will remain between new school buildings and properties facing towards the site on the northern side of Lodgefields Drive.

Although the side garden boundary of No.21 adjoins the northern school boundary, the school building itself is sited in a position off-set from No.21. As a result the proposals will have no adverse impact on the amenities of this property in terms of a loss of light, privacy or outlook or to principal windows.

In summary given the separation distances between the school and existing properties, coupled with the remaining distance which will remain between new buildings and the boundaries of the school grounds, it is not considered that the siting and design of the proposals will result in a loss of amenity for adjoining properties.

Highways

The site is currently vacant and whilst no transport movements have occurred for some time, it was previously occupied by a primary school with approximately 210 pupils. This proposal is for a SEND school with 40 pupils and 30 full-time equivalent staff.

The existing access into the site from Lodgefields will be closed with two new vehicle accesses and one pedestrian access provided. The proposed vehicular accesses from Lodgefields Drive have been created to allow for a one-way system to serve a small drop-off area on the frontage of the school.

Vehicles would enter the drop-off area from the main school access and exit via the proposed western access. The Council's Highway Engineer has assessed the submitted Swept Paths drawings and considers that it has been satisfactorily demonstrated that mini-buses, cars and

taxis can safely make this manoeuvre, including in the event that cars are parked outside the residential properties on the opposite side of Lodgefields Drive.

As this is a small, SEND school the majority of pupils will arrive by mini-bus or taxi, the vehicular trips associated with the development will be minimal, and far less than what the previous school would have generated. The Highway Engineer has advised on the basis that school minibus can typically cater for 15 pupils, and assuming 3 pupils per taxi, then the total number of vehicle movements in either peak for pupils, would be less than 20 (in and out). If all staff arrived by car then this would equate to 30 movements. In total, this is less than a vehicle movement per minute on average across an hour. The movements between staff and pupils would also be staggered and, subject to the demand for before and after school clubs, traffic movements could be staggered further.

Parking provision is to be provided at 1 space per member of staff, with additional drop-off, visitor, and mini-bus parking to be provided. The Highway Engineer considers this level of on-site provision to be acceptable.

The applicant has stated that given the nature of the school, and the typical large catchment of staff, cycling is unlikely to be used and cycle parking has therefore not been proposed. Nevertheless, the National Cycle Route 451 runs along the southern and eastern boundary of the site and there is a bus service available on Coppenhall Lane a few minutes walk from the site, with footway infrastructure connecting the site to the wider area. It is therefore recommended that a condition be imposed requiring the provision of secure, covered cycle storage within the school grounds.

In summary on the basis of the level and nature of vehicle movements generated by the new school, this would not result in highway safety problems at the junction of Lodgefields Drive and Coppenhall Lane, along Lodgefields Drive or from the operation of the school drop-off area.

The Highway Engineer has raised no objection to the proposals subject to a conditions requiring cycle storage and also the submission of a Construction Management Plan to mitigate the highway impact of activities and vehicle movements associated with the construction of the development.

Contamination

The site is adjacent to a known landfill site or area of ground that has the potential to create gas. The Environmental Protection Officer initially objected to the proposals on the basis that insufficient information had been submitted with the application which satisfactorily assessed potential gas risks arising from the former landfill and thereby determine whether the site could suitably accommodate a school.

However, in response to these concerns the applicant has submitted further information relating to the risks posed by the adjacent landfill has been provided. A report outlining the potential risks posed by the landfill and proposed gas protection measures has been undertaken (Report Ref: GRM/P9000/GPMVP, GRM Development Solutions Ltd. July 2019). This sets out details of proposed gas protection measures including the use of a suitable

membrane in combination with a sub-floor void, and that a final gas risk assessment will be undertaken to determine precise specification of gas protection measures.

Following assessment of this report, and proposed approach to the provision of landfill gas mitigation, the Environmental Protection Officer has confirmed that the original concerns have been addressed.

No objections are therefore raised subject to conditions being imposed requiring that prior to the commencement of development supplementary information concerning landfill gas risk should be submitted and agreed, and subsequently approved gas protection measures implemented in full.

Other Matters

The application site is located within Flood Zone 1 according to the Environment Agency Flood Maps. The Council's Flood Risk Officer has advised that the overall findings of the submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) relating to the development and drainage of the site to be acceptable in principle.

Conditions are recommended ensuring that the development permitted is carried out in accordance with the approved FRA and the detailed design strategy for the drainage system is submitted and agreed prior to the commencement of development.

United Utilities have been consulted as part of this application and have raised no objection to the proposed development subject to a condition for the implementation of foul and surface water drainage arrangements.

PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSIONS

The development is located in a sustainable urban location and will utilise a vacant, previously used site.

The new school development will also importantly meet the identified need for additional special school places within the borough, enabling the needs of pupils to be met locally through the provision of purpose built facilities.

The school is of a good quality, contemporary design, which satisfactorily respects the character and appearance of the locality. The siting and layout of the building would not adversely affect the residential amenities of nearby dwellings.

The proposal, subject to conditions, would not have an adverse impact upon trees or ecology and also ensure that issues associated with drainage and contaminated land are addressed. Furthermore in view of the anticipated traffic movements resulting from the new school, the proposals would not have harmful impact on the local highway network in terms of traffic congestion or increased highway safety risks.

For these reasons, the proposals are considered to represent a sustainable form of development in accordance with the relevant requirements of the Development Plan and national planning policy

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE

- 1. Standard**
- 2. Approved Plans**
- 3. Details of Materials**
- 4. Contaminated Land - Submission and approval of gas protection measures**
- 5. Contaminated Land - Submission of Verification for installed gas remediation measures**
- 6. Contaminated Land - Verification of importation of soils and forming materials**
- 7. Contaminated Land - Works to stop if unexpected contamination is discovered on site**
- 8. Details of external lighting**
- 9. Breeding Birds – timing of works**
- 10. Inclusion of features to increase biodiversity**
- 11. Provision of secure, covered cycle storage**
- 12. Notwithstanding submitted plans, details of the hard and soft landscaping to be submitted and approved**
- 13. Implementation of the landscaping scheme**
- 14. Boundary treatments**
- 15. Development to be carried out in accordance with approved FRA**
- 16. Submission of details of surface water drainage scheme and implementation**
- 17. Submission, approval and implementation of a Construction Management Plan**
- 18. Tree protection measures during construction**
- 19. Electric vehicle charging**

In order to give proper effect to the Southern Planning Committees intent and without changing the substance of its decision, authority is delegated to the Head of Planning (Regulation) in consultation with the Chair (or in their absence the Vice Chair) to correct any technical slip or omission in the resolution, before issue of the decision notice

