

Application No: 14/3687C

Location: HOLMES CHAPEL COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL, SELKIRK DRIVE,
HOLMES CHAPEL, CHESHIRE, CW4 7DX

Proposal: Permanent retention of modular teaching buildings to provide teaching
and learning facilities

Applicant: Tony Halsall, Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School

Expiry Date: 08-Oct-2014

SUMMARY

The NPPF advises that planning should give great weight to the need to expand or alter schools. It also requires that existing open space, including playing fields shall not be built upon unless certain criteria are met. In addition, the NPPF states that planning should seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

The acceptability of the proposal with regards to sustainability is dependent on the scheme meeting these requirements.

The school have detailed a need for the permanent retention of the buildings which provide a targeted level of intervention to a growing group of students who have either; physical, educational or emotional needs.

The section of playing field which forms this application site has been identified as being surplus to requirements.

The scheme is of an appropriate design which does not have a significant impact upon neighbouring amenity or highway safety.

The scheme therefore represents a sustainable form of development.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE subject to conditions

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

Full planning permission is sought for the permanent retention of modular teaching buildings to provide teaching and learning facilities at Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site falls on playing fields to the rear of the school which fall within the Open Countryside. Residential properties bound the application site to the north. To the east, south and west of the application site are the school grounds.

RELEVANT HISTORY

12/2934C – To install temporary Portakabin Limited buildings to be used as teaching facilities for the 6th form whilst works are carried out to rectify the structural defects in the existing 6th form teaching facilities. It is proposed that there will be 2 classroom buildings, 1 building to be used as a common/study area and one building to be used as office space, all buildings to be hired from Portakabin Limited for a period of 3 years – Approved 24th September 2012

NATIONAL & LOCAL POLICIES

National policy

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

Of particular relevance to this application are paragraphs; 17 (Core planning principles), 56-68 (Good design), 72-74 (School and Playing Field development).

Development Plan

The Development Plan for this area is the Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review 2005. The relevant Saved Policies are:

PS8 - Open Countryside
RC2 - Protected area of open space
GR1 - New Development
GR2 - Design
GR6 - Amenity and Health

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:

PG2 – Settlement Hierarchy
PG6 – Open Countryside
SD1 - Sustainable Development in Cheshire East
SD2 - Sustainable Development Principles
SE1 - Design

Supplementary Planning Documents

Development on Backland and Gardens

CONSULTATIONS

Strategic Highways Manager – No objections

Sport England – No objections, subject to the following condition; within 1 month of determination a scheme for the restoration of the rugby pitch margins shall be submitted to and approved

Jodrell Bank (University of Manchester) – No comments received at time of report

Children's Services (Cheshire East Council) – Support the proposal

Environmental Protection - No objections

VIEWS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL:

Holmes Chapel Parish Council – Object to the proposal due to the loss of the playing fields

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

Neighbour notification letters were sent to all adjoining occupants and a site notice erected. 4 letters have been received objecting on the following grounds:

- Principle of the development – No requirement for them anymore now works to school are completed & sufficient space within the existing building
- Design
- Amenity – Visual intrusion, loss of light, loss of privacy
- Loss of playing field
- Highway safety – loss of parking
- Question some of the application content – e.g. that the playing field is boggy

5 letters of support have been received.

APPRAISAL

The key issues are:

- Principle of development
- Impact of the design
- Impact upon neighbouring amenity
- The impact upon highway safety

SUSTAINABILITY

This application shall consider the sustainability of the proposed development in the context of the application for the permanent retention of modular teaching buildings to provide teaching and learning facilities at Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School.

In this instance, consideration of the need for the development, the loss of the playing field, design, and amenity are the principle considerations.

Paragraph 72 of the NPPF states that;

'The Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a 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:

- give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools; and*
- work with schools promoters to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.'*

The applicant has advised that these buildings are in use to *'...provide quality accommodation for some of our most vulnerable children who have additional physical, educational, or emotional needs. This is a group of children who are increasing in number as more parents choose our school for their children.'*

More specifically, the new building will provide; 2 specialist teaching rooms, 1 computer learning centre, an area for teacher training, 2 small group areas and a de-escalation room for children in crisis.

It is advised that student performance at GCSE level for children with specific needs is being hampered by a lack of space and the quality of the areas available without access to this modular facility.

It is stated that *'without this facility, the school does not have the capacity to continue to provide this level of targeted intervention to a growing group of students who choose to come to HCCC [the school].'*

The application is also supported by Cheshire East Council's Children's services.

As a result of this justification, it is considered that there is a 'need' for this facility.

Paragraph 74 of the NPPF states that;

'Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.'*

The applicant has advised that the application site was chosen for development as it was not in use and was *'notoriously poorly drained.'*

It is advised that the application site remains unsuitable for use in PE, sport or games.

It is also noted that the application site is in an unsafe location for such activities due to its proximity to the school car park.

The school advise that the playing pitches for rugby, football and athletics are marked out and are sufficiently distanced from the application site so to not interfere.

In response, Sport England have advised that they raise no objections to the permanent loss of this part of the playing field, subject to a condition that the applicant mark out the existing rugby pitch within 1 month of the determination date of the planning application.

As such, it is considered that the applicant has clearly shown that the land is surplus to requirements and satisfy's Sport England's original concerns.

Design

Paragraph 56 of the NPPF advises that;

'The Government attached great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.'

Paragraph 63 of the NPPF advises that;

'In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which help raise the standard of design more generally in the area.'

Paragraph 64 of the NPPF advises that;

'Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.'

The application proposes to retain the presence of 4.No portakabin units to the north of the site which take the form of a courtyard layout adjacent to the existing car park.

3.No classroom buildings are approximately 16.5 metres by 9.6 metres with a height of 3.5 metres. The 4th building is smaller and measures approximately 12.1 metres by 3.9 metres with a height of 3 metres.

The units are of typical portakabin design, and whilst they have a relatively large footprint, given the amount of accommodation they provide, they are all single storey in height. The development is seen within the context of its school setting and would not have any detrimental impact upon the character and appearance of the Open Countryside or visual amenity of the area.

As such, in conjunction with the needs of the school, there would be no significant conflict with the provisions of Local Plan policies GR1 (New Development) and GR2 (Design).

Amenity

Paragraph 17 of the NPPF states that planning should; *'always seek to secure... a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.'*

The proposed mobile units (and associated courtyard) are sited to the north of the site in proximity to the northern boundary. Residential properties are situated to the north, with the nearest property to the development being number 9 Mardale Court. The closest of the mobile units is approximately 1.6 metres away from the common boundary with this property. The boundary is defined by an established hedgerow which measures between 1.8 and 2 meters in height and would provide a level of screening to the proposal.

It was considered as part of application 12/2934C, that because the closest classroom would have a number of windows to the north and west facing elevations in proximity to this boundary, that a form of obscure glazing treatment to windows would be appropriate to prevent any issues of overlooking or loss of privacy.

It is proposed that this condition be re-worded so that these obscure windows are retained should the application be approved.

Although the closest mobile unit lies within close proximity to the side elevation of No.9 Mardale Court, given that the only windows within the side elevation of this property, parallel to this porakabin represent secondary ground-floor windows to a lounge, in conjunction with the tall boundary treatment between the built forms and the relative low height of the application units, it is not considered refusal of this application on visual intrusion or loss of light grounds would be significant enough to warrant refusal on this application on amenity grounds.

It is not considered that the proposal would create any loss of amenity with regards to loss of privacy, light or visual intrusion to any other neighbour because of its relative low height and distance from these other neighbouring units.

With regards to environmental disturbance, the Council's Environmental Protection Team have raised no objections.

As such, the proposal is considered to adhere with Policy GR6 of the Local Plan.

Highway Safety

The Strategic Highways Manager has advised that as no changes are proposed to the existing access or parking arrangements at the school, he raises no objections.

Planning Balance

The NPPF encourages the alteration or expansion of schools where a need has been identified and allows for the loss of playing fields where the site is surplus to requirements.

The application proposal lies on a northern portion of the school playing field, with built form to the north, east and south. As such, it is not considered that the development has a detrimental impact upon the wider openness of the countryside in this location.

The school have identified a need for the buildings which provide a targeted level of intervention to a growing group of students who have physical, educational, or emotional needs.

The section of playing field used has been identified as being poorly drained and does not interfere with existing playing pitches. As such, the principle of the development is accepted.

The proposed scheme provides an appropriate design that subject to conditions, would not have a detrimental impact upon neighbouring amenity or highway safety.

The scheme therefore represents a sustainable form of development providing needed teaching facilities of a sufficient quality of design without impacting the usable playing fields, neighbouring amenity or highway safety.

The application is therefore recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE subject to conditions

- 1. Plan**
- 2. Materials**
- 3. Obscure glazing retention**
- 4. Submission within 1 month of determination of a scheme for the restoration of the rugby pitch margins.**

In order to give proper effect to the Board`s/Committee`s intentions and without changing the substance of the decision, authority is delegated to the Head of Strategic & Economic Planning, in consultation with the Chair (or in her absence the Vice Chair) of Southern Planning Committee, to correct any technical slip or omission in the wording of the resolution, between approval of the minutes and issue of the decision notice.

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