

School Sites – Impact of Building Expansions

Introduction

The increased demand for school places is a nationally discussed issue; this has already become problematic in some areas of Cheshire East Council. Rising birth rates, pending planning applications and proposed development in the forthcoming local plan will further exasperate the issue.

In light of this increasing demand the Education Funding Agency has carried out a number of reviews and subsequent updates to the guidance and legislation around school buildings and land.

This report considers the land implications of school alterations and expansions to enable the authority to identify the options available for the provision of additional places on existing school sites.

This report has been acknowledged by the School Organisation Strategy Group. The School Organisation Strategy Group's members consist of representatives for Local Authority, Diocese, Schools and Governors. The School Organisation Strategy Group accepted the methodology at the meeting dated 16th March 2015.

Background

There are two key pieces of legislation regarding school sites that must be taken into account, these are;

- **The School Premises (England) Regulations 2012**; these state that “suitable outdoor space must be provided in order to enable physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum and pupils to play outside.” Replaces the Education School Premises regulations 1999.
- **Section 77 of the school standards and Framework Act 1998**; this framework seeks to protect schools playing field from a change of use or a disposal. The DfE guidance note published on S77 states “Local Authorities and schools will need to apply for consent to build on playing field land, for example when adding classrooms to expand successful and popular schools or to address the demand for pupil places”.

In addition to the legislation the Department also provides a guidance document;

Building Bulletin 103 (BB103) which sets out simple, non-statutory area guidelines for mainstream school buildings and sites. This replaces BB98 and 99.

It should be noted that a number of schools within Cheshire East that do not meet these guidelines for outdoor space.

Method of analysis

First consideration is made to review any class base size rooms that are not utilised for this purpose within the existing accommodation.

When considering playing field requirements all schools are considered within locations specified by School Organisation. Current playing field measurements and existing

accommodation is noted for each school. Schools are taken up to their next nearest half form of entry and analysed against the BB103 guidance. As a school grows, their accommodation and playing field requirements increase. Any shortfalls of build incurred by the desktop expansion (for example; class bases, hall extensions, group rooms etc) are included onto the building's footprint and taken from current playing field.

The analysis of school sites considers expansion to the next 0.5FE each time, i.e. an additional 0.5fe, 1.0fe, 1.5fe and so on. Each expansion is measured against BB103 guidelines for infrastructure and playing field and is recorded on a worst case scenario basis.

As School Premises Regulations do not specify a size with regards to outdoor play, thorough consideration has been made to the impact that changes may or may not have on a school after playing field has been reformed.

To assist in this consideration, the raw data formulated above is then processed to reflect remaining playing field against BB103 and displayed in a RAG rating format.

This process applies a 'tolerance' level to the guidance. Through a desktop review, sites can be categorised into the following four categories;

- 1) Site will remain to be 80% of the recommended playing field after expansion
- 2) Site will remain to be 70-79% of the recommended playing field area after expansion
- 3) Site currently has 70%+ of the recommended playing field area but it will be left under 70% after expansion.
- 4) Site is already below 70% of the recommended playing field area so not suitable for expansion

When the tolerance is applied to each 0.5fe increase it considers the cumulative impact of the expansion.

The desktop area assessment considers the possibility of 'off site' options. At the initial stage it will look for the presence of land that could be of use. Use of public open space and high school playing fields has been discounted as an option due to safeguarding and capacity reasons.

Synthetic Pitches

To comply with Section 77 conditions, mitigation measures will be applied to replace any reduced playing field area with either a rubber crumb area or a synthetic pitch. The legislation states that reconfiguration resulting in 'no net loss' is classified as a change of use and therefore a general consent will apply.

All weather play provision counts as double the area to grass under EFA guidelines due to students being able to utilise the facility twice as much as grounds that are reliant upon weather.

The processed data reflects the amount of synthetic pitch needed to counter-act the loss of playing field due to the expansion. This is presented on a like-for-like basis and calculations have been displayed to show how synthetic pitches could be used as sporting pitches.

Feedback from the School Organisation Sub Group stated that preference should be given to sites within the 80% tolerance.

It has been considered that the area of the synthetic pitch to mitigate the build impact would not just replace the area lost to build but may also increase the playing field area up to the agreed threshold of 70% or 80%.

Research has been carried out on existing schools sites to look at the advantages and disadvantages of having synthetic pitches on primary and high school sites. This research looked at costs, maintenance and hire to the community. It was concluded that synthetic pitches are a benefit to schools and pupils allowing for a greater utilisation of outdoor space for timetabled classes as well as break and lunch times.

A maximum size synthetic pitch was applied, based on Middlewich High school's full size synthetic pitch (6,500m²). It was considered that any pitch needed as a mitigation measure that was bigger than this, would be too extreme for a school and costs would outweigh benefits.

An example of this methodology applied to school sites is attached.

Recommendation

School sites to considered against the criteria and methodology stated above to determine those able to accommodate expansion.

Synthetic pitches or 'rubber crumb' surfaces should be used to mitigate the impact of expansion on school sites where the remaining land remains to be 70% or greater of the BB103 guidelines.