

ITEM 2

Application Reference	DC/065604
Location:	Highfields Essex Road Brinnington Stockport SK5 8DR
PROPOSAL:	Erection of 2no. double mobile classrooms with integral toilet facilities to provide additional teaching space for new intake of students in September 2017.
Type Of Application:	Full Application
Registration Date:	04.05.2017
Expiry Date:	29/06/2017
Case Officer:	Steven Kirkham
Applicant:	Stockport MBC C_YPD
Agent:	Carillion Stockport

DELEGATION/COMMITTEE STATUS

Departure from the Development Plan (Green Belt). Should Area Committee be minded to grant permission under the Delegation Agreement the application should be referred to the Planning & Highways Regulations Committee.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The application is for full planning permission for the erection of 2no. double mobile classrooms with integral toilet facilities to provide additional, teaching space for new intake of students in September 2017.

The 2 double mobile classrooms, (Unit 1 and Unit 2), are proposed to be located centrally within the site, to the east of the existing car park, and south of the existing school building on an area that is currently laid to hardstanding and grass.

The mobile classrooms are pre-fabricated flat roofed structures they would each measure 2.5m (h) x 17.9m (l) x 9.7m (b) approx. This would provide an additional 332m² of teaching floorspace which would equate to an additional 6 classrooms (4 in Unit 1 and 2 in Unit 2). The overall floorspace at Highfields school would be increased to 1,859 m² (approx.)

The materials specification would be as follows:

- External Walls – plastisol coated steel insulated panels in goose grey;

- Doors – steel with vision panels in blue to match existing main school building;
- Roller shutters on all windows – external manual steel roller shutters in blue to match existing main school building;
- Windows – double glazed PVCu in white; and
- RWP/ gutters – black PVCu round / half round.

In addition the above the following should be noted:

- The number of pupils will increase from 75 to 95 as a result of the proposals (an increase of 20)
- The number of staff will increase from 36FT/16PT to 38FT/18PT
- A new Travel Plan is to be produced for the school
- A 6-space cycle shelter is proposed to be constructed as part of the proposal.

The application has been accompanied with a Design and Access Statement, Energy Statement and a separate Planning Statement which presents a case against Green Belt Policy and also identifies the need for the facility, it identifies that:

There are 3 PRU's (Pupil Referral Units) in Stockport with each school providing a different level of provision, this includes Highfields PRU, Pendlebury Centre and The Moat House. Highfields operates from two sites (Brinnington & Park View) it offers places for pupils who have been excluded from mainstream education, are at risk of being excluded, or those who meet the 'hard to place criteria'. Pendlebury Centre is an alternative provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. The Moat House offers places for pregnant and teenage mums.

Without the provision of additional space at the school, Highfields would be required to send additional pupils from the 2017 intake to external placements. Given the shortage of available PRU teaching space in Stockport, these placements may have to be outside of the Stockport authority area. The proposal would improve the education provision at Highfields to meet expect demand.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The school is located to the east of Essex Road, Brinnington, the area is essentially residential in character with properties located west of Essex Road overlooking the site. The alignment of the highway delineates the boundary between the residential area and Green Belt.

Highfields school operates as a specialist referral school providing education to pupils between the ages of 11-16 who have been excluded from secondary school. The school operates from a modern complex which is in part 2 but mainly single storey in height set around a single building complex that is triangular in shape. Levels fall marginally across the site, the application refers to a grassed area located to the south of the school building and east of the car park.

Access to the site is taken directly off Essex Road which forms the western boundary. The site is bound to the north by residential dwellings, to the east of the site there is a strong tree belt and to the south to the schools building by enclosed playing fields/sports pitch.

There are pockets of landscaping throughout the site including tree planting to the Essex Road Frontage. Site boundaries are defined by a secure Palisade and Weldmesh fences which are powder coated green in appearance.

POLICY BACKGROUND

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications/appeals to be determined in accordance with the Statutory Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Statutory Development Plan includes:-

- Policies set out in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan Review (SUDP) adopted 31st May 2006 which have been saved by direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; &
- Policies set out in the Stockport Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document (CS) adopted 17th March 2011.

N.B. Due weight should be given to relevant SUDP and CS policies according to their degree of consistency with the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') issued on 27th March 2012 (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given); and how the policies are expected to be applied is outlined within the Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG') launched on 6th March 2014

Saved policies of the SUDP Review

The site is allocated as Green Belt on the Saved UDP map. This allocation borders a Predominantly Residential area.

EP1.7: Development and Flood Risk

GBA1.1: Extent of Green Belt Protection

GBA1.2: Control of Development in Green Belt

CTF1.1: Development of Community Services and Facilities

LDF Core Strategy/Development Management Policies

CS1: OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

SD-1: Creating Sustainable Communities

SD-3: Delivering the Energy Opportunities Plan – New Development

SD-6: Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change

CS5: ACCESS TO SERVICES

AS-2: Improving Indoor Sports, Community and Educational Facilities and their Accessibility

CS8: SAFEGUARDING AND IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT

SIE-1: Quality Places

SIE-3: Protecting, Safeguarding and Enhancing the Environment

CS9: TRANSPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

CS10: AN EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT NETWORK

T-1: Transport and Development

T-2: Parking in Developments

T-3: Safety and Capacity on the Highway Network

National Planning Policy Framework Conformity

The Planning Advisory Services' National Planning Policy Framework Compatibility Self-Assessment Checklist has been undertaken on Stockport's adopted Core Strategy. This document assesses the conformity of Stockport's adopted Core Strategy with the more recently published NPPF and takes account of saved policies from the Unitary Development Plan where applicable. No significant differences were identified.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Supplementary Planning Guidance (Saved SPG's & SPD's) does not form part of the Statutory Development Plan; nevertheless it does provide non-statutory Council approved guidance that is a material consideration when determining planning applications.

Transport & Highways in Residential Areas SPD

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued by DCLG on 27th March 2012 sets out the Government's planning policies for England, and how they are expected to be applied.

Paragraph 6 states: "The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development".

Paragraph 7 states: "There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental".

Paragraph 11 states: "Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise".

Paragraph 13 states: "The National Planning Policy Framework constitutes guidance for local planning authorities and decision-takers both in drawing up plans and as a material consideration in determining applications".

Paragraph 14 states: "At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.

For decision-taking this means (unless material considerations indicate otherwise):

- approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and
- where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
 - specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted”.

Paragraph 30 states “Encouragement should be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion. In preparing Local Plans, local planning authorities should therefore support a pattern of development which, where reasonable to do so, facilitates the use of sustainable modes of transport”.

Paragraph 56 states “The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, it is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people”.

Paragraph 69 states “The planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities”.

Paragraph 70 states “To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments”.

Paragraph 72 states “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 school promoters to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted”.

Paragraph 74 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”.

Paragraph 79 states “The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence”.

Paragraph 80 states “Green Belt serves five purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land”.

Paragraph 81 states “Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land”.

Paragraph 87 states “As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances”.

Paragraph 88 states “When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations”.

Paragraph 89 states “A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are (amongst others):

- buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- the extension or alternation of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- the limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; or
- limited infilling or partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding

temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.

Paragraph 125 states “By encouraging good design, planning policies and decisions should limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation”.

Paragraph 187 states “Local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible. Local planning authorities should work proactively with applicants to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area”.

Paragraph 197 states “In assessing and determining development proposals, local planning authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development”.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

DC/044063 - Extension to existing Pupil Referral Unit. Application approved April 2010.

DC/014061 – Demolition of existing building and erection of school for secondary children as a behavioural support unit. Application approved May 2006.

NEIGHBOUR'S VIEWS

The owner/occupiers of neighbouring properties have been notified by letter (39) and the proposal has been advertised as a departure from the Development Plan within site and press notices.

At the time of writing the report no representations have been received.

CONSULTEE RESPONSES

Biodiversity Officer: - The proposed site comprises of short-mown amenity grassland of low ecological value. There is limited potential for the development to impact upon protected species. No further ecological information is required but suggest opportunities to enhance the sites value are explored.

Coal Authority: - Confirm that the site falls outside of a referral area. No objections subject to standing advice.

Drainage: - No objections/observations

Energy Officer: - The submitted Energy Statement is fully compliant with policy SD-3

Highways: - The proposal should not result in a material increase in vehicle movements on the local highway network and the existing car park within the site should be able to accommodate the additional staff. 20 additional pupils attending

the school is, however, it is likely to result in some additional parking on roads in the vicinity of the site associated with parents dropping off and picking up their children. Recommend a conditional approval with conditions requiring submission of a Travel Plan and additional Cycle Storage to the 6 space facility proposed.

Pollution Control: - No objections/issues raised by the application from a pollution control perspective.

ANALYSIS

Core Strategy CS5 promotes the provision of new education facilities provided they are located in sustainable accessible locations, and they are designed to respect levels of amenity. The proposed mobile classrooms would be sited within the established boundary of Highfields School, an existing education facility within the Green Belt. The principle of education use at the site is therefore already established.

Saved policy GBA1.2 of the UDP Review reflects national advice, it advocates a general presumption against the construction of new buildings unless it is for specified uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with its purposes. This is enforced within NPPF paragraph 79 which attaches 'great importance' to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl.

For the purposes of decision making, paragraph 89 identifies that local planning authorities should ensure substantial weight is given to inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Very Special Circumstances will not exist unless harm to the Green Belt is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

At paragraph 89, the NPPF states exceptions to inappropriate development. These include; extension and alterations of existing buildings and which are not disproportionate to the size of the original building, and limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.

In recognition that the buildings would be freestanding within the site it is not considered that the works would fall within the exceptions of para 89. It is therefore identified that for the purposes of the decision making process the construction classrooms in this instance should be viewed as 'inappropriate development' in the Green Belt, and therefore treated as a departure from the Development Plan and should not be approved unless it can be adequately demonstrated that 'Very Special Circumstances' exist to justify an otherwise inappropriate form of development.

Whilst any loss of openness is a consideration that should be added to the harm to the Green Belt caused by inappropriateness, acceptability does not simply hinge as to whether or not there would be a loss of openness or unacceptable impact on the visual amenity but on whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any

other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify an exception to policy GBA1.2.

Very Special Circumstances:

It is necessary to consider the supporting statement (referred to above within the Description of Development) relating to the enhancement of educational facilities demonstrates 'very special circumstances' sufficient to outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm that would result to the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt. Moreover Development Management policy AS-2 highlights the importance of improving secondary schools within the borough; and the educational requirements to improve facilities have carried significant weight when the Council has considered other development proposals for schools within the Green Belt.

The applicant has presented a case that highlights the current shortage of available PRU teaching space in Stockport, at present, to meet local needs. The increased provision of teaching space at the PRU, proposed via the proposals, would ensure that the Highfields site could accommodate this demand, and that pupils would not need to be sent to external placements potentially outside of the Stockport area.

On balance the case for 'very special circumstances' in respect of the enhancement of educational facilities is considered sufficient to outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm.

Openness / Visual Amenity:

The buildings would be sited to immediately to the south of the existing school buildings and directly east of the sites staff/visitor car park. The area at present is cleared and laid to ancillary amenity grassland. Views of the area where the buildings would be located are partially screened from surrounding vistas by virtue of the existing school building, boundary treatments and landscaping. Nonetheless from the schools entrance there would remain views of the building, although this would be limited to vantage points along Essex Road.

Being only single storey in height the classrooms would measure approximately 2.5m below the ridgeline of the lowest section of the existing building, by virtue of this they would take a subservient form to the host building. The buildings themselves would also be viewed against a backdrop of a mature tree belt.

Perhaps the most important attribute of the Green Belt is its openness, in recognition of the sites characteristics, the design proposals, it is considered that the proposals would be of modest scale when viewed in the context of existing school buildings and their overall visual impact would kept to a minimum by virtue of their subservient scale. As such, their addition within the site would only impact marginally on the overall openness of the Green Belt. The design would not be out of character with the building and the works are considered to meet the design/environmental requirements expected by policies SIE-1, SIE-3, CTF1 and AS-2

Residential Amenity:

The school represents an established use within the residential environment. The nearest residential properties are those located to the west on Essex Road approximately 50m away. This distance is separated by highway in addition to boundary treatments and partial tree planting. With regard to the design and the influence that the development may have upon residents, the size and location of the classrooms is such that no overshadowing would occur. Likewise the intervening distance to residential boundaries taken with the landscaping would ensure that overlooking would not be an issue.

In comparison to the extent of the existing school the extension would facilitate only a modest increase to the existing floor space/capacity. The activity associated with this would be absorbed by that already taking place at the school, consequently it is not considered that it would give rise to additional disturbance to residents, this view is supported through the consultation with the Pollution Control Officer. The proposals therefore satisfy the requirement of policies CS5, CTF1.1 and SIE-1.

Highway Safety:

Pedestrian access within the curtilage of the site is largely unaffected and site conditions are such to provide a level approach from within the existing grounds. Vehicular accesses and parking arrangement would remain as existing. The highways officer notes that the local highway network and car park should be able to accommodate the additional staff and pupils and that the proposals would not have a material impact on the highways network. It is recommended that the provision of onsite cycle storage is increased to 16 cycles, in addition an updated Travel Plan (to be conditioned) would provide further mitigation to encourage sustainable travel.

Other Issues:

Drainage - Saved UDP policy EP1.7 states that the Council will not permit development where it would, amongst other considerations, increase the risk of flooding or significantly increase surface water run-off. The proposals sit within much larger site, accounting for the playing fields the majority of the site is not developed. The increase in runoff from the buildings is considered negligible when viewed in this context.

Core Strategy policy SD-6 requires all development to incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems, so as to manage run-of water from the site and advises specific minimum requirements to reduce the rate of unattenuated run-off. This can be satisfactorily addressed through a condition that requires the submission, approval, implementation and management of both a foul water and surface water drainage scheme, which shall incorporate SUDS.

Details of landscaping have not accompanied the application. Recognising the Green Belt status it is recommended that conditions are applied securing proportionate planting within the site aimed at raising its biodiversity value.

Conclusion

The educational need has previously been accepted at the site under planning permissions DC/014061 & DC/044063. The classrooms would represent a proportionate addition to the site which would have a limited impact upon the openness of the local Green Belt. The social benefits associated with provision of needed educational services is considered sufficient 'very special circumstances' to outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm. Therefore an exception to policy GBA1.2 can be justified in this instance, consequently it is recommended that permission be granted subject to appropriate conditions.

RECOMMENDATION

Members resolve to grant full planning permission subject to recommended conditions