

38/2008/298

THE GOVERNERS OF TAUNTON SCHOOL

RETENTION OF 2M HIGH TIMBER FENCE TO THE SOUTH OF WEIRFIELD BOARDING HOUSE, TAUNTON SCHOOL, STAPLEGROVE ROAD, TAUNTON

321823/125757

FULL

PROPOSAL

Taunton School lies to the north of Staplegrove Road. The main school buildings and Fairwater Boarding House are Grade II Listed.

This application seeks planning permission for the retention of a close boarded timber fence with lattice work above giving a total height of up to 2.0m. This encloses a small area of land on the west, south and east at Weirfield Boarding House. The fence is of tanalised timber and the proposal is to let it weather naturally rather than stain it. Some planting has been carried out on the open side of the fence.

The purpose of the fence is stated to be to provide a secure private garden for the girl boarders, who live at Weirfield House and houseparents of this building.

The application submitted was accompanied by six letters in support of the fence, four from local residents and two from housemasters of the school raising the following points:

- Fence is in keeping with surroundings and does not reduce quality of visual amenity, spoil views or sight lines though school.
- Fence enhances appearance of modern boarding house and no visual impact on school buildings.
- Improves safety and security of house and improves appearance and setting of Fairweather.
- No impact on neighbours.

This is the resubmission of an identical application, which was refused in January 2008 (reference 38/2007/602).

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

CONSERVATION OFFICER - Open site, where close timber fence inappropriate to setting of Listed Building. Objection raised.

POLICE COMMUNITY SAFETY OFFICER –

Considered the following points:

- Weirfield House caters for 70 plus female boarders, aged between 13 - 18 years,
- intruders have entered the premises on more than one occasion in the past,
- local youths have also acted as 'Peeping Tom's' under the girls bedroom windows at night,

- girls sitting outside, on occasions sunbathing, are in full view from the main road and school entrance,
- the residential house staff, with a young family, have concerns about their security and road safety,
- there is a need to provide privacy, safety and security for all boarders and staff.
- there appears to me to be an obvious need for some form of access control in the environs of Weirfield House to provide security and also clearly delineate private space.

Fencing is the usual option for access control and close board fencing is a suitable option where natural surveillance is not an appropriate solution. 1.8 metres is the minimum height recommended to deter access and a topping of trellis makes it more difficult to climb. The provision of prickly plants also aids security.

Bearing in mind the fairly poor perimeter security in some areas of the school, during my visit I was concerned that unauthorised persons using the footpaths cutting across the site from the main entrance to link up with public footpaths to the north and west in Greenway Road presented a significant security risk, particularly to the occupants of Weirfield House. I made various recommendations including the provision of a Security Lodge (with manned security) at the main entrance, improved cctv and lighting in some areas and improved fencing in certain locations, including the retention of the fencing, in its current or more acceptable form, around Weirfield House.

My main concerns voiced at the time of my visit are:

1. The young girls boarding at Weirfield House are at risk particularly because they can be seen from Staplegrove Road and by casual visitors to the school.
2. Weirfield House has French doors leading onto the grass in full view of the main road and it is essential to provide private amenity space for the girls so that they feel safe and are screened from public view.
3. The defensible (amenity) space around the building, provided by the wooden fencing, would also deter and prevent casual intruders from entering via the French windows which often stand open during the summer months and would prevent individuals approaching the buildings and standing outside the windows of the girls' rooms at night.

In my opinion, the provision of mounding and landscaping would not be appropriate in this situation and, in fact, could exacerbate the problem by restricting surveillance of the surrounding area and providing potential climbing aids and hiding places for potential intruders. Bearing in mind both the police's and council's obligations under Section 17 of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998, to do all we reasonably can to prevent and reduce crime and disorder in our area, both PC Alderman and myself feel this application should be supported.

THREE LETTERS RECEIVED – One from a housemaster of the school and two from local residents (all copies of letters submitted as part of original application).

POLICY CONTEXT

Planning Policy Statement 1 (Delivering Sustainable Development)

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment)

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review
Policy 9 (The Built Historic Environment)

Taunton Deane Local Plan
S1 (General Requirements)
S2 (Design)

ASSESSMENT

This fence lies in a prominent position in front of Weirfield Boarding House, which is located between the Listed Buildings of Fairwater House and the Main School Building. In this location it is visible from the main road, clearly viewed on entering the school site and forms part of the setting of the two adjacent Listed Buildings.

The existing fence in tanalised wood is stark in appearance and appears prominent against the backdrop of the boarding house and Listed Buildings. The nearby boundaries are of natural hedging and there is no evidence of any other timber fences like this in such a prominent location within the school grounds. It therefore appears out of keeping with the natural appearance of the area. Whilst some planting has been carried out on the open side of the fence, the trees are dispersed and have only reached approximately 1.5 metres in height, therefore have little noticeable impact on softening its appearance. The Conservation Officer raises objections to the fence.

Whilst it is understood that some method of security is required, it is considered that there are other ways of providing this. If a means of enclosure is essential, this should be by way of natural hedging which would blend in with surroundings and not affect the setting of the adjacent Listed Buildings. The comments received from the police refer to the "fairly poor perimeter security" and made recommendations for the provision of a security lodge (with manned security) at the main entrance, improved CCTV and lighting and improved fencing in certain areas. Members should be aware that permission was granted in August 2005 (reference 38/2005/290) for the erection of a gatehouse and two security barriers and this could be implemented at any time. It is also important to note that the planning committee, when considering the application for the perimeter fence (reference 38/2008/032) earlier this year, indicated that the principle of a perimeter fence was acceptable, subject to achieving an appropriate design. There are therefore other methods of security available to the school, that have not been implemented (in the case of the gatehouse) and not been followed up (in the case of the perimeter fencing), that would help address the problems highlighted in an attempt to justify the retention of the fence, as well as improving security of the site overall.

Following the refusal of the previous application, the planning committee resolved to defer enforcement action for two months to allow for a planning application to be submitted. An enforcement notice was subsequently served on 22nd May 2008, giving four weeks for compliance, which was subsequently appealed. There is therefore an appeal pending against the enforcement notice.

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE planning permission

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

The fence represents an incongruous and inappropriate feature, having an adverse impact on the open setting of adjacent Listed Buildings. As such, the fence fails to preserve or enhance the settings of the adjacent listed buildings and is therefore contrary to the guidance contained in PPG15 and policy 9 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review.

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

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NOTES: