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ERECTION OF CONSTRUCTION AND MOTOR VEHICLE WORKSHOP, A REPLACEMENT SPORTS HALL AND NEW INFANT NURSERY BUILDING AT SOMERSET COLLEGE OF ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY, WELLINGTON ROAD, TAUNTON.

321467/124779

FULL

PROPOSAL

Somerset College are in the process of implementing a programme to replace a number of facilities on site which are either in poor condition or not suitably located to deliver the necessary curriculum requirements. This application is for the erection of a new construction and motor vehicle workshop, a replacement sports hall and a new children's nursery.

The new teaching building for construction and vehicle workshops is located along the northern boundary of the site and replaces the existing construction building while also incorporating facilities for the motor vehicle workshops that are currently off site. The size of the building is prescribed by the Learning and Schools Council and there is a large Information Learning Centre (ILC) as well as 15 classrooms and an administrative department. The building is approximately 130m long, 35m wide and 9-10m high set into the site so it is on split levels with the central administration block over 2.5 storeys. The building is divided into 3 parts, the construction workshops, the vehicle workshops and the teaching block. The workshops have a masonry base and are clad on the upper levels with an insulated metal panel system punctuated with glazing to give high levels of natural light and have a standing seam metal roof. The single storey teaching blocks are located on the south side of the construction and are clad in brick, timber and masonry, reflecting the 'trades' that they support. The central teaching block is articulated as two rendered blocks separated by a glass foyer/atrium.

The existing sports hall dates from the 1960's, is in poor condition and has become unsuitable for long-term use. The proposal is to replace the building with a new facility to the west of the car park where it is readily accessible to the public and has good access to the playing fields and will allow third party access without disrupting the College use. The building is 33m by 38m and 11m high with a masonry base and insulated panel cladding at a high level with a standing seam metal roof. An area of insulated translucent panels is provided on the eastern elevation to provide a controlled level of natural light. The building has a lean-to element to the south which houses the fitness room, a classroom, reception, office and changing areas. The height of the main hall building is governed by the need to provide badminton facilities within the main hall.

The proposed nursery replaces temporary facilities and will provide the same number of spaces as the existing 40. The building is sited on the edge of the

existing campus and is set back to allow for a landscaped play area between it and the access road while retaining the existing trees and providing for a drop off point without having to go through the existing car park. The building is 25m by 19m and 5.5m high with two monopitch standing seam zinc roofs over single storey spaces. The building is clad in brick and timber panels.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

LANDSCAPE OFFICER - Given the sensitive setting of the proposals on the edge of the green wedge I recommend a landscape assessment of the impact of the two buildings. My main concerns are - Nursery: the proposed building is within the root protection area of several mature trees that are likely to be severely affected by the proposals. The general landscape treatment looks fine. Sports Hall: there is no tree planting to the north or west of the building to help its fit into the wider green wedge landscape setting.

The revised planting scheme around the Sports Hall and Nursery needs adjusting as I've indicated on the drawing.

NATURE CONSERVATION OFFICER - The survey of May 2008 concluded that the site has minimal nature conservation value and that the development will have no significant impact on the wildlife of the site. Trees onsite provide nesting opportunities for a variety of birds. Retention and protection of trees during development need safeguarding. Any tree or scrub removal should take place outside the nesting season. If any tree needs to be removed it should be individually surveyed for protected species prior to felling.

FORWARD PLAN UNIT - 1. It is proposed that the sports hall and nursery, currently located within the settlement limits of Taunton and outside the green wedge, be relocated through provision of new improved facilities outside of those limits and within the green wedge. There they would occupy part of an area of playing fields protected as Recreational Open Space (ROS). Therefore saved Taunton Deane Local plan (TDLP) policies EN13 and C3 apply.

2. Policy C3 states that loss of recreational facilities, including playing fields, will not be permitted unless one of a number of criteria would be met. Criterion B requires that the development provides recreational or community benefit greater than the long-term recreational value of the recreational facility that would be lost. It is considered that provision of an improved sports hall and nursery would meet that criterion, particularly as the part of the playing field affected appears to be a relatively small area of outfield, between the artificial pitch to the north and the college access. It is also possible that the proposal could meet criterion D, since college playing fields are involved, although further information would be needed to show that adequate playing fields to meet statutory requirements would be retained or provided.

3. Policy EN13 states that development that would harm the open character of green wedges will not be permitted. Building a new sports hall and nursery on the playing field would affect the openness of the actual site, within the green wedge, but it is on

the extreme edge of a wide green wedge, and would not affect the integrity of the wedge. The landscape of the immediate area has been affected by the artificial pitches to the north, with fencing and floodlights, and to a degree by the proximity of the college car park and adjoining buildings, despite a partial screening by trees.

4. However, it seems unnecessary to locate the sports centre and nursery in the green wedge. It should be possible to locate them on the area proposed for car parking, (within the settlement limits and outside of the green wedge), and to locate the car parking to the west, within the green wedge. This would not affect the character of the green wedge as much as the proposed buildings, particularly if appropriately designed car parking, perhaps with a porous surface comprising sets allowing grass to grow in the gaps, was used. The new sports hall and nursery would still be towards the edge of the campus, maintaining the scope for ease of accessibility by the local community. While we would not object to the proposal as proposed, this alternative layout is preferred and should be investigated.

5. According to the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) accompanying the application, most of the site is flood risk zone 1 (low risk), but the “eastern extremity of the site appears to be at risk from flood zone 2, medium risk and zone 3 high risk”. Saved TDLP policy EN28 applies. From the flood zones map in the FRA, it appears that the proposed sports hall to the west also falls within zone 2 and possibly partly in zone 3, (although the map is far from clear). The sequential test in PPS25 requires demonstration that there are no reasonably available sites in areas with a lower probability of flooding that would be appropriate to the type of development or land use proposed. The application does not explain why land within zone 1, proposed for car parking, could not be reasonably used for the sports hall instead, (although it is unclear from PPS25 which is the more vulnerable use, a sports hall or a car park.) The Environment Agency should be consulted on this point and the application as a whole.

6. Saved TDLP policy S1, criteria A and B, cover road safety issues and accessibility by public transport, cycling and walking. The Highway Authority should be consulted on these aspects, including the proposed coach turning drop off space and new pedestrian access.

7. Saved TDLP policy S1, criterion E, covers noise, vibration, and other forms of pollution or nuisance. While a Noise Assessment has been submitted, the Borough Environmental Health Officer should be consulted on these aspects, particularly regarding the proposed construction and motor vehicle workshops, since residential properties lie nearby to the south east.

8. Saved TDLP policy S2 criterion J covers energy efficiency. The Design and Access Statement states that “ground source heat pumps, wind turbines and photovoltaics have been rejected for good reasons” but does not state what the reasons are. We feel that more information is required to show that use of heat pumps and photovoltaics in particular would not be reasonable or feasible, since the location at a college, particularly adjoining the Genesis Project, seems ideal for maximum use of such renewable energy. Similarly more justification for the non-use of biomass is needed, since the adjoining Genesis Project uses that source of renewable energy successfully.

Conclusion

While we do not object to the proposal, we strongly recommend investigation of the potential to amend the proposal as described in paragraph 4, including consultation with the Environment Agency on the flooding issues. Other points where further investigation/consultation are required are outlined in paragraphs 6, 7 and 8.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER - I have reviewed the noise assessment submitted and the noise monitoring and assessment appears satisfactory. The assessment does however identify that the final construction of the workshop has not been finalised and this would provide the majority of the sound insulation for the activities within the workshop. As such I would recommend a noise condition to limit levels above background levels at residential boundaries.

LEISURE DEVELOPMENT - Local Plan policy C3 on the loss of public open space states that a development resulting in the loss of playing fields needs to provide equal or better community benefit. This argument is not articulated and needs to be. There is potential for community benefit to offset loss of the pitches through the provision of community access to the proposed sports centre and to the outdoor pitches, both on this site or at the Canonsgrove sports pitches owned by SCAT. This would need to be a binding community access document agreed with the Council and Sport England prior to the commencement of the development.

SPORT ENGLAND - In relation to this application in order not to object we need to be satisfied that Exception E5 of our policy is met. This requires that "The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor sports facility, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of the playing field or playing fields." There appears limited information regarding the impact of the development on the College's playing fields. It appears that there is currently one football pitch marked out. The proposed location of the replacement sports hall does not impact on the existing pitch. The proposed layout plan indicates two football pitches being accommodated on the site to the west of the proposed sports hall. In order for the proposals to fully meet the requirements of policy E5 we would need to be satisfied that there are sufficient benefits to outweigh the loss of part of the field. In order to achieve this Sport England would wish to see the indoor and outdoor facilities at the college made available to the local community. We would suggest this is achieved either through a Section 106 community use agreement or a condition attached to the planning permission. Sport England has produced a number of model conditions and one which relates to community use scheme may be appropriate to use in this case. In the light of the above comments I can confirm that subject to confirmation that indoor and outdoor facilities will be made available for community use by way of an agreement or similar arrangement Sport England does not wish to object to this application.

CIVIC SOCIETY - The application illustrates the inadequacy of the SCAT site for the current and future development of the College. The application would have been better for two or three separate applications with each building being treated on its own. We have no comment to make on the functional proposed Construction and Motor Vehicle Workshops building, but are concerned about the consequences of its

large footprint, namely the forced move of the sports hall. The proposed sports hall site is in the Green wedge and in principle all such incursions ought to be resisted. We have read the Planning Policy comments and strongly support the suggestion that the sports hall should be relocated to the existing car park and the space lost from the car park should be made up by a 'greencreted' area in the green wedge. We think the response from NVB that the option was discarded because it worsened community access and decreased college security is nonsense. The alternate site on the existing car park is only less accessible by 50 or 60m and we cannot see how the car park presents a lower threat to security than the sport hall – if anything we regard a car park as a higher threat – and surely some users of the sports hall will use the car park. Another concern stemming from the Sports Hall site is there may be a privacy issue for Richmond Park if there is any southwards facing viewpoint for the public from anywhere above the hall's ground floor level.

WESSEX WATER - The development is in a foul sewerred area and a point of connection will need to be agreed at detailed stage. There is a public foul sewer crossing the site and an easement is required and diversion or protection works may need to be agreed. The integrity of Wessex systems should be protected. The developer has proposed disposal of surface water to the main sewer and the Development Engineer should be contacted to discuss an acceptable discharge rate. Attenuation of flows may be required. Water supply connection can be agreed at detailed stage. The developer should check with Wessex Water to ascertain if there are uncharted sewers or mains within the site.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY - We would remind the Local Planning Authority and the applicant that Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 25 requires the Sequential Test to be demonstrated for proposals other than those that meet the description in footnote 7 of the PPS and Change of Use. As this proposal is for 'Major' development the Environment Agency **OBJECT** on the lack of evidence of the Sequential Test. The Sequential Test is a requirement of PPS25 and the Local Planning Authority must be satisfied that it has been demonstrated and the Exception Test applied if appropriate too. In each case the Local Planning Authority must have a demonstrable Sequential Test (and Exception Test where appropriate) as part of the planning application. If they do not and they are challenged then this could clearly be an issue for them and could possibly lead to judicial review. Advice on the evidence required to show that the Sequential and Exception Test has been properly applied is set out in the Sequential Test table within the Practice Guide to PPS25 and the Environment Agency's Standing Advice on development and flood risk.

The Environment Agency further **OBJECT** to the proposed development, as it has been submitted without a fully compliant Flood Risk Assessment (FRA).

The FRA needs to demonstrate that the proposed floor levels of the development will be set at a minimum of 600 mm above the likely 1 in 100 year flood depth or 300 mm above the likely 1 in 100 year plus climate change flood depth, whichever is the highest. If the development cannot be raised to the above requirement, the applicant needs to provide evidence to that matter and explain how the building will be defended against flooding by using flood proofing measures to the same level.

Insufficient information has been submitted regarding the surface water drainage and the scheme for surface water limitation. The applicant should submit details of the existing surface water drainage system and demonstrate that it is designed to the current standards, and estimate the existing runoff from the site for a storm event up to and including the 1 in 100 year event plus climate change. The applicant should also provide an indicative layout plan for the surface water drainage network and attenuation scheme for the development.

In the event of the Environment Agency's objection being overcome, we would request the inclusion of the following conditions in addition to any flood risk conditions and informatives that may be applied as a result of the information received in respect of the above.

HIGHWAY AUTHORITY - The applications are for the redevelopment of a section of the existing SCAT complex. In the main it results in the demolition and rebuilding of elements of the College. The development also results in the relocation to the site of 2 currently off-site activities. This will result in a limited number of extra people on site but parking and therefore trip generation will be very similar to the existing trip patterns. This therefore will not have significant adverse effect on the Highway Network. The college contributed to Highway Works as a result of a previous application and I do not propose to require further works.

The College currently has a Travel Plan, set up in 2002. I believe it is important that this develops and changes as the College develops. To this end I would request a condition be attached to any consent to require the existing Travel Plan be updated, agreed by the LPA in conjunction with the Highway Authority and implemented prior to the new development coming into use.

3 LETTERS OF OBJECTION on grounds of the area is prone to flooding, the access road floods and the proposal will exacerbate the situation. The increased traffic noise will inconvenience residents of the hospice, the development would be a significant and detrimental incursion into the Green Wedge and undermining the policies that protect it. The sports hall and infant nursery will intrude into the green wedge and should be sited closer to existing buildings, approval for the road and car park stated no further western development would be allowed. The proposal will generate more vehicles and coaches using the access road, cars are often parked along the access and traffic would have to cross Silk Mills Road increasing the potential for accidents. The problem with surface water drainage will be increased. Noise and disturbance to local residents through traffic and sports hall could be considerable. The sports hall is 11m high and 38m long and will have an overbearing and oppressive effect on the nearest dwellings, the proposal will have a visual intrusion and the spectator balcony may lead to overlooking. The proposal may impact on badgers.

POLICY CONTEXT

Regional Planning Guidance Note 10
Policy SS5 – Principal Urban Areas
Policy SS14 - Taunton
EN1 – Landscape and Biodiversity

EN4 – Quality in the Built Environment
TRAN1 – Reducing the Need to Travel
RE2 – Flood Risk

Regional Spatial Strategy – Following the Panel Report the Draft RSS has recently been revised. Relevant policies are:

SD1 – The Ecological Footprint
SD2 – Climate Change
Policy A – Development at the Strategically Significant Cities and Towns
Policy G – Sustainable Construction
F1 – Flood Risk

Somerset & Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review

STR1 – Sustainable Development
STR4 – Development in Towns
STR6 – Development Outside Towns
Policy1 – Nature Conservation
Policy 38 – Sport and Recreation in the Countryside
Policy48 – Access and Parking

Taunton Deane Local Plan

S1 – General Requirements
S2 – Design
S7 – Outside Settlements
M2 – Parking
C3 – Protection of Recreational Open Space
C5 – Sports Facilities
C12 – Renewable Energy
EN6 – Protection of Trees/hedges
EN13 – Green Wedges
EN28 – Development and Flood risk

ASSESSMENT

The proposal is for the erection of a construction and motor vehicle workshop to replace the existing construction building on site as well as providing a replacement sports hall and new infant nursery building thus providing the necessary range of facilities to deliver the curriculum requirements on the current campus site. This would also help achieve a sustainability aim of reducing the need to travel by providing facilities in an accessible central location. The main issues raised over the scheme are the impact on residential amenity of nearby residents, the impact on the character of the area and the green wedge, sports facility provision, the traffic implications and the impact on flood risk and flooding.

The proposal will increase the built footprint of the development on the campus and will extend it westwards. Elements of the proposed scheme particularly the sports hall will be visible from the properties in Richmond Park. However the building will be approximately 25m from the residential boundaries of properties and there will be screening provided in addition to the existing between the building and these boundaries. In addition there are no first floor windows in the building facing south towards the residential properties. The Nursery building is lower and set around

60m from residential boundaries with more screening in between. The impact on these residential properties in terms of visual impact is considered to be an acceptable one and the noise issue is one that is considered by the Environmental Health Officer and no objection is raised subject to a noise condition to address the appropriate insulation of the buildings. The option of locating the car park to this location would potentially create more noise and disturbance to residents. An amendment to the landscaping scheme has been submitted which addresses the Landscape Officer's concerns over the siting of the Nursery building and planting associated with it and the sports hall. The current layout is therefore considered to be one that, while potentially impacting on views, particularly in winter months, is considered to be an acceptable one.

The site of the development extends the built form into the green wedge and the sports hall for instance lies around 80m beyond the car park boundary. Policy EN13 relates to green wedges and seeks to prevent development which would harm the open character of the area. The development as proposed lies on the edge of the existing green wedge area and the running track, artificial pitches and fencing lie to the north and it is therefore considered that the integrity and openness of the green wedge as a whole would not be harmed by the location of the buildings as proposed. Policy C3 of the Local Plan seeks to protect recreational open space and Sport England have guidance in terms of loss of playing fields. The area of the sports hall and nursery are within this area, however it is an under utilised open area not used for sport and pitches used in the area are to be retained. Sport England has raised no objection to the scheme subject to the provision of a community use agreement. The proposed new sports hall will provide an improved facility better than that lost and will be subject to a condition to secure a community use of the development. The use of the land is for educational facilities and there are considered to be sufficient playing field facilities retained to meet the necessary requirement of the establishment on the site. The site is well related to the existing campus and sports hall location and the access is considered suitable by the Highway Authority. There is an alternative for the sports hall siting which is the existing car park. The alternative sites were looked at by the College and the car park was rejected as a solution since it wanted to ensure the community facilities were located on the periphery of the campus to meet the objective of easy community access and enhanced college security. The car park option was also rejected on the basis of available site area and the need to retain access through the existing car park to service the site. It is considered that the replacement sports hall building is necessary, that moving the car park area would involve more noise and disturbance and land take and thus the site as proposed is an appropriate one that would comply with policy C3 and C5 of the Local Plan.

The Environmental Health Officer has considered the proposal and considers the scheme to be acceptable subject to a condition with regard to noise to ensure the buildings are adequately sound insulated. An ecological survey was submitted with the application and no protected species were considered to be affected by the scheme. The scheme includes energy efficiency measures designed into the construction of the building and includes solar panel provision as a means of heating in striving to achieve a BREEAM excellent status. Other renewable energies have been looked at but not taken up on grounds of cost and practicality. The provision of the renewable energy proposed is an element of the scheme that will be conditioned.

The Highway Authority are satisfied that there will be no significant difference in trip patterns to the current situation and raise no objection subject to the updating of the travel plan.

The site of the proposal lies to the north west of the existing campus and lies within flood zone 2. The development is considered to comply with the sequential test in that there are no alternative sites within the campus to locate the buildings proposed that lie outside of flood zone 2. The proposed buildings are considered to be in the 'More Vulnerable' category of development and this is considered to be an appropriate form of development within flood zone 2. The developer has set floor levels at 17.56m and 18m AOD to address the flood risk and details of surface water are being submitted to address the Environment Agency concerns. Consequently subject to the Environment Agency withdrawing their objection the scheme would be acceptable in flood risk terms and the recommendation is therefore worded accordingly.

In summary the development is considered an acceptable means of providing the necessary on site replacement of teaching and workshop space to meet the needs of the College. The siting and impact on the character of this area in terms of neighbour's amenity, the green wedge and protected open space has been carefully considered and impact is considered an acceptable one and one that will see a benefit to the College and local community in the long term.

RECOMMENDATION

Subject to the withdrawal of the Environment Agency objection and provision of any necessary conditions and no objections raising new issues by 5th September the Development Manager in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair be authorised to determine and Permission be GRANTED subject to conditions of time limit, materials, landscaping, retention and protection of trees, site clearance, updated travel plan, community use agreement, surface water disposal details, oil/fuel storage, noise limit, further ecology survey if no commencement in a year, inclusion of solar panel provision. Notes re nesting birds, oil storage pollution, waste, protection of Wessex infrastructure.

If the Environment Agency objection is not withdrawn by 14th September permission be refused for reason of inadequate FRA contrary to PPS25.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION

The proposed development is not considered to have any significant detrimental affects on the amenity of neighbours, flood risk, highway safety or the openness of the green wedge and is considered to comply with Taunton Deane Local Plan policies S1, S2, M2, C3, C12, EN6, EN13 and EN28 and material considerations do not indicate otherwise.

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

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