

DELEGATED REPORT

APPLICATION NUMBER	S6/2005/863/FP
LOCATION	Queenswood School, Shepherds Way, Hatfield
PROPOSAL	Erection of new tennis centre and sports hall following demolition of existing buildings

THE SITE

The Queenswood School site is located between Hatfield and Potters Bar, adjoining the B157 (Shepherds Way). The application site is located to the northern part of the educational core of the school and the site is presently occupied by a structure known as "the Palaestra" (a large unheated building housing two indoor tennis courts), two temporary classrooms and a number of other ancillary structures (stores).

The site adjoins woodland areas which envelope the School site and trees to the north are protected under area Tree Preservation Order TPO 3 (W30).

The site falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the Queenswood School site is also designated as a Major Developed Site (MDS). A master planning brief for this MDS was adopted in March 2003.

THE PROPOSAL

The application seeks planning permission for the demolition of existing buildings and for the erection of a new sports hall and tennis centre together with a new driveway to enable access for emergency vehicles.

The proposed sports hall/weights room are to be located to the eastern part of the proposed building immediately adjacent to the Leach Centre and an existing gym. A viewing gallery is proposed at first floor level to the northern end of this sports hall. Ancillary accommodation (ie seating area, changing rooms, store and office space) will link the sports hall to the (larger) indoor tennis centre containing two tennis courts.

The proposed building is to have a contemporary designed external appearance with a curved roof not unlike that of the recently completed indoor swimming pool close to this site. External materials proposed are to be brickwork together with obscured glazed "Kalwall" and terracotta "Rainscreen" cladding. The proposed curved roof is to be "Sarna".

The largest element of the scheme is to be the tennis centre. The footprint of the proposed building is shown (drawing no 0307-03 A) as being reduced from that of the existing tennis centre (to be demolished) and the ridge height of the existing structure is 64m, whereas the ridge height of the proposed tennis centre is to be 60.9m.

A supporting planning statement accompanies the application. This document outlines the policy background of the site, its MDS status within the Green Belt and the adoption of the master plan in March 2003.

The statement explains that the master plan sets out the School's educational requirements and development aspirations and that some of these have now been achieved including the construction of the new swimming pool and the conversion of the former Great Hall into a performing arts centre (planning permission S6/2004/446 presently being implemented).

The supporting statement makes it clear that the subject of this planning application represents the last element in the master plan. The need for new facilities was established in the master planning brief. The current indoor tennis courts are a totally inadequate complement to the outstanding outdoor tennis facility. In addition, Lawn Tennis Association requirements state that courts must be sole marked for tennis and the old gymnasium is too small to provide for the other sports currently played in the Palaestra. Queenswood sport overall, and its continued development as a centre for excellence for tennis in particular, is there dependant upon the building of a two-court indoor tennis facility. Because the tennis centre must be used exclusively for that sport, other sports facilities currently accommodated within the Palaestra need to be housed in a separate modern four-court sports hall.

The applicant states that the proposals meet the needs previously set out in the master planning brief and comprise a new indoor tennis building on the footprint of the Palaestra, a new sports hall, a weights room and ancillary changing, storage and administrative accommodation. The applicant states that the design of the proposals have been carefully considered to ensure that they are appropriate in massing, style and materials to the Green Belt location in general, the overall School campus and the particular attributes of the site and surrounding buildings.

The statement explains that the school has two existing pedestrian routes passing either side of the existing Leach centre connecting to other parts of the site and that one of these passes across the site of the proposed new buildings. The applicant suggests that it is necessary to retain both of these routes and so the new sports hall is designed to be separate from the Leach Centre with a covered walkway between them to retain this route. At the time the master planning brief was prepared, it was assumed that the roofs of the new building and the existing Leach Centre would be formed into an integral element. However, the applicant explains that the establishment of the walkways provides for a flat roofed and understated link element allowing the two buildings to be viewed as independent structures and designs. The applicant is of the opinion that this is beneficial to the overall appearance of the buildings.

The applicant points out that, although this separation helps articulate the existing Leach Centre and the proposed new building, it will require the removal of the nearest protected Oak tree for the route to be retained.

In a similar manner, the applicant explains that the link between the proposed sports hall and tennis centre provides an opportunity to articulate these two large buildings with a different flat roof and glazed façade.

Finally the applicant points out that the two connected buildings will require access for fire engines. This is to be provided to the rear of the sports hall and Stamp House

(residential boarding accommodation). This emergency vehicle route was shown indicatively in the master plan.

PLANNING HISTORY

S6/2004/446	Alterations and extensions to the existing Great Hall to form a performing arts centre - Granted
S6/2003/319	Erection of indoor swimming pool building - Granted
S6/2002/37	Erection of glazed entrance to library - Granted
S6/2000/1119	Formation of new vehicular access and gates to serve existing car park, and closure of existing access - Granted
S6/1990/1011	New building to provide replacement changing facilities, with first floor gym facilities and single storey extension to existing gymnasium & provision of 5 car parking spaces - Granted

SUMMARY OF RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

PPG2 Green Belts

Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991- 2011:
Policy 5 - Green Belts

Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005:

SD1 – Sustainable Development

D1 – Quality of Design

D2 - Character & Context

CLT7 – Community Use of Education Facilities

CLT8 – New and Extended Education Facilities

RA1 – Development in the Green Belt

RA5 – Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt (Limited Infilling)

RA6 – Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt (Redevelopment)

RA21 – Leisure and Tourism in the Countryside

R17 – Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

Supplementary Design Guidance (Statement of Council Policy)

Revised Parking Standards- Supplementary Planning Guidance, adopted Jan 2004

REPRESENTATIONS

Neighbour notification letters were not sent, there being no properties adjacent to the application site.

A site notice posted on 20 July 2005 advertised the application.

No third party representations have been received.

North Mymms Parish Council has not commented on the application

Hertfordshire Highways

Initial response from Glyn Reedman (Area Highways Engineer) 20 July 2005:

Requests that the applicant submit a transport statement setting out the likely usage of the sports facilities, including any use by the community outside normal school hours and the likely car parking requirements.

Transport Statement from the applicant, received 30 August 2005:

- Primarily, these facilities will be built for the use of Queenswood staff and pupils in pursuance of the school's standard sports curriculum. On school days there will be no additional use of the parking facilities apart from occasional visiting team coaches.
- Overall level of parking provision at the immediate adjoining car park is 90 spaces. This is considered sufficient to meet the needs of any community use that may occur. It should also be noted that there are a further 100 spaces adjoining the tennis centre, approximately 5 minutes walk away.
- Any use of the sports facilities will be outside the school times when the car park is not in use by either staff, pupils or visitors.
- The two proposed indoor tennis courts may be available for use by external groups during the school holidays, some evenings and weekends during term time. Anyone attending must be a member of a recognised sporting organisation, as casual use by the general public cannot be entertained. However, this merely mirrors the current availability of the existing two indoor courts (which are to be demolished) and will not result in any significant additional traffic seeking access to the site.
- The only possible increase in use will be associated with the proposed Sports Hall. It is intended that the new Sports Hall will also be made available for external groups, but, again, this will be outside the school day and on occasions during the holidays.
- A detailed letting schedule cannot be provided as the school have yet to discuss any lettings with community groups and are unlikely to do so until such a time as the building is at least under construction if not completed. Given the layout of the hall, even if it were to be used by two teams of say 11 a side, 90m spaces will be more than adequate even if there were a swimming club utilised the adjoining pool.
- In terms of traffic, school holiday use will be partly by groups already resident at the site. External groups, whether in the holidays or in the evenings/weekends will access the site outside peak hours, and have no impact on the free flow of traffic in the vicinity of the site.
- Proposal is in accordance with the adopted planning brief for the site, which was the subject of consultation with a range of statutory and non-statutory bodies, including Hertfordshire Council Highways who raised no objection to the principle of development as established in the brief.

Response from Glyn Reedman (Area Highways Engineer) 9 September 2005:

The transport information provided by the applicant in respect of likely usage and car parking provision for the site satisfies me that there are no additional highway issues arising from the application. Therefore confirm that the highways authority would not wish to raise any objections.

Council Arboricultural Officer

Following submission of further details of an arboricultural survey (AR/592p/03) the Council's Arboricultural Officer comments:

I am still wary of the very large magnificent Oak they plan to fell on the corner of the sports hall (closest to the tennis centre) it appears they plan to plant a replacement, but this would need to be sizeable and have an establishment program put in place.

Also I think we should see a protection plan for the retained trees, there is a lot of work going on very near some very valuable trees and a specification/method statement from them showing how they expect to achieve this would be helpful.

Suggests conditions with regard to construction specification/method statement and tree protection.

DISCUSSION

The main issues relate to the appearance and visual impact of the proposed building and also to any potential impact on the character and openness of the Green Belt taking into account the status of the site as a Major Developed Site in the Green Belt within the context of the adopted master planning brief.

The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and identified in the adopted plan as a Major Developed Site (MDS).

In terms of the master planning brief (adopted in March 2003) and relevant policies in the adopted and emerging plan relating to the MDS, this states that limited infilling and partial redevelopment may be permitted subject to the following criteria:

- the proposal will have no greater impact on the purposes of including land in the Green Belt than the existing development;
- the proposal should not exceed the height of the existing buildings;
- the proposals should not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site;
- All significant trees on the site should be protected;
- A high quality of design will be expected in any new development. The architectural style found on the site varies between buildings and a flexible palette of materials should be used to ensure that buildings are suitable for the site and their context. Reference should be made to the Design Guidance prepared as SPG by the Council;

- Any new development must be acceptable in terms of its impact on the highway network, including highway network including highway safety;
- Any planning applications should have regard to relevant elements of the Sustainability Checklist in Appendix 1 of the Revised Deposit District Plan Review.

Paragraph 3.15 of the master planning brief makes particular mention of a replacement indoor tennis facility linked to a new sports hall.

Overall, the proposals are considered to accord with Green Belt policy and with the adopted master planning brief. The proposed new indoor tennis facility, sports hall and link building are to be located within the developed envelope (MDS boundary as defined in the brief). The proposals would have no greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing school complex. Furthermore, no element of the proposals would exceed the height of the existing buildings- the new tennis centre will in fact be lower in height than the existing building.

The proposed new building will comprise a total 2836 sq m of external floorspace (ie new indoor tennis facility, sports hall and link building). The adopted master planning brief indicates that the total external floorspace for these facilities was envisaged to be 2885 sq m. When considered in terms of the total floorspace on the site (the estimated footprint of buildings within the MDS boundary is approximately 10,400 sq m) this would not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site.

Policy CLT7 (Community Use of Education Facilities) states that the Council will grant planning permission for the multiple use of existing and new educational facilities for community and leisure activities and that where new dual use facilities are proposed they should:

- (i) Be ancillary to the main use of the facility for education;
- (ii) Not interfere with the delivery of the education service; and
- (iii) Not have a harmful impact on the character of the surrounding area or amenities of nearby residential properties and other uses.

Although the supporting statement has indicated that primarily, these new facilities will be for the use of Queenswood staff and pupils in pursuance of the school's standard sports curriculum. However the applicant has acknowledge that the two proposed indoor tennis courts may be available for use by external groups during the school holidays, some evenings and weekends during term time. Similarly, the applicant acknowledges that it is intended that the new Sports Hall will also be made available for external groups, but, again, this will be outside the school day and on occasions during the holidays. It is considered that the proposal is acceptable and complies with Policy CLT7, and a condition shall be imposed on the consent to ensure that the use of the development remains ancillary to the main use of the site for educational purposes.

While the proposals may appear to be contrary to elements of Policy CLT8 (New and Extended Education Facilities) in that it is a proposal to locate additional education facilities away from existing centres of population and passenger transport services, it is considered that this policy is only partially relevant here. The preamble suggests

that this policy relates to County Council maintained schools and, in any event, the specific requirements of this policy are outweighed by the special circumstances here in that this is a designated Major Developed Site within the Green Belt for which there is an adopted master planning brief.

Turning to aspects of design, the proposed building relates well to the scale and character of adjacent buildings. As stated in the master planning brief, a high quality of design will be expected in any new development and the architectural style found on the site varies between buildings and a flexible palette of materials should be used to ensure that buildings are suitable for the site and their context.

The architectural style, roof form, windows, detailing and materials proposed are considered appropriate in this location and the new building will represent a marked improvement in design terms over the existing structures that are to be demolished. The separated link sections will, in particular, represent an attractive design feature and will not impact detrimentally on the visual amenity when viewed from other areas of the site.

The proposal will result in the loss of one Oak tree protected by TPO 3 but this is considered to be justifiable given the benefits the whole scheme represents. New planting will compensate for this loss and relevant conditions will be imposed both to protect existing trees and to ensure that a detailed Construction Specification/ Method Statement is submitted to and approved by the LPA in relation to the proposed driveway.

Overall, the design of the proposals is considered to comply with adopted guidance including the Design Guidance prepared as SPG by the Council. The resulting structure will be well-designed and attractive and will complement the existing buildings on the site.

The proposal accords with relevant elements of the Sustainability Checklist in Appendix 1 of the Revised Deposit District Plan Review.

In terms of parking, the Highways Authority is satisfied that the proposed development will not give rise to additional pupils or staff, and information provided by the applicant in respect of likely usage and car parking provision for the site satisfies the highways authority that there are no additional highway issues arising from the application. It is considered, therefore, that no additional parking will be required on site.

CONCLUSION

The proposals are acceptable. The design of proposed new tennis centre and sports hall relate well to the character of this part of the Queenswood School site and to those school buildings in the vicinity. Existing car parking provision and access are acceptable. The size of the proposal falls within the scope of the development for these purposes outlined in the adopted master planning brief and represents an acceptable increase in total floor area over and above the size of the existing school complex. The proposals are acceptable in that they will not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site and will have no greater impact on the surrounding countryside and the Metropolitan Green Belt than the existing buildings that are to be demolished.

The proposal satisfies all relevant policies of the Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991- 2011, together with Policies SD1, D1, D2, CLT7, RA1, RA5, RA6, RA21 and R17 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 and Supplementary Design Guidance. The proposal also accords with the adopted master planning brief for the site.

RECOMMENDATION

That planning application S6/2005/0863/FP be **APPROVED**.

CONDITIONS

1. SC01 – Standard time limit
2. The development hereby approved shall be used as a facility ancillary to the main use of the site for educational purposes.

REASON: To ensure control over the scale of the use of development within the Metropolitan Green Belt. To comply with Policies RA1 and RA5 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

3. No development shall take place until samples of materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with details so approved. The type of external materials used shall not be varied without the prior written permission of the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To ensure that the finished appearance of the development is satisfactory. To comply with Policy D1 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

4. No work shall commence on site in relation to the development hereby approved (including any tree felling, tree pruning, demolition works, soil moving, temporary access construction and or widening, or any other operations involving the use of motorised vehicles or construction machinery) until a detailed Arboricultural Method statement for the construction of the proposed driveway and buildings has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This shall provide for the protection of retained trees during construction works and the long-term retention of the trees. No development or other operations shall take place except in complete accordance with the approved method statement.

No operations shall commence on site in connection with the development hereby approved (including any tree felling, tree pruning, demolition work, soil moving, temporary access construction and/or widening or any operations involving the use of motorised vehicles or construction machinery) until the protection works required by the approved protection scheme are in place.

No excavations for services, storage of materials or machinery, parking of vehicles, deposit or excavation of soil or rubble, lighting of fires or disposal of liquids shall take place within any area designated as being fenced off or otherwise protected in the approved protection scheme.

Protective fencing shall be retained intact for the full duration of the development hereby approved, and shall not be removed or repositioned without the prior written approval of the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To protect the health of trees on the site. To comply with Policy R17 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

Informatives:

1. The applicant is advised that any asbestos on the site, either bonded with cement or unbonded, should be dismantled carefully using water to dampen down and removed from the site. If unbonded cement is found, the Health and Safety Executive should be contacted and the asbestos removed by a licensed contractor. This procedure is necessary to protect the health and safety of people in the vicinity, including those working on the development.

SUMMARY OF THE REASONS FOR THE GRANT OF PERMISSION

The proposal satisfies Policy 5 of the Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991- 2011 together with Policies SD1, D1, D2, CLT7, RA1, RA5, RA6, RA21 and R17 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 and Supplementary Design Guidance (Statement of Council Policy). The proposal also accords with the adopted Master Planning Brief for the site.

DRAWING NUMBERS

- 0215-400 A
- 0307-02 A
- 0307-03 A
- 0307-04
- 0307-05

Signature of report writer.....

Date.....

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