Report to	Planning applications committee Item	
	13 May 2021	
Report of	Area Development Manager	
Subject	Application no 21/00381/U - Eaton Vale Activity Centre, Church Lane, Norwich, NR4 6NN	4(a)
Reason for referral	Objections	

Ward:	Eaton
Case officer	Sarah Hinchcliffe - <u>sarahhinchcliffe@norwich.gov.uk</u>

Development proposal					
Retrospective change of use from outdoor sports or recreation (Use Class F2) to day					
nursery (Use Class E).					
Representations					
Comment	Support				
0	0				
	e from outdoor sports or re Representations				

Main issues	Key considerations	
1. Principle of use	Creation of educational facilities, loss of open	
	space.	
2. Landscape, trees and	Impact on Yare Valley Character Area and	
open space	designated open space.	
3. Transport	Suitability of access to the site by all modes. The	
	narrow nature of Church Lane.	
4. Amenity	Noise and disturbance from outdoor activities	
Expiry date	12 May 2021 (extended until 19 May)	
Recommendation	Approve	



© Crown Copyright and database right 2021. Ordnance Survey 100019747.

Planning Application No21/00381/USite AddressEaton Vale

City Council

PLANNING SERVICES

Eaton Vale Activity Centre, Church lane 1.1 500



Scale

1:1,500 NORWICH





The site and surroundings

- 1. The application site is located within the Yare river valley in the ward of Eaton, to the south of the city. The site consists of a 900 square metre compound, site access and 10 spaces within the main car park, within a larger site which comprises a Scout and Guide activity centre with open spaces used for outdoor activities and camping.
- 2. The area of the site that is subject to this application is enclosed by a mixture of timber and wire mesh fencing 2 metres in height and is located to the north of the main activity centre buildings and adjacent to the vehicle access road.
- 3. There are a number of mature trees within and surrounding the whole site. The site forms land which slopes down to the river to the south and west of the site. There is a railway line to the south of the site adjacent to the river and Eaton golf course is located to the east.
- 4. The site is accessed via a short single vehicle width section of Church Lane which extends south from the main section of Church Lane where it meets Marston Lane. Church Lane continues as a green link through to the river along the vehicular/pedestrian track that runs to the east of the site.

Constraints

5. Yare Valley Character Area and Eaton Vale Open Space, natural and semi natural green space designation.

Relevant planning history

6. There is no planning history that is relevant to this application. The site has a number of permissions relating to the use of the site as a Scout headquarters building and activity centre.

The proposal

- 7. The application is to regularise the use of a small enclosed area of land as a children's day nursery at the existing activity centre at Eaton Vale Activity Centre on Church Lane in Eaton. The day nursery use has reported to have been operating at the site since March 2018.
- 8. The nursery described as a 'philosophy-led forest school nursery', provides outdoor facilities for children aged between 2 and 8 years old on a full and part time basis. The nursery caters mainly for home educated children and children who experience flexible schooling (where children attend the nursery on some days alongside main-stream schooling on other days). There are currently 56 children on the school roll although there will generally be between 30 and 40 children on site at any one time. Up to 10 staff provide education and supervision, dependent on the number of children present.
- 9. The proposed use change relates to an approx. 900 square metre fenced area only. Access into the enclosed site (approx. 40 metres x 22 metres) is from a path off the access road to the north. The area contains some small, ancillary, structures

temporary in nature such as a yurt/tepee, open sided shelter, timber platform and small timber sheds.

10. In addition, 10 parking spaces are allocated for use by the nursery in the main activity centre car park, 50 metres to the south.

Representations

11. Due to the nature of the site and its location alongside a well-used route to the river the application was advertised on site. Adjacent and neighbouring properties have been notified in writing. 2 letters of representation have been received citing the issues as summarised in the table below. All representations are available to view in full at http://planning.norwich.gov.uk/online-applications/ by entering the application number.

Issues raised	Response
Church Lane is now a busy traffic route and Fairways School creates a daily traffic jam. A nursery school would only add to the problem.	See main issue 3
Access to the site is narrow and needs to be controlled at busy times and we do not want any road widening. The road is too dangerous with the increase in traffic over the last few years noticeable.	See main issue 3
Perhaps the solution to the narrow section of road may be lights to stop traffic for pedestrians or for visitors to park on Church Lane.	See main issue 3
Outdoor sports and recreation is ideal for the site, but a change to a nursery is inappropriate and does not need to be on this site. If a nursery is needed in Eaton it should be sited in Bluebell Road.	See main issue 1
Change of use to Class E would permit wider activities including retail to industrial which is out of the question for this site.	A planning condition can be used to restrict use. See main issue 1.
Local residents and other regular users of this road have not been consulted.	A site notice was erected at the entrance to the site to make users of the lane aware of the application.

Consultation responses

12. Consultation responses are summarised below the full responses are available to view at http://planning.norwich.gov.uk/online-applications/ by entering the application number.

Highways

- The nurserv is located on Church Lane which is an adopted highway, however it is 13. narrow for most of its length being suitable for one way vehicular traffic with no passing places from its junction with Marston Lane to the site entrance, which is approximately 90 metres. There is no footway and any vehicles encountering the site would have to slow or stop to enable pedestrians to pass by, or crawl behind pedestrians at walking pace as the verges are narrow and adjacent hedges do not allow space for pedestrians to get off the carriageway. Church Lane is unlit, so in hours of darkness, especially during winter months would make this a much less attractive walking route. Church Lane is a 30mph road so does not have traffic calming and does not have speed limit signage shown, it is adjacent to a 20mph speed limit restriction on Marston Lane, due to the narrowness of this section of Church Lane towards the site actual traffic speeds were observed as being less than 20mph which is more conducive to pedestrian safety. Bus stops are located nearby on Marston Lane, but there is no footway, pedestrians would be required to walk on the grass verge which is showing signs of wear, so that it becomes mud, there are no resources currently available to construct a footway for this route.
- 14. Once pedestrians enter the site there is no footway, and so must deal with any vehicular traffic on the site road. It was observed that the grassed verge area is obstructed with various objects that present an obstacle course for pedestrians which would seem to require them to walk on the site road. The site road is unlit, which again poses risks to pedestrians during hours of darkness in winter.
- 15. Once at the site there is a logical one-way system for vehicles to enter, drop off and depart. The application proposes 1 EV chargepoint which is welcome. Pedestrians accessing the site must use an un-surfaced compacted mud path. This is not considered acceptable in wet months. We would normally ask for an asphalted path or a TROD which is used in more rural settings that uses road planings to provide a drained and more suitable surface for pedestrians.
- 16. The application makes no specific provision for cycle parking for staff or visitors. This is unacceptable in highway terms as there is inadequate provision for sustainable travel. We would encourage between 5% to 10% of staff and parents attending to have cycle parking, it is understood that some children use push scooters.
- 17. The applicant has not provided a modal split of how staff or parents with children travel to and from the site, so it is difficult to give more specific advice about what provision should be provided for their needs. However, it would be essential that a Travel Information Plan is provided.
- 18. I have outlined my concerns and would hope that some of these matters would be addressed by a future application if the site did expand significantly. Namely I would expect to see adequate provision for pedestrian movement within the site and suitable cycle parking, I may also wish to see a footway constructed on Marston

Lane to the bus stop. Consideration should also be given to limiting future growth of the site to mitigate potential unacceptable vehicular traffic generation and conflict on the narrow section of Church Lane.

19. Notwithstanding these concerns given that the use is extant and has not resulted in complaints of severely adverse highway issues my view on balance is that I will not wish to object, subject to the imposition of conditions to secure an electric vehicle charging point and supply and implement a Travel Information Plan.

Landscape

- 20. The site is currently in use as a nursery and it would appear that the activities on site are not of detriment to the existing trees and green infrastructure.
- 21. The existing access track and car parking is very informal and in the most part appears to be unsurfaced. The car parking may need to be rationalised and formalised with no dig surfacing to take account of increased use and potential long-term damage to existing tree roots.
- 22. The existing boundary fencing although functional is not attractive, as fencing is replaced or maintained options more sympathetic with the woodland setting should be encouraged.

South Norfolk Council

23. No comments or views on the retrospective change of use.

Yare Valley Society

- 24. The Applicant has failed to demonstrate there is a need for a change of use for the Day Nursery to continue to function. Unless the Applicant can demonstrate a need for a change of use to class E, the application should be refused.
- 25. The Day Nursery is a "Forest School" nursery that has been in operation since early 2018 under land use Class F2. The Yare Valley Society is not aware of any challenge to this arrangement over this period of time. (The only comments received by the Yare Valley Society relate to the Church Lane access to the Nursery, and not to the Nursery as such.) It would seem that there is no reason for the Nursery not to continue to operate under the present land use, and so there is no need for a change of use.
- 26. Land Use Class E is not appropriate for an area that lies in the Yare Valley Character Area and has the protection of Policy DM6 under the Local Plan
- 27. Under the new classification of land use introduced in September 2020, Class E covers many uses ranging from "...retail sale of goods ..." to "Industrial processes". Most importantly, changes of use within the new Class E do not constitute development, and so do not require planning permission, e.g., change of use from Day Nursery to "industrial processes". Few, if any, of the uses in Class E could be deemed to fit with the requirements of Local Plan Policy DM6. Granting a change of use to Class E would open the way for Planning Applications for developments inappropriate for a site in the Yare Valley Character Area.

- 28. Unless the change of use can be restricted by enforceable conditions, a change of use to Class E should be refused on the grounds that Class E embraces developments that would be outside of those consistent with Policy DM6.
- 29. The Nursery is reached by way of a very narrow section of Church Lane which is a popular and frequently used recreational access route for pedestrians to Eaton Common, Marston Marsh, Keswick Mill, and the network of bridleways, paths, and quiet roads beyond. There is little room for cars and other vehicles to pass pedestrians in this section, and there is often a need for pedestrians (if able) to squeeze to one side. The access road is certainly not suitable for anything but occasional vehicular use, and, bearing in mind the rural setting of this entrance to the Yare Valley Character Area, widening of the road is undesirable.
- 30. To alert drivers to the need to drive considerately over this section, suitable signage should be installed, ideally indicating that "Pedestrians have Priority" or at minimum "Pedestrians in Road Ahead", although the latter does not ideally fit the situation.
- 31. The present "boundary fence" consists, at least in part, of a makeshift arrangement of what appears to be hessian stretched between wooden posts, presumably to give an element of privacy. It is an unsightly intrusion into the woodland character of the site, and out of place within a Landscape Character Area. Immediate steps should be taken to secure a more sympathetic boundary screening, ideally in plant form guided by professional green landscaping advice.

Assessment of planning considerations

Relevant development plan policies

- 32. Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk adopted March 2011 amendments adopted Jan. 2014 (JCS)
 - JCS1 Addressing climate change and protecting environmental assets
 - JCS2 Promoting good design
 - JCS5 The economy
 - JCS6 Access and transportation
 - JCS7 Supporting communities
- 33. Norwich Development Management Policies Local Plan adopted Dec. 2014 (DM Plan)
 - DM1 Achieving and delivering sustainable development
 - DM2 Ensuring satisfactory living and working conditions
 - DM3 Delivering high quality design
 - DM5 Planning effectively for flood resilience
 - DM6 Protecting and enhancing the natural environment
 - DM7 Trees and development
 - DM8 Planning effectively for open space and recreation
 - DM16 Supporting the needs of business
 - DM17 Supporting small business
 - DM22 Planning for and safeguarding community facilities
 - DM28 Encouraging sustainable travel
 - DM30 Access and highway safety
 - DM31 Car parking and servicing

Other material considerations

34. Relevant sections of the National Planning Policy Framework February 2019 (NPPF):

- NPPF2 Achieving sustainable development
- NPPF6 Building a strong, competitive economy
- NPPF8 Promoting healthy and safe communities
- NPPF9 Promoting sustainable transport
- NPPF12 Achieving well-designed places
- NPPF 11 Making effective use of land
- NPPF12 Achieving well designed places
- NPPF14 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- NPPF15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Case Assessment

35. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Relevant development plan polices are detailed above. Material considerations include policies in the National Planning Framework (NPPF), the Councils standing duties, other policy documents and guidance detailed above and any other matters referred to specifically in the assessment below. The following paragraphs provide an assessment of the main planning issues in this case against relevant policies and material considerations.

Main issue 1: Principle of development

- 36. Key policies and NPPF paragraphs JCS7, DM1, DM8, DM22, NPPF section 8 and 11.
- 37. The established use of the site is as an activity centre for outdoor sports, recreation and associated residential use by Scouts and Guides. The day nursery use currently operating from the application site is not connected to the Scouts or Guides associations and is unconnected to the main activity centre operators and operations. It therefore constitutes a separate planning unit.
- 38. Policy 7 of the Joint Core Strategy and policy DM22 of the local plan set out the policies for the provision of educational facilities. Policy DM22 sets out that educational development will be accepted and permitted subject to it meeting a number of criteria. Of relevance to this case are that the proposal would not undermine the objectives for sustainable development set out in policy DM1 and that it would not give rise to significant impacts on the environment, highway safety or traffic arising from locational constraints.
- 39. A nursery school is not a use which would necessarily command an urban fringe location such as this. The specific type of day nursery provision offered at the site is however based on forest school principles and access to the natural environment for play and learning based on a child's emotional wellbeing and physical needs. The nursery operates from within a clearly defined, enclosed area in an area of existing trees and contained within an expansive wider natural area. On occasion children attending the nursery are taken on supervised walks within the wider activity centre grounds.

- 40. Policy DM1 supports development that enhances and extends accessible opportunities for education and training and improved health and well-being and promotes mixed, diverse, inclusive and equitable communities by increasing opportunities for social interaction, community cohesion, cultural participation and lifelong learning, which could be achieved through permitting the continued use of the site for day nursery use.
- 41. This type of day nursery does not require conventional buildings or classrooms. Use of the site by children and with a primary focus on access to the natural environment for play and learning is considered a complementary use to those of the activity centre. The specific type of operation that takes place justifies the location and is acceptable given the very small extent of the 5.5 hectare activity centre site and designated area of open space that has changed to the nursery use. The confined nature of the application site helps to restrict capacity of the nursery to ensure that it remains low key and prevents the use from compromising activities or the function of the wider designated area of natural, semi-natural green space. The lack of large scale buildings also ensures that the 'loss' of open/green space is limited and reversible in the future and should the use cease the fencing and temporary structures could be removed and the area reincorporated into the wider site.
- 42. The specific operations of the day nursery are considered by officers to justify this quite unique location and it is necessary to restrict the use of this discrete and well defined part of the activity centre site to day nursery use only by planning condition.
- 43. The benefits that such a facility provides for children, some of which have individual educational needs, should be weighed against the conflict with policy DM8 that results from the associated loss of designated open space, which is considered in more detail in section 2 below.

Main issue 2: Landscaping, trees and open space

- 44. Key policies and NPPF paragraphs JCS2, DM1, DM3, DM6, DM7, DM8, NPPF section 11, 12 and 15.
- 45. The wider Eaton Vale Activity Centre is used for outdoor recreation activities and camping. Existing structures on this expansive rural/urban fringe site include a climbing wall, sheds, cabins and large tents, canoe storage racks and small scale structures associated with activities such as archery, canoeing, climbing, high ropes etc. all located mainly in and amongst the wooded areas of the site.
- 46. Policy DM6 only permits development for specific purposes within the Yare Valley character area where it would not damage the environmental quality, biodiversity or character of the area. The types of development which could be permitted include facilities ancillary to outdoor sport and recreation or other uses appropriate to the purpose of this policy.
- 47. The nursery site is a discrete, small area enclosed by high boundary fencing for safeguarding and child security reasons. It is an unfortunate but necessary requirement to enclose this area and separate it from the activities which take place on the rest of the site. The enclosure is however viewed in the context of other enclosures and structures located in close proximity to the main activity centre building and does not otherwise have a significant impact on the more open areas

of the site. The enclosure therefore adequately relates to the character of the surrounding site as an activity centre, and would not be an incongruous feature at the site or to the landscape.

- 48. Within the enclosed area are small scale, temporary type structures made of timber and canvas, which provide areas for shelter, play and toilet facilities. These structures are low level, low key and mainly obscured from view by the perimeter fencing.
- 49. The landscape section have commented that it would appear that the activities on site are not of detriment to the existing trees and green infrastructure and no trees are to be removed. However, the existing boundary fencing although functional is not attractive and options more sympathetic with the woodland setting are encouraged as it is replaced or maintained. The Yare Valley Society echo the concerns about the appearance of the fencing.
- 50. Policy DM1 and DM3 requires proposals to protect and enhance the physical, environmental and heritage assets while safeguarding the special visual qualities of Norwich and respect the character and local distinctiveness of an area. The presence of mature trees and vegetation around the immediate area provide a good level of screening, and provide a natural backdrop to help blend the application site into the landscape when viewed from the wider river valley. The enclosure is however visible from the lane to the east which provides access for members of the public to the river. The fencing itself however does not require planning consent and is viewed in the context of other fencing in the locality which encloses storage compounds associated with the activity centre. The natural character, distinctiveness and visual qualities of the wider landscape is not adversely affected by the proposed development and the proposals comply with policies DM1, DM3, DM6 and DM7.
- 51. Whilst policy DM8 seeks to protect existing open space of various types the designation acknowledges that much of the site is in private ownership and used as an activity centre and therefore general public access to the site is already not possible. The green link along the eastern edge of the site to the river is still maintained and not directly affected by the proposed development. Given that the extent of loss of urban greenspace is not significant and the proposed use is related to recreation through play and wellbeing of children there is not considered to be an unacceptable loss of urban greenspace under the provisions of policy DM8.

Main issue 3: Transport

- 52. Key policies and NPPF paragraphs JCS6, DM28, DM30, DM31, NPPF paragraphs 8, 102-111.
- 53. Due to the specialised offering of the nursery, families may access the facilities at the site from a wider catchment than a conventional nursery school setting. Morning drop off times are between 08:00 and 09:00 with pickups at 12 noon and then between 14:00 and 17:30.
- 54. The site is located to the south of the Eaton estate accessed via Church Lane, where there is a nearby bus service to the city centre. The bus stop on the north side of Church Lane can be accessed via a continuous footway, whereas the stop on the south side of Church Lane is located within a grass verge area.

- 55. The site is walkable and cyclable to the adjacent built-up area. It is recognised that to access the site requires vehicles and pedestrians to utilise a short, narrow section of single-track lane with no dedicated footway. This is an approximately 90 metre long, straight section of Church Lane with good forward visibility. The lane is public highway used to access Eaton Vale Activity Centre and the nursery and two residential properties located to the south of the site only. Beyond the Eaton Vale site entrance, the lane changes from a metalled surface to more of an unmade track.
- 56. Parents accessing the site by car are required to park within the main car park for the activity centre to the south. A short walk is then required along an informal path from the car park alongside the site access road to the fenced nursery enclosure. As the parking provision is within an area shared with the activity centre it is not considered reasonable to request the provision of an electric vehicle charging point as requested by the highway authority.
- 57. Parents and children accessing the site on foot are required to walk within the carriageway for a short section of Church Lane. At the entrance to the activity centre site they will then walk along the access drive or the grass verge adjacent to it as there is no dedicated footway. The access drive is also of single car width; however it includes passing place provision and speed humps to ensure that vehicle speeds remain low and refuge is provided to allow vehicles and pedestrians to pass as necessary. This is considered an acceptable arrangement for access to the site given the informal, rural setting of the site and the private nature of the road. Although the road is used to access both the nursery and the activity centre the applicant and landowner are in a position to put in place any additional controls they feel necessary to provide advance warning to drivers of the possibility of pedestrians walking within the highway and to supplement existing signage.
- 58. People accessing the site by bicycle would do so in the same way as car drivers. Access is available to secure cycle parking facilities at the main activity centre in the same location as the car parking provision for the site. The application did not contain specific information on the modal split of how people travel to the site and therefore it is difficult to understand any deficiencies in sustainable access provision or identify additional measures which may be required specific to the use. Therefore, a Travel Information Plan will be required to consider and address any such issues and can be secured by planning condition.
- 59. The Yare Valley Society and two local residents have questioned the suitability of the access arrangements to the site which can give rise to conflicts with pedestrians. They recognise that it is not possible to make any modifications to Church Lane to provide dedicated pedestrian facilities due to third party landownership and the physically constrained nature of the section of the lane in question. The characteristics of the lane is also part of the rural nature of the setting.
- 60. On balance, the existing access arrangements are considered suitable for the continued use of the site as a day nursery as the characteristics of the environment and the highway network in this location serves to maintain traffic speeds at a level suitable for the intensity of use of the lane by vehicles. The highway authority have not raised an objection to the use in its current form and the proposals will not have a severely adverse impact on highway safety.

Main issue 4: Amenity

- 61. Key policies and NPPF paragraphs DM2, DM11, NPPF paragraphs 8, 127 and 180-182.
- 62. The closest residential properties are located 150 metres to the north and 175 metres to the south. The closest residential garden is located over 100 metres distant. There are large areas of trees, open space and intervening activity centre uses between the application site and any residential properties or their gardens.
- 63. As the children spend the entirety of their day outside or under light weight canopies there will inevitably be noise associated with children playing and talking. The site is however well enclosed and located well away from residential properties such that the continuation of the use should not give rise to unacceptable impacts on residential amenity.
- 64. It appears that the nursery has been operating from the site for over three years and there do not appear to have been any complaints raised as a result of operations taking place at the site.
- 65. Therefore, it is concluded that the scale, form and positon of the day nursery use within the wider activity centre site will not result in loss of privacy or disturbance from noise to residential properties or gardens on Church Lane at unacceptable levels and is acceptable in accordance with policy DM2.

Equalities and diversity issues

66. There are no significant equality or diversity issues.

Local finance considerations

- 67. Under Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the council is required when determining planning applications to have regard to any local finance considerations, so far as material to the application. Local finance considerations are defined as a government grant or the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- 68. Whether or not a local finance consideration is material to a particular decision will depend on whether it could help to make the development acceptable in planning terms. It would not be appropriate to make a decision on the potential for the development to raise money for a local authority.
- 69. In this case local finance considerations are not considered to be material to the case.

Conclusion

70. It is considered that the benefits of the proposals outweigh the limited harm. The continued use of the site as a day nursery is considered appropriate for the site and the area, subject to the conditions recommended below. The development is in accordance with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Development Plan, and it has been concluded that there are no material considerations that indicate it should be determined otherwise.

Recommendation

To approve application no. 21/00381/U - Eaton Vale Activity Centre Church Lane Norwich NR4 6NN and grant planning permission subject to the following conditions:

- 1. In accordance with plans;
- 2. Use restricted to Class E(f) or sports and recreation directly associated with the activity centre only;
- 3. Should the use cease, removal of perimeter fencing and structures.
- 4. Provision of a Travel Information Plan within 3 months of permission being granted.
- 5. Implementation of a Travel Information Plan in accordance with timescales to be agreed.



