

Report for Resolution

Report to Planning Applications Committee
Date 19th July, 2012
Report of Head of Planning Services
Subject 11/01862/F St Thomas More Catholic Junior School
Jessopp Road Norwich NR2 3QB

Item
5 (1)

SUMMARY

Description:	Alterations and extension of existing school to include: 1) Extension, provision of canopy and remodelling to Year 1 and Reception Class area; 2) Extension and provision of canopy to main entrance and front office suite; and 3) Provision of additional windows to school hall; and 4) Addition of 7 car parking spaces.
Reason for consideration at Committee:	Objection
Recommendation:	Approve
Ward:	University
Contact Officer:	Jo Hobbs Planner 01603 212526
Valid Date:	25th April 2012
Applicant:	Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia
Agent:	Hooper Architects Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

1. The application is for the extension and alteration to the existing school at Jessopp Road. This school is currently used as a junior school for St Thomas More School. The infant school (St John's) is currently located on Heigham Road, but it is proposed to amalgamate both schools onto the Jessop Road site from the autumn.
2. It should be noted that this application is only for the relatively minor extensions and alterations to the school. Although two school sites are merging onto this site this is not a matter that requires planning permission and so is not the subject of this application. This application is only for the rear extension to a class room, the two new canopies on the front entrance and the additional 7 car parking spaces on site.

The Site

Location and Context

3. The site is located on Jessopp Road in the ward of University to the west of the city. The site is located within a predominantly residential area although there are commercial uses such as the shops at the Colman Road/The Avenues local centre and open space including Heigham Park.
4. The site itself contains the school building to the south of the plot with open space and

playing fields to the north. There are some on-site parking spaces to the north east of the school, with the land immediately adjacent to the buildings hard surfaced forming playgrounds and circulations areas around the building.

5. There is one vehicle access onto the site via Christchurch Road to the east and two others from Jessopp Road to the south. The pedestrian access into the site is predominantly to the south along Jessopp Road, although there is no restriction to pedestrians also using the access to the east.
6. The site is currently in use as a junior school although it is intended this will be converted to a primary school containing a wider age range than the current school.

Constraints

7. The site is designated urban greenspace and contains some mature trees along the west boundary of the site that are subject to a Tree Preservation Order (reference TPO.378). There are also a number of mature street trees along Jessopp Road.

Topography

8. The site is slightly higher to the north leading to the school being elevated by about 1m from the level of Jessopp Road.

Planning History

9. There are a number of applications relating to the site, but none relating to the current proposed development. These applications were determined by Norfolk County Council. Due to the funding of the proposed works the county council are not required to determine this application and so the responsibility has fallen to the city council.
 - **4/2001/1048** - Steel access ladder and platform. (No comments from City Council - 03/01/2002)
 - **4/2002/1165** - Single storey extension, car parking and accessibility works. (No objection from City Council subject to tree conditions - 07/01/2003)
 - **4/1994/0628** - Extension to hard surfaced playground. (Approved by County Council - 17/08/1994)
 - **4/1996/0035** - Conversion of a former boiler room to a staff room. (No comments on application from City Council - 14/03/1996)
 - **4/1999/0283** - Installation of replacement glazing and curtain walling. (Approved by City Council - 20/05/1999)
 - **05/00961/CFR3** - Provision of 4 no. parking spaces. (Objection as no justification by City Council - 25/10/2005)
 - **11/01197/CF3** - Siting of temporary portable classroom on existing hard play area at rear of school. (No response made by City Council)

Equality and Diversity Issues

10. There are no significant equality or diversity issues, but there would be some access

benefits as a result of the proposals as set out below.

The Proposal

11. The application includes the following proposed development and works:

- The building will be extended on the north elevation to the west of the building, with a footprint of 13m by 7m.
- A new entrance canopy facing Jessopp Road will be installed at the entrance to the Reception Class with landscaping in the external play area to create a ramped access and new steps up to the entrance.
- Extension to the main visitor entrance to create a reception lobby, reception and head teacher's office, along with a new entrance canopy facing Jessopp Road.
- Provision of three sets of windows in the school hall facing onto Jessopp Road.
- Addition of 7 car parking spaces to existing 4 parking spaces to the north east of the school building (accessed off Christchurch Road).

Representations Received

12. Advertised on site and adjacent and neighbouring properties have been notified in writing. Ten letters of representation have been received citing the issues as summarised in the table below.

13.

Issues Raised	Response
Highway safety measures such as posts/rails, raised crossing places, one-way system, zig zag lines or yellow lines should be conditioned as an effective measure for protecting the verges and trees on surrounding roads from inappropriate parking.	See paragraphs 33-54.
Costs for any highway safety improvements should be funded by the school.	As above.
Concern over highway safety for children and adults as pedestrians on pavements and cyclists on roads through area with increased parking demand, dangerous driving and parking across private driveways.	As above.
No statement of community engagement with application and insufficient community consultation before application was submitted.	No pre-application community consultation is required for non-residential developments of under 1000square metres or development that generates over 100 traffic movements/hour or 1000 over 24 hours. Also see paragraphs 39-41.
Travel plan should be conditioned to any permission to ensure it is adhered to.	See paragraphs 33-54.

Schools should not merge on this site as site not suitable, and does not have good public transport links which are needed as pupils travel from further away to access this school than other primary schools due to its faith status.	As above.
Parking across verges leading to soil erosion, which blocks drains and causes flooding next to speed bumps.	As above.
Off-road onsite parking should be provided on the school site for parents and coaches dropping off/collecting pupils.	As above.

Consultation Responses

14. Natural Areas Officer – No objections subject to suggested conditions

15. Local Highway Authority – No objections

ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Planning Policies

National Planning Policy Framework:

Statement 4 – Promoting sustainable transport

Statement 7 – Requiring good design

Statement 8 – Promoting healthy communities

Statement 10 – Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Statement 11 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Relevant policies of the adopted East of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy 2008

ENV7 – Quality in the built environment

Relevant policies of the adopted Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk 2011

Policy 1 – Addressing climate change and protecting environmental assets

Policy 2 – Promoting good design

Policy 6 – Access and transportation

Relevant saved policies of the adopted City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan 2004

NE8 – Management of features of wildlife importance and biodiversity

NE9 – Comprehensive landscaping scheme and tree planting

HBE12 – High quality of design

EP17 - Water quality and treatment of runoff from car parks

EP22 – Protection of residential amenity

TRA6 – Car parking provision

Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance

Trees and development SPD 2007

Principle of Development

Policy Considerations

16. The application is for the extension to the existing school. As identified above in paragraphs 1 and 2 the fact the school is merging two sites onto this one site is not a matter that can be taken account of under planning law. Planning permission is not needed for this merger.
17. The National Planning Policy Framework identifies that local planning authorities should be proactive, positive and collaborative in their approach to school provision and give great weight to the need to expand schools.
18. The key considerations for this application are design of the alterations, any impact on residential amenity from overlooking, overshadowing and loss of outlook, impact on protected species and trees on the site.
19. The matters raised over highway safety and parking are also referred to in the report below.

Design

20. There are three key areas of proposed extension and alteration. The extension to the rear is of appropriate scale and form in relation to the existing school building and is therefore considered to be acceptable in design terms.
21. The proposed new canopies on the front elevation will provide a legible entrance way for pupils and visitors to the school. The contemporary appearance of these canopies contrasts the existing architectural style of the school but the alternative design approach is considered to be in-keeping with the use of the building as a school. Conditions are recommended however to ensure an appropriate choice of material and colour are used on this highly visible elevation.
22. New railings are proposed along the boundary fronting onto Jessopp Road. These are light weight in appearance, but again a condition is recommended for the final details and colour to be agreed through condition.
23. Three new sets of windows are proposed in the school hall south elevation. These are well sited within the existing design of the building and enhance the appearance of this currently largely blank wall.
24. The proposed parking spaces to the rear extend an additional parking area. Whilst a large area of parking may be visually detrimental to the site the additional parking spaces do not take up a significant amount of space on the site thus reducing their visual impact. The parking area is not highly visible to the surrounding area in any case due to existing development surrounding the site.

Residential amenity

25. The proposed extensions need to be considered in relation to the neighbouring properties for overlooking, overshadowing and loss of outlook.
26. The proposed alterations are in keeping with the scale of the existing building and largely within the shadow of the existing built form. The extensions are however at a sufficient distance from the nearest residential dwellings to not lead to a loss of outlook, daylight, direct sunlight or privacy.
27. The proposed windows on the school hall would face towards dwellings on Jessopp Road. These dwellings however are at a sufficient distance on the south side of Jessopp Road to not lead to a significant loss of privacy.

Protected species

28. The proposed parking area will remove some smaller trees and a natural area on the site.

There was previously a pond in this location but it has since been filled in with rubble and concrete.

29. Given the close locality to Earlham cemetery, Bluebell Allotments and Eaton Park (all within 500m) it is likely that bats may use the environs for foraging. The ecology survey with the application indicated that there were no bats roosting on site. Therefore it is unlikely that there would be any disturbance to protected bat species from these proposed works. An informative note is recommended however to remind the applicants and developers of their duties to obtain the relevant licence from Natural England if bats are found on the site before works continue.
30. To replace the existing semi-wild area to be removed by the additional 7 parking spaces a condition is recommended for a programme of tree and vegetation planting to be agreed elsewhere on the site to replace the biodiversity value of this land. These should include indigenous species to provide potential food for birds and bats.

Trees

31. There are a number of mature trees around the boundary of the site along with several smaller trees and shrubs within the site. The trees and shrubs to be removed within the site to enable the car parking are of less arboricultural value, but in any case a condition is recommended for replacement tree planting.
32. No works are proposed near the trees subject to the Tree Preservation Order on site. Works will be carried out adjacent to the mature trees that line Jessopp Road however. A condition is recommended for further details of tree protection of the branches of these trees to ensure that no damage is done to these trees during the construction phase of works. A pre-construction site meeting with the Arboricultural Officer is also recommended. The works should be achievable without damage to these trees but a condition is recommended to ensure this.

Transport and Access

Car parking proposed on site

33. The additional 7 car parking spaces will create more traffic movements in and off the site. These spaces are proposed to be used for staff and so cars are likely to arrive before and leave after the main traffic movements of the day with pupils being dropped off. This additional car movement is not considered to be significant enough to lead to concerns over highway safety or traffic issues.
34. The level of parking provided on site would total 20 parking spaces of which one would be designated disabled parking. The maximum parking standards as set out in the local plan would be 8 staff parking spaces and 2 visitor parking spaces. The proposed parking would exceed these parking requirements.
35. This parking is required for the 16 staff that will be present on site, the same number as previously present on site. Teaching staff for primary schools often require access to private car to transport teaching materials that are used. These can be bulkier in size than resources would be for secondary school teaching.
36. As stated above as well teaching staff are likely to arrive earlier than pupils and leave much later than pupils due to background work to the teaching that is required to be done outside of school hours. It has been noted however in letters of representation that parking on the streets around the school is also a problem during the school day with visitors to the school parking on the surrounding roads.
37. The context of this site must also be considered. The site is not within a controlled parking zone and is at some distance to the nearest zone. This means that off-site parking is not restricted and staff and visitors could easily park on the road network around the school.
38. This level of parking needs to be balanced against highway safety concerns and potential mitigation measures identified below.

Highway safety

39. A number of letters of representation have been submitted relating to concerns surrounding the current transport situation at the school at school drop-off and collection times and how this will change with the current application.
40. This application is only for relatively small extensions to the school, which only totals an additional 79 square metres of teaching space for pupils and 58 square metres reception area and staff rooms. These extensions themselves will not lead to a significant amount of potential traffic increase.
41. The traffic increase referred to in the travel plan submitted with the application refers to the merger with the infant school on Heigham Street to create a single site primary school. This merger however does not require planning permission.
42. The feasibility and reasonability of potential mitigation measures are considered below.

Potential mitigation measures

43. A travel plan has been produced to promote sustainable transport to and from the school. The travel plan has been developed in consultation with the Local Highway Authority. Following efforts by the Diocese to address the concerns of local residents in relation to transport issues a letter of support to the school has now been received from a local residents association. This travel plan continues to be developed and promoted by the school.
44. A Traffic Regulation Order has been suggested in letters of representation. It has been suggested that this order could enforce the restriction of parking in the area that it covered and would be shown through the use of double yellow lines.
45. The issue of restricting parking around the school is that such a restriction would be likely to just displace parking demand and push parking problems further away from the school and on to other local roads instead.
46. There are Controlled Parking Zones nearer the University of East Anglia and nearer the centre of the city to the east, but these zones are too far away to be extended to cover the school. Controlled Parking Zones are not successful if designed in isolation as they only push parking problems to the edge of their boundaries. This is considered likely to be the case if parking restrictions were put in place at this site.
47. Demand for parking is actively being reduced through the travel plan for the school. Further to this it would be less favourable to push parking of staff and visitors out of the site onto the local road network. In this instance and in view of the particular circumstances of the case, the level of car parking proposed on site is considered to be acceptable compromise.

Conditions relating to mitigation measures

48. The impact on the proposed development has been considered in relation to highway safety and parking pressures. Whilst it is recognised that there will be an increase in parking pressures from drop-off/collections at the school these are not due to the proposed extension of the building. They are due to the school merger of St. John's Infant School on Heigham Road to St. Thomas More Junior School at this site.
49. Before any conditions can be imposed on a planning permission they must be considered under the tests of Planning Circular 11/95 – Use of conditions in planning permissions. The six tests of this circular include that conditions should be necessary, relevant to planning and relevant to the development permitted.
50. Any improvements to the highway network, parking provision or highway safety are not directly related to the content of this planning application. Whilst the merger of the schools will happen it can happen outside of this application process. Only the small extensions to the school are subject to this application and given the small magnitude of these extensions in comparison to the size of the existing school it is not considered reasonable under Planning Circular 11/95 to impose any conditions requiring highway safety improvements.
51. As noted above, the potential mitigation measures of Controlled Parking Zones or Traffic Regulation Orders would not address the issues for this site and simply push highway problems to other areas.

52. The school have submitted a draft travel plan for information with this application and have been working closely with the local highway authority separately to this application to help improve the transportation issues raised by the local community. These efforts have been made separate to the planning process out of the good will of the school in response to local community concerns.
53. Although some representations have suggested the use of a Traffic Regulation Order to address local parking issues and the agent has been made aware of this, this is not considered likely to be as effective as the development and use of a robust Travel Plan for the site. It is also worth noting the behaviour of car users cannot be controlled through the planning process either, but the travel plan seeks to educate parents and guardians into alternative modes of transport.
54. In this instance considerable efforts have been made to address the parking and traffic issues that have been raised by the local community around the school. The recent National Planning Policy Framework requires local planning authorities to support schools proactively in their provision of school places. This application provides an opportunity for additional staff and visitor parking to be provided on site to reduce the parking demand on the surrounding road network. A travel plan has been implemented to reduced private car use by parents dropping off and collecting children from school. Therefore in this instance, although the parking space numbers are in excess of the maximum parking standards it is considered to be an acceptable exceptional circumstance in light of the nature of the use of the parking spaces by staff and the reduction in parking pressure on the surrounding road network.

Surface water run-off

55. Any new hard surfacing should seek to prevent further run-off that could contribute to surface water flooding. Whilst the proposed parking area is relatively small it would replace an area of currently un-made ground. A condition is therefore recommended for details of the surfacing treatment to be submitted, which should include permeable paving or surface treatment that prevent additional surface water run-off.

Equality and Diversity Issues

56. The proposed works will seek to improve access to the building with an additional level access to the building. This will be of benefit to those using wheel chairs or with less mobility and so is considered a positive addition to the school building.

Conclusions

57. The application provides an opportunity to improve the appearance of the key entrances for visitors to the school, making the building more approachable for younger people and adults alike. The additional parking on site also provides an opportunity to reduce parking pressures on the existing road network through providing additional car parking spaces for staff and visitors to the school. This is considered to be an acceptable compromise to address the current issue noted by surrounding residents and does not set a precedent for further parking on this site or other sites for parking in excess of the required standards. The National Planning Policy Framework requires local planning authorities to have a proactive and positive approach to school to enable them to expand and provide school places. Whilst it is recognised that the merger outside of the planning process could lead to an increase in traffic around the school it is not considered reasonable to refuse this application for extension on this basis.
58. It is considered that the design of the alterations and extensions are in keeping with the scale and form of the existing school and that the proposal is unlikely to have an adverse impact either on the amenity of the immediate neighbours or the wider area due to the distance of the proposed development to the nearest residential dwellings. Replacement tree planting on site will mitigate against the loss of the existing lower grade trees and shrubs

whilst enhancing the biodiversity value of the site and proposed parking on site is acceptable in this instance due to the efforts made to reduce parking demand and for the avoidance of parking on public highways of staff and visitors to the school. As such the proposal accords with the criteria set out within policies NE8, NE9, EP17, HBE12, EP22 and TRA6 of the City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan and policy 2 of the Joint Core Strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To approve application no 11/01862/F "Alterations and extension of existing school to include:

- 1) Extension, provision of canopy and remodelling to Year 1 and Reception Class area;
- 2) Extension and provision of canopy to main entrance and front office suite; and
- 3) Provision of additional windows to school hall; and
- 4) Addition of 7 car parking spaces"

and grant planning permission subject to the following conditions:

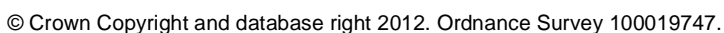
- 1) Standard time limit
- 2) In accordance with plans
- 3) Details:
 - a) external facing materials
 - b) fencing around new access ramp
 - c) material and colour of new railings along Jessopp Road
 - d) permeable hard surfacing
- 4) In accordance with AIA
- 5) Pre-construction site meeting
- 6) Additional Tree Protection Plan and Arboricultural Method Statement
- 7) Scheme of replacement tree and vegetation planting to be agreed

Reason for approval:

- 1) The decision is made with regard to policies NE8, HBE8, EP17, HBE12, EP22 and TRA6 of the City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan, the adopted Joint Core Strategy March 2011 and all material considerations.
- 2) The design of the alterations and extensions are in keeping with the scale and form of the existing school and that the proposal is unlikely to have an adverse impact either on the amenity of the immediate neighbours or the wider area due to the distance of the proposed development to the nearest residential dwellings.
- 3) Replacement tree planting on site will mitigate against the loss of the existing lower grade trees and shrubs whilst enhancing the biodiversity value of the site.
- 4) Proposed parking on site is acceptable in this instance due to the efforts made to reduce parking demand and for the avoidance of parking on public highways of staff and visitors to the school.

Informative note:

- 1) Protected species licence
- 2) Tree protection barriers
- 3) Travel plan welcomed, as will be future work to reduce parking demand for staff, pupils and visitors



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PLANNING SERVICES

