

ECH/5231/12-D - St Mary's School

New girls school including teaching and residential accommodation, chapel, sports facilities. Playing fields and tennis courts. Challow Park, Challow Road, Wantage

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 This is a reserved matters application for the siting, external appearance, design and landscaping of new school premises at Challow Park and the former Depot site for the relocation of St Mary's School, Wantage. The only reserved matter not being considered at this time is access.
- 1.2 Approximately 15,448 square metres of new floorspace is proposed in the form of a new teaching block, two blocks of residential accommodation, a chapel, a sports hall and swimming pool, and three units of staff accommodation. Challow Park itself will remain and will be converted into school use.
- 1.3 All the new buildings are to be located within the existing curtilages of Challow Park and the Depot site. Beyond these boundaries, six tennis courts and three lacrosse pitches are proposed. A new auditorium building shown to be located directly to the east of Challow Park house has been withdrawn from this application. The three staff houses shown on the south-west corner of the site have also been withdrawn from the proposal.
- 1.4 The buildings are to be constructed of a mix of brick and render walling with slate, tiles and metal finishes on the roofs. Extracts from the submitted plans including cross-sections through the site are attached at **Appendix 1** and a Planning and Design Statement received with the application is attached at **Appendix 2**. A model of the development will also be made available at the Meeting.
- 1.5 The application is brought to Committee because of objections received from East Challow Parish Council.

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 Outline planning permission for the relocation of St Mary's School to the site was granted on 13th October 2005 (ref: ECH/5231/11-X).

3.0 Planning Policies

- 3.1 Policies relating to the principle of developing the site for school purposes were considered at the outline stage. At this reserved matters stage, General Development Control Policies D1, D2, D3, and D4 of the adopted Local Plan are relevant. These require high quality development that is sympathetic to its surroundings, accessible and well landscaped. Policies DC1, DC5, DC6 and DC9 of the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan are the equivalent policies in the replacement Local Plan.

4.0 Consultations

- 4.1 East Challow Parish Council objects to the application. Their comments are attached at **Appendix 3**.
- 4.2 Wantage Town Council raises no objections to the proposal.
- 4.3 The County Engineer has some concerns about the internal layout of the site but reserves the right to make final comments regarding this matter after the findings of a safety audit have been published. He also expresses concern about the need for the 120 car parking spaces on the site

without any supporting justification. Access details will be dealt with by a further application.

- 4.4 Environment Agency have concerns about the proposal. Their comments are attached at **Appendix 4**.
- 4.5 Thames Water has no objections/comments to make regarding the proposal.
- 4.6 Oxfordshire Crime Prevention Design Officer states that one of the main issues which needs to be considered is linking the buildings with security fencing and gates to make the site secure. He considers that this should have been addressed in the Design Statement. He refers to Policy DC3 of the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan and Section 37 of PPS1 which set out the need to design developments to increase security and deter crime and that local authorities should have regard to the good practice set out in By Design and Safer Places better practice documents.
- 4.7 Countryside Agency – no formal representations to make.
- 4.8 Consultant Architect and Architects Panel comments are attached at **Appendix 5**.
- 4.9 County Ecologist – no objection to the proposal from an ecological point of view but recommends that the site be checked for bat roosts which may require a mitigation strategy/DEFRA licence before any permission is granted.
- 4.10 County Archaeologist – requests informative to applicant to advise the County Archaeologist if any archaeological finds occur during construction.
- 4.11 English Nature – See **Appendix 6**.
- 4.12 3 letters of objection have been received raising the following concerns – loss of privacy for neighbouring property's conservatory, loss of views and daylight, request the provision of a buffer zone to the south of this boundary to protect residential amenities. Development will greatly reduce the valuable green space between Wantage and East Challow. Such tall buildings on the site will be out of keeping and will be visible for long distances. If permission is granted (1) existing planting should be retained and improved around the site, (2) the site should have only one access. High security fences should be avoided. Concern that the development will have a harmful impact on numerous species of local wildlife.

5.0 **Officer Comments**

- 5.1 The principle of the development of this site to provide a new school complex for St Mary's School, Wantage, was established when outline planning permission was granted in 2005. This application seeks approval for some of the detailed elements of the scheme including siting, design, external appearance and landscaping. Access details (which will include the diversion of the footpath) will be submitted under a separate reserved matters application at a later date

Siting

- 5.2 As required at the outline application stage, all new school buildings are located within the existing curtilages of Challow Park and the former Depot site. Only the lacrosse pitches, tennis courts and some low-key parking spaces for the public use of the sports hall and swimming pool building fall outside this area.
- 5.3 The sports hall, swimming pool, chapel and the majority of the teaching block are located within the grounds of Challow Park, which is retained as part of the proposal. One wing of the sixth form quadrangle also lies within the house's original curtilage. The Teaching block, chapel and sports hall and pool are all situated to the rear of the house, which will remain the focal point of this part of the site when viewed from the A417. The large area of trees between the house and the A417 will be retained, as will other vegetation along the highway boundary. The current

access drive to Challow Park will be closed off and the farm track leading to the existing farm building to the north east of the site will be modified to provide vehicular access to Challow Park and an enlarged car parking area and to a new access road which runs along the rear (northern) boundary of the site. The upgraded track will also provide access to the public car parking spaces that will serve the sports building.

- 5.4 On the former Depot site, the sixth form accommodation quadrangle is situated closest to the road and will be served by the existing access. The second girls' accommodation building is situated in the middle of the site with a car parking and service area beyond.
- 5.5 The proposed layout of new buildings retains all the trees on the site considered worthy of retention and additional screen planting is proposed. Outside this area, two lacrosse pitches are proposed to the east of Challow Park on the flattest part of the adjoining field. These will result in the loss of some mature trees, but the Council's Arboriculturist is satisfied that these are not in themselves good specimens and has agreed to the replacement trees proposed. A further lacrosse pitch is to be situated to the west of the Depot site. This pitch will be the closest to one of the neighbours who is concerned about a loss of privacy. However, this pitch is approximately 200 metres from the property. Six tennis courts are to be located just beyond the northern boundary of the developed land. As with the lacrosse pitches, this area was chosen to make best use of existing land levels to ensure as little regrading as possible of the field is required. Cross-sections through the site are attached at Appendix 1.
- 5.6 Members will see that the Environment Agency (Appendix 4) has raised concern about the layout of buildings on the site because this may affect a suitable drainage scheme for the development. The Agency raised no objections to the outline application subject to conditions. The submission of a suitable foul and surface water drainage system for the site and the submission of a desk top study of the site are conditions of the outline consent and these will still have to be agreed with the District Planning Authority in consultation with the Environment Agency. As a consequence, Officers do not consider that the satisfactory receipt of these details is prejudiced by this reserved matters application because if required, the applicant could amend the layout of the development at a future date. However, notwithstanding this, the applicant is providing further information to the Environment Agency, which may allay its concerns and an update regarding this issue will be given at the Meeting.
- 5.7 The County Engineer has also raised some concerns about the layout of the development and in particular the position of roads within the site. However, the submitted layout has the benefit of keeping all vehicular traffic on the periphery of the site, leaving the central area for pedestrians only. This will allow staff and pupils to access the main accommodation buildings, teaching blocks and other facilities on foot without conflict with vehicles. Officers consider that this feature of the layout has considerable merit. Consideration also has to be given to the other constraints on the site, such as the retention of many individual and groups of trees, which has limited flexibility in the siting of many of the buildings. The County Highway Engineer has also raised concern about the level of car parking to be provided. The applicants have confirmed that this is based on their experience of the car parking requirements at their existing site.

Design and Appearance

- 5.8 Having referred to some of the site constraints above, one of the advantages of the application site is that it slopes away from the A417 to the north. This has allowed many of the larger and taller buildings to be located on the lower, northern part of the site, which has helped reduce the impact of their overall scale and bulk. In many cases, this means that many of the buildings will appear to be similar in height to Challow Park. The exception to this was the new Auditorium building which would have appeared much taller than the existing house and which has now been deleted from the application.
- 5.9 The teaching block is the largest new building on the site, with a maximum ridge height of 14 metres. This is located on the northern boundary and is a three storey structure to be built of brick, with some render, under a predominantly slate roof. The roof structure has been broken up

to reduce the bulk of the building, particularly when viewed from the north, and some lead or similar sheet roofing on the lower elements also helps to add variety. The St Hilda's and St Margaret's cruciform accommodation building is 13 metres high (maximum) and is a mix of 2 storey and three storey elements plus rooms in the roof. It is to be constructed predominantly of brick with a little render and will also have a slate roof. The sixth form quadrangle building is a mixture of two and three storeys with a lower basement level housing plant machinery. It is also 13 metres to the ridge at its highest point and is to be constructed of brick with a slate roof.

- 5.10 The Chapel and sports hall and pool buildings have more individual designs. The Chapel building lies at the centre of the site. It is 14 metres in height with a steeply pitched roof. It is to be built of a mix of render, brick and has large areas of glazing. Natural slate is proposed for the roof. In contrast, the sports hall has a curved mono-pitched metal clad roof and the pool has a similar shaped but lower telescopic roof. This building is also mainly brick with some render.
- 5.11 The comments of the Consultant Architect are attached at **Appendix 5**. He has expressed some concerns about certain elements of the scheme and the relationship between buildings but has no overall objections to the proposal. Amendments to the treatment of the dormer windows on the cruciform block have been sought and amended plans are awaited. However, in response to the comments made in relation to the impact of the tennis courts and landscaping, your Officers are confident that these can be treated in a sympathetic manner.

Landscaping

- 5.12 With regard to landscaping, the application seeks to build on the existing mature character of the site. Additional planting is proposed on the site boundaries to enhance the existing screening. A row of Hornbeams immediately to the north of the teaching block building will be lost, but will be replaced in the area between the rear access road and the tennis courts. Outside the developed part of the site small groups of trees are proposed to the west, north and east of the site to help break up distant views of the development from the surrounding countryside and also to reinforce the parkland character of the land, particularly that to the east of Challow Park. In addition to this, screen planting is also proposed immediately to the north of the tennis courts. The submitted landscaping plans make no specific reference to fencing in or around the perimeter of the site (other than around the tennis courts) and given the comments of the Crime Prevention Design Officer, Officers have asked the applicants to clarify whether any fencing is proposed around the school and an update will be given at the Meeting.
- 5.13 No specific types of new trees or shrubs have been specified at this time but a condition is recommended requiring the submission of this information. This condition will also require details of the hard surface treatments, including that of the tennis courts and car parking areas, to be approved.

Ecology Issues

- 5.14 After the outline application was considered by Committee, it came to light that there were bats present on the site and also a badger set in the north eastern corner of the garden of Challow Park. In order to carry out works which affect these protected species, licences will be required from English Nature and DEFRA. The existence of these protected species is a material consideration in the determination of this application and Officers sought clarification from English Nature, which will be reported at the Meeting. Their letter is attached at **Appendix 6** and, while this sets out the ecological framework under which the application should be considered, it does not raise objections to the proposal.

Conclusions

- 5.16 Your Officers consider that the submitted details in relation to the siting, design and external appearance of the proposed buildings and the structural landscaping of the site are acceptable. The objections of the Parish Council are noted. Some of their highways concerns will be dealt with by the forthcoming reserved matters application dealing with details of access. It is also

acknowledged that the physical character of the site will be changed by the proposed development, but this was evident when outline planning permission was granted. Concerns that the school may grow and expand beyond the existing clearly defined boundaries are also understandable, but this area is identified as an important open gap between East Challow and Wantage and the District Planning Authority would have strong grounds to resist such development in the future.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 *That subject to the ecological issues on the site being satisfactorily resolved, the reserved matters application be granted subject to the following conditions:*

- 1 *TL3 Time Limit - Reserved Matters*
- 2 *LS2 (landscaping)*
- 3 *MC2 (materials samples)*
- 4 *Notwithstanding the submitted plans, the auditorium building situated to the east of Challow Park and the three staff houses in the south-west corner of the application site do not form part of this reserved matters application and have been withdrawn from the scheme.*
- 5 *Prior to work commencing on site a full ecological survey of the bats and badger on the site, including recommended mitigation measures, shall be submitted and approved in writing.*