

**ABG/1723/13 – Our Lady’s Convent Senior School
Construction of new multi-purpose school hall to replace existing facilities and associated external works, forming new main entrance to school (resubmission).
Our Lady’s Convent, 3 Oxford Road, Abingdon.**

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 This application seeks planning permission for the erection of a new school hall, with a revised main entrance into the school buildings. Planning permission was granted in October 2005 for an almost identical building, and work has begun on site, with the steel frame of the building having been erected.
- 1.2 This application seeks approval for changes to the design of the building in terms of its materials finish (brick panels replacing timber panelling) and the provision of natural air ventilation (i.e. non mechanical / powered only by the wind) equipment on the roof. The size, height and location of the building are not proposed to be changed.
- 1.3 The school is located on a site that is primarily bounded by three public roads, Oxford Road to the north, St. John’s Road to the east and Radley Road to the southwest. To the immediate northwest of the site lie Our Lady and St Edmund Catholic Church, and the St Edmund’s centre. To the south, lies a terrace of dwellings which front onto Radley Road.
- 1.4 The school hall is being built on part of the school site that adjoins the rear gardens of those dwellings fronting Radley Road.
- 1.5 A copy of the proposed plans showing the location and design of the development, and the proposed ‘windcatcher’ units, are attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.6 A copy of the approved development is attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 1.7 The application has been referred to Committee because several letters of objection have been received.

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 Planning permission for the erection of a new school hall was approved in October 2005. No letters of objection were received to that scheme.

3.0 Planning Policies

- 3.1 Policies D1, D2, and D3 seek to ensure that all new development is of a high standard of design, does not cause harm to the amenity of neighbours and is acceptable in terms of highway safety.
- 3.2 Similar policies to those above have been included in the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan 2011. The corresponding policies are DC1, DC5, and DC9.

4.0 Consultations

- 4.1 Abingdon Town Council does not object to the application but requests that:

“A safe and convenient access is provided within the site and to and from the adjoining highway as stated under policy DC5 (i) of the Vale of White Horse Second Deposit Draft 2011”.

- 4.2 County Engineer – No objections.

4.3 Consultant Architect – Comments attached at **Appendix 3**.

4.4 Architects Panel – Neutral design proposal, recommend approval.

4.5 Six letters of objection have been received from local residents and are summarised below:

- The original planning permission should never have been approved. This revised proposal only serves to worsen the impact of the original, to an unacceptable degree.
- Although permission has been previously granted for brick on the end elevation, it is visually intrusive and completely out of character with the neighbouring gardens and surrounding environment.
- The proposed natural wind catchers planned to be sited on the roof, at 1.3m above the roof, will be unsightly and will cause an unacceptable level of visual intrusion.
- Proposal will have a detrimental effect on house prices (This is not a material planning consideration).
- Object to the proposed alteration from timber boarding to brick on the side elevations, and question the budgetary reason for the change. The proposed change is a retrograde step, resulting in a less pleasing and more obtrusive building.
- Trees should be planted to replace those recently removed in order to minimise the visual impact of the hall.
- Concern that the new building does not produce excessive light pollution.

5.0 **Officer Comments**

5.1 This application seeks the approval of revisions to the previously approved scheme. The main issues, therefore, are considered to be 1) the impact of the proposed changes on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, and 2) their impact on the amenities of neighbouring properties.

5.2 On the first issue, the replacement of the timber cladding detail with brickwork at the upper level on the side elevations is considered acceptable. The end gable opposite those dwellings in Radley Road remains as previously approved, to be constructed wholly in brick with detailed coursing. The proposed wind-catchers will enable the school to provide a sustainable and environmentally friendly form of ventilation of the building. Whilst concern has been expressed over their size and potential visual impact, they are located approximately seven metres from the edge of the roof and, thus, when viewed from ground level they will not be visually intrusive. Furthermore, the Consultant Architect concludes they will add skyline interest to the hall building.

5.3 Your Officers consider that the revised design is in keeping with other two storey buildings on the school site. As such, it is considered a refusal of these revisions on design grounds could not be supported.

5.4 Turning to the second issue, the potential harm to neighbours, the new building is sited 30m from the rear elevations of the dwellings on Radley Road. This distance was considered acceptable when granting the original permission. There is not considered to be any increased loss of privacy or light compared to the approved scheme.

5.5 Furthermore, the removal of three trees on the boundary was approved as part of the original planning permission, as they were considered to be too close to the new building and were not worthy of tree preservation measures. Due to the potential impact of trees on the new building, and given the distance of 30m in relation to those properties in Radley Road, it was not considered appropriate to require replacement trees to be planted in the space between the building and the rear gardens in order to provide screening.

5.6 A brick wall approximately 2m in height lies on the boundary with the rear gardens and the building itself is, at its closest, 5m away from this. Its impact on the amenities of those adjoining properties is considered acceptable in planning terms. As this application seeks only revisions to the design of the building, it is considered by your Officers that it would be unreasonable to require replacement tree planting now to mitigate the visual impact that is now perceived by neighbours to be harmful.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 *That planning permission is granted subject to the following conditions:*

1. *TL1 Time Limit.*
2. *MC2 Materials.*
3. *Prior to the commencement of development, a scheme for the acoustic insulation of the building, shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the District Planning Authority. The approved scheme shall be implemented prior to the first use of the building and shall thereafter be maintained in accordance with the approved scheme.*
4. *No external plant, flues or vents shall be installed other than those expressly approved under this permission, without the prior grant of planning permission.*
5. *No external lighting shall be attached to the building.*