

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE  
FRIDAY, 8 DECEMBER 2017 AT 10.00AM**

Agenda Item  
No.

**4**

**EAST HERTS DISTRICT**

**PROPOSED APPLICATION FOR A SINGLE STOREY EXTENSION TO FORM 1 NEW CLASSROOM AND CIRCULATION SPACE, INFILLING OF AN INTERNAL COURTYARD TO CREATE NEW OFFICE SPACE AND ENLARGEMENT OF PLAYGROUND HARDSTANDING AT WALKERN PRIMARY SCHOOL, HIGH STREET, WALKERN, HERTFORDSHIRE, SG2 7NS**

*Report of the Chief Executive and Director of Environment*

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Local Member: Ken Crofton

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To consider application 3/2301-17 (CC0476) for the single storey extension to form 1 new classroom and circulation space, infilling of an internal courtyard to create new office space and enlargement of a playground hardstanding at Walkern Primary School, High Street, Walkern, Hertfordshire, SG2 7NS

**2 Summary**

- 2.1 The proposed single storey extension would be attached to the East Block of the school and extend the building south, the extension would contain a new classroom, four toilets and a link corridor. The infilling of the courtyard would occur within the West Block and would be used as a new office. The enlargement of the playground hardstanding would replace hardstanding lost from the extension to the East Block.
- 2.2 The proposal would not increase the number of children allowed to attend the school overall; it would allow all classrooms at the school to accommodate the required 25 children per year, which currently not all classrooms do.
- 2.3 The school is within the Walkern Conversation Area and Walkern is considered a Category 1 village as defined by Policy OSV1.
- 2.4 It is considered that the proposed development would not significantly impact neighbour's amenity. It would also not worsen the current traffic situation at the site. Further, the proposal is considered to be appropriate within the Walkern Conversation Area and would not impact the landscape setting.

### **3 Conclusion**

- 3.1 It is recommended that permission be granted subject to conditions.

### **4 The Proposal and Site Description**

- 4.1 The proposal seeks the construction of an extension to the East Block, to the south, on an area of existing hardstanding. The proposed extension would measure 12.5m in length on its southern elevation, 19.5m in length on its western elevation and 9m in length on its eastern elevation; there is no change to the north elevation as this will connect with the existing building. The proposed extension will have a maximum height of 4m and feature a flat roof. The proposed extension will contain a 70m<sup>2</sup> classroom, four toilets and a corridor circulation area. It is proposed to construct the extension from dark grey brick, featuring dark grey window and door frames. The courtyard proposed to be infilled is within the West Block and will be used as an office; it will be constructed to match the existing school building. There is a minor locational change proposed to the location of a fence and gate close to the dining hall in the southern part of the site.
- 4.2 Walkern Primary School is a 1FE school located on a 1.12 hectare site located within the residential area of Walkern village. The school is situated towards the southern edge of the village, fronting onto the east side of High Street. This road becomes the Benington Road to the south and is the main road linking Walkern with Watton at Stone, which is some six kilometres to the south.
- 4.3 The main school building is situated centrally towards the front of the site, with the playing fields situated to the rear, which slope gently down to the River Beane on the eastern boundary of the site. There is open countryside beyond the river. The main school building dates from the 1920s and is of traditional construction with more recent extensions to the rear. There are several other buildings present on the site which include: the school dining hall located at the southern end of the site, a mobile nursery unit located between the dining hall and main school building and a classroom block at the northern end of the site.
- 4.4 The main pedestrian and vehicular access from the High Street is in the North West corner of the site with two additional pedestrian accesses on the western edge of the site from the High Street.
- 4.5 The site falls within the Walkern Conversation Area and is a Category 1 village as defined by Policy OSV1.

## **5 Policy Considerations**

### **5.1 National Planning Policy Framework 2012**

Section 8 Promoting healthy communities:

Paragraph 72 The Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities

### **5.2 East Herts Local Plan Adopted 18th April 2007**

Policy TR2 – Access to New Development

Policy ENV1 – Design and Environmental Quality

Policy ENV2 – Landscaping

Policy ENV4 – Access for Disabled People

Policy ENV11 – Protection of Existing Hedgerows and Trees

Policy ENV19 – Development in Areas Liable to Flood

Policy BH5 – Extension and Alterations to Unlisted Buildings in Conservation Areas

Policy BH6 – New Developments in Conservation Areas

Policy OSV1 – Category 1 Villages

## **6 Relevant Planning History**

6.1 The following planning history is considered to be of relevance to this proposal:

- 3/0705-98 – Mobile classroom for preschool – Approved June 1998
- 3/0243-04 – Classroom extension – Approved April 2004
- 3/0850-09 – Classroom block, with covered walkway link, 11 additional parking spaces, retention of double mobile classroom for use by pre-school and demolition of pre-school single mobile unit – Approved December 2013
- 3/1890-14 – Application for the demolition and replacement of dining hall and storage sheds; along with the removal of mobile classroom unit – Approved January 2015
- 3/0700-16 – Extend time limit for removal of mobile classroom – Approved April 2016

## **7 Consultations & Representations**

7.1 East Herts District Council; does not object to the proposal as the extensions and alterations are carefully and sympathetically designed to fit within the existing school complex.

7.2 Hertfordshire County Council as a Highways Authority; does not object to the proposal as the development will not result in any highway implications.

7.3 Hertfordshire County Council Landscape Officer; No objection as the visual impact of the extension is considered to be minimal, however has suggested that alternative material colours be sought to closer reflect the existing school building to retain the distinct character within the Conversation Area.

7.4 Walkern Civil Parish; did not respond to formal consultation.

7.5 Sport England; does not wish to raise an objection to this application subject to the following condition;

1. The Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) hereby permitted shall not be constructed other than substantially in accordance with the Sport England Technical Design Guidance Notes “Artificial Surfaces for Outdoor Sport (2012) <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/artificial-sports-surfaces/>”

7.6 Environment Agency; does not object to the proposal.

7.7 Neighbours / Publicity; Publicity for this application was as follows:

2 site notices were erected on the main vehicular and pedestrian accesses on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

A total of 69 properties were consulted and **6** responses have been received. The concerns raised in these representations include:

- The relocation of gates and retaining walls could affect safeguarding of children
- Uncertainty over the number of children attending the school and surrounding residential expansions which could result in more children attending the school
- Further disturbance to neighbours as expansions have not happened simultaneously, rather they have been one after the other
- Further impact of traffic causing congestion and parking issues within Walkern
- Increased noise as a result of construction and traffic movements
- Loss of views due to expansion
- Raising the height of the existing classroom would negatively affect our outlook
- Concern over the location of waste bins which will be moved due to changes in the fencing
- Impact on view from Grade II listed building
- Impact on the Conservation Area due to the location of the building within the school site
- Impact to bats from lighting and the proximity of slow worms to the school
- Risk of flooding caused by development

## **8 Planning Issues**

8.1 The principal planning issues to be taken into account in determining this application are:

- The need for the proposal;
- The location and design of the proposal;
- Landscaping
- Traffic and highways impacts;
- Residential amenity;
- Flood Risk
- Ecology

### **8.2 The need for the proposal**

Currently the school accepts 25 children per year, however, not all of the classrooms are an adequate size to comfortably take 25 children and therefore some classes have mixed year groups. As a result of this application an additional classroom of adequate size for 25 children would be produced within the extension and with this extra classroom, internal alterations can be made to two undersized classrooms to create one appropriately sized classroom and a group working room; therefore resulting in the total number of classrooms still being 7 but all of these classrooms being an appropriate size. There are 138 children at the school presently; however there is an approved capacity of 175 children to attend the school as a result of the 2014 approval.

Historically, class numbers at Walkern primary school have been smaller in upper years as some children have transferred at Year 5 to middle schools in Buntingford. Due to increased demand for school places in Buntingford, however, it is expected that this will no longer be the case. It is therefore necessary to provide classes large enough for 25 children for each year group. Therefore the total number of children attending Walkern School could potentially increase but not above 175, which is the limit based on the current infrastructure at the school. Overall the proposed changes allow for each year group to have a dedicated classroom of adequate size and significantly improve the logistics of organising the teaching environment space.

8.2.1 As the proposed classroom is being constructed on an area of existing hard play, it is proposed to extend the hard play area to the south to replace the lost area.

8.2.2 Overall it is considered that the application complies with Section 8 paragraph 72 (Promotion Health Communities) of the National Planning Policy Framework as the government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places are available to meet the needs of existing and new communities.

### 8.3 The location and design of the proposal

The classroom extension is proposed to extend the east block to the south within the central area of the site. By being central to the site this should reduce the impact to most neighbouring properties in terms of noise and visual impact. It is recognised that the extension would result in the reduction of space between the main school building and the freestanding nursery building to the southwest and this can be seen from the High Street and properties to the west which have views across the valley to the east of the school; objections have been received from neighbouring properties stating that this location does impact their view. However, there would still be a clear visual break between the extended building and nursery building, the extension would be a low-profile structure with a flat roof and the site slopes downwards away from the road frontage. Therefore it is considered that the impact to neighbour properties will be minimal by locating the extension in this location.

8.3.1 In terms of design, the new classroom would be a low-profile extension to the existing building. While the existing building has pitched roofs of varying heights, the proposed extension would have a flat roof to minimise its impact on the character of the building and the wider street scene and Conservation Area. It is proposed to finish the building in dark grey bricks, to further minimise the visual impact, however it has been suggested by the Council's Landscape Officer that matching the development to the existing school building would be preferable in terms of visual cohesion and would be as minimal in terms of impact as grey brick. All access to the building would be from flat floor level, without the requirement for stairs or ramps. Overall it is considered that the design would be acceptable in the Conservation Area and as such has not raised any objection from East Herts in this regard. Therefore it is considered that the application complies with Policy ENV1 (Design and Environmental Quality), ENV4 (Access for Disabled People), BH5 (Extensions and Alterations to Unlisted Buildings in Conservation Areas), BH6 (New Developments in Conservations Areas) and OSV1 (Category 1 Villages) of the East Herts Local Plan 2007.

### 8.4 Landscaping

No significant landscaping works are proposed as part of the development. The areas affected are currently hardstanding, or immediately adjacent to existing hardstanding and not of any significant landscape value. It is proposed to establish a root protection area for a Category C tree to the rear of the proposed classroom block and a Category B tree in close proximity to the proposed area of hardstanding and this approach has been supported by the Landscape Officer at Hertfordshire County Council. It is therefore considered that the application is in compliance with Policy ENV2 (Landscaping) and Policy ENV11 (Protection of Existing Hedgerows and Trees) of the East Herts Local Plan 2007.

## 8.5 Traffic and highways impacts

The current application does not propose to increase the overall number of children permitted to attend the school. Previous applications have considered the implications of extending the capacity of the school to its current level. As the overall number of children permitted to attend the school is not proposed to change under this application, it is not proposed to increase the amount of parking on site.

8.5.1 It has been recognised however, that local residents have raised concerns about the traffic situation related to the school. As there could be a small rise in the number of students attending the school, due to the school not being at maximum capacity currently, it is proposed that the school travel plan agreed in 2015, which saw the expansion from 15 to 25 children per year, will be reviewed again as part of this application and the establishment of a park-and-stride facility is being investigated. Further, efforts to re-establish walking bus schemes at the school are being undertaken to encourage further walking, rather than driving, to the school.

8.5.2 Overall it is considered that the application complies with Policy TR2 (Access to New Development) of the East Herts Local Plan 2007 and there has not been an objection from the Highway Authority at HCC.

## 8.6 Residential amenity

Concerns regarding residential amenity have been raised with particular concerns including the impact on the Conversation Area and setting of a Listed Building, as well as impact from noise and disruption particularly during construction.

8.6.1 The proposed extension has been designed in such a way that it should have minimal impact to the Conservation Area, a viewpoint which has been reflected in the response from East Herts District Council, who are responsible for advising on this topic. Further, while the extension will be visible from the nearby Grade II Listed Building it is considered the impact will be minimal and ultimately views are not protected under planning legislation. The consideration of impact to the setting of the Listed Building is that due to the minimalist design of the building, in close proximity to the existing built up area of the school, means that the proposal is not considered to impact upon the setting of the Listed Building.

8.6.2 In regards to noise and disruption, the overall operation of the school is not expected to change significantly and therefore the existing noise levels are not expected to differ significantly. In terms of construction, previous works to the school have been at a larger scale than is currently proposed, therefore it is expected the level of vehicle movements and duration of construction would be much lower. While the majority of construction will occur during holiday times, not all of the works can be completed in this time, accordingly construction traffic will avoid peak school travel times and vehicles will park on-site as is

viable. It is a requirement for any contractor that they monitor their parking and traffic movements and avoid, as much as possible, conflict with other road users and local residents.

#### 8.7 Flood Risk

Although parts of the site are within Flood Zone 2, the proposed expansion is entirely within Flood Zone 1; which is the lowest risk area. The new extension and infill would be sited on existing areas of hardstanding and would therefore not increase the impermeable area. There have been concerns from residents regarding flooding in Walkern, however there has not been an objection from the Environment Agency or the Lead Local Flood Authority. It is also proposed to include sustainable drainage measures as part of this development. Overall it is considered that the proposal complies with Policy ENV19 (Development in Areas Liable to Flooding) of the East Herts Local Plan 2007.

#### 8.8 Ecology

The proposed development would principally be focused on an area of the site that is already paved with hardstanding and has negligible ecological value. Much of the grassed area on the site is also heavily managed and therefore is not considered to be of high potential for ecological value.

It has been raised by neighbours that the development could impact upon bats and slow worms. However, the existing buildings on site are considered to have low potential for bat roost and no external lighting is proposed as part of this application; therefore there is no expectation of impact to bats. There are no known records of slow worms being present on the site; however contractors will be made aware that they must avoid any protected species if they are found on site. The response from Hertfordshire Ecology has echoed these statements with the view that it is highly unlikely that bats or slow worms are present on site and the site as a whole has negligible ecological interest.

### 9 **Summary**

- 9.1 The proposed expansion would allow for a significant improvement to the logistical operation of Walkern School. The expansion has been sympathetically designed for the Conversation Area and will have minimal impact to the surrounding area. Although concerns have been raised about increased student numbers and the impact this could have, the number of children permitted at the school will not increase as a result of this application and consideration has been made previously for the expansion to the potential maximum capacity of the school. No objections have been raised by statutory bodies as a result of this application. Overall having taken into account the balance of all the issues and relevant policy, it is recommended that planning permission should be granted subject to the conditions below:



### 1. Time Limit for Commencement

The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of a three year period commencing on the date of this notice.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Act 1990 (as amended).

### 2. Approved Plans and Documents

The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents submitted with the application unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority:

- Design and Access Statement – September 2017
- Ecological Appraisal – 9985 – June 2017
- Flood Risk Assessment – RE70090Y001B – July 2017
- Proposed Site Plan – 539PEP7WAL-AL(0)101 P2 – August 2017
- Proposed Sectional Elevations Sheet 1 of 2 – 539PEP7WAL-AL(0)131 P2 – August 2017
- Proposed Sectional Elevations Sheet 2 of 2 – 539PEP7WAL-AL(0)132 P2 – August 2017
- Existing Site Plan – 539PEP7WAL-AL(0)01 P1 – August 2017
- Proposed Ground Floor Plan – 539PEP7WAL-AL(0)120 P1 – August 2017
- Proposed Part Site Plan Roof Plan – 539PEP7WAL-AL(0)112 P1 – August 2017
- Proposed Part Site Plan Drainage & Services – 539PEP7WAL-AL(0)111 P1 – August 2017
- Temporary Works Site Access Plan – 539PEP7WAL-AL(0)13 P1 – August 2017
- Proposed Site Plan – 539PEP7WAL-AL(0)101 P1 – August 2017

Reason: In order to protect the character, appearance and amenity of the site and the surrounding area and for the avoidance of doubt.

### 3. Multi Use Games Area

The Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) hereby permitted shall not be constructed other than substantially in accordance with Sport England Technical Design Guidance Notes “Artificial Surfaces for Outdoor Sport” (2012) <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/artificial-sports-surfaces/>

Reason: To ensure the development is fit for purpose and sustainable and to accord with Development Plan Policy.

#### 4. Surface Water Drainage System

Prior to occupation a detailed surface water drainage scheme for the site, based on sustainable drainage principles and as assessment of the hydrological and hydro geological context of the development, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The drainage strategy should demonstrate how the new soakaway will be designed to cater for the surface water run-off generated by the new development.

The scheme shall as a minimum include:

- detailed drainage design supported by suitable calculations for all rainfall return periods up to and including the 1 in 100 year + climate change event.
- evidence of ground conditions and permeability including BRE Digest infiltration tests undertaken on the proposed location of the soakaway.

Reason: To prevent flooding by ensuring the satisfactory disposal of surface water from the site.

#### **Background information used by the author in compiling this report**

Application documents

NPPF 2012

East Herts Local Plan Adopted 18th April 2007

Neighbour representations

Consultee responses