

APPLICATION SE/06/2478 – 10 BAY PERFORMING ART AND DRAMA MOBILE CLASSROOM AT THE BRADBOURNE SCHOOL, SEVENOAKS

NOTES of a Planning Applications Committee Members' site meeting at the Bradbourne School, Sevenoaks on Tuesday, 13 March 2007.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr R E King (Chairman), Mr G A Horne, Mr S J G Koowaree, Mr J F London, Mr T A Maddison, Mr W V Newman and Mr A R Poole. Mr N J D Chard was present as the local Member.

OFFICERS: Mr J Crossley, and Mr A Tomaszewski (Planning) and Mr A Tait (Legal and Democratic Services)

THE APPLICANTS: The Bradbourne School: Mrs M Boyle (Head Teacher) and Ms M Deighton (Bursar).

OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES: Sevenoaks TC (Mrs P C Walshe – Chair of Planning)

ALSO PRESENT was Mr Carter from 4 Oast Cottages

- (1) The Chairman opened the meeting. He explained that its purpose was for the Committee Members to familiarise themselves with the site and to listen to the views of interested parties. The Committee had considered the application in February and had decided to defer making a decision until after this visit had taken place.
- (2) Mr Crossley introduced the application. He began by explaining its location. This was on the north side of Sevenoaks and of the A25. This placed it just inside the Metropolitan Green Belt, whose purpose was to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land within a 15 mile radius of the edge of London predominantly open. The site also lay within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and was in an Area of Local Landscape Importance.
- (3) The significance of these designations was to emphasise the importance of protecting the countryside for its own sake and its landscape quality, the need for open space around urban areas and the visual impact in the wider landscape setting.
- (4) Mr Crossley went on to describe the siting for the proposed development. This would be between the pagoda and the green temporary building on the southern side of the School.
- (5) The building itself would be a 268m² ten-bay mobile classroom. Its measurements would be 17.5m by 15m. Its height would be 3.5m (similar to the green building). It would be between 10 and 14 metres from the boundary with residential properties and 40 metres from the nearest house (4 Oast Cottages).

- (6) Mr Crossley then said that Bradbourne School had already developed a specialism in Visual Arts and was now seeking to supplement this with a Performing Arts and Drama specialism. Appropriate accommodation was needed if this was to be achieved. Funding for permanent accommodation would only be made available if the School was able to prove that it could already deliver that aspect of the Curriculum. For this reason, the School had brought forward this application for a temporary period of 5 years. It would only be in use during the day and in School Term time, so that no community use was envisaged.
- (7) Mr Crossley said that the Committee Members would need to consider whether they were content to accept a temporary building at a time when the policy was to reduce their number.
- (8) Mr Crossley explained that the recommendation by the Planners to the Committee meeting in February had taken account of the need to ensure that the proposed development was not intrusive in either visual or acoustic terms. The former could be achieved through decorating and screening. It would, however, be difficult to attenuate noise. This would arise both from leakage through openings such as windows and from floor vibration. The Planners had accepted the applicants' case in terms of the Green Belt and Landscape impacts but had been less convinced on the question of residential amenity, particularly in terms of noise insulation. For this reason they had recommended refusal.
- (9) Mrs Boyle (Head Teacher) agreed that Mr Crossley's presentation had accurately covered all the issues. She said that as Bradbourne was an extended School, it was likely that there would need to be some after-hours use after all. It was possible that there would be a dance club or that it would be used for "Scamps" (a project for very young children). She expected that use would usually go on until 6pm and possibly later on occasions.
- (10) Mrs Boyle also said that she did not believe that the noise would be a great problem. Her office was next to the auditorium in the main building where music and dance took place. She did not find that this noise was disturbing to her.
- (11) In response to a question from Mr London, Mrs Boyle said that the green mobile was currently in use by the Voluntary Services Unit. The land behind the small fence was actually part of the School grounds but was on loan to the VSU whilst they were renting it. The actual boundary was marked by the larger fence next to the residential properties.
- (12) Mr Carter (from 4 Oast Cottages) said that he was concerned about the noise question. For 15 years, he and Mrs Carter had been forced to put up with noise disturbance from a temporary building in this location. He was quite happy to tolerate school noise but asked why activities such as these had to take place on the residential side of the School. If this was

located on the northern side, there would not be a problem. Football was played on that side of the School on Sundays. There was a lot of screaming and shouting but the noise levels were tolerable.

- (13) Mr Boyle said that the reason for the location of the current application was that the necessary services were already underground from the time when a 7 bay mobile had been installed there to take the former Eden Valley pupils. She added that permission had previously been granted by the District Council for a music block between the pagoda and the nearby tree. This permission had now lapsed.
- (14) Mrs Walshe (Sevenoaks TC) said that the Town Council had considered this application in September 2006. They had raised no objection to the proposal subject to the provision of additional screening.
- (15) Mr Chard (Local Member) said that he was an LEA-appointed Governor at the School. He thanked the Planners for clarifying that the main area of difficulty was acoustic disturbance. He added that the School found itself in a "Catch 22" situation in that it could not receive funding for the Performing Arts specialism until it was able to demonstrate the necessary abilities but that it could not do so unless it had the facilities.
- (16) Mr Chard continued by saying that 7 years earlier, the School had been struggling to admit up to a 3 f.e. Now it had turned itself around and was oversubscribed at 5 f.e. This had a consequential impact on the space available.
- (17) When Eden Valley School had been closed, the pupils had been fully integrated into their new School as a result of the high quality management that Bradbourne possessed. As a consequence, this School was now thriving.
- (18) Mr Chard said that he did not expect that money from the "Building Schools for the Future" investment programme would be made available in Sevenoaks for some 10 years (if ever). A building was, however essential. It would have community uses but the School would be happy to negotiate over the question of what was an appropriate level.
- (19) Mr Chard then turned to the question of noise levels. He said that the Teachers were able to talk over the levels of music in order to ensure that the pupils understood their tasks. It would be a mistake to believe that the music would be either too loud or contain a heavy thumping disco beat. He therefore did not feel that it would be too disturbing. Further evidence for this view was that Music and Drama lessons took place in the same hall at the same time, separated only by a curtain.
- (20) Mr Chard concluded by saying that a temporary permission for 5 years would give the School an adequate opportunity to demonstrate that it was fulfilling the curriculum so that it could gain the funding. This would allow

the School a three year window to make its case and 2 further years to build the permanent complex.

- (21) Mrs Boyle said, in support of Mr Chard, that it had only taken two years from the date of the closure of Eden Valley to the point where the School building had been extended and refitted (including the dining hall and science rooms).
- (22) Mr Horne informed the meeting that he had been a teacher at the School until 1995. He then asked Mr Carter how old his property was as the School had moved onto the site in 1995.
- (23) Mr Carter said that his house had been built in 1932. He personally had been living there well before the School had been built.
- (24) In reply to a question from Mr Horne, Mr Crossley said that the construction materials would be timber rather than masonry. The Planners had investigated whether cladding could be added. It had emerged that this would be so costly that it might be as expensive as a brick-built building. It would therefore have different noise characteristics than the rest of the School buildings, including a greater amount of vibration from even normal classroom activities. Whilst this could be managed to a certain extent, the question still remained whether the building could be sufficiently soundproofed or whether the activities could be managed in a manner that would reduce noise disturbance to an acceptable level.
- (25) Mrs Walshe asked whether noise management would require the windows to be glazed and closed. If so, the heat levels would be unacceptable. Mr Crossley replied that heat levels could be contained through mechanical ventilation or by opening the east-facing windows.
- (26) Ms Deighton (Bursar) said that although the School could not afford total soundproofing, the sound system would be installed in such a way that noise levels could not rise above a set maximum.
- (27) The Chairman noted that Jacobs Noise had said that the floor would be 1 metre above ground level. They had explained that this would create an echo and vibration effect (similar in principle to that of a drum).
- (28) Mr Carter said that he was retired and that he spent a lot of his time in the garden. In the past pop groups had practiced in the old mobile until well into the evening. This had included drum playing until 10pm.
- (29) Mr Carter also said that he could hear people in the School talking normally from his garden. This, rather than the aesthetic view, was what concerned him.
- (30) Mr London asked whether the School would be content to have time constraints imposed on use of the mobile. Mrs Boyle replied that any such constraints would be acceptable as the pupils would be able to relocate

into the main building if necessary. She added that there would be a maximum of 60 pupils using the mobile at any one time.

- (31) Mrs Boyle replied to a question from Mr Horne by saying that it had taken the School two years to collect the £200k needed for the multi-purpose hall. This had included £50k from the Community for Arts College. As a result they did not have any additional funds to construct a permanent building for performing arts and drama. They had been told that they were due to receive BSF money in 2008 but expected this to be delayed until 2015.
- (32) The Chairman thanked everyone for attending. The notes of the visit would be sent to Committee Members as an appendix to the main report for the Committee meeting on Tuesday, 20 March.
- (33) Following the meeting, the Planners showed Members the location of the boundary of the proposed development. Members were then shown around the school grounds, noting the likely site for the intended *permanent* building, which Mr Carter suggested would make a perfect site for the *temporary* one.