

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

A report by Head of Planning Applications Unit to Planning Applications Committee on 16 January 2007.

Application by Boughton-under-Blean Methodist School and Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for the extension and modernisation to 1.0FE school at Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classrooms at Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist Primary School, School Lane, Boughton-under-Blean, Faversham.

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): A. Bowles

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School is located within the Boughton Street Conservation Area, off School Lane. The site of the existing school shares boundaries with farmland to the north and to the east. The rear gardens of the properties along The Street and a few houses lie to the south of the school. To the west, a car park for the Village Hall is accessible from Bulls Lane. A site location plan is attached.

Proposal

2. The application has been submitted by Boughton-under-Blean Methodist Primary School and Kent County Council Children, Families & Education and proposes an extension and modernisation to 1 Form of Entry school, including a new parking area and temporary works including mobile classrooms. Vehicular access is proposed to be from School Lane. Car parking is to be extended to provide an additional 21 spaces including disabled spaces. The application is also accompanied by a School Travel Plan.

Design

3. An attempt has been made to design a sensitive low-impact building appropriate to its natural setting. External materials have been chosen on the basis of being durable and low maintenance. The building would use large areas of glass with aluminium windows and skylights to provide internal spaces with good levels of daylight and views towards the exterior play areas the external teaching spaces.

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Item B3

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

Item B3

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Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

Planning Policy

4. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to the consideration of the application:

(i) **The Kent & Medway Structure Plan, 2006:**

Policy SP1 - Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's environment and ensuring a sustainable pattern of development.

Policy QL1 – All development should be well designed and be of high quality.

Policy QL6 – Seeks to preserve or enhance the special character and Appearance of Conservation Areas.

Policy QL11 – Existing community services, including schools, will be protected as long as there is a demonstrable need for them.

Policy TP19 – Development proposals should comply with the respective Vehicle Parking policies and maximum standards adopted by Kent County Council and Medway Council.

(ii) **Swale Borough Local Plan, 2000:**

Policy G1 – All development will be expected to accord with the policies and proposals of the Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, have regard for the character of the locality, avoid unacceptable impact, cause not harm to residential amenity, provide parking facilities.

Policy E9 – The countryside of the Borough will be protected for its own sake.

Policy E36 – When considering development within or adjacent to Conservation Areas, the Borough Council will pay special attention to ensure that the character or appearance of the area is preserved and enhanced, high standard of design is achieved and the scale, mass and setting of the development are appropriate.

Policy E48 – The Borough Council will seek to ensure that all new development is of a high standard of design appropriate to its surroundings and reflecting local distinctiveness.

Policy E49 – The Borough Council will, in appropriate cases, require the submission of a landscaping proposal in connection with the proposed development.

Item B3

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

Policy E50 – The Borough Council will expect development to have regard to security and safety measures within its design and layout.

Policy IN12 – Proposals for schools, or for significant extensions to existing schools, will be required to provide adequate car parking and dropping off facilities on site.

(iii) **Swale Borough Local Plan, First Deposit 2004:**

Policy E1 – As G1 above.

Policy E6 - As E9 above.

Policy E14 – As E36 above.

Policy E18 – As E48 above.

Policy E19 – As E50 above.

Policy C1 – The Borough Council will grant planning permission for new or improved community services and facilities.

(iv) **Swale Borough Local Plan, Second Deposit 2005:**

Policy E1 – As above.

Policy E6 – As above.

Policy E15 – As E14 above.

Policy E19 – As E18 above.

Policy E20 – As E19 above.

Policy C1 – As above.

Consultations

5. **Swale Borough Council:** raises no objection to the proposed works, subject to the following:

- Standard time limit condition;
- High quality of materials for external surfaces;
- Management of the time of use;
- Restrictions on the use of School Lane by construction vehicles;
- Any other conditions recommended by consultees.

Item B3

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

“Whilst we raise no objection to the proposal, we would draw your attention to the location of the proposed car park extension. As shown on the current drawings, the car park extends across the entire length of the boundary with a nearby residential property, and we are of the opinion that this may result in detrimental amenity impacts for the occupiers of the dwelling. We therefore suggest that an investigation into the possibility of continuing the line of the existing tarmac parking area, bringing the car park extension gradually further away from the boundary fence and allowing space for appropriate screening”.

Boughton-under-Blean Parish Council: welcomes the long overdue improvements to the school and upgrading of the conditions under which the children are taught.

“With regard to the proposed plans, the Council has carefully considered these and Members have queried as to why cedar cladding is being used when it would be more appropriate to have red brick to match the existing building and which would require less maintenance in the future.

“There is also some confusion regarding the design of the roof, which seems to be, at least, partially flat – a feature not to be recommended as this type of construction always leads to future problems.

“Finally, in the light of a recent devastating fire at another Kent school, are there any plans to have an internal sprinkler system installed in the new building?”

Sport England: no objection to the temporary road subject to the proviso that the County Council imposes planning conditions to ensure the removal of the road and reinstatement of the playing field afterwards. Sport England would wish to see a condition that requires the complete removal of the temporary road including all gravel and other materials deposited within 1 month of completion and signing off of the project. The playing fields shall be reinstated to the same or better condition than before the road was constructed. Photographic evidence of the current condition of the playing field should be recorded to ensure this.

English Heritage: No comments.

Conservation Officer: No comments.

Divisional Transport Manager: No objection.

Biodiversity Officer: Comments as follows:

“The submitted bat report is satisfactory to conclude that currently there are unlikely to be significant impacts upon bats. I would note section 5 of the report that potential exists for bats to use the building, I would recommend that the implementation of the precautionary mitigation in section 5 of the report is used as a condition of any planning permission.

“Likewise the potential to impact on breeding birds is significant and mitigation advice at section 5.5 of the report should also be conditioned with any grant of permission.

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

“Whilst the applicant has not provided any evidence of why reptile and great crested newts surveys were not required after having been highlighted in the scoping report. From reviewing the site photographs and our GIS information it seems unlikely that significant potential for impacts exists to either of these receptors”.

Environment Agency: No objection subject to the following conditions:

- All surface water drainage from parking areas and hard-standings shall be passed through an oil separator and trapped gullies. Roof water shall not pass through the separator.

Local Member

6. The local County Member, Mr A. Bowles was notified of the application on the 19 September 2006.

Publicity

7. The application was publicised by an advertisement in a local paper, the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 18 neighbouring properties.

Representations

8. 1 letter of representation has been received to date. The main areas of concern and objection are as follows:
 - What is the need for additional parking spaces?
 - The car parking area appears to extend along the whole length of the fence against a neighbour's Golden Cypress hedge, preventing it from receiving any rain, damaging the roots and killing the hedge (it must be at least 2m from the hedge to avoid killing it).
 - School Lane is to be the main access but is only approx. 13ft wide with high brick walls on each side, with no footpaths. Unaccompanied children and elderly people use the lane, building lorries should not be allowed to use it.
 - Lorries will churn up the road surface and damage the foundations requiring extensive repairs.
 - What is the point in introducing bats on to the site? Encouraging bats on to the site will lead to health risks. Who will clear up the droppings caused by bats?
 - Bats only come out at night when the children are not there to see them.
 - Bats are offensive to neighbours who do not like them entering their roofs.
 - The building of a newt pond seems impractical and expensive and will need to be properly fenced for safety, concreted, located well away from the hedge otherwise newts could be adversely affected by the shedding of twigs and leaves.
 - The newt pond will need cleaning regularly so that it does not have an offensive smell and cause a health hazard. Who will pay for this?
 - Children in this rural and attractive area have plenty of opportunity to study wildlife without the expense of introducing bats and newts.

Discussion

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

9. This application must be determined with regard to the relevant Development Plan Policies and in the light of other material planning considerations, including relevant planning objections raised by consultees, set against the need for the proposed development.

Policy

10. The key policies for consideration regarding the proposed development are SP1 (environment), QL6 (Conservation Areas), and QL11 (Community). I consider that the principle of the development accords with Policy SP1 and the detailed layout and design is such that the overall impact on the wider landscape and environment is minimised and generally acceptable.
11. Overall I consider that the proposed development is in general in accordance with the relevant Development Plan Policies and I see no overriding objection on planning policy grounds. In particular the proposed development would be erected adjacent to the existing school, and would not encroach onto playing field or open land. However, there are detailed design and layout, ecological and parking issues, which need to be addressed further.

Design

12. Due to the restrictive nature of the site and level of accommodation required by the School, I consider a mix of new build and refurbishment to be an appropriate design approach.
13. Boughton-under-Blean Parish Council raises concern regarding the choice of Cedar Cladding to be used instead of red brick, which would match the existing building. The applicant provides two reasons for this choice: *Best Practice & Best Value and Architectural Merit*. In terms of Best Practice and Best value, the applicant states that unless reconstituted Victorian red brick was employed for the new build it would be impossible to closely marry to the existing. Using reconstituted Victorian brick would have implications in that it would require sourcing brick from a similar building that has been demolished with a mind for reuse, which is uncommon. Reclaimed brick also requires manual cleaning prior to re-use which has significant associated time, cost and wastage factors which would dramatically hinder the ability to deliver the new school on time and on budget. The sourcing of non-reconstituted brick that marries with the existing is also difficult and requires greater transportation. Cedar cladding is considered a more practical option and has a low ecological impact rating. I support these arguments.
14. With regard to architectural merit, in circumstances where it is difficult to marry with an existing structure it is argued by the architects that aesthetically successful extensions do not try to mimic architecture of a differing genre but instead provide a solution that contrasts whilst complementing the existing. This can be facilitated by a sympathetic linking structure. The applicant does not consider the proposed new build would lend itself to an application of brick construction. The proposed extension is of a modern contemporary nature and as such the chosen materials should reflect this in order to maintain the building's integrity.

Item B3

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

15. I do not consider the use of red brick, in order to try and match with the existing school building, to be practicable or aesthetically appropriate in this instance, particularly considering the school's location within a Conservation Area. I consider the proposed contrasting extension to be an acceptable solution to the School's development needs. The contrasting nature of the proposed extension would also complement the existing building in terms of its architectural merits and the existing Victorian features should become more prominent than if they were crudely copied by the new build.
16. The reasoning for not employing a traditional pitch roof is similar to that for the use of cedar cladding rather than red brick. The architectural language of the building does not lend itself to a pitched roof construction and the architect has stated that the employment of a flat roofing system is a cleaner and more elegant solution that would have a significantly smaller aesthetic impact from the road side and on its surrounding landscape and environment. Under the circumstances pertaining to this particular site and development, I would agree with this view.
17. The applicant has stated that a number of problems would be experienced should a pitched roof be adopted. If a pitched roof was employed it would be preferable to span the entire extent of the width of the building. In order to keep the ridge height at an acceptable level a 15° pitch would need to be employed. The vast majority of tiles on the market require a minimum of 22.5° pitch, with a few requiring a minimum of 17° pitch. Therefore in order for the tiles to function effectively against elements of wind, rain and snow an under tray system would be required to hold the tiles in place which has significant cost implications for that particular element. Even with a 15° pitch, the height of the building would be increased by 1m along the entire extents of the façade, resulting in a 6m-ridge height of which half the main elevation would become roof. I do not consider this to be an acceptable solution as the proportion of roof to façade would be disproportionately balanced.
18. The applicant has advised that within the original competition brief the installation of an internal sprinkler system was requested as an additional feature. When the project is submitted to competitive contractors for tender they will be requested to quote for an internal sprinkler system as an 'over & above' element. The normal resulting scenario is that if the returned tender prices fall below budget the inclusion of the 'over & above elements' are then considered for inclusion. My own view is that the precise method of fire protection is a matter best resolved through the Building Regulations and Insurance provider, and it is not a matter for the Planning Authority to concern itself with.
19. Overall, I consider that the design approach is of a satisfactory standard for this particular site. The proposed extension complements the existing building and I consider that it is appropriate to its location (attached to the existing school building). Under the circumstances, I consider that the new building would enhance the visual appearance of the site.

Parking & Access

20. Boughton-under-Blean Primary School suffers from a lack of on site car parking. Limited parking facilities create an overflow that encroaches on the school's entry and compromises the safe entry for students and visitors. It is proposed within this application to introduce additional car parking by extending the existing car park along the southern boundary of the school site.

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

21. Concerns have been raised by Swale Borough Council regarding the proximity of this extension to an adjacent residential property. I consider that by redesigning the parking in such a manner that it effectively extends the current line of the existing tarmac area would result in an unacceptable loss of soft open play area. The applicant has stated that at the eastern extent of the extension they had aspired to provide a bunded play area around the existing slide. Details of this could be requested through a landscaping condition. There is also a significant amount of soil that would be required to be moved in order to accommodate a reasonably level playing area. It is currently proposed that the soil could be placed around the existing slide area to form landscaped bunds that define a visual boundary around this particular play space. This would not be possible if the existing line of the current car park was simply extended. However, the applicant has proposed that a compromise could be reached to resolve this issue that could provide a 1200mm buffer zone to the boundary of the affected neighbouring property resulting in a smaller proportion of the existing slide play area being lost.
22. I acknowledge neighbour's concerns regarding associated pollutants with the car park, and the applicant has confirmed that if it is deemed necessary it is quite feasible that additional landscaping can be included within this area and specified in such a manner that the flora assimilates light and heavy toxins/pollutants exhausted from cars and thereby help mitigate the effects of pollutants. Self-clinging climbers are particularly effective in this manner and a surprisingly high level of success can be achieved in this way. I consider that this can be dealt with through a suitably worded planning condition, requesting the prior submission of a detailed landscaping scheme to include details relating to flora and fauna to mitigate pollution impacts.
23. With regards to the concerns raised about an existing 2 metre high golden cypress hedge and the possibility of damage occurring to it, the applicant has confirmed that the development would be carried out in such a manner as to avoid damage to hedges, including their root system, and a suitable condition placed on the planning permission would help to ensure that this is the case. Overall, it is not expected that the existing hedging would be threatened by the proposed proximity of the car park.
24. The car park extension would, in my view, reduce the problem of visitors parking in and around the entrance of the school. Appropriate landscaping and tree/hedge protection measures would help reduce any visual or pollutant impacts that the proposed car park would have.
25. Due to the concerns raised by neighbours of the school with regard to School Lane being used as a main site access, the applicant is proposing a site access via Bulls Lane with a temporary service road being laid through the school playing field, which would later be removed and remedial works would ensure that it is reinstated to its original condition. Neighbours should not be significantly affected by the construction access under the circumstances.
26. Concern has been raised by neighbours of the school regarding access arrangements for the school and contractors involved in the new build. In particular, concerns have been raised regarding the amount of playing field space taken up by the temporary construction access and road. I agree that the temporary access road does take a large sweep through the playing field and the applicant has confirmed that it is being proposed for a number of reasons. In particular, School Lane is particularly narrow and poses a

Item B3

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

number of health and safety issues if used as a site access to pedestrians, especially parents with school children. It is the opinion of the School and myself that using School Lane as site access would cause undue disruption to the local community. It was also considered by the planning supervisor that School Lane was unsuitable for HGV's, cranes, plant and any other heavy or sizeable equipment.

27. With regard to the specification for the temporary site road, the applicant proposes to strip the topsoil down and fill with granular material and provide a geotextile to cover compacted gravel/granular materials. This road would be in place for the full duration of the construction period and all remedial works would ensure that the field would be reinstated as before. This can also be attached as a condition to the decision notice should Members be minded to permit.
28. I do not consider there to be a detrimental impact to playing field and sporting/play areas as a result of the construction access road given that it is temporary in nature and playing fields and open space would only be affected for a limited period of time. A condition can be placed on the decision notice requesting the playing fields be reinstated as originally found prior to the construction access being instated on the land.

Ecology

29. The application also seeks to provide facilities on site to encourage wildlife, such as bats and great crested newts on to the school site by providing bat boxes and additional ponds. This has raised concerns with a neighbour of the school in terms of the impacts this would have on residents and the area.
30. Bats are a European protected species and are protected due to declining populations as a result of a number of factors, particularly habitat loss. Legislation protects the bats themselves as well as any place they use for shelter, whether they are present or not. The school building was identified as having the potential to support bats. Albeit no bats were recorded emerging from the building on the day of survey, bats were recorded in the local area and bats may move roost relatively frequently. There is, therefore, the potential that bats may roost in the building in the future, prior to works commencing on the extension. If a roost is identified, it will be necessary to obtain a licence to undertake works and a replacement roost must be provided if the original roost is to be lost. This replacement roost must either be in the form of bat boxes or through building in roosting sites into the structure, through lifted tiles or gaps under the eaves. It is also best practice to enhance development sites for biodiversity and this may include erecting bat boxes or building in habitat for bats into structures.
31. An adjoining resident raises concerns relating to bat hygiene and need to clean out droppings. The ecologist employed by the School advises that many people may have bats between tiles and roofing felt in their loft and are never aware of their presence. If bat hygiene does become a concern it would ultimately be a management issue incurred and absorbed by the School and would be undertaken in accordance with current health & safety standards. I do not consider this to be a reason in itself to warrant refusing planning permission.
32. Similar concerns have been raised in respect of the maintenance associated with providing newt habitat. As there is already an existing pond, no more additional maintenance should be required than is already in place. It is of the opinion of the school that the pond does not require fencing as the children would always be under

Item B3

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

appropriate supervision and they also consider that this is an opportunity to teach the children about responsible behaviour and safety around bodies of water.

33. Overall, I consider that any proposals incorporating facilities to encourage the introduction of biodiversity and ecology as part of a development scheme should be welcomed. It is not so much for the benefit of learning (especially with regards the nocturnal bats) but to encourage and maintain a protected species by providing safe habitats for them. The Biodiversity Officer does not consider that a detrimental impact would be have on wildlife habitats and encourages the mitigation measures proposed.

Landscaping

34. Although no objections have been received in terms of landscaping and tree removal, a number of small trees and a couple of semi-mature trees are proposed to be removed as part of the application, these are located, in the main, within the area proposed for the car park extension. There are no plans to remove the hedging and climbing plants along the southern boundary adjacent to the proposed extended car parking area. A full landscaping scheme incorporating the retention of trees, any new trees to be planted, bunding and shrubs can be requested via condition on the planning permission. I consider that this would help to compensate for the loss of those trees proposed for removal.

Temporary Facilities

35. During construction, pupils would be required to be taught in temporary mobile classrooms until the permanent classrooms are ready to be occupied. This would include the relocation of an existing mobile classroom, and a proposed new temporary mobile classroom. I have no objection to these temporary facilities being provided, however, a planning condition should be placed on any grant of planning permission requiring the removal of these facilities on the completion of the development and the reinstatement of the areas back to their former condition.

Conclusion

36. Overall the application has to be considered in relation to the location of the proposed development set against the impact of the proposal in the context of the Development Plan. I consider the design of the development to be acceptable in planning terms and that the development would represent an opportunity to improve and enhance the school site overall in line with development plan policies. Whilst concerns have been raised mainly relating to access and parking at the site and the proposed methods of encouraging bats and newts onto the site, these matters can be addressed through suitably worded conditions. I therefore recommend accordingly.

Recommendation

37. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO conditions including: -
the standard time condition;
- Submission of details of all external materials;

Item B3

Extension and modernisation to 1.0FE Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist School, including parking area and temporary works, including mobile classroom – SW/06/1137

- Submission of a detailed landscaping scheme to include details of trees to be removed and replaced, shrubbery to minimise pollution impacts, fencing details and bunding details;
- Temporary consent for mobile classrooms;
- The temporary access road to be removed upon completion of the development and the land reinstated to its former state;
- A minimum 1200mm landscape buffer zone to the southern boundary shall be created between the extended car park and neighbouring property.
- Details of any external lighting shall be submitted for prior approval.

Case officer – Helena Woodcock	01622 221063
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Background documents - See section heading
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