

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	251923
Address:	Finchampstead C Of E School, The Village, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 4JR		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed erection of a single storey front extension to create a new year 5 and 6 breakout classroom and resource area, single storey front extension to boys toilet and single storey front/side extension to extend the link corridor.		
Heritage Asset:	Finchampstead, The Village - Area of Special Character (AoSC) - (NDHA) <i>Setting of:</i> The Verge - Grade II since 1986 Finchampstead Baptist Church – Grade II since 1986 The Thatched Cottage – Grade II since 1986 Finchampstead War Memorial – Grade II since 2016 Broad Oak Cottage - NDHA		
Site Visit Made:	Yes – external only		

Summary Of Recommendations

No objection subject to amendments

Comments On Proposal

Thank you for consulting Built Heritage on the above application.

The proposed alteration and extension to Finchampstead Primary School impacts upon the character and appearance of the Finchampstead Village Area of Special Character (AoSC), a non-designated heritage asset, as well as the setting of the Grade II listed The Verge, The Thatched Cottage, the former Baptist Church and unlisted Broad Oak Cottage, and to the wider setting of the Grade II listed War Memorial.

Given the sensitive nature of the setting, it is important that any development not only be sympathetic to the context but also seek to respond to the extant built form in the vicinity. Within its site's core are the original Victorian school house and room of 1858, however these elements, whilst still partly visible from the public realm, are concealed by the additions of the 1960s and 70s. These flat roofed elements, are, politely, very much of their time, with their basic 'box' utilitarian

appearance dominating the street scene. Given their simple aesthetic, they do not positively contribute to the character and appearance of the AoSC nor to the setting of the identified heritage assets within the vicinity. Given this, where there is an opportunity to improve the overall appearance of the site, with an architectural form more appropriate for the context, this would be welcomed. This is coupled with the school being an important element of character within the village itself, not only for the obviously educational, social and economic benefits, but from a historic use perspective, the continued function and survival of the small primary school is important to the settlement's character.

The Village (as in the road) does not have a consistent building line, and whilst the majority of buildings are set back from the highway, there are notable exceptions – such as the immediate neighbour The Verge. And thus, whilst typically development would be expected to have a greater set back from the road, given the variation of the building line, along with the site restrictions, such a forward placement would be considered acceptable from a heritage perspective in this instance.

In terms of the proposed appearance of the main element, a pitched roof form is undoubtably the correct choice. And whilst this adds great bulk and massing to the forward element, this is more than made up in terms of a traditional form, reflecting not only the wider AoSC but the original 19th century school buildings. Internally, the vaulted roof space will make for a pleasant and modern space for the children and members of staff. A further flat roofed form would seek to compound the pre-existing negative appearance, not to mention the increased maintenance and other issues a flat roof brings. This, however, relates solely to the main proposed element, it makes perfect sense to bring out the passing corridor and WC extension in a flat roof, and given the relatively modest addition here, no concerns are raised over the form of these elements.

The arguably more dominant pitched form, does however bring its own set of issues. As this new structure would be prominent in the street scene, and would effectively act as the 'primary' element of the school, it is important, therefore, the architectural details and material finishes, are not only of a high standard in themselves, but seek to be appropriate and sympathetic to the historic environment. With this in mind, a number of points are raised:

- In terms of the facing materials, the use of brick is appropriate, however rather than seeking match the brown brick of the 1972 element of which it would attach, a more sympathetic red-orange brick would be advised. And whilst this would be a contrast to the attaching host, a superior and more appropriate brick for the context – combined with the prominence – should be the better option. A suitable blend as to best match the 19th century elements and would work well.
- It is also noted the 1972 element was built using a Flemish Bond – the new element, should also be constructed using this bond.
- Similarly, whilst it is appreciated this is a new element, further architectural detailing should be employed as to better reflect the host and context. Whilst stone detailing may not be appropriate, the (limited) use of a contrasting brick – for example as a string course or window surround –

may work well. A buff brick would arguably be most appropriate (as to reflect the stone detailing of the 19th century buildings, but if not designed and executed well can look awful. A darker red brick may be a better choice, but equally wouldn't necessarily reflect the context. As per the 'Head's study' element, a brick header detail to the windows should be specified. Consideration should also be given to a raised/extruded plinth, again to add interest.

- Slate as a roof covering would also be appropriate. And whilst it would not be expected for the highest grade of Welsh slate to be specified, it is also important the roof does not appear artificial. Specification of exact materials would be advised upon in due course.
- In terms of fenestration, whilst there are no overriding concerns, certain amendments could be made. The form and proportions of the side elevation windows is perfectly fine, however the main arched window appears to be a little small for the space, with the walling to glazing ratio too great. And whilst it is appreciated this reflects the dimensions and proportions of the extant window in the Head's study, there is an opportunity to increase the size and add interest of this, what would become, the most visible element of the school. As the window cannot be lowered, due to usable internal wall space and privacy, consideration should be given to elongating the window upwards, not by much, perhaps 50-60cm or more, to a) add interest, b) allow further natural light, but also c) – and perhaps most importantly – better reflect the ecclesiastical connection, with slightly more of a lancet appearance. And whilst I do not consider a full-blown gothic arched tracery window would be appropriate, there is certainly an opportunity (a rare one at that) as to add visual interest and better showcase the school as a C of E primary school.
- Related to this, in terms of materials, there would be a preference for aluminium or uPVC (being (slightly) more sustainable, better in terms of frame dimensions, and (generally) having greater longevity).
- In terms of the rooflights, these are acceptable, however should be of a 'conservation' type (i.e. be of a lower profile with a central glazing bar) – the Velux product would be acceptable here.
- I am mindful of costs, and considerate to not increase pressure on pre-existing budgets. There is, however, a responsibility to attain the best possible architectural design and detailing possible – for the school in itself – this element would be a 'showcase' for the school, may attract new families etc., thus sustaining the establishment further, but also for the historic environment, and thus the constraints in which it sits – if built well, this element could last a century or more, and thus there is a duty to achieve the best possible design for the future users as possible.

With the above in mind, whilst there is no central objection to the form, appearance of the proposals, consideration to the above points should be given prior to full acceptance from a heritage perspective.

Conditions

Specific material and fenestration details to be advised upon if required in due

course.

Date:

19/10/2025

Signed:

Roderick McDonald
Built Heritage Officer

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Public: Information that can be seen and used by everyone inside and outside the Council.