

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	242561
Site Address:	Reading Blue Coat School, Sonning Lane, Sonning, Wokingham, RG4 6SU
Expiry Date:	4 December 2024
Site Visit Date:	7 December 2023 & 11 October 2024
Proposal: Application to vary conditions 2 and 3 of planning consent 232925 (as amended by application 242223) for the proposed erection of a part single, part two storey building for educational purposes following the substantial demolition of existing building; permanent retention of temporary drama studio for educational purposes; external alterations, including new roof and cladding, to existing music annexe; associated hard and soft landscaping. Condition 2 refers to the approved details and 3 to external materials, and the variation is to allow for changes to footprint, bulk and appearance and to incorporate changes to the Surface Water Drainage Strategy.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Conservation Area
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Scale and Location of Development Proposals – **Countryside**
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone – **Amber and Red Risk Zones**
Nuclear Consultation Zone – **12km Zone**
Radon Affected Area
Landscape Character Assessment Area
SSSI Impact Risk Zones

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Design Guide
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP2 – Inclusive Communities CP3 – General Principles for Development CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk

	CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character TB22 – Sites of Urban Landscape Value TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets TB25 – Archaeology TB26 – Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character
Other	National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sonning Parish Design Statement Sonning Design Appraisal

PLANNING HISTORY		
App No.	Description	Decision/Date
582/1972	Laboratory and lecture hall	Approved 13 April 1972
1165/1972	Laboratory and lecture hall	Approved 3 August 1972
02059	Pavilion and changing rooms	Approved 20 February 1975
02514	Storage building	Approved 15 May 1975
03292	Storage accommodation	Approved 2 October 1975
04479	Additional classroom and roof repairs	Approved 7 May 1976
05285	Demolition of library and class block and new form block, library and additions to classroom	Approved 30 September 1976
05606		Approved 25 November 1976
07979	Alterations and extensions	Approved 13 April 1978
08519	Three new classrooms	Approved 8 June 1978
10293	Assembly area, dining hall and staff accommodation	Approved 13 April 1979
10668	Staff accommodation and additional classroom	Approved 8 June 1979
11577	Assembly hall and music rooms	Approved 28 August 1979
12508	Extensions to changing rooms	Approved 14 February 1980
19762	Staircase extension	Approved 28 July 1983
19763	CoU of recreation room to laboratory	Approved 28 July 1983
19764	CoU of changing room to art centre	Approved 4 November 1983
19848	Replacement open air rifle range	Approved 28 July 1983
20056	Extension to gymnasium	Approved 25 August 1983
BR 21537	New changing rooms	Approved 11 Nov 1983
BR 22786	Change of roof to pitched roof	Approved 10 May 1984
20875	Infill and level bonfire field	Approved 2 July 1984
21788	Single storey dining room extension	Approved 26 July 1984
BR 24026	Store building	Approved 4 February 1985
23425	Common room and facilities	Approved 22 May 1985
BR 24732	Alterations to Sixth Form block	Approved 23 May 1985

24391	Two storey classroom	Approved 11 Sept 1985
26025	Sports fields	Approved 9 October 1986
33285	Extension to gymnasium	Approved 30 May 1989
35548	Two storey teaching and staff room	Approved 30 May 1990
35571	Relocation and erection of classrooms	Approved 30 May 1990
35859	Two satellite dishes	Approved 27 June 1990
BRA 9351	Two storey building	Approved 20 Sept 1990
FP/1996/5173	New classroom	Approved 30 May 1996
44849	Single storey extension and linkway	Approved 2 October 1995
F/1996/64819	Classroom building	Approved 30 June 1997
F/1997/66271	Three classrooms	Approved 24 June 1987
F/1997/66272		Approved 24 June 1987
F/1998/68268	Rear conservatory extension	Approved 5 November 1998
T/1998/68633	Storage building (temporary)	Approved 5 January 1999
T/1999/70792	Storage building (temporary)	Approved 8 February 2000
CA/2000/2925	Demolition of cadet hut, sheds and wall	Approved 19 January 2001
F/2003/9331	Re-cladding of gym. kitchen extension and alteration to sports hall	Approved 17 September 2003
F/2004/3003	Replacement cricket pavilion	Refused 18 November 2004
CA/2005/4083	Demolition of two cricket pavilions	Approved 22 April 2015
F/2005/4082	Replacement cricket pavilion	Refused 22 April 2005
	Appeal against refusal of F/2005/4082	Upheld 10 April 2005
F/2005/4490	CoU of vacant land to sports field	Approved 24 October 2005
F/2007/1365	Retractable enclosure to pool	Approved 6 August 2007
F/2008/1648	Single storey rear extension to dwelling	Approved 12 Sept 2008
F/2008/1606	Two storey side and single storey rear extensions to dwelling	Refused 4 September 2008
CA/2008/1901	Replacement boathouse with new causeway and gates	Approved 27 November 2008
F/2008/1900	Replacement boathouse with new causeway and gates	
F/2008/2281	Two storey side extension and single storey rear extensions to dwelling	Approved 13 Nov 2008
F/2009/2049	Alterations and extension to existing Sixth Form Centre	Approved 30 July 2009
CA/2010/1643	Demolition of three classroom buildings	Approved 14 October 2010
F/2010/1641	Two storey classroom block, access road and two temporary buildings containing four classrooms	
F/2013/0330	Demolition of side extension to 'The Cottage', new plant room, removal of chimneys and rooflights	Approved 24 April 2013
F/2013/0474	Extension to dining/sports hall to provide kitchen and ancillary facilities	Approved 7 June 2013

CA/2013/0790	Demolition of garden wall and extension to dining/sports hall	Approved 28 June 2013
F/2014/2116	Changing room block, demolition of shed and link to pool	Approved 11 March 2015
F/2014/2319	New Performing Arts Centre, Grounds Maintenance & Activity Centre, Design & Technology Centre, temporary Drama Studio, and vehicle drop-off/turning point, demolition of Music Centre, ICT Centre, Way Hall, Drama Studio, Design Technology building, CCF Building and Grounds and Maintenance buildings	Approved 9 July 2015
170118	Variation of Condition 13 for increase in pupil numbers to 825	Approved 18 April 2017
171780	MUGA with fencing and lighting	Approved 19 Sept 2017
180129	Demolition of 3 bay garage block	Approved 12 March 2018
182281	Partial demolition of Design and Technology buildings and new roof to retained "Old Coach House" building	Approved 9 November 2018
210693	Application to vary condition 13 of 170118 and F/2010/1641 to allow for increase of up to 1,100 pupils to be enrolled at the school	Approved 17 August 2021
210694 (Berkshire County Sports Club)	Full application for the proposed extension of the existing Berkshire County Sports Club car park adjacent to Sonning Lane with associated erection of new floodlighting	Approved 17 August 2021
212301	Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the proposed erection of a single storey temporary building for educational use.	Approved 2 September 2021
230127	Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the proposed single storey, detached toilet block.	Approved 1 February 2023
242223	Application for non-material amendment to planning consent 232925 to amend the description to the following: Full application for the proposed erection of a part single, part two storey building for educational purposes following the substantial demolition of existing building; permanent retention of temporary drama studio for educational purposes; external alterations, including new roof and cladding, to existing music annexe; associated hard and soft landscaping.	Approved 9 September 2024

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No comments received
WBC Drainage – No objections
WBC Landscape and Trees – No comments received
WBC Built Heritage Officer – No objections
WBC Ecology Newts – No objections
WBC Ecology – No comments received

External

Berkshire Archaeology – No objections
Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue – Advisory commentary

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	No objection
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

Reading Blue Coat School is an independent school located within the open countryside at Holme Park, on the west side of Sonning Lane, a short distance to the south of Sonning Village. The main school building group comprises an extensive but relatively closely spaced cluster of academic, sporting, administrative and incidental educational facilities in the centre of the site and accessed via a long drive.

The oldest building is a large nineteenth century house built in the gothic revival style and known as School House (previously Holme Park), which is listed as a Building of Traditional Local Character. Playing fields and sporting facilities surround the buildings but predominate to the south, east and north. Woodland to the west of the School slopes down towards the eastern bank of the River Thames.

The school's buildings and grounds form part of the Sonning Conservation Area but there are no statutorily listed buildings within or close to the site. The School House and the Walled Garden are non-designated heritage assets.

Proposal Description:

This application seeks approval for the proposed variation of conditions 2 (approved details) and 3 (materials) of consent 232925 (as varied by application 242223) for the proposed erection of a part single, part two storey building for educational purposes following the substantial demolition of existing building; permanent retention of temporary drama studio for educational purposes; external alterations, including new roof and cladding, to existing music annexe; associated hard and soft landscaping.

The amendments consist of the following:

- The main auditorium/drama/dance building's (Way House) design has been altered, in particular its width to the north has been increased to include a predominantly glazed flat roof side extension which would facilitate a café/servery for use by the school's Sixth Form. This has also resulted in minor changes to the building's northern and western facades, ranging from minor changes to fenestration, roof material alterations to the re-design of the building's western frontage such as the removal of the previously proposed recessed canopy entrance.
- Alterations to the music annexe's roof materials to match that of Way House.
- Minor changes to the landscaping adjacent to the site's western entrance.
- Revised drainage strategy.

Principle of Development:

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. Policy CC01 of the MDD Local Plan states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Location within the Countryside:

The site is located outside the settlement boundary and in the countryside, where the restrictions of Core Strategy Policy CP11 are applicable. Policy CP11 indicates that new development should normally be located within the settlement limits; however community facilities that cannot be accommodated within development limits or that can be provided through the re-use/replacement of existing buildings can be appropriate.

The restrictive countryside policy should also be weighed against the advice contained within the NPPF. Paragraph 97 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should "take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community, and deliver sufficient social, recreational and cultural facilities and services to meet the community needs." Paragraph 99 of the NPPF states that it is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. It also states that local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive, and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. It continues to state that great weight should be given to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications.

Policy CP2 of the Core Strategy also aims to ensure that new development contributes to the formation of sustainable and inclusive communities through the provision of community facilities (including development for education), and that the requirements of children are addressed.

Summary:

The principle of development was already found acceptable under previous planning

consent ref. 232925; the enhancement of the school constitutes the provision of an essential community facility which re-uses existing buildings and consists of a new building that results in environmental improvements, subsequently complying with CP11 of the Core Strategy. Nothing herein contained within the current application is deemed to affect this conclusion, therefore no objections are raised on the principle of development.

Notwithstanding the principle of development, this application is subject to further assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the character of the area, street scene, neighbouring amenity as well as compliance with other local and national planning policies. These are addressed in turn below.

Character of the Area:

Policy Context:

Policy CP11 supports development in the countryside only where it maintains the high quality of the rural environment. Policy CP1(1) similarly only supports development that maintains or enhances the high quality of the environment, with policy CP3 supporting development of an appropriate mass, layout, built form, height and character to the area CP3(a) and which makes a positive contribution to the sense of place contributes to the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings CP3(f).

Paragraph 180 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside,

The Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document provides further guidance for developers with general guidance that development should respond positively to its site and local context (G1) and respond positively to the local character of the area (G2).

The National Design Guide section B1, paragraph 67 also states that the built form of well-designed places should relate well to:

- the site, its context and the opportunities they present;
- the proposed identity and character for the development in the wider place;

Assessment:

The amendments to Way House do increase the building's massing to the north and result in the loss of a small outdoor terrace area but neither factor is considered to result in any adverse harm to the visual appearance of the building, nor the setting of the school grounds or Holme Park House as a Building of Local Character. The extension to the north is a subservient addition to the building's contemporary architectural style and remains enveloped within the site's originally approved development footprint.

The revised elevational and roof material choices (for both buildings proposed) also still echo the materials used on the majority of the more modern buildings on site. This is acceptable.

Additionally, the area of land in-between The School House and the new Way House is still proposed to be extensively landscaped with a variety of new trees and shrubs planted, which the proposals would have no impact on. These additions would soften the impact of the new building and would further enhance the school's rural setting.

Overall, the changes proposed would have an acceptable impact on the character of the area.

Heritage:

The WBC Built Heritage Officer has concluded that the proposed changes, and the overall scheme, do not directly affect the historic Holme Park House (School House), the main school building of the site, with the buildings the subject of this application being considered to be sufficiently distant from this identified Building of Local Character such that it's immediate setting is not affected.

In terms of the effect of the proposal to the Sonning Conservation Area, the proposed changes are not believed to be of any visual harm to this designated heritage asset. The buildings would still remain relatively low and well screened from those general views afforded from along Sonning Lane and would not be visible from the public footpath along the Thames to the north and eastern of the site.

Neighbouring Amenity:

The nearest residential property to the proposed buildings is 160 metres to the north (Bishops Close). The nature of the changes proposed warrant no further neighbouring amenity concerns.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

The nature of the changes proposed warrant no further concerns on these grounds.

Amenity Space:

The proposed increase in Way House's massing would not encroach the adjacent sports fields and therefore there would be no impact on the school's outdoor space provision.

Flooding and Drainage:

The proposals involve minor revisions to the previously approved Drainage Strategy. WBC Drainage have no objections to these revisions providing the number of boreholes and/or the volume of attenuation storage will be adjusted based on the infiltration rate encountered in the deep bore soakaways at the time of installation.

Compliance with the revised strategy will be secured via condition.

Landscape and Trees:

The proposed changes raise no additional landscape or arboricultural concerns. The Arboricultural Method Statement conditioned by consent 232925 (condition 5) will remain imposed following the determination of this application.

Ecology:

The proposed changes result in no additional ecological implications. The biodiversity enhancements conditioned by consent 232925 (condition 4) will remain imposed following the determination of this application.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION

Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approval
Date:	19 November 2024
Earliest date for decision:	7 November 2024

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>MC</i>
Date:	19.11.2024