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Date: 7th October 2024

Planning Services
Wokingham Borough Council
Civic Offices,
Shute End,
Wokingham,
RG40 1BN.

VIA THE PLANNING PORTAL

Dear Sir or Madam,

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)

SITE AT READING BLUE COAT SCHOOL, SONNING LANE, SONNING, WOKINGHAM RG4 6SU

S.73 APPLICATION TO VARY PLANNING CONDITION

PLANNING PORTAL REF: PP-13350235

This letter accompanies the Section 73 application ("the S.73 Application") for the variation of conditions 2 (Approved Details) and 3 (External Materials) of Planning Permission 232925 ("the Planning Permission" and "the Approved Scheme") dated 18th January 2024 for the following development at Reading Blue Coat School ("the School"):-

'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 above description of development was agreed by the LPA on 9th September 2024 as a non-material amendment (ref: 242223) to the original description shown on the Planning Permission.

The requested variation to condition 2 of the Planning Permission comprises the substitution of various approved drawings and the Surface Water Drainage Strategy (dated November 2023) with new drawings and a revised Surface Water Drainage Strategy in connection with proposed minor material amendments to the Approved Scheme, as detailed below.

The requested variation of condition 3 of the Planning Permission comprises the removal of the words '*and application form*' so as to allow for the approval of the alternative external materials shown on the amended drawings lodged with the S.73 Application.

In addition to this letter, the following documents are submitted with the S.73 Application:-

- The amended proposed OS location plan number 7119-GBS-XX-XX-A-DR-002-P02 and block plan number 7119-GBS-XX-XX-A-DR-003-P02;
- The amended proposal drawing numbers 7119-GBS-XX-RP-DR-A-105-P01, 7119-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-106-P01, 7119-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-107-P01, 7119-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-108-P01, 7119-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-109-P01, 7119-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-110-P01, 7119-GBS-XX-01-DR-A-111-P01, 7118-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-203-P05, 7118-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-204-P07, and 7118-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-205-P07;
- The amended Landscape Plan no. 0058-200-P1;
- The amended Surface Water Drainage Strategy (ref: 330511026/2000 Rev: 02 October 2024);
- The amended Design & Access Statement (DAS) (Minor Amendment S.73 Application October 2024); and
- The CIL Information Form.

The S.73 Application is not subject to the requirements of Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain because the Planning Permission to which the application relates was granted before 12 February 2024.

In assessing the merits of the S.73 Application, the LPA is requested to have regard to the following submissions.

The Site and its context

The School is located in open countryside on the west side of Sonning Lane, a short distance to the south of Sonning Village. The School's buildings and grounds form part of Sonning Conservation Area. The main school building group comprises an extensive but relatively closely-spaced cluster of academic, sporting, administrative and incidental educational facilities. The open land to the south, east and north of the main School complex is used as sports fields. The main School House building is a non-designated heritage asset.

The application site, which does not fall within an area at risk from flooding, is relatively tightly defined to include only those buildings which are the subject of the Planning Permission. This group is located to the north-east of School House and to the south-east of the Richard Aldworth building, and includes Way Hall, the temporary drama studio, the Music Annexe and a shed.

The Planning Permission

The Planning Permission comprises the following main elements:-

- The substantial demolition of Way Hall with the retention of its main structural frame and base, and the removal of the shed;
- The construction of a performing arts centre ("the PAC") based around the retained structural framework of Way Hall but with a larger footprint. The PAC would incorporate single-storey and double-height elements, and would be used for a range of educational purposes including music and drama. The PAC, which would incorporate a double-height auditorium, would be linked to the existing drama studio (previously subject to a temporary planning permission) which would be permanently retained. Part of the enlarged footprint of the PAC would occupy the space where the existing shed is located;
- The refurbishment of the Music Annexe, including its re-cladding and re-roofing; and

- Associated hard and soft landscaping, and surface water drainage works.

Condition 2 of the Planning Permission lists the approved drawings for the above development including the proposed landscape plan and the approved Surface Water Drainage Strategy.

The Proposed Amendments

In summary, the S.73 Application proposes the following amendments to the Planning Permission:-

- An enlarged footprint and a revised roof form to the single storey section of the PAC;
- Revised facing and roofing materials and other minor external design changes on the PAC, and revised roofing materials on the Music Annexe; and
- Associated revised landscaping and surface water drainage layouts.

These amendments are shown on the revised drawings, landscape plan and drainage plan submitted with the S.73 Application, and are described in more detail below and in the DAS.

The proposed amendment to the footprint of the PAC is confined to the ground floor. No changes are proposed to the plan size or height of its first floor, double-height auditorium section. The additional ground floor accommodation would be added along the PAC's north elevation, and would incorporate a café/dining area (for use by sixth form pupils), servery and store rooms. Part of the café/dining area would make use of an area of corridor within the footprint of the Approved Scheme.

The roof of the ground floor accommodation would be modified so as to be flat and of a consistent height throughout. This would mean that its proposed height of 4150mm would be lower than the point of maximum height (4600mm) of the ground floor of the Approved Scheme although the general height would be somewhat increased through the absence of roof slopes. There would be corresponding minor changes to the elevations of PAC, along with some revised materials, as described in the DAS and shown on the elevation drawings.

No changes are proposed to the footprint or height of the Music Annexe and former drama studio. The proposed new roofing material for the Music Annexe has been revised to match that of the PAC.

A revised Surface Water Drainage Strategy has been prepared to account for the amended footprint of the PAC. In order to achieve the separation distances required by the Building Regulations, the necessary boreholes and attenuation tank would be located further to the north of the PAC than shown in the previously approved strategy.

Please note, with regard to condition 2 of the Planning Permission, that previously approved drawing numbers 7118-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-201-P01 (Demolition plan) and 7118-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-202-P05 (Music annexe proposed ground floor plan) are not amended by the S.73 Application.

Pre-application Engagement with the LPA

The amendments proposed by the S.73 Application have been the subject of constructive pre-application engagement with the LPA. An initial revision to the description of development on the Planning Permission was agreed by way of a non-material amendment application so as to allow procedurally for the subsequent submission of a S.73 application which officers indicated would be the appropriate means of determination for the proposed amendments.

Planning Merits

For the reasons set out below, and as illustrated in the DAS, the proposed amendments comprised in the S.73 Application would be of only limited material impact in planning terms, and would meet the expectations of applicable national and local planning policy.

Use

As in the case of the Approved Scheme, the proposed PAC would be used for educational and ancillary educational purposes, including music and drama teaching and performances. The S.73 application now also includes a dining area for sixth form pupils. School uses are strongly supported by the NPPF (paragraph 99), which stresses the need to support the expansion and alteration of existing schools, and by Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (WBCS) Policy CP2.

Countryside Protection

The School lies within the 'countryside' for planning purposes. The Planning Permission established the acceptability of replacement and additional development at the application site in the context of criteria-based WBCS Policy CP11 which generally restricts development within the countryside beyond settlement limits albeit subject to certain exceptions.

The proposed limited increase in the size of the PAC does not conflict with the applicable criteria set out in Policy CP11 because the development would (i) contribute to a sustainable rural enterprise, (ii) not lead to an excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings (see further below), and (iii) bring about environmental improvements through the construction of a replacement building.

Footprint, Massing & Appearance

The proposed additional footprint of the PAC would extend northwards to a point which would remain recessed behind the established building-line of the north elevation of the existing (retained) drama studio. On its western elevation, the footprint of the PAC would not extend closer to the School House to any material degree. The proposed revision would therefore not lead to any excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the existing School buildings.

The overall massing of the PAC would remain very similar to that of the Approved Scheme. It would continue to comprise a main single storey element which would be punctuated centrally by the double-height auditorium which would not increase in height or extent. The introduction of a uniform height to the single storey element of the PAC would not substantially change its architectural character or form.

The S.73 Application also proposes minor changes to the elevations and to the choice of external materials, as described in the DAS and shown on the proposed elevation drawings. The requested variation to the wording of condition 3 of the Planning Permission would allow for these amendments to be approved without any conflict with the different details shown on the application form for the Approved Scheme.

Heritage & Landscape

The proposed additional footprint of the PAC would not materially impact the setting of School House, either in terms of the Approved Scheme's separation distance to the non-designated heritage asset,

or in terms of views of the front elevation of School House from the east/north-east across the playing fields. In its revised proposed form, the PAC would continue to respectfully address School House through a well-proportioned and carefully articulated west-facing main entrance. The setting and significance of the non-designated heritage asset, and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, would therefore be preserved.

As in the case of the Approved Scheme, the amended planting scheme would soften the boundary between the playing fields and the main developed area of the School campus in the vicinity of the proposed PAC.

The amended proposals, the subject of the S.73 Application, would therefore continue to comply with WBCS Policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDDLDP) Policies CC03, TB21 and TB24 with regard to design quality, the protection of heritage assets, and landscape impact.

Surface Water Drainage

The amended Surface Water Drainage Strategy would comply with national policy expectations, and the requirements of WBCS Policy CP1 and MDDLDP Policy CC10.

For the reasons set out above, it is therefore considered that the proposed changes to the Approved Scheme are limited in scope and planning impact, and are fully compliant with applicable planning policy.

The requested variation to Conditions 2 and 3 of the Planning Permission

The LPA is requested to vary the wording of condition 2 of the Planning permission to read as follows:-

2. Approved details – This permission is in respect of the submitted application plans and drawings numbered:

- 0058-200-P1
- 7119-GBS-XX-RP-DR-A-105-P01
- 7119-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-106-P01
- 7119-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-107-P01
- 7119-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-108-P01
- 7119-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-109-P01
- 7119-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-110-P01
- 7119-GBS-XX-01-DR-A-111-P01
- 7118-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-201-P01 [N.B. Previously approved; not subject to amendment]
- 7118-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-202-P05 [N.B. Previously approved; not subject to amendment]
- 7118-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-203-P05
- 7118-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-204-P07
- 7118-GBS-XX-XX-DR-A-205-P07
- Surface Water Drainage Strategy (Stantec, October 2024, Project Ref: 330511026/2000)

The LPA is requested to vary the wording of condition 3 to read as follows:-

Condition 3. External materials - The materials to be used in the construction of the development hereby permitted are to be as specified on the approved drawings, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

We look forward to the early and favourable determination of this application. In the meantime, if you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

Christopher Wickham Associates

CHRISTOPHER WICKHAM ASSOCIATES

c.c. Ms A.West, Bursar, Reading Blue Coat School