

REGULATORY COMMITTEE
12th NOVEMBER 2003

**WARMINSTER: PROPOSED NEW ASSEMBLY HALL AT
THE MINSTER CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL,
EMWELL STREET, FOR WILTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
(Application No. W.03.1086.CP)**

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the above application and to recommend that conditional planning permission be granted.

The Site

2. The application site is located at the Minster C of E Primary School, Warminster and comprises a flat, terraced grass area east of the existing school buildings and south of two car parks situated off Emwell Street.
3. The site is some 50.0 metres away from the main school buildings, with a playground and vehicular access point lying between. A 2001 classroom extension lies 5.0 metres to the south-west. The school buildings are listed (Grade II) and the school site lies within the Warminster Conservation Area. The application site is bounded to the south by a line of mature horse chestnut trees, which are subject to Tree Preservation Orders and to the west by two young lime trees.
4. A site location plan is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Planning History

5. In brief, the planning history of the site is as follows: -

<u>W.00.1812.CP</u>	Single system-built permanent classroom extension granted planning permission 20 th December 2000.
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Proposals

6. Permission is sought for the building of a new Hall at the Minster C of E Primary School, Warminster. The current space serving as a Hall is located in a range of 'Pratten' buildings which, due to low ceiling heights and lack of storage space, have been deemed by OFSTED as unsatisfactory.

7. The Hall would be rectangular in form with a pitched roof, the ridge height being 8.0 metres with 4.4 metres to eaves. The Hall would provide a 140 square metre activity space together with storerooms, lobby and toilets. Walls would be of red facing brick to match the existing buildings with reconstructed Bath Stone door and window opening surrounds and lintels. The roof finish would be clay plain tiling with clay angle ridge tiles. The major windows are planned on the north elevation both to maximise day-lighting and natural ventilation without causing solar gain or glare problems.
8. Drawings showing the position of the proposed Hall on the site and elevations are attached as **Appendix 2 and 3** respectively.
9. The main use of the Hall would be for the teaching of the physical education curriculum, such as physical education (PE) and drama but it would also be made available for community use.
10. The proposals for the new Hall also include the upgrading of the existing vehicular access and the provision of a new pedestrian link from the existing School grounds. Vehicular access to the School site is gained via the existing car parks, which terminates in a steeply sloped and roughly formed area. The proposals include reforming this area to improve access, but also to improve the visual and engineering qualities of the surface. This space will also allow disabled parking close to the new Hall. Reinforcement of the existing fenced northern boundary through the planting of a willow hedge is also proposed, together with a new hedge to segregate the new pedestrian link from the access area.

Planning Policy

11. Policy HE7 of the adopted Wiltshire Structure Plan 2011 (January 2001) is considered relevant to this proposal.
12. Policies C12 and C19 of the adopted West Wiltshire District Plan 1996 are also considered relevant to this proposal.
13. All relevant planning policies are set out in the attached **Appendix 4**.

Consultations

14. **West Wiltshire District Council** - objects on grounds that the proposed location, design and scale of the building are detrimental to the Conservation Area and the setting of surrounding listed buildings.
15. **Warminster Town Council** - no objection.
16. **English Heritage** - no objection.
17. **Local Highway Authority** - no objection in principle, but recommends that conditions be imposed requiring the provision of disabled parking spaces and cycle racks.

18. **County Countryside Section** - concerned that the siting of the proposed Hall is too close to existing lime trees. Comment that these trees are semi-mature and have the potential to develop into specimens which, along with the existing horse chestnut trees, are considered to provide an important break in the built environment.

Publicity

19. The application has been publicised in the local press and by site notices. A neighbour notification exercise was also carried out. No letters of representation have been received.

Planning Considerations

20. This planning application proposes the building of a new Assembly Hall, with associated improvements to vehicular and pedestrian access. The current space within the School which serves as a hall has been found to be inadequate and identified as a key issue of improvement for the School. The proposed new Hall would provide the necessary accommodation to teach all elements of the PE curriculum.
21. The main issue to be considered with regard to this application is whether the proposed location and design of the building are detrimental to the conservation area and the setting of surrounding listed buildings, as suggested by the District Council.

Location of the new Hall

22. The District Council is concerned that the position proposed for the new Hall would block views from Emwell Street to the open space that exists behind the school and have a harmful impact on the listed building known as 'The Weymouth Arms' Public House. The District Council also considers that the new Hall would represent a very dominant building that would erode the semi-rural character of this part of the Warminster Conservation Area and create a more urbanised appearance to the street. The District Council suggests that an alternative location should be found for the proposed Hall.
23. Policy C12 of the Adopted West Wiltshire District Plan states the proposals for development considered detrimental to the special character and appearance of a designated conservation area, by virtue of form, materials, scale or siting will not be permitted. Policy C19 of the District Plan states that planning permission will not be granted for any development that would adversely affect the character or setting of any listed building.
24. The proposed location for the new Hall takes into account the overall strategic long-term development of the School and potential positions for future classroom buildings. The building of the Hall in the location proposed also retains the existing access arrangement to the school grounds and, given its proximity to the public car park, is the optimum for community use and disabled access. The prevailing site features on the remainder of the school grounds, such as trees and ground contours, prohibit the building of a Hall in any other position.

25. Whilst the District Council refers to views from Emwell Street to the open space behind the school, it is the case that there are no such views available. The rise in ground level that exists between Emwell Street and the school grounds means that the only views available from Emwell Street are that of the two car parks, the grass embankment that distinguishes the change in ground level and the line of large, mature horse chestnut trees. If the new Hall were to be granted planning permission, the row of trees would still be seen prominently above it, with the existing grassed embankment to the car park retained and enhanced with a new hedgerow.
26. The District Council has not qualified the ‘harmful impact’ it considers the proposed new Hall could have on the listed building known as ‘The Weymouth Arms’ Public House. Whilst there is no rule of thumb that may be applied to define at what distance away from a listed building a proposed development should be, Officers consider that, in this case, the proposed new Hall would not harm the immediate setting of the listed building. The proposed Hall would, at some 25.0 metres, be well set back from the listed building and, at a height of 4.4 metres to eaves, would not be overbearing or overdominant. English Heritage has not objected to the proposed Hall and when considered in the context of the environs in which the listed building already sits, it is not considered that the location or the appearance of the proposed Hall would adversely affect the character or setting of ‘The Weymouth Arms’ Public House.
27. With regard to the District Council’s concern that the proposed Hall would create a more urbanised appearance to the street, the fact should not be ignored that the site on which the new Hall is proposed lies to the rear of two car parks. The car parks are of a tarmac surface and incorporate steel gates and mesh fencing, lighting columns and a ticket machine. A low brick wall forms the boundary of the car park to Emwell Street and a public telephone kiosk is sited mid-way along this frontage. On-street parking also occurs along Emwell Street. Considered in this context, Officers disagree with the District Council’s perception that the proposed new Hall could urbanise Emwell Street or erode the “semi-rural” character of this part of the Conservation Area.
28. A minor amendment to the location of the proposed new Hall was made after the submission of the planning application. This minor amendment was to relocate the Hall 2.0 metres further to the east than originally proposed. This was to address the concerns expressed by the County Countryside Section over the proximity of the Hall to the existing lime trees. Allowance has been made in the proposed design of the foundations to the new Hall for the close proximity of the trees and their future growth.

Design of the new Hall

29. The project Architect advises that the new Hall has been designed to relate strongly to the 19th century extension of the main School buildings, this being the closest and with its axis on a similar alignment. However the District Council disagrees, commenting that the new Hall would be much wider and on a different alignment. In fact, the eastern end of the 19th century extension, i.e. that part which is closest to the proposed new Hall, is 10.0 metres wide. The width of the new Hall would be 10.7 metres – just 0.7 metre wider. In terms of alignment, the proposed Hall is not on the same axis but only varies across its east-west axis by a few degrees. The alignment recognises ground contours and the line of adjacent trees.

30. Despite this minimal difference in the width of the said buildings, the District Council considers that it would be appropriate to remodel the Hall to reduce its width and lengthen it, so that roof level could be dropped in height. However, such a stance fails to take into consideration that the height of the building is appropriate to the intended use of the building, i.e. as a hall for teaching elements of the PE curriculum. Lowering the roof height would only impinge on the internal space available to PE activities and the provision of such equipment as climbing apparatus. Any significant reduction in the height of the building would seem self-defeating, especially as the need for a new Hall is to address inadequacy of the existing hall space caused by its low ceiling height.
31. The District Council has not raised any concerns over the proposed materials to be used in the construction of the new Hall. Officers consider that, in principle, the materials proposed are compatible with the location of the building. Nevertheless, a condition can be attached to any permission granted requiring actual samples of the proposed materials to be approved prior to the commencement of development.

Conclusion

32. Due to its low ceiling height and lack of storage space, the current area serving as a hall has been deemed unsatisfactory and identified as a key issue of improvement for the School.
33. Having given careful consideration to the District Council's comments regarding the impact the location and design of the proposed new Hall, Officers are of the opinion that the proposed development would not adversely affect the setting of the listed building known as 'The Weymouth Arms' Public House, nor would it be detrimental to the character and appearance of the Warminster Conservation Area.
34. In view of the above, it is considered that the proposal accords with the provisions of the Development Plan.

Recommendation

35. That planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:-
1. The development hereby granted shall be begun before the expiration of five years from the date of this permission.
 2. No development shall take place until samples of materials to be used in the construction of the development hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the County Planning Authority. Development shall be in accordance with the approved details.
 3. No development shall take place until a scheme of hard and soft landscaping works has been submitted to and approved in writing by the County Planning Authority. Such scheme shall include details of all hard surfacing treatments and all means of enclosure. Soft landscaping shall include full details of the new planting, including the number, height, type, species and spacing. The approved scheme shall be implemented in accordance with those approved details.

4. All new soft landscaping works and planting approved under Condition 3 shall be implemented within the first available planting season following completion of the building. Any trees, shrubs or hedges which die, become diseased or damaged, or are removed within five years of initial planting shall be replaced with others of a similar species, size and number in the next planting season.
5. All existing trees and shrubs shall be retained, unless shown on the approved drawings as being removed. All trees and shrubs on and immediately adjoining the site shall be protected from damage during the works on the site. This shall be in accordance with the relevant British Standards (BS 5837:1991). In the event that trees become damaged or otherwise defective during such period, the County Planning Authority shall be notified within seven days and a programme of remedial action shall be submitted for approval and thereafter implemented as approved.
6. The development hereby approved shall not be occupied until two disabled parking spaces have been provided within the curtilage of the site.
7. The development hereby approved shall not be occupied until four secure cycle spaces have been provided within the curtilage of the site.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

Consultation replies.

