

The application is for full planning permission for the conversion of part of the school to a pre school with a new entrance, new porch and outdoor covered play area.

The site lies within the Green Belt and an Area of Landscape Restoration as indicated on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

The 8 week period for the determination of this application expired on the 10th February 2015 however an extension of time has been agreed to the 5th March 2015.

RECOMMENDATION

PERMIT the application with the following conditions:

- 1. Time limit condition**
- 2. Approved plans**

Reason for Recommendation

The proposed development would result in disproportionate additions over and above the original size of the building taking into account extensions that have previously been undertaken, and would therefore represent inappropriate development, which is, by definition, harmful to the openness of the Green Belt, and should not be approved unless very special circumstances exist that would outweigh the harm caused by inappropriate development, and any other harm, to the openness of the Green Belt.

The proposals are very minor in relation to the existing building, and that the school has grown over time to accommodate additional demand for school places and will provide improvements in respect of access for the disabled. The proposals have been designed to have a minimal visual impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and would be largely not visible within wider views. It is considered that these factors represent the very special circumstances that would outweigh the harm caused to the openness of the Green Belt.

Statement as to how the Local Planning Authority has worked in a positive and proactive manner in dealing with the planning application

The development proposal is considered sustainable and would have a minimal impact upon the openness of the Green Belt. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Policies and proposals in the approved development plan relevant to this decision:-

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy (CSS) 2006-2026

- Policy SP1: Spatial Principles of Targeted Regeneration
Policy SP3: Spatial Principles of Movement and Access
Policy ASP6: Rural Area Spatial Policy
Policy CSP1: Design Quality
Policy CSP3: Sustainability and Climate Change
Policy CSP4: Natural Assets

Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan (NLP) 2011

Policy S3: Development in the Green Belt
Policy T16: Development – General Parking Requirements
Policy N17: Landscape Character – General Considerations
Policy N21: Area of Landscape Restoration

Other Material Considerations include:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012)

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (2014)

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

Newcastle under Lyme and Stoke on Trent Urban Design Supplementary Planning Document 2010

Planning for Landscape Change – Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan

Relevant Planning History

NKPL1861 Permitted 1966 Extensions and alterations

Views of Consultees

County Highway Authority – No objections

Environmental Protection – No objections subject to an informative being included on any approval to advise on the importation of waste materials to facilitate construction

The views of **Kidsgrove Town Council**, **County Education Authority** and **Cheshire East Council** have been sought. As they have not been received by the due date it is assumed that they have no comment.

Representations

None received

Applicant's/Agent's submission

The application plans, supporting information and form are available for inspection at the Guildhall and on www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/planning/1400782FUL

Key Issues

The application is for full planning permission for the conversion of part of Castle Primary School to a pre school with a new entrance. The school is located within the Green Belt and an Area of Landscape Restoration as indicated by the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

The key issues in the determination of this planning application are considered to be:

- Does the proposal represent appropriate development within the Green Belt?
- Is the design of the extension acceptable?

- Is the impact upon neighbouring occupiers in terms of amenity acceptable?
- Is the impact upon the Landscape Restoration Area acceptable?
- If the development represents inappropriate development, do the very special circumstances exist to outweigh any harm to the openness of the Green Belt?

Does the proposal represent appropriate development within the Green Belt?

Paragraph 89 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets where the construction of new buildings involves appropriate development in Green Belt areas. This paragraph states that the extension or alteration of a building can be considered to be appropriate development, provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

The proposal includes a canopy over the existing outside play area, a canopy and steps up to a new entrance to the pre-school part of the school, egress stairs at the rear of the building and new 1.5 metre high fence and gates at the entrance from Mow Cop Road.

It is considered that the conversion of the school to pre-school element of the proposal would not involve a material change of use, therefore is not considered to constitute development.

From looking at the planning history relating to the site, the original school has been extended to over double its original size with some significant extensions and alterations. This proposal involves a canopy over an existing enclosed outdoor play area, and a small porch and two sets of egress stairs, which, as they would result in further extensions to an already significantly extended building, would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Paragraph 90 of the NPPF sets out what other forms of development, not involving the construction of a building, provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purpose of including land in Green Belt. The 1.5 metre high entrance gates and fence would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would not conflict with the purpose of including land within it and as such are considered to represent appropriate development in the Green Belt.

A case for very special circumstances is set out and considered at the end of the report.

Is the design of the extension acceptable?

Paragraph 56 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.

The proposed entrance and steps are considered to be a modest addition to the existing school building, and would be subordinate to the existing building in terms of their proposed size and height. The steps to the rear of the building are considered a minor addition that would not be visible within views from the street scene, and would not harm the overall character of the building.

The proposed canopy to provide a covered play area would be enclosed on three sides by the existing building. This would be steel framed transparent polycarbonate sheeting or glass to ensure natural light penetrates the existing building, which is considered an appropriate design.

The proposed gates would be steel in a red colour, with adjacent stone walling to 1.5 metres in height. This is considered an appropriate design and appearance that would be in keeping with the character of the existing school.

Overall, the proposal is considered to comply with the requirements of Policy CSP1 of the Core Spatial Strategy which is considered acceptable.

Is the impact upon neighbouring occupiers in terms of amenity acceptable?

Supplementary Planning Guidance provides advice on achieving satisfactory amenity standards.

The proposed extensions and alterations would not harm the amenity of neighbouring properties in terms of loss of light or privacy, and therefore the proposal is considered acceptable in this regard, and in compliance with the Space Around Dwellings SPG.

Is the impact upon the Landscape Restoration Area acceptable?

The site is located within an area of Landscape Restoration. Within these areas, Policy N21 of the Local Plan states that the Council will support, subject to other plan policies, proposals that will help to restore the character and improve the quality of the landscape. Within these areas it is necessary for the applicant to demonstrate that development will not further erode the character or quality of the landscape.

It is considered that the proposed canopies and alterations would not harm the quality of the landscape due to the small scale of the proposals and their appropriate siting and design.

The proposals are therefore considered to comply with Policy N21 of the Local Plan.

If the development represents inappropriate development, do the very special circumstances exist to outweigh any harm to the openness of the Green Belt?

As indicated above elements of the proposed development are considered to represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the openness of the Green Belt and should not be approved unless very special circumstances exist which outweigh the harm caused by inappropriate development, and any other harm, to the openness of the Green Belt.

A case for very special circumstances has been submitted, which is summarised below:

- The porch and new accesses are proposed in response to limited disabled access and general access around the school
- The canopy to create a covered play area would be over an existing play area, surrounded by the building on three sides
- The area will provide a raised decking area for much needed free flow play between the interior of the school and the outside play space along with removing the need for using the existing steps outside which are dangerous
- The canopy will be of steel frame with a transparent roof which will allow natural light in and also minimise visual impact when viewed from inside the school boundary, and will not be visible within the wider landscape
- The proposals include a partially covered entrance over the new stairs and a disabled platform lift up to the entrance of the new pre-school. The canopy will extend for approximately 2 metres by 1.5 metres over the top landing of the stairs and lift and will provide a weather proof disabled entrance for children, staff and visitors.

- An independent access to the facilities is required to provide some separation between school children and pre-school children when arriving at or leaving the school site
- All new openings to the building have been designed to match and complement the remainder of the school site
- Disabled access would be provided to the facilities and a rear access means this is not the sole access to the pre-school
- The proposals are for a very minor, small and proportionate porch extension which will have limited impact on the openness of the Green Belt as it is only partially covered.
- Additional planting and landscaping is proposed to the front of the school to soften the approach to the pre-school which will enhance the rural character of the school site in the Green Belt.
- Paragraph 73 of the NPPF encourages local planning authorities to '*give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools*'.
- Paragraph 89 lists amongst its exceptions for inappropriate development in the Green Belt "the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building."
- Although the school has been extended considerably in the past, this has been to take account of the rising number of children requiring primary school education in the area
- The proposals have been designed to provide the smallest amount of development possible to achieve the aim of the school to provide appropriate pre-school facilities which are safe and accessible to all
- The proposals have re used an existing part of the school to house the pre-school facilities and the only additions are a small porch and canopy to create a covered play area, providing weather proof, free floe play for children, both of which will have a limited impact on the School site and the wider landscape in the Green Belt due to their size, scale, design and location.

It is accepted that the proposals are very minor in relation to the existing building, and that the school has grown over time to accommodate additional demand for school places and will provide improvements in respect of access for the disabled. The proposals have been designed to have a minimal visual impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and would be largely not visible within wider views.

In conclusion it is considered that the above represent very special circumstances that would outweigh the harm caused by inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Therefore the development proposal should be permitted.

Background papers

Planning files referred to
 Planning Documents referred to

Date report prepared

13th February 2015