

13. FULL APPLICATION – ERECTION OF RE-LOCATABLE TIMBER FRAMED GARDEN ROOM FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING SPACE DESIGNED AROUND THE NEEDS OF A DISABLED PUPIL AT COMBS INFANT SCHOOL, COMBS COUNTY SCHOOL, LESSER LANE, COMBS. (NP/HPK/0817/0843 404120 / 378383 P5524 AM 15/08/2017)

APPLICANT: Ms Rosemary Cook

Site and Surroundings

Combs County School is located on Lesser Lane in Combs, within the designated Conservation Area. The building is a shared space providing the school and village hall.

The oldest part of the school fronts onto the highway and is an attractive building of vernacular merit. The windows of this part have arched openings. There is a modern extension behind the original building which has been designed in sympathy with the original and appears subordinate to it and has less ornate detailing. The school is constructed of natural gritstone with natural blue slate roof.

There are open fields to the east and south site, on the opposite side of the road there are dwellings. There is a hedgerow forming the boundary with some mature trees within it.

The land immediately behind (to the east) of the school is designated in the Chapel-en-le-Frith Neighbourhood Plan as Local Green Space.

Proposal

The erection of an outbuilding to the north of the existing school building.

The proposed building would have a central classroom with a circular plan form 8m in diameter. There would be two wings, one on each side projecting a further 2.45m and providing office, cloakroom, toilet and study area. The central circular element would have a conical roof with shallower pitched roofs to each of the wings.

The walls of the building would be clad with untreated larch which would be left to weather naturally. The roof would be clad with either a green roof (Sedum and wild-flower) or recycled composite slates. Windows and doors would also be timber.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be REFUSED for the following reason:

It is considered that the design of the proposed building would be unacceptable by virtue of its form and materials and that the development would consequently harm the setting of the existing building and the Conservation Area contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP2, GSP3 and L3, Local Plan policies LC4 and LC5, the Authority's adopted design guide and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Key Issues

- Design and impact upon the setting of the existing building and the designated Design, amenity, impact on the designated Combs Conservation Area.

History

NP/HPK/0616/0549 – Planning application for new build modular classroom and associated servicing. This was withdrawn following officers' concerns about its design and impact on the setting of the building and designated Conservation Area.

NP/HPK/0217/0193 – Planning permission granted for classroom extension at the June Planning Committee. The approved extension would be located to the west of the existing building and would be built to a design using traditional materials that the Authority concluded would conserve the existing building and be in accordance with adopted design guidance.

Consultations

Highway Authority – No objections.

High Peak Borough Council – No response to date.

Parish Council – Raise no objection and say that the proposed garden room will be an asset to the school at a time when the number of pupils is at maximum. It should not become a permanent fixture.

Sport England – Make no comment but refer the Authority to general guidance and the National Planning Policy Framework.

PDNPA Cultural Heritage – Object to the development for the following reasons:

This proposal is for a modular building, the walls would be of timber, and the roof either a green roof or of recycled, reformed slate. As a building type in itself, I can understand how the proposal would create a pleasant and conducive educational space, but unfortunately I consider that the context is wrong for it.

The former chapel owes its visual impact to its strong geometry and attractive windows, and also to its stand-alone location. It is not uncommon to find small nonconformist chapels standing alone like this in rural locations. The conservation area appraisal makes few recommendations for future management, but one that is expressed quite emphatically is as follows:

“Area B – Open land between hamlets. The historic separation between the two hamlets still survives south of the Peak Park boundary and should be maintained as part of the Conservation Area. The only historic incursion into this area was the mid-19th century Methodist Church (which now also serves as the local school and village hall), at its extreme western corner. A limited amount of recent development in the northern corner of the field should not be allowed to set a precedent for further development in this important open space.”

The impact of the proposed new modular structure would be played down to some extent by standing in the curtilage of the school that is already visually distinct from the open field adjacent, but would nevertheless impinge upon it and would also detract from the character and setting of the former church as a non-designated heritage asset.

The needs of the school to continue functioning are recognised, but it would be more appropriate to pursue the alternative of adding to the main building in a suitable style, and that the current proposal will neither preserve nor enhance the special qualities of the Conservation Area. Although semi-permanent in character, this would be a permanent building and it is unlikely that the site would become an open space again. Development here would be harmful to the Conservation Area and should therefore be refused.

Representations

One representation letter has been received objecting to the proposed development. The reasons for objection are summarised below, the letter can be read in full on the website.

- Plans have recently been passed for an additional classroom.

- The development would take away from the other children's playing area.
- Development would increase pupil numbers and the single track road is unsuitable and gets blocked with traffic currently.

Main Policies

Relevant Core Strategy policies: GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, GSP4, HC4, L1, L3, T7.

Relevant Local Plan policies: LC3, LC4, LC5, LC20, LT10, LT18.

Chapel En-le-Frith Neighbourhood Plan: TM3, C1.

SPDs 'The Design Guide'

Core Strategy DS1 explains that in settlements and in the countryside outside the Natural Zone extensions to existing buildings are acceptable in principle. Policy HC4 and TM3 set out that proposals to provide community facilities and services involving a change of use of traditional buildings or a replacement building which achieves enhancement, will be encouraged.

HC4 D says that the redevelopment of a community recreation site or sports facility for other uses will not be permitted until a satisfactory replacement site or facility has been provided or it can be demonstrated that the facility is no longer required.

The site is within the designated Conservation Area and therefore policies L3 and LC5 are relevant. These policies are clear that where development affects heritage assets that it must conserve or enhance the significance of the heritage asset. Development that has a harmful impact will not be permitted unless there are exceptional circumstances. The Combs Conservation Area Appraisal is a material consideration when determining applications within the Conservation Area.

GSP3 and LC4 require that where development is acceptable in principle its detailed treatments are of a high standard that respects, conserves and where possible enhances the landscape, built environment and other valued characteristics of the area. Particular attention is paid to amongst other things: design details, materials and finishes that reflect or compliment the style and traditions of local buildings; the amenity, privacy and security of the development of nearby properties.

C1 Identifies Local Green Spaces within the Neighbourhood Plan, one of which is the field behind the school and says that development of these sites will not be allowed, except in very special circumstances.

Local Plan Policy LC20 deals with protecting trees put at risk by development, it requires sufficient information is included to enable the impact on trees to be properly considered. Where risk of damage to trees is acceptable, room must be left on site for their replacement with an appropriate species.

Relevant policies are considered to be in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and therefore should be afforded full weight in the determination of the application.

Assessment

Principle

Relevant Development Plan policies encourage community facilities and development to extend or improve them in principle. The school requires an extension to cater for those with special

education needs. The Authority acknowledged the need for an extension in approving the recent application in June and there have been no material changes since then. It should however be noted that there is no policy requirement to demonstrate a need for community facilities outside of named settlements such as in Combs which are not listed in policy DS1.

This is an alternative proposal to the recent extension which was approved in June rather than a proposal for additional development. There is little reference in the submitted information to explain why the previously approved extension is not being pursued other than to state that the proposed development is considered by the applicant to be the most appropriate, least disruptive and has a minimum impact.

There is a presumption against development on Local Green Space as designated by the Neighbourhood Plan. The proposal will not affect the Local Green Space as this lies behind the site. The principle of the development is therefore considered to remain acceptable.

Design and impact upon Conservation Area

The key issues in the determination of the current application is therefore considered to be design and impact upon the existing building and the Conservation Area. Relevant policies are clear that development must be of a high design standard, in accordance with the adopted design guidance and that development must conserve or where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets such as the existing school building and the designated Combs Conservation Area.

The design of the proposed building would be significantly different to that approved planning permission at the June Planning Committee. The proposal is now for a detached building located within the curtilage of the infant school in the north east corner of the site.

The proposed building would have a circular floor plan with conical roof with two 'wings' on each side of the building and a covered decking area to the front. The walls of the building would be clad with treated larch timber which would not be finished and be left to weather naturally. The roof would be either be a green (Sedum and wild-flower) or recycled composite slates. Windows and doors would also be timber.

The proposed design and materials proposed do not reflect that of the existing building or nearby buildings within the village. The proposed design takes a clearly different design approach to local buildings and would be read as such where seen on site and from public vantage points.

The design guide describes the local built tradition within the National Park and generally advocates designing in harmony with existing buildings by reflecting traditional form and materials in the design of new buildings. Occasionally high quality materials can be used as substitutes where appropriate to the design provided that they harmonise well. There is no tradition of external timber boarding in the Peak District and therefore there is only a limited place for external timber particularly where the development is seen in the context of a traditional building.

The design of the proposed building therefore would be contrary to the Authority's design guidance because the form and materials of the building would not harmonise with the existing buildings on site or in the local area. The development in these respects therefore is contrary to policies GSP3 D and LC4.

The application site is located within the designated Combs Conservation Area where the Authority is obliged to pay special regard to the preservation of the area when making planning decisions. The existing building is important within the Conservation Area and relevant policies say that all development must conserve or enhance the Conservation Area unless there are exceptional circumstances.

In this context it is considered that the proposed building would be a prominent and incongruous addition which would detract from the setting of the existing building and the Conservation Area. Officers also note the adopted Conservation Area appraisal which identifies the proposed site as part of important open space which historically separated the two hamlets and goes on to say that more recent development in the open space should not set a precedent for further development.

The Conservation Area appraisal is a material consideration and having regard to it and comments from the Authority's Conservation Officer it is concluded that the proposed development would detract from the Conservation Area contrary to policies L3 and LC5.

Officers acknowledge that in principle an extension to the school is acceptable, however this does not provide exceptional or overriding justification for an unacceptable design contrary to adopted design guidance or harm to the Conservation Area. It is also acknowledged that the proposed design is the preference of the school, however no reasoning has been put forward why the existing approved extension could not provide the required accommodation.

Finally, the applicant has stated the intention that the building would only be erected for a period of 10 years and considers therefore that any building should be considered temporary and acceptable on that basis. Officers are concerned that there is no clear reasoning for a ten year temporary period (for example to provide for a trial run or a need for which there is a definite end date) and that there would be pressure to retain the building especially given the stated 30 to 40 year life. But in any case it is considered that the impact of the building would not be acceptable even on a temporary basis.

Other Issues

During discussions between the agent and Officers an alternative smaller building of a similar design has been put forward by the agent. Officers have considered this alternative against the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) and have advised that provided that the building is erected by a Local Authority and is in accordance with the restrictions of the GPDO then planning permission would not be required.

This alternative scheme represents a fall-back position which could be available to the applicant if planning permission is refused and therefore is a material consideration in the determination of this planning application. Officers note the fall-back position for a smaller building, however it is not considered that this provides substantive justification for a larger structure which would have a greater impact than the potential fall-back position and has on its own merits been found to be contrary to the development plan. It should also be noted that any Local Authority carrying out development under the GPDO would be obliged to have regard to National Park purposes.

The proposed building would be located on part of the play area used by the school and therefore the Authority has consulted Sport England on the application. Sport England has advised that the proposal does not fall within their remit and therefore Officers are satisfied that the proposal would not result in the loss of any sports facility. Further information from the school in this regard is expected in time for the meeting.

The proposed building would be constructed from locally sourced timber products and would be heavily insulated with high performance in energy conservation. The use of efficient and local materials is welcomed, however this is not considered to be an issue which would override the design issues raised above.

The proposed building would be sited close to mature trees on site and within their respective root protection areas. The applicant has provided further information stating that the building would effectively stand on the ground with minimal ground preparation and with no foundations

dug or base erected. On the basis of the information provided Officers are satisfied that the development could be carried out without harm or loss to the affected trees.

Officers note the concerns raised in regards to potential impact upon Highway Safety and the amenity of road users. In determining the previous application for an extension the Authority concluded that there would be no adverse impact in terms of Highway Safety and Officers consider there is no reason to come to a different conclusion in this case. No changes to existing access arrangements are proposed and while existing off-street parking is limited, given the size of the school it is considered that additional disruption as children are dropped off / picked up would be low and would not materially harm highway safety or amenity.

Given the location of the building in relation to neighbouring properties and intervening planting Officers are satisfied that the development would not harm the amenity, security or privacy of any neighbouring property.

Conclusion

For the reasons given above it is concluded that the proposed design would be unacceptable by virtue of its form and materials and that the development would consequently harm the setting of the existing building and the Conservation Area contrary to relevant policies in the Development Plan. The need for additional space can be met by the already permitted extension, this would not have an unacceptable impact on the conservation area. In the absence of further material considerations the application is therefore recommended for refusal.

Human Rights

Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil