

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

03 August 2023

REPORT OF: DIRECTOR PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Members are asked to determine the planning application outlined below:

APPLICATION NO: 23/0644/08 (RP)
APPLICANT: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
DEVELOPMENT: Proposed installation of a new single storey modular constructed classroom unit (Amended site location plan received 06/07/2023).
LOCATION: PARK LANE SCHOOL, PARK LANE, TRECYNON, ABERDARE, CF44 8HN
DATE REGISTERED: 16/06/2023
ELECTORAL DIVISION: Aberdare West and Llwydcoed

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to conditions

REASONS: The introduction of a modular classroom unit at the school would provide improved services for both students and staff.

The proposal would be consistent and compatible with the existing educational use of the site whilst the building itself is considered to be acceptable in terms of its siting, scale and design.

Whilst one letter of representation has been received in relation to the proposal, it is not considered that the building would have an adverse impact upon the character and appearance of the surrounding area or the amenity and privacy of surrounding residential properties.

Furthermore, given that the proposal would not increase the number of staff currently employed at the site nor increase the existing school roll, it is not considered that the development would impact detrimentally upon highway safety in the vicinity of the site. The application would therefore comply with Policies AW2, AW5, AW6 and NSA12 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

REASON APPLICATION REPORTED TO COMMITTEE

The application has been submitted by the Council, on land within its ownership, and where the Council's interest is of more than a minor nature.

APPLICATION DETAILS

Full planning consent is sought for the installation of a single storey modular constructed classroom unit within the grounds of Park Lane School, Park Lane, Aberdare.

It is proposed to erect the modular unit at the north-westernmost part of the school grounds, adjacent to the school yard and would require some groundworks to be undertaken via the reduction in level of a grassed embankment and construction of a retaining wall.

The modular unit would sit on ground sunk, concrete foundation pads so that level access is provided for students and staff from the school yard and would comprise of 4no. pre-constructed bays to a width of 11m and depth of 8.4m.

The unit would extend to an overall height of 3.1 metres, being a flat roofed structure and would contain 2no classrooms that would each provide 36.15m² of internal space together with changing and washroom facilities. With regard to its external finish, the wall and roof panels would be of a grey, powder coated galvanised steel construction, whilst aluminium framed double-glazed door and window openings would be contained within the southern, western and eastern side elevations.

The application is accompanied by a design and access statement which indicates that the proposals would not involve the improvement of the vehicular access to the site or the provision of additional parking facilities as staffing numbers would not increase at the school and that the new building only improve facilities available to existing staff and pupils of the school.

SITE APPRAISAL

The application site relates to Park Lane School, a modern school building located to the far south-west of the residential area of Trecynon, Aberdare and which provides an educational facility for pupils with a range of special educational needs (SEN).

The existing school buildings sit centrally within a curtilage of approximately 6500m² with a vehicular access and car parking areas being located upon its northern extent. The whole site is demarcated by palisade type fencing and upon the northern boundary, where it is proposed to site the modular unit, are a number of mature trees. However, the more mature specimens originate from outside the plot and overhang it, from a public right of way (ABD/17/2) and the Pen Llew Court Flats that border the site to the north.

The site is accessed via the adopted highway of Park Lane to the south-east which also serves the residential units at the aforementioned Pen Llew Flats. To the north-east of the site is a large allotment site.

PLANNING HISTORY

15/0619	Park Lane School, Trecynon	Construction of new external lift and relocation of existing walls.	Granted	03/07/15
10/1164	Park Lane Special School, Trecynon	Single storey extension, providing two classrooms and a basement/storeroom.	Granted	10/01/11
05/1788	Park Lane School, Trecynon	Proposed erection of 1.8m high steel palisade fencing.	Granted	12/12/05

PUBLICITY

The application has been advertised by means of direct neighbour notification and through the erection of site notices.

One letter of representation has been received and raises the following points:

- There has been no consultation with local residents;
- Reduced parking within the school grounds following previous extension work has led to parking problems for local residents;
- Transport vehicles that queue early in the afternoon to pick up pupils cause double parking on Park Lane, reducing the carriageway to single width;
- Makes reference to the Council's cabinet report of the 26th September 2022 and the development of the Council headquarters site in Clydach Vale.
- Questions the necessity of another classroom unit on the site;
- Enquires about the long-term future of the Park Lane School Site.

CONSULTATION

- Flood Risk Management – no objection, subject to conditions.
- Highways and Transportation – no objection.
- Public Health and Protection – no objection.
- Welsh Water – no objection, subject to conditions and advisory notes.
- The Coal Authority – no objection subject to standard advisory notes.

POLICY CONTEXT

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan

The current LDP's lifespan was 2011 to 2021 and it is in the process of being reviewed. The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 introduced provisions specifying the period to which a plan has effect and providing that it shall cease to be the LDP at the end of the specified period. These provisions were commenced on 4th January 2016 but do not have retrospective effect. Therefore, the provisions do not apply to LDPs adopted prior to this date and plans adopted before 4th January 2016 will remain the LDP for determining planning applications until replaced by a further LDP. This was clarified in guidance published by the Minister on 24th September 2020. Subsequently, the existing Plan remains the development plan for consideration when determining this planning application.

The site is situated within the defined settlement limits of Aberdare.

Policy CS1 – sets out the criteria for development in the Northern Strategy Area.

Policy AW2 – supports development in sustainable locations and includes sites that are accessible by a range of sustainable transport modes and would not unacceptably conflict with surrounding uses.

Policy AW5 – sets out criteria for new development in relation to amenity and accessibility.

Policy AW6 – requires development to involve a high-quality design and to make a positive contribution to place making, including landscaping.

Policy AW10 – does not permit proposals where they would cause or result in a risk of unacceptable harm to health and/or local amenity.

Policy NSA12 – identifies the criteria for assessment of development proposals within and adjacent to settlement boundaries.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Design and Placemaking;
Access, Circulation and Parking

National Guidance

In the determination of planning applications regard should also be given to the requirements of national planning policy which are not duplicated in the Local Development Plan, particularly where national planning policy provides a more up to date and comprehensive policy on certain topics.

Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (PPW) was issued on 24th February 2021 in conjunction with Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (FW2040). PPW incorporates the objectives of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act into town and country planning and sets out Welsh Government's (WG) policy on planning issues relevant to the determination of all planning applications. FW2040 sets out the National Development Framework for Wales (NDF), WGs current position on planning policy at regional and national level.

It is considered that the proposed development is consistent with the key principles and requirements for placemaking set out in PPW; and is also consistent with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act's sustainable development principles through its contribution towards the Welsh Ministers' well-being objectives of driving sustainable development and building healthier communities and better environments.

It is also considered the proposed development is compliant with the NDF.

Other relevant policy guidance consulted:

PPW Technical Advice Note 11: Noise;
PPW Technical Advice Note 12: Design;
PPW Technical Advice Note 18: Transport;
Manual for Streets.

REASONS FOR REACHING THE RECOMMENDATION

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that, if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Furthermore, applications that are not in accordance with relevant policies in the plan should not be allowed, unless material considerations justify the grant of planning permission.

Main Issues:

Principle of the proposed development

The proposal relates to the siting of a modular classroom unit within the grounds of a well-established educational facility that is located within the defined settlement boundary of Aberdare. The building would facilitate a purpose-built, specialist classroom unit to accommodate pupils with additional educational needs. It is therefore considered that the proposal would make a productive use of the site that is consistent and compatible with the surrounding educational and residential land uses.

As such, the proposal would comply with the objectives of Policy AW2 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan and the development is therefore considered to be acceptable in principle.

However, in accordance with the requirements of Policies NSA12, AW5 and AW6, development proposals may only be considered acceptable providing no adverse impacts result in terms of character, amenity or highway safety. These matters will be considered in detail in the following sections.

Impact on the character and appearance of the area

The proposed classroom unit is of a modest scale that would be suitable and acceptable within the context of the wider school site.

In terms of siting, the applicant has confirmed the proposed location for the modular building was identified as it offered the most sensible approach in terms of logistics (handling / delivery of the proposed modular unit) and also in terms of connections to existing services (water / drainage). In addition, the need to have direct access from the proposed new setting onto the external yard area was identified as a must to suit the needs of both staff and pupils via providing a level access.

As a consequence of its siting, upon the north-western boundary of the site, it is acknowledged the unit would become a legible feature towards both occupants of the Pen Llew Court Flats and users of the Public Right of Way. However, the palisade fencing and trees that bound the site would provide an element of screening and given the location of the school, the unit would have a limited visual impact on the wider public realm.

Furthermore, it is not considered the finishing materials proposed would be visually intrusive or out of context with what is a modern school building.

As such, it is not considered that the classroom structure would form an overly prominent feature within the context of the school grounds or result in a detrimental impact upon the character of the immediate area.

Consequently, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of the impact it would have on the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area and the application would therefore comply with Policies AW5 and AW6 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

Impact on residential amenity and privacy

Whilst the application site is closely related to the adjacent Pen Llew Court Flats site, the modular unit would be sited approximately 18m away from the nearest flat within the complex, being separated from the development by its associated car park, the aforementioned Public Right of Way and a number of mature trees.

Furthermore, no window openings would be contained within the rear elevation of the unit that would face the flats, whilst the submitted drawings indicate that the wall panels and roof of the modular unit would be insulated and windows double glazed which is considered would limit any noise transference from within the building to the closest receptors.

Lastly, given that the additional classrooms would be positioned next to an existing school yard/playground, it is not considered that the siting of the unit at this location would give rise to significantly greater levels of noise and disturbance than that which already occurs.

Consequently, it is not considered that the addition of the modular classroom unit to the existing school site would compromise the amenity or privacy of the closest residents or represent an incompatible land use. Therefore, the application is considered to be acceptable and in accordance with Policy AW5 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

Impact upon highway safety

The Council's Transportation Section have been notified of the proposals in order to provide comments on the suitability of the scheme with regard to highway safety and have made the following comments in relation to access and parking.

Access

The school is located at the termination of Park Lane which provides a single footway link leading to the site and benefits from parking/waiting restrictions to maintain the free flow of traffic to and from the school and an informal turning area at its termination.

Parking

In accordance with the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance relating to Access, Circulation & Parking (2011) the proposed additional classrooms will increase the parking requirement of the site by 2 spaces with none proposed.

Highways Conclusion

There is slight concern that the proposal would increase the parking requirement of the school site by 2 spaces with none proposed. However, taking into consideration that the increase is minimal and that the number of staff and the school roll would not increase, the proposal is considered acceptable and in accordance with Policies AW5 and NSA12 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

Drainage

The proposed development would result in a total construction area of over 100 square metres and the applicant will therefore be required to submit an application to the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) Approval Body (SAB), under Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. The applicant would also be required to comply with Part H of the Building Regulations.

Neighbour Consultation Responses

Where the issues raised by the representee are not addressed above, the following additional comments are offered:

In respect of the consultation exercise, direct neighbour notification letters were sent to no fewer than twenty occupants of the Pen Llew Court Flats who it is considered, given the site context and minor nature of the proposals, would be the neighbouring residents who could be most directly affected by the development. In addition, three site notices were erected within the vicinity of the site to publicise the application to wider neighbouring residents.

In terms of the proposed works, the addition of the modular accommodation to provide two additional classrooms will not reduce or compromise current onsite car parking arrangements. The applicant has also advised that, subject to gaining planning approval, it is their intention to undertake the development over the summer holidays to minimise disruption to learners, staff and local residents.

In relation to the vehicular congestion during drop-off and pick-up times at the school, the applicant has been made aware of the concerns shown so that it can be communicated to staff, parents and carers to park appropriately and be respectful of residents when visiting the school site. Members should note that, there are provisions outside of the planning process to enforce illegal parking in line with the parking and waiting restrictions that exist at the access road to the site.

The Council's education directorate have also advised that pupil numbers within special schools have continued to grow and they are seeing increasing numbers of learners with complex needs requiring specialist facilities and support. Therefore, given that the Council have a statutory duty to keep Additional Learning Need (ALN) provision under review, there is a requirement for sites to be frequently improved and upgraded. Accordingly, and as reported, previous works undertaken to create more capacity on a number of the Council's special school sites are now complete. However, school sites remain under constant review so that learners and staff have access to best possible teaching and learning environment.

The current proposals are being made to improve facilities at Park Lane School for both pupils and staff. The opening of the new school at the Clydach Vale site, if approved, will provide a brand-new state of the art special school in the Rhondda Valley to meet the growth in demand for special school provision. This will alleviate capacity pressures in the medium to long-term and will result in the growth of special schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf from 4 to 5 schools. Educational colleagues have

confirmed that Park Lane School will continue to provide much needed special school placements in the Cynon Valley for 3–19-year-olds, so that pupils do not have to travel far for their educational needs.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Liability

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was introduced in Rhondda Cynon Taf from 31 December 2014.

The application is for development of a kind that is not CIL liable under the CIL Regulations 2010 (as amended).

Conclusion

The introduction of a modular classroom unit at the school would provide improved services for existing students and staff. Furthermore, the new unit would have no undue impact upon the character and appearance of the site or the surrounding locality; the amenity and privacy of the surrounding neighbours; or upon highway safety in the vicinity of the site.

The application is therefore considered to comply with the relevant policies of the Local Development Plan and is recommended for approved, subject to the conditions detailed below.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of five years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Sections 91 and 93 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the approved drawing numbers and documents received by the Local Planning Authority on 16/06/2023 and 06/07/2023, unless otherwise to be approved and superseded by details required by any other condition attached to this consent:

- Drawing no. 5495_4097_B01 (Existing Site Layout)
- Drawing no. 5495_4097_B01 (Proposed Layout)
- Drawing no. 5495_4097_A01 (Site Location Plan)
- Drawing no. 23025 (Proposed Elevations)
- Drawing no. 23025 (General Arrangement)
- Drawing no. 23025 (Foundations Plan)
- Drawing no. SK01 (External Retaining Wall Detail)

Reason: To ensure compliance with the approved plans and documents and to clearly define the scope of the permission.