DELEGATED REPORT

Recommendation Made: 20 May 2011

Reference:- 11/00350/C **Parish:- Ratby Parish Council**

Applicant:- Mr Gareth Williams
County Hall
Glenfield
Leicester
LE3 8RF

Location:- Ratby County Primary School Main Street Ratby Leicester Leicestershire

Proposal:- REMOVAL TWO EXISTING MOBILE CLASSROOMS, ERECTION OF REPLACEMENT CLASSROOM BLOCK, REINSTATEMENT OF SCHOOL FIELD AND EXTENSION TO PLAY AREA COUNTY COUNCIL IDENTITY NO. 2011/L451/04

Introduction:-

The Borough Council has been consulted on this County planning application. The application seeks full planning permission for the erection of a permanent single storey two classroom block to replace two temporary single storey modular classrooms that are to be removed from the site. The proposed new classroom block is located to the rear (west) of the main building complex at Ratby Primary School. It is to be constructed of red brick and horizontal timber cladding walls with mono-pitched grey single ply membrane roof and aluminium windows. The building will have a footprint of approximately 188 square metres with front elevation eaves at approximately 5 metres in height and rear elevation eaves at approximately 3 metres in height. The application also proposes a 70 square metres extension to the existing hard surfaced play area.

History:-

There have been a number of County planning permissions for modular classrooms on the site including retention and renewals of temporary permissions dating back to 1977. Those being removed are no longer considered to meet satisfactory classroom facilities.

Consultations:-

There are no consultation responses as the Borough Council is a consultee rather than the determining planning authority.

Development Plan Policies:-

Hinckley & Bosworth Local Development Framework: Core Strategy (2009)
Policy 8: 'Key Rural Centres Relating to Leicester' (Ratby)

Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan (2001)
Within settlement boundary of Ratby
BE1: 'Design and Siting of Development'
BE7: 'Development in Conservation Areas'
CF2B: 'Alternative Uses of Existing Educational or Community Sites

Ratby Village Design Statement (2011)

Appraisal:-

The main considerations in respect of the application are:- the principle of development; the siting and design of the new classroom block; impact on the Ratby Conservation Area; impact on neighbours amenities and other issues.

Principle of Development

The proposed new classroom block is located within the settlement boundary of Ratby and within the school grounds as defined on the proposals map of the adopted Local Plan. Evidence has been provided in the form of forecasts that indicate a small increase in pupil numbers to 2015. As such it is considered that the proposed development is acceptable in principle and that a permanent solution to replace the existing temporary modular classrooms should be supported.

Siting, Design and Ratby Conservation Area

The new classroom block is to be located to the rear, and well related to, the existing school buildings and in a less prominent location than the existing two temporary modular classrooms that are located on a higher platform adjacent to the hard surfaced play area. The ground level of the site is to be reduced by approximately 1 metre such that the proposed building will occupy the same ground level as the existing school buildings and will reduce its impact and prominence further. The new classroom is to be sited such that it does not have an adverse impact on visual amenity to surrounding areas. The building will be well screened from the east by the existing school buildings and from the south by a public house. It will also be well screened from the west (public house car park) as a result of the reduction in ground levels and the existing tree and hedge screen along the boundary of the site. To the north it will be well screened by an earth bank at the edge of the raised playing field/hard surfaced play area.

Policy 8 of the adopted Core Strategy and policy BE7 of the adopted Local Plan require new development to respect, preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Ratby Conservation Area and be in sympathy with the merits of neighbouring development by incorporating locally distinctive features. The Design and Access Statement submitted suggests that the proposed building does this by incorporating locally sourced brickwork and a roof slope already found on two elevations of the existing school. Notwithstanding this, and following discussion with the Borough Council's Conservation Officer, the design of the building with a mono-pitched ply membrane roof is not considered to reflect the character or construction of the main school buildings to which it is most closely related which are of brick and tile construction to meet the requirements of these policies. Although there are extensions with similar mono-pitched roof slopes close to the entrance to the school site off Burroughs Road and which occupy a far more prominent position in the Ratby Conservation Area, these pre-date 1980 since when changes in policy and the adoption of the Ratby Conservation Area place more emphasis on the importance of design of new development and its impact on the character and appearance of the area.

Neighbours Amenities

The only neighbouring property affected by the proposed new classroom block is the public house to the south of the site which occupies a lower ground level. The blank side elevation of the proposed single storey block will be approximately 6 metres from the rear elevation of the public house which has windows at ground and first floor facing the site. It is not known what rooms these windows belong to but given the single storey scale of the proposed building, the proposed reduction in ground levels and its siting and design it is considered unlikely that there will be a significant detrimental impact on the amenities of the public house as a result of the proposed development.

Other Issues

The proposal involves the loss of a large Weeping Willow tree within the Ratby Conservation Area which the submitted Tree Survey identifies as being of moderate quality and value without defect. As the access stairs to the upper field can be lengthened without the need to remove the tree this is considered to be unnecessary. Notwithstanding that the tree has not been designated as an 'important tree' within the Ratby Village Design Statement, to remove the tree will have a detrimental impact on visual amenity in the Ratby Conservation Area. An ornamental Cherry tree is also proposed to be removed and is necessary in order to facilitate the erection of the new classroom block in the proposed location. However, this is not a significant tree given its much smaller size and its removal is therefore considered to be acceptable.

The modest extension to the existing hard surfaced play area has no detrimental impact on visual amenity or neighbours and is more than offset by the removal of the modular classrooms and the reinstatement of the area to grass playing area. As such this element is considered to be acceptable.

Conclusion

The replacement of the temporary modular classrooms with a permanent classroom block and the extension of the play area is acceptable in principle in the proposed locations, however, there are concerns in respect of the design of the building in relation to the existing school buildings and the Ratby Conservation Area. In addition, the loss of a mature tree which provides visual amenity within the site is considered to be unnecessary in relation to the development and should be retained.

RECOMMENDATION:- That the Leicestershire County Council be advised that Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council has the following comments to make:-

1 Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has no objection in principle to the erection of a new permanent classroom block in the proposed location and the removal of the two modular classrooms from the site or to the extension to the play area. However, the design of the classroom block is not considered to reflect the character or appearance of the Ratby Conservation Area or be in sympathy with the merits of the existing Victorian school buildings. The County Council is therefore encouraged to consider a more sympathetic design and, in the interests of visual amenity, to retain the large Weeping Willow tree that is currently proposed to be removed.

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