BOROUGH OF BROXBOURNE

PROPOSED ERECTION OF NEW 5 BAY DOUBLE AND 3 BAY SINGLE MOBILE CLASSROOM UNITS AT GOFFS SCHOOL, GOFFS LANE, CHESHUNT.

Report of the Director of Environment

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1. Purpose of Report

To consider planning application ref 07/0704-02 for the siting of a new three bay single mobile and a five bay double mobile classroom unit for a temporary period of 5 years and the provision of replacement parking spaces at Goff’s School, Goff’s Lane, Cheshunt.

2. Summary

2.1 Goff’s School is located in the Green Belt and occupies a site area of 8.81 hectares, with the main access off Goff’s Lane. This application is for a three bay single and a five bay double mobile classroom unit. The new mobile classrooms are required due to an anticipated increase in demand for secondary places in the area, and from September 2002, the school will be admitting additional pupils. There is an overall programme of rationalisation of secondary education provision in Cheshunt.

2.2 The double mobile would be located on a grassed area at the rear of the school between existing mobile classrooms and the school rugby pitches, and the single mobile would be on the existing car parking adjacent to the Design and Technology block.

2.3 There would be a loss of 13 staff car parking spaces due to the siting of the single mobile. It is proposed to provide an equivalent number of alternative staff parking spaces in the front of the school by removing some concrete bollards from the existing lay-by/waiting area thereby creating the additional parking spaces.

2.4 The Local Member has raised concerns regarding the impact on the traffic using Goff’s Lane at the beginning and end of the school day resulting from the loss of the waiting drop off area. The Borough of Broxbourne also raises concerns regarding the flow of traffic and wishes to see the replacement parking located elsewhere within the site and the retention of the waiting area. The Highway Authority raised no objections to the proposal, however they have required that the School implement a School Travel Plan within six months of planning permission being granted to help mitigate and manage the impact of the loss of the waiting area.
2.5 The main issues raised by this application and considered within the report are Green Belt, the need to provide educational facilities and highway implications.

3. **Conclusion**

3.1 The report concludes that any harm caused to the Green Belt is limited, is outweighed by the educational need for the development and would only be for a temporary period. However it would be appropriate to limit any consent to three rather than five years, pending the re-organisation of schools in Cheshunt. The preparation of a School Travel Plan should help to offset any highway impacts.

3.2 The report therefore concludes that the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant temporary permission subject to conditions including the requirement for the preparation of a School Travel Plan within six months of the date of the permission.
1. Description of the site and proposed development

1.1 This application is for the siting of a three bay single and a five bay double mobile classroom unit of 80.95m² and 134.35m² respectively for a temporary period of 5 years. The double mobile is to be located on a grassed area at the rear of the school between existing mobile classrooms and the school rugby pitches and the single mobile would be located on an existing car parking area adjacent to the Design and Technology block. The only other available space to site the temporary mobile classrooms is on land within the site that is allocated for the planned future extension of the school.

1.2 The new mobile classrooms are required due to an anticipated increase in demand for secondary places in the area, and from September 2002, the school will be admitting additional pupils. The mobile accommodation will be a short-term measure whilst the design and planning is in progress for the proposed expansion of the school resulting from the rationalisation of secondary education provision within Cheshunt.

1.3 The development will not involve the formation of either a new access or an alteration to an existing access to and from the public highway. However, there will be a loss of 13 car parking spaces due to the siting of the single mobile. It is proposed to provide an equivalent number of alternative spaces at the front of the school by removing some concrete bollards from the lay-by/waiting area and parking vehicles in towards the front fence of the school.

1.5 It should be noted that the school has already implemented this scheme prior to the grant of planning permission.

2. Consultations

2.1 Consultations were carried out with Broxbourne Borough Council, the Highways Authority, Transco and Thames Water Utilities. Publicity was by means of site notices and a press release.

2.2 Broxbourne Borough Council - The Council has no objection to the principle of the mobile classrooms, but has concerns over their effects on the parking arrangements. As the new spaces are intended for staff use only, the loss of the drop off point could have serious implications for the congestion and the free flow of traffic around the school and could increase parking on Goff’s Lane and Dark Lane. It is suggested that the proposed staff parking spaces are relocated elsewhere within the site until a comprehensive scheme can be devised to retain the drop-off point.

2.3 The Highway Authority - The Highway Authority has raised no objections to the proposal however it would wish to see the requirement by condition for the implementation of a School Travel Plan.

2.4 Transco - The company has plant in the vicinity of the proposed development but advise that this plant should not be affected by the work. Advice is appended regarding a schedule of measures to protect Transco Apparatus.
2.5 **Thames Water Utilities** - The company’s apparatus could be affected by the proposed development. They advise that prior to any work commencing, the applicant must contact the company’s Customer Field Services for advice regarding the exact location of any water mains within the vicinity.

2.6 **The local member** is concerned about the loss of 13 parking spaces. The school is on an extremely busy highway, Goff’s Lane, which is regularly gridlocked at school starting and finishing times.

2.7 The application was publicised with site notices and a press release, and to date no comments have been received.

3. **Planning Considerations**

3.1 **The Development Plan**

The site is in the Green Belt and part of the site is a Green Wedge, but has no other designations or proposals in both the adopted and emerging District Local Plan.

3.2 The relevant policies of the development plan are:

- **Hertfordshire Structure Plan** - Policy 5 (Green Belt) Policy 13 (Education and Training), Policy 25 (Car Parking).

- **District Local Plan (adopted)** - Policy GC3 (Development Within the Green Belt), Policy UE1 (Green Wedge), Policy WC16 (Green Wedges - Retention of Open Character), Policy T9 (Parking Provision).

- **District Local Plan (emerging)** - Policy GBC3 (Development Within the Metropolitan Green Belt), Policy T11 (Car Parking).

3.3 The principal issues to be taken into account in determining this application are: -

- Green Belt.
- Educational need.
- Highway considerations.

3.4 **Green Belt**: Buildings, even of a temporary nature on existing school sites, are not identified within the categories of development regarded as appropriate within the Green Belt. Such buildings therefore are not acceptable, unless any harm to the Green Belt is outweighed by other considerations.

3.5 The siting of the mobiles within the school complex is such that the visual impact on their Green belt setting would be minimal. The modular form of the mobile units proposed are similar in size, colour and finish to others located within the site. As such, the proposed development would have little impact on the openness of the site in Green Belt terms, particularly given its temporary nature.
3.6 **Need:** From September 2002 the Goff’s School needs to allow for increased numbers of pupils (16 extra) and staff (4 extra), despite already being oversubscribed. The mobile classrooms are envisaged to be a short-term measure whilst planning is going ahead to re-build an enlarged St Mary’s School, which will result in the enlargement of this school and Turnford School in permanent accommodation. However, at this time it is not clear as to when these permanent buildings are to be provided and as such a five-year temporary permission is sought.

3.7 In these circumstances it is concluded that in this instance the limited harm, which the proposed development would cause to the Green Belt, is outweighed by the educational need, particularly given the temporary nature of the proposals in this application. Therefore, the special circumstances required to warrant the setting aside of Green Belt have been shown to exist.

3.8 **Highway considerations:** Due to the single mobile classroom having to be located on the existing car park, it is proposed to replace the 13 parking spaces lost by setting out 14 formal spaces within the existing waiting area located at the front of the school. While it is acknowledged that at the start and end of the school day congestion outside the school is a problem, the proposal is of a temporary nature and the Highway Authority are of the opinion that the provision of a School Travel Plan and management of the traffic could go some way to alleviating this problem.

3.9 The proposed mobiles are temporary measure pending their replacement by permanent accommodation as part of the future expansion proposals of the Cheshunt Schools Package. Given these circumstances it is considered unreasonable to require a comprehensive appraisal of the on site parking and access arrangements as part of this planning application. An appraisal should form a part of any future application, which may be submitted as part of the proposed expansion plans for Goff’s School. However, the production and implementation of a School Travel Plan should be monitored to enable the plan to be revised to meet the future demands posed by any further expansion of the school.

4. **Conclusions**

4.1 Clearly the development as proposed does constitute inappropriate development within the Green Belt, however the applicant has identified the need for this temporary accommodation in educational terms and as such the special circumstances required to allow for the setting aside of Green Belt Policy has been demonstrated.

4.2 The proposal, as submitted, does not provide for any additional on site parking provision to alleviate the existing congestion at the beginning and end of the school day and although issues have been raised regarding the impact of the loss of the waiting area at the front of the school on the free flow of traffic, the Highway Authority have not raised any formal objections. The proposal meets the requirement of current parking standards and with the implementation of a School Travel Plan and the management of traffic circulation the school could facilitate the reduction of the overall car usage at the school rather than relying solely on the provision of additional on site parking. The key to easing congestion outside schools in the long term is
through changing peoples travel habits. Therefore, as a result of current circumstances it is difficult to recommend refusal on highway grounds.

4.3 The application proposes siting the two mobile units within the school site for a temporary five-year period, however, given the proposed rationalisation of the Cheshunt Schools and their resultant expansion it is considered that a three-year period is more appropriate. As such it is concluded that the Director of Environment be authorised to grant a temporary planning permission for three years and the implementation of a School Travel Plan within six months of this planning permission being granted.

5. **Financial implications**

5.1 There are none for this committee.

*Background information used by the author in compiling this report*

Planning application reference 7/0704-02.
Consultation responses and representations received in response to planning application ref. 7/0704-02.
And the Broxbourne Borough Local Plan 1st Stage Deposit Version 2001.