

St. Joseph's Academy, Lee Terrace

in the London Borough of Lewisham

planning application no. DC/04/57340

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended); Greater London Authority Act 1999; Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2000 – strategic planning application stage 1 referral

Demolition of St. Joseph's Academy and part of Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Lee Terrace SE3 and construction of a part single/part 2/part 3 storey plus lower ground floor level building to provide primary and secondary school facilities and single storey building to provide nursery school facilities, together with associated landscaping and playing fields, provision of 323 bicycle and 32 car parking spaces and 2 spaces for disabled people, with a vehicular access road from St. Joseph's Vale and pedestrian access from Belmont Hill

Context

1 On 10 August 2004, Lewisham Council consulted the Mayor of London on a proposal to develop the above site for the above uses. Under the provisions of the Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2000 the Mayor has the same opportunity as other statutory consultees to comment on the proposal. This report sets out information for the Mayor's use in deciding what comments to make.

2 The application is referable under Category 3C of the above Order: *'development which is likely to prejudice the use as a playing field of more than 2 hectares of land which is used as a playing field at the time the relevant application for planning permission is made'*.

3 If Lewisham Council subsequently decides that it is minded to grant planning permission, it must first allow the Mayor an opportunity to decide whether to direct the Council to refuse permission.

4 The environmental information for the purposes of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 has been taken into account in the consideration of the case.

5 The Mayor of London's comments on this case will be made available on the GLA website www.london.gov.uk.

Site description

6 The application site is located south of the Lewisham to Blackheath railway line and north of Lee Terrace (B220) and is situated midway between Lewisham and Blackheath Town Centres. The site is bisected north south by St. Joseph's Vale, a public highway that provides access to a residential estate north of the railway line. To the east of the application site is a residential development known as The Glebe. Christ the King Sixth Form College and Our Lady of Lourdes Infant and Nursery Schools are located to the west of the application site. To the south of the site (fronting Lee Terrace) there are residential properties, a car showroom, a churchyard with remains of the former St. Margaret's Church, a former convent that has been converted to residential use and is now known as the Cedars and a small part of the existing secondary school in a converted house (5 Lee Terrace).

7 The site lies within the Blackheath Conservation Area and there are a number of listed buildings adjacent to the site.

8 The site consists of three elements. East of St. Joseph's Vale is St. Joseph's Academy, an 11 – 16 school, together with a hard play area. The school is a 1960s brick clad building, which rises up to three storeys and occupies floorspace of 6,281 square metres. West of St. Joseph's Vale comprises St. Joseph's School playing fields and the junior section of Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School (0.77 hectares). The playing field area includes two full size football pitches, a disused cricket pitch and a wooded area that is designated as a Site of Interest of Nature Conservation (Borough Grade II). Our Lady of Lourdes is also a 1960s brick clad building that rises to three storeys. Both schools are co-educational, Roman Catholic and state funded. Christ the King Sixth Form College and Our Lady of Lourdes Infant and Nursery Schools do not form part of the application site.

9 The application site area is 3.9 hectares. The existing buildings have footprint of approximately 4,224 square metres and therefore occupy 10.4% of the site. The existing primary and secondary schools have capacity for 420 (plus 25 nursery places) and 730 places respectively, although actual school rolls are 294 and 559 respectively.

10 Vehicular and pedestrian access to the junior school is through the grounds of Christ the King Sixth Form College, which is accessed from Belmont Hill. There is a pedestrian access from Lee Terrace via The Cedars (the converted convent). The entrance to the Academy is through the grounds of 5 Lee Terrace. There is a small amount of parking in the forecourt of this building. However, there is no space for service vehicles.

Details of the proposal

11 Hephher Dixon, planning consultant, has submitted a full application on behalf of St. Mathew's Academy Ltd. seeking permission for the demolition of existing buildings and the construction of a part single/part 2/part 3 storey plus lower ground floor level building to provide primary and secondary school facilities and single storey building to provide nursery school facilities, together with associated landscaping and playing fields, provision of 323 bicycle and 32 car parking spaces plus 2 spaces for people with disabilities with a vehicular access road from St. Joseph's Vale and pedestrian access from Belmont Hill. The scheme has been designed by Architecture plb.

12 The new school will be constructed on the site of the playing fields and the junior school. Once opened, the site of the existing secondary school (St. Joseph's Academy) will be laid out as sports pitches. It is proposed to open the new school in September 2005. The new buildings will be finished with glazing, white rendering, zinc and timber cladding. The academy would be

accommodated within a single new building with the main accommodation in north and south wings. The western part of the northern wing would accommodate the primary school at ground and lower ground levels, with its own separate entrance; the remainder of the northern wing would accommodate secondary education science, arts, media and practical workshop facilities and a sports hall. The southern wing would accommodate a resources area, with dining facilities at ground floor level, and secondary classroom facilities on the upper floors, which would rise to three storeys in height. An assembly hall and external courtyard areas would link the two wings. There would also be a bridge link in the courtyard area between the two wings at first floor level. The nursery, which would have its own dedicated outdoor space, would be located to the west of the south wing. The new playing fields will comprise two 5-a-side all weather pitches and two 5-a-side grass pitches.

13 The proposed school would accommodate 420 primary, 900 secondary and 25 nursery school places. There would be an increase in 170 secondary school places.

14 A pre-application presentation was made to the Mayor in March 2004. This included a small element of residential development on the site of the existing infants' school. This is not included in this application but is likely to be brought forward at a later date.

Case history

15 There is no relevant planning history.

Strategic planning issues and relevant policies and guidance

16 The relevant issues and corresponding policies are as follows:

- Education *London Plan;*
- Open Space *London Plan; PPG17*
- Built Heritage *London Plan; PPG15*
- Urban design *London Plan: PPG1*
- Access/equal opportunities *London Plan*
- Transport and Parking *London Plan; the Mayor's Transport Strategy; PPG13*
- Biodiversity *London Plan; the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy; PPG9, draft PPS9*
- Sustainable development *London Plan: PPG1, draft PPS1*

17 The development plan in force for the area is the 2004 Lewisham Unitary Development Plan and the London Plan. The London Plan forms part of the development plan following commencement of Part 3 (Section 38) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, on 28 September 2004.

Education

18 The sponsors of the academy, De La Salle Trustees and the Archdiocese of Southwark, propose to establish a charitable company that will open a new academy for 1½ to 16 year olds. The academy will have strong Roman Catholic ethos and values and will focus on business and enterprise. Academies are a new type of school, challenging the culture of educational under-attainment and delivering real improvements in standards. All academies are located in areas of disadvantage. They are publicly funded independent schools providing free education to all abilities.

19 St. Joseph's Academy is recognised as a failing school, judged to have serious weaknesses in its most recent Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) report. Both the secondary and primary/nursery schools have difficulties associated with the recruitment and retention of staff and an unusually mobile pupil population. The existing design of the schools' buildings and access to the site militates against curriculum delivery, communication and supervision. In particular the most recent OFSTED Inspection referred to the fact that the multi level site and narrow corridors cause congestion at lesson change-over times and therefore restrict the movement of pupils. It also noted that the nature of the site meant that there was no suitable provision for disabled pupils. The significant under-capacity of both schools is also a measure of their standing; particularly the secondary school as there is a deficit of secondary school places in Lewisham.

20 Access to a high quality school education is a fundamental determinant of the future opportunities and life choices of London's children and young people. By 2016, London's school age population is projected to increase by almost 8%. Just over half of this total growth of 140,000 is expected to be in outer London. The Government intends to rebuild or renew every secondary school within the plan period (by 2016) and to use this investment to provide school buildings that are more capable of widening educational and sporting opportunities in a more pupil friendly environment.

21 The London Plan sets out how borough councils should make provision for education needs (policy 3A.21). In particular, the policy refers to the need to have regard to other London Plan policies such as inclusive design, sustainable design and construction, safety, enhancement of the public realm and protection of open spaces.

22 The proposal will replace poor quality buildings with a modern high quality learning environment. This will represent a significant improvement in the quality of education facilities in Lewisham and provides the framework for an improvement in wider educational standards. It will also assist in reducing Lewisham's forecast deficit in secondary school places. The design of the school allows for community use of facilities, such as the drama studio and sports hall, which is welcomed. However, Lewisham Council should consider using a section 106 agreement to safeguard community use.

Open space

23 The site is designated as Urban Green Space in the Lewisham UDP. The London Plan states that development on local open spaces will not be acceptable where they have been designated for protection in a UDP (policy 3D.10). Planning Policy Guidance Note 17, 'Planning for Open Space Sport and Recreation' (PPG17) seeks to prevent new building on existing open space. In terms of development of playing fields, PPG17 reiterates Sport England's policy. This resists the loss of playing fields unless the development is ancillary and does not adversely effect the quantity or quality of pitches; and/or the proposed development only affects land which is incapable of forming a playing pitch; and/or the playing fields will be replaced by ones of equivalent or better quality in a suitable location; and/or the proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor sports facility of sufficient benefit to the development of sport to outweigh the loss of the playing field.

24 The existing school site (excluding the infant school) has a site area of approximately 40,605 square metres. The existing buildings have a total footprint of approximately 4,224 square metres and therefore occupy 10.4% of the site area. The proposed development has a footprint of approximately 5,428 square metres and therefore occupies 13.6% of the site area. There is therefore a small increase in built development on the site.

25 The arrangement of the buildings on the site and the effect this has on openness is more significant. 2.23ha (86%) of the open space within the existing development comprises the playing field, a single large expanse of open space. The playing field in the new development will only occupy 1.4ha (41%) of the open space. The remainder of the open space comprises incidental open space around the new buildings and the woodland area adjacent to the railway line. As such the functional value of the open space will be reduced. However, much of it will remain available for informal use during break times.

26 The exclusion of the infant school from the application does mean that the opportunity of utilising an area of existing built development either as new development or as replacement open land has not been taken up. However, the infant school site is separated from the main site (joined only by a narrow driveway) and therefore it would be difficult to provide a new building on this site that could be easily linked to the main school. As it is separate from the main school site it could not be used as informal open space (during break time etc) and as it is at the opposite end of the site from the changing rooms it would be impracticable to use for curriculum activities. It is therefore accepted that use of the infant school site would not be practicable.

27 While there is a small loss of open space and a reduction in the open character of the site the overall benefits of the scheme outweigh this. Furthermore the provision of new all weather pitches will improve the functional quality of the available open space. Lewisham Council should impose a condition setting a time limit by which the new playing fields have to be provided, to ensure that the period of time when there is no open space within the site is kept to a minimum.

Urban design, conservation and landscape impact

28 In 2002, the Government published 'Schools for the Future (Building Bulletin 95)' which aims to increase the quality of school design both in aesthetic terms and in terms of functionality. It recognises that changes in the curriculum have given rise to new ways of learning and thus new design challenges.

29 Design guidance for secondary schools is governed by Building Bulletins and other guidance issued by the Department for Education. This includes Building Bulletin 82, which provides specific guidelines on areas for specific building functions. It also deals with area requirements for children with special educational needs or disabilities. The bulletin also provides guidance on dealing with dual uses and security.

30 The London Plan calls for the highest standard of design and to ensure that proposed developments preserve or enhance local social, physical, cultural, historical, environmental and economic characteristics.

31 The new school will have a prominent entrance, which is clearly visible from St. Joseph's Vale. It will have a generous approach and forecourt that will allow pupils to congregate and which also allows for anticipated high volumes of circulation at key times. There are three entrances, for each of the year groups: nursery, primary and secondary.

32 The building will have a clear layout, which is designed to meet all relevant educational space standards and will be sufficiently robust to be able to change over time to meet future educational priorities. The new accommodation is also arranged in such a way as to enable the assembly areas, the sports hall and the library to be shared with the public out of hours. It will also be a pupil-friendly environment. There will be spaces for informal recreation and contemplative space. At the same time, all of the outdoor spaces and internal circulation areas will be easy to supervise providing valuable reassurance to parents, staff and children.

33 The new building will be highly articulated and rational with satisfying sculptural overtones. The colour palette, which will be derived from the predominant cladding materials, will be white rain screen render with vertical zinc tile cladding and timber. The fenestration, which will either be in large expanses or in thin horizontal strips, will have a galvanised or charcoal grey powder coated, thin-section framing system. The form of the building and the modelling of the elevations will provide an impressive and intrinsically attractive building, which will not dominate the surrounding natural landscape, will be easily recognisable and sit comfortably within it. The roof will be well articulated with transverse roof lights in the style of a 'Belfast roof' (i.e. with a saw tooth profile), which will provide both ventilation and light to the buildings thus improving its environmental performance. Many of the materials used in the building, will also be recycled.

Transport

34 The nearest rail station at Blackheath is approximately 10 minutes walk from the site. Additionally bus routes 54, 89 and 108 serve the site. The development has good access to the bus services via the nearby bus stops, on Lee Terrace, just south of the site. Furthermore the routes that serve the site have sufficient spare capacity to accommodate the extra trips expected due to the increased school size and travel plan.

35 The area is well served by cycle routes. St. Joseph's Vale is included on the London Cycle Network (Route No. 28). There are anticipated to be 100 staff and 900 secondary school pupils, the London Cycle Network Design Manual standards require 1 space for every 10 of each of these groups – the level of cycle parking proposed well exceeds these levels and would therefore be welcomed by TfL. In order to improve and promote cycling, cycle parking should be covered, secure, well lit and observed.

36 TfL would accept a car parking provision of 32 car-parking spaces plus two spaces for disabled people. There are no specific standards present in the London Plan, however this level appears appropriate.

37 To encourage journeys by foot an audit of pedestrian routes between the site and the local public transport facilities should be undertaken to identify where the safety and directness of pedestrian access could be improved.

38 TfL welcomes the addition of a comprehensive travel plan. However, to secure any future growth in the use of sustainable transport modes there must be commitment from the school administration to enforce, monitor and review the plans.

39 In conclusion there are no objections to the proposals in terms of strategic transport.

Access/equal opportunities

40 As stated in paragraph 19 the existing schools make no provision for disabled pupils. The development of new facilities provides the opportunity to build a school that is fully inclusive. The new school represents a significant improvement. However, a greater commitment to delivering an inclusive environment is required, in accordance with Policy 4B.5 of the London Plan. Lewisham Council should therefore request an access statement that details how the principles of inclusive design, including specific needs of disabled people, have been integrated into the proposed development, and how inclusion will be maintained and managed. The statement should cover those matters referred to in Section 2.5 of the Accessible London Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG).

41 The access statement needs to consider access issue from the perspective of different users; pupils, staff and the public (particularly if the facilities are to be used outside of school hours). The statement should consider the practical use of accessible features not just their practical installation. For example, the outdoor theatre between the primary hard play area and the primary arrival court comprises fixed stepped seating with a flight of stairs to one side. Therefore the only way that disabled people can get from the arrival court to the play area is via the lift in the school building. Furthermore there is no provision within the theatre area for wheelchairs.

42 The Access SPG provides further guidance on statutory duties in respect of school buildings and sources of further information. The SPG's guidance on sports facilities is also relevant.

Biodiversity

43 The application site includes part of a Site of Borough Grade II Importance for Nature Conservation. This is a wooded slope adjacent to the railway corridor. The proposed development retains this wooded area, and there are proposals to improve this habitat with additional dead wood for stag beetles (paragraph 6.6.6 of the Environmental Statement). A planning condition could be imposed to require the provision of loggeries for stag beetles. There will be minor losses of trees and bird nesting habitat. This should be undertaken outside the bird-nesting season. A planning condition should be imposed to prevent clearance of trees or scrub between March and July inclusive. There should not be significant adverse impacts on biodiversity.

Sustainable development

44 In order to promote sustainable development, new developments should take account of the impact they have on London's natural resources and environmental assets (policy 2A.1). Developments can achieve this by improving energy efficiency, increasing the proportion of energy use generated from renewable sources, minimising the use of treated water, utilising rainwater harvesting and grey water recycling schemes and incorporating sustainable drainage systems. Proposals should be accompanied by an energy assessment that demonstrates the steps taken to apply the Mayor's energy hierarchy. Heating and cooling systems should be selected in accordance with the following order of preference: passive design; solar water heating; combined heat and power, for heating and cooling, preferably fuelled by renewables; community heating for heating and cooling; heat pumps; gas condensing boilers and gas central heating.

45 The Department for Education and Skills states that academies 'will be innovative in design and built to high environmental standards'.

46 The applicant's environmental statement does not address issues such as water and energy usage or waste disposal. The design statement states that the development aims to achieve an 'excellent' rating using the Schools Environmental Assessment Measure (SEAM). The statement states that SEAM embraces environmental impact, CO2 emissions, use of long life renewable/recyclable materials, water consumption, storm and foul water disposal, reduction of environmental pollution from the manufacture of disposal of building materials and from the building in use. However, apart from limited references to maximising daylight and natural ventilation and use of exposed concrete to regulate temperature fluctuations it does not provide any detail of what an excellent rating of SEAM would require or how this would be achieved.

47 An energy assessment has not been supplied and there is no specific reference to the Mayor's energy hierarchy or the use of renewable energy. Similarly there is no reference to issues, such as sustainable drainage, rainwater harvesting, water recycling or sustainable waste management.

48 The Department for Education and Skills has recently commissioned the Building Research Establishment (BRE) to develop an environmental assessment method for new schools. It is unclear how advanced this is or how it will differ from SEAM (although the implication is that SEAM is out-dated). To ensure that the most up-to-date methodology for assessing the environmental impact of the school is used the applicant should be required to conduct a bespoke BRE BREEAM assessment, with the aim of achieving an 'excellent' rating.

49 Lewisham Council should require an energy assessment to be completed and set a target that 10% of the energy requirement should come from on-site renewable sources. Lewisham Council should also require the development to demonstrate how it will meet other sustainable development objectives such as sustainable drainage, rainwater harvesting, water recycling or sustainable waste management.

50 Lewisham Council should also ensure that all new timber and ply-wood (especially hardwood) is certified by the Forestry Stewardship Council as being from a sustainable source.

Local planning authority's position

51 The application is expected to be reported to Lewisham's planning committee in November. At this stage the officers' recommendation is unknown.

London Development Agency comments

52 The London Development Agency supports the proposal in principle given the regeneration benefits to the community, subject to the resolution of the redevelopment of the school on open green space.

Legal considerations

53 Under the arrangements set out in article 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2000 the Mayor has an opportunity to make representations to Lewisham Council at this stage. If the Council subsequently resolves to grant planning permission, it must allow the Mayor an opportunity to decide whether to direct it to refuse planning permission. There is no obligation at this present stage for the Mayor to indicate his intentions regarding a possible direction, and no such decision should be inferred from the Mayor's comments unless specifically stated.

Financial considerations

54 There are no financial considerations at this stage.

Conclusion

55 The proposed development will provide new high quality educational facilities that will assist in improving the educational attainment of pupils. The standard of architecture is first class, which will underpin the highest educational aspirations in future pupils and staff. There is a small loss of open space and the functional quality of that open space as a single large area is replaced by smaller dedicated playing fields and more informal space. However, the new playing

pitches will be of a higher quality and of more use to the school. The buildings will provide improved disabled access. However, an access statement should also be prepared. The improvements to the Site of Importance for Nature Conservation and protection of birds during the nesting season should be secured by condition. The proposal makes some commitments towards sustainable development. However, given the Government's expectation that academies will be built to high environmental standards, these commitments are insufficient and therefore more information should be provided. Consideration should also be given to safeguarding community use of the school facilities.

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