Dundonald Primary School, Wimbledon
in the London Borough of Merton
planning application no. 12/ P1058

Strategic planning application stage 1 referral (new powers)

The proposal
Expansion and refurbishment of Dundonald primary school comprising refurbishment of existing main school building and the erection of part first floor/ part two storey extension to existing detached rear annexe building. Proposed works to Dundonald recreation ground comprising of demolition of existing pavilion and shed buildings, loss of existing bowling green, creation of new multi-use games area, new tennis courts, new public children’s playground, outdoor gym, nature garden and new associated footpaths, planting, and seating.

The applicant
The applicant is Merton Council, and the architect is Haverstock Associates.

Strategic issues
The key strategic issue is the loss of public park. There are also minor issues relating to energy, drainage and transport.

Recommendation
That Merton Council be advised that the application broadly complies with the London Plan, subject to the provision of additional information, for the reasons set out in paragraph 41 of this report. The application does not need to be referred back to the Mayor if the Council resolves to refuse permission, but it must be referred back if the Council resolves to grant permission.

Context
1. On 28 November 2012 the Mayor of London received documents from Merton Council notifying him of a planning application of potential strategic importance to develop the above site for the above uses. Under the provisions of The Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008 the Mayor has until 3 January 2012 to provide the Council with a statement setting out whether he considers that the application complies with the London Plan, and his reasons for taking that view. The Mayor may also provide other comments. This report sets out information for the Mayor’s use in deciding what decision to make.

2. The application is referable under Category 3E of the Schedule to the Order 2008:
3E: “Development — (a) which does not accord with one or more provisions of the development plan in force in the area in which the application site is situated; and (b) comprises or includes the provision of more than 2,500 square metres of floorspace for a use falling within any of the following classes in the Use Classes Order— (xi)class D1 (non-residential institutions).”

4 Once Merton Council has resolved to determine the application, it is required to refer it back to the Mayor for his decision, as to whether to direct refusal or allow the Council to determine it itself, unless otherwise advised. In this instance if the Council resolves to refuse permission it need not refer the application back to the Mayor.

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

Site description

6 Dundonald School is a one form entry primary school, located to the south west of Wimbledon town centre. The surrounding character is mainly two storey Victorian houses. The 0.98ha school site comprises the original two/three storey school building, dating from 1894, a small playground to the rear and a later annex building. The school is surrounded on three sides by Dundonald Recreation Ground, which is currently laid out with three grass playing pitches, a childrens playground, two tennis courts, a bowling green, rose garden and pavilion building.

7 The closest section of Strategic Road Network is the A298, Kingston Road, which is less than 450 metres from the southern boundary of the site. The site is located less than 585m from the nearest bus stop (Wimbledon, which is served by routes 57,93,131,156,163,164, 200 and 219), and is 200m from Dundonald Road tram stop. Consequently the site has a public transport accessibility level (PTAL) of 5 on a scale of 1 to 6 where 6(b) is most accessible.

Details of the proposal

8 The application proposes a new two storey building to the south of the existing school to provide an additional form of entry, providing places for a further 210 local children. The majority of the building will be located on land that is currently part of the recreation ground. The new building will also include changing rooms and pavilion for the park. The existing pavilion will be demolished. The bowling green will be removed and a new childrens playground, three court multi use games area (MUGA) and green gym provided. The MUGA will be used mainly by the school during school hours, but open to the public outside of these times.

Case history

9 There is no strategic planning history. The application was originally submitted in April 2012, but not referred at that time. Further information has been submitted and the Council has subsequently advertised the application as a departure from the development plan, hence triggering referral to the Mayor.

Strategic planning issues and relevant policies and guidance

10 The relevant issues and corresponding policies are as follows:

- Education London Plan
- Open land London Plan
- Playing fields London Plan
- Urban design London Plan
Inclusive design: London Plan; Accessible London: achieving an inclusive environment SPG; Planning and Access for Disabled People: a good practice guide (ODPM)

Transport: London Plan; the Mayor’s Transport Strategy;

Climate change: London Plan; Sustainable Design and Construction SPG; Mayor’s Climate Change Adaptation Strategy; Mayor’s Climate Change Mitigation and Energy Strategy; Mayor’s Water Strategy

11 For the purposes of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the development plan in force for the area is the 2011 Merton Core Strategy, the 2003 Merton Unitary Development Plan and the 2011 London Plan.

12 The National Planning Policy Framework and Technical Guide to the National Planning Policy Framework, the draft Revised Early Minor Alteration to the London Plan and the draft Sites and Policies DPD are also material considerations.

Principle of development

13 The principle issue for consideration is the loss of local park land and reconfiguration of facilities. As with the rest of London there is a shortage of school places in Merton. This has occurred for a variety of reasons that are well documented. Within Merton the number of children entering reception class has increased 39% from 2,535 to 3,523.

14 Through the NPPF the Government attaches great importance to ensuring that sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. The Government urges authorities to give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools. The London Plan similarly supports the expansion of school places (policy 3.18).

15 However, in this instance the clear and pressing need for school places has to be considered against the impacts on the park. These are, the construction of a two storey building primarily for school use, provision of a smaller pavilion, the annexing of some additional open space for the school playground, the loss of the two tennis courts and replacement with a three court MUGA for school use during school hours and the loss of the bowling green.

16 The harm caused by these impacts is mitigated and outweighed by the following factors.

17 There is a clearly identified need to provide additional school places in this locality. The Council has already increased provision by 19 forms of entry over the last four years, including at Dundonald. However, a further six to eight forms of entry are required. The shortage is particularly acute in the Wimbledon area and the Council has demonstrated that all schools in the area that have the potential to expand are doing so. The area of search to meet the identified need has been set at two miles as this is the distance beyond which the Council is required to meet transport costs for infant children.

18 The immediate need for places in this locality is increased by the fact that Dundonald School is extremely popular and has maintained its ‘outstanding’ OFSTED classification. It is the most over subscribed school in the borough (203 first or second preferences for 30 places) and is currently only able to offer places to those living within 220 metres. The council estimates that even with the expansion this will only increase to 500 metres. It is evident that Government policy
expects successful schools to be able to expand and for parents to be able to have the choice and ability to send their children to such schools.

19 The Council has investigated the potential for a new school in the Wimbledon area and demonstrated that there are no sites that could be delivered within the timescale necessary to meet the identified shortfall in places. The Council has also investigated the potential to expand Dundonald School within its existing boundary. While this is physically possible there would be impacts on trees and the adjacent conservation area. The building layout would be sub-optimal for the school’s use and the school would still need to expand its playground into the park to meet its statutory requirements.

20 The existing pavilion is a dated unattractive building that is no longer fit for purpose. The new pavilion will be a significant improvement albeit that it is smaller (four changing rooms instead of six). It could be argued that this prejudices the use of the playing fields as not all three could be used at the same time. However, the Council has indicated that staggered start times would overcome this. Attaching the pavilion to the school building should lessen the vandalism and other damage and secure its long-term future.

21 The amount of built footprint within the Park will be virtually unchanged as the pavilion and storage shed are similar in footprint to the proposed school/pavilion building. Although it is accepted that replacement of a single storey building with a two-storey building will have some impact.

22 The Council has an up to date Open Space Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy, which underpins the proposed changes to the facilities within the Park. The Strategy notes that there is little latent demand for bowls in the borough and that the retention of Dundonald may be difficult to justify in terms of value for money (there is currently one club with less than 15 members). While the loss is regrettable it may well have occurred anyway and there are three other bowling greens within 900m of the site, which are capable of absorbing additional demand.

23 The two existing tennis courts will be replaced by a three court MUGA, thus increasing provision. It is accepted that for the majority of school hours it will be restricted to school use only. However, it is understood that there is an informal arrangement already, whereby the school uses the tennis courts during the school day. Details of public access to the MUGA should be secured by condition and some public access during the school day should be secured.

24 The new childrens playground will be bigger and better equipped than the existing. The provision of an outdoor ‘green’ gym will be a new facility. Both of these elements of the scheme are strongly supported.

25 In conclusion the need for increased school places outweighs the limited impact that the proposal has on the Park.

**Urban design & inclusive design**

26 Given the nature of the scheme, a relatively modest extension to an existing school building, the design and layout of the proposal does not raise any strategic concerns.

**Flood risk and drainage**

27 The site is not within a flood risk zone however some areas in the vicinity of the school are vulnerable to surface water flood risk as shown in the Council’s draft Surface Water Management Plan.
The Council should ensure that the development minimises its surface water discharge. For this particular site there are several opportunities including:

- Rain water harvesting - this will also help to reduce water bills for the school. The GLA has experience of rainwater harvesting schemes fitted to other schools in London.

- Infiltration via soakaways and swales within the playing fields adjacent to the school

- Creation of surface water features, whether temporary or permanent within the school grounds or adjacent playing fields

- Sub surface storage in tanks and oversized pipe network.

A combination of these measures should enable the site to restrict its discharge rate to that of a Greenfield site and should be secured via an appropriate planning condition in order to be in conformity with London Plan policy 5.13.

**Transport**

The current vehicular entrance onto the site from Dundonald Road is proposed to remain as existing. Pedestrian and cycle access into the site is also to remain as existing.

There is currently no car parking provision on site, however staff are eligible for on-street parking permits. The proposed scheme does not include any car parking spaces, which is supported in accordance with London Plan Policy 6.13.

At present 18 new cycle spaces are to be provided, but this falls short of the minimum standards set out in policy 6.9, 6.13 and table 6.3 of the London Plan. To meet minimum standards 23 new cycle spaces for the expected additional staff and pupils should be provided. In addition cycle spaces should be provided for users of the pavilion, community centre and proposed public facilities to meet the minimum standards set out in London Plan policies 6.9 and 6.13 Parking.

Delivery and servicing is currently undertaken from Dundonald Road, with the proposals outlining that this will continue following the extension of the school. Given the constrained nature, this approach is acceptable.

The submitted transport assessment outlines a draft construction logistics plan. In line with London Plan policy 6.14, a formal construction logistic plan should be secured by condition. The construction logistic plan should identify efficient and sustainable measures that will be undertaken during construction of the development.

The school currently has a travel plan that is reviewed on a yearly basis; however, it is requested that a travel plan is submitted as part of this application. In line with TfL travel planning guidance, the travel plan should include commitments and measures to reduce the impact of delivery and servicing movements on the transport network. The final travel plan should be secured, monitored, reviewed, and enforced by planning condition.

Further information is required to ensure the application complies with London Plan transport policy. This includes further work on the level of cycle parking to be provided, the submission of a travel plan and construction logistics plan.
Climate change

As the scheme is not a major development (as defined by the London Plan) no energy strategy is required. However, the applicant has stated that the development will achieve 25% carbon savings over Part L 2010 Building Regulation in line with London Plan Policy and this is welcomed.

Local planning authority’s position

It is understood that the Council intends to report the application to committee in January 2013.

Legal considerations

Under the arrangements set out in Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008 the Mayor is required to provide the local planning authority with a statement setting out whether he considers that the application complies with the London Plan, and his reasons for taking that view. Unless notified otherwise by the Mayor, the Council must consult the Mayor again under Article 5 of the Order if it subsequently resolves to make a draft decision on the application, in order that the Mayor may decide whether to allow the draft decision to proceed unchanged or direct the Council under Article 6 of the Order to refuse the application. 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 statement and comments.

Financial considerations

There are no financial considerations at this stage.

Conclusion

The principle of the application is acceptable, however the following changes are necessary to ensure full compliance with the London Plan:

- Community use of the school facilities including some public use of the MUGA during school hours should be secured by condition.
- A drainage strategy incorporating the measures set out in paragraph 28 should be secured.
- The number of cycle spaces should be increased, a construction logistics plan secured and a travel plan produced and implementation secured.

for further information, contact Planning Decisions Unit:

Colin Wilson, Senior Manager – Planning Decisions
020 7983 4783    email colin.wilson@london.gov.uk

Justin Carr, Strategic Planning Manager (Development Decisions)
020 7983 4895    email justin.carr@london.gov.uk

Gemma Kendall, Case Officer
020 7983 6592  email gemma.kendall@london.gov.uk