

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

12th July 2023

Planning Application 23/00596/FUL

Extensions to existing building (two storey teaching accommodation; single storey school hall & single storey sports hall) and external works (extension of existing hard surfaced external play areas; reconfiguration and increase in the capacity of the existing vehicular circulation & parking provision).

Birchensale Middle School, Bridley Moor Road, Redditch, B97 6HT

**Applicant: Bordesley MAT
Ward: Batchley And Brockhill Ward**

(see additional papers for site plan)

The case officer of this application is Mr Paul Lester, Planning Officer (DM), who can be contacted on Tel: 01527 881323 Email: paul.lester@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk for more information.

Site Description

Birchensale Middle School is a mixed, non-selective, non-denominational middle school serving students from the age of 9 to 13 years (Year 5 to Year 8), drawing approximately 600 pupils from the wider Batchley and Brockhill catchment area (five classes of 30 pupils per year group). The school is in the residential area of Redditch, with access from Bridley Moor Road.

Proposal Description

The development involves a number of elements, of which the principal is the two storey extension of the existing two storey teaching accommodation at the south end of the building to provide six additional classrooms, together with associated ancillary and circulation spaces.

The development also proposes the following:

- Extension of the existing school hall to provide additional space for large group activities, including year assemblies, examinations, indoor games, and (most regularly) dining.
- Extension of the existing sports hall at the north end of the building, to provide a larger but dividable space.
- Extension of the existing hard surfaced external areas used for both formal and informal play.
- Reconfiguration and an increase in the capacity of the existing vehicular circulation and parking provision on the site.

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Background To The Application

Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and Worcestershire Children First (WCF), aware of changing demographics in the west of Redditch, including those resulting from the Persimmon Brockhill housing scheme, have identified a need for a substantial increase in the provision of school places in the area, at all ages, from September 2024.

This increased need is expected to continue over the coming 25 years. The Bordesley Multi Academy Trust (MAT) was approached to discuss the feasibility of Birchensale Middle School as the most appropriate location within the area to provide additional places for its age range, having its capacity expanded by one form of entry (1FE) to a published admission number (PAN) of 180 (i.e., six forms of entry; six classes of 30 pupils per year group) to give an overall school roll of approximately 720 pupils. The resulting feasibility study concluded that it was practicable for the school to be extended to accommodate the proposed increase in numbers within the capital funding budget that WCF would be able to make available.

The feasibility study compared the existing accommodations and site facilities against a standard model. The current site area helped ensure that the playing field area was more than sufficient for the enlarged roll.

However, the feasibility study identified the following areas of work that would be required to provide for the necessary increase in pupil capacity. This included increasing the number of classrooms for new pupils and replacing the temporary classroom on site. Increasing the number of group rooms and tutorial rooms as well as the number of WCs. The extension of the existing school hall, which is already too small for the current pupil capacity, will ensure that there is sufficient area to accommodate larger group activities, such as year assemblies, examinations, and indoor dining. As well as the existing sports hall, which could be considered to already be too small for the current pupil capacity, to ensure that it provides sufficient area to accommodate both expanded indoor sports use and larger (part) school assemblies. The extension of the existing formal and informal external hard play areas is both to compensate for any areas lost to extensions to the building and to ensure that the provision is sufficient for the projected increase in the pupil population.

In terms of the car park/circulation work, the section of the vehicular circulation that previously formed the access currently presents an obstruction to the northward extension of the existing sports hall. The feasibility study therefore proposed that, in parallel with diverting the circulation to enable the sports hall to be extended and providing the additional 15-plus parking spaces required for the proposed expansion of the pupil capacity, the works should include the reinstatement of the coach turning circle and the broader rationalisation and reconfiguration of the vehicle circulation and parking areas to provide a more legible, coherent, efficient, and inherently safer layout.

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Relevant Policies:

Borough of Redditch Local Plan No. 4

Policy 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

Policy 13: Primarily Open Space

Policy 18: Sustainable Water Management

Policy 19: Sustainable Travel and Accessibility

Policy 39: Built Environment

Policy 40: High Quality Design and Safer Communities

Others

NPPF National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

Redditch High Quality Design SPD

Relevant Planning History

22/00796/FUL	Erection of temporary classroom, together with associated external works.	Approved	19.07.2022
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2000/145/CPO (County Application)	Extension Of Existing School And Increased Parking Provision.	Approved	
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Consultations

Worcestershire Archive And Archaeological Service

No objection

North Worcestershire Water Management

No objection, subject to a drainage condition

WRS - Contaminated Land

No objection, subject to standard contamination condition.

Highways Redditch

The Highways Authority has no objection subject to the conditions relating to;

1. Electric vehicle charging points
2. Cycle parking
3. Conformity with submitted details

Arboricultural Officer

No objection, subject to landscaping condition.

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Public Consultation Response

Site notice posted on 7 June 2023 expired 1 July 2023
39 Neighbour letters sent 2 June 2023 Expired 26 June 2023

No comments have been received following the public consultation process.

Assessment of Proposal

Principle of Development

The expansion of Birchensale Middle School will support the Local Authority's statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places are available in the local area. The local planning authority is satisfied that the need for the proposal to provide additional accommodation at the school to accommodate school place demand has been demonstrated. In accordance with paragraph 95 of the NPPF, LA's must give great weight to any proven need to expand the school and attach great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. The NPPF also states that local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive, and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. Furthermore, as the new building elements of this proposal have been designed to sit within and adjacent to the existing main school building footprint, there is no loss of a formal sports field/playing pitch, or activity space.

It is noted that a small area of the car park extension will be located on land designated as Primarily Open Space under Policy 13 of the Local Plan. This policy seeks to maintain the levels of open space provision in the Borough. Proposals that would result in the total or partial loss of Primarily Open Space will not normally be granted planning permission unless it can be demonstrated that the need for development outweighs the value of the land as an open area.

It is evident that this area of the site is not used for sport or recreation related to the school, while there will be a small loss in the area due to the extension of the car park and the extension to the sport hall, which will support the expansion of the school. For the reasons outlined earlier in the report, it is considered that it has been demonstrated that the need for the development outweighs the land as an open area of the site.

Design

The extension to the dining hall has been designed to fully fill the existing re-entrant corner formed by the existing hall to its east and the kitchen accommodation to its north. Given its lower height and the need for greater robustness, the applicant made the decision to further differentiate the new extension from the existing sports hall by cladding it in brickwork rather than the coated metal plank finish adopted in 2001-02. Except for the main (dining) hall extension, for which the new brickwork will endeavour to match the red/orange multi brick employed on the original building, the main wall facing material for

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the new extensions will be the blue/grey brick employed on a number of the elements constructed in the major expansion works of 2001-02. This is intended to provide some consistency in the more modern extensions and to allow these further extensions to more directly relate to the parts of the building to which they abut.

It is considered that the extensions will integrate with the existing school complex. The local planning authority is therefore satisfied that the proposal would not harm the surrounding character of the area.

Highways and Parking

Postcode analysis of the current pupil population (prepared by the applicant) shows that 72% of this population live within a one-mile radius (a reasonable distance for walking, cycling and scootering by pupils) of the school site.

If this proportion were to be projected forward to encompass the 120 place enlargement of the pupil population, it might be expected that no more than 33 pupils would be travelling more than one mile to school. However, given that the new Brockhill development, which is expected to provide most of the additional pupils, lies within the one-mile radius, it is likely that a considerably larger proportion of the increase will be resident within this area. In that event, it would be reasonable to expect that most of these additional pupils will have the practical option of walking, cycling, or scootering to and from the school.

As part of the project, the following measures are being planned by the Trust/school to encourage sustainable transport options and, in parallel, mitigate any potential additional road congestion caused by the increased numbers of pupils:

- Register the School on ModeShift Stars; establish a working group, and develop an active travel plan with the goal of achieving Silver accreditation within two years of the completion of the building works
- Take an active part in national awareness weeks such as Sustrans Big Walk and Wheel
- Investigate schemes to subsidise the purchase of bicycles and scooters
- Through newsletters and electronic communications, promote walking, cycling, and scootering to school and, where those might be difficult for families, encourage car sharing
- Continue the existing successful promotion of cycling and scootering to schools to further increase the uptake; support this promotion with continued delivery of cycle safety awareness courses and with increased provision of cycle and scooter shelters (effectively doubling the capacity) within the proposed works.

WCC Highways has assessed the application, and based on the analysis of the information submitted, the Highway Authority concludes that there would not be an unacceptable impact, and therefore there are no justifiable grounds on which an objection could be maintained. They have no objection, subject to conditions.

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Ecology

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site was commissioned from Udall-Martin Associates Ltd. The findings and recommendations in the report are summarised as follows:

1. The perceived need for the eradication of invasive cotoneaster and yellow archangel species across the site by a suitably qualified specialist.
2. The site provides some potential bat roosting, foraging, and commuting habitat. The bat surveys recommended in the report were subsequently carried out, and, while no immediate evidence of bat activity was found, elements of the existing cladding provide possible bat roosting sites. As a result, bat emergence surveys in the areas of the building most likely to house bat roosts have been commissioned (to be carried out later in May and June 2023, when the temperature and other weather conditions are likely to be more favourable for bats). If resident bat populations are identified, then appropriate action by qualified and licensed bat specialists should be commissioned, and whatever the final outcome of the investigations, appropriate measures should be adopted across the site to avoid the disruption of existing bat populations and to support increased bat activity.
3. A buffer zone, at least 10 metres wide, should be established, for the duration of the building works between the southern bank of the Batchley Brook and the works to reconfigure and extend the car parking area. To ensure that no temporary parking of vehicles or storage of equipment and materials takes place in the buffer zone, temporary Heras fencing should be installed along the buffer zone boundary. The line of the edge of the proposed buffer zone is shown on Drawing No 481-10-22-PL06: Site Plan (North End): As Proposed.
4. Any tree removals required to allow the works to proceed should be followed, at an appropriate point in the development, by both replacement and additional reinforcing tree planting using a range of native species.
5. A range of ecological enhancements, including the provision of bat and bird boxes, additional planting with native shrubs, and hedgerow reinforcement.

Subject to the imposition of an appropriate condition reflecting the recommendations of the submitted Ecological appraisal, the proposed development would have no adverse impacts on the ecology and biodiversity at the site or in the surrounding area.

Flooding and Drainage

The proposed development site is situated in the catchment of the Batchley Brook and Hewell Stream. The site falls within flood zone 1 and it is not considered that there is any significant fluvial flood risk to the site. Based on the EA's flood mapping, risk to the site from surface water flooding is indicated on the site. Particularly around the sports hall and

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car park extension at the north end of the site. Which is to be expected given the nearby Batchley Brook. NWWM considers that a correctly designed drainage will mitigate any flood risk from surface water on the site and in the surrounding area. They have no objection subject to a condition.

Other Matters

No concerns have been raised by the Tree Officers.

Given the limited scale and massing of the extensions, the proposed development has been designed to ensure that the new development would not harm the living conditions of surrounding residential occupiers. The external canopy to the south-east would cover already utilised outdoor space. No adverse impact on residential amenities would arise.

Conclusion

Overall, it is considered that the proposal accords with the policies in the Local plan and the NPPF and is acceptable.

RECOMMENDATION:

That having regard to the development plan and to all other material considerations, planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:

Conditions:

- 1) The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of the grant of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the requirements of Section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2) The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans and drawings:

481-10-22-PL01 Location Plan
481-10-22-PL03 Block Plan: As Proposed
481-10-22-PL06 Site Plan (North End): As Proposed
481-10-22-PL07 Site Plan (South End): As Proposed
481-10-22-PL12 GF Plan (Part): South Block: As Proposed
481-10-22-PL13 1F Plan (Part): South Block: As Proposed
481-10-22-PL14 Roof Plan (Part): South Block: As Proposed
481-10-22-PL15 South Block: Elevns & Sections: As Proposed
481-10-22-PL19 GF Plan (Part): Hall Area: As Proposed
481-10-22-PL20 Roof Plan (Part): Hall Area: As Proposed
481-10-22-PL21 Hall Area: Elevations: As Proposed

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Reason: To provide certainty to the extent of the development hereby approved in the interests of proper planning.

- 3) Unless otherwise agreed by the Local Planning Authority development, other than that required to be carried out as part of an approved scheme of remediation, must not commence until conditions 1 to 6 have been complied with:
1. A preliminary risk assessment must be carried out. This study shall take the form of a Phase I desk study and site walkover and shall include the identification of previous site uses, potential contaminants that might reasonably be expected given those uses and any other relevant information. The preliminary risk assessment report shall contain a diagrammatical representation (conceptual model) based on the information above and shall include all potential contaminants, sources and receptors to determine whether a site investigation is required and this should be detailed in a report supplied to the Local Planning Authority. The risk assessment must be approved in writing before any development takes place.
 2. Where an unacceptable risk is identified a scheme for detailed site investigation must be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to being undertaken. The scheme must be designed to assess the nature and extent of any contamination and must be led by the findings of the preliminary risk assessment. The investigation and risk assessment scheme must be compiled by competent persons and must be designed in accordance with the Environment Agency's "Land Contamination: Risk Management" guidance.
 3. Detailed site investigation and risk assessment must be undertaken and a written report of the findings produced. This report must be approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to any development taking place. The investigation and risk assessment must be undertaken by competent persons and must be conducted in accordance with the Environment Agency's "Land Contamination: Risk Management" guidance.
 4. Where identified as necessary a detailed remediation scheme to bring the site to a condition suitable for the intended use by removing unacceptable risks to identified receptors must be prepared and is subject to the approval of the Local Planning Authority in advance of undertaking. The remediation scheme must ensure that the site will not qualify as Contaminated Land under Part 2A Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to the intended use of the land after remediation.
 5. The approved remediation scheme must be carried out in accordance with its terms prior to the commencement of development, other than that required to carry out remediation, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
 6. Following the completion of the measures identified in the approved remediation scheme a validation report that demonstrates the effectiveness of the remediation carried out must be produced, and is subject to the approval of the Local Planning Authority prior to the occupation of any buildings.

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7. In the event that contamination is found at any time when carrying out the approved development that was not previously identified it must be reported in writing immediately to the Local Planning Authority. An investigation and risk assessment must be undertaken and where necessary a remediation scheme must be prepared, these will be subject to the approval of the Local Planning Authority. Following the completion of any measures identified in the approved remediation scheme a validation report must be prepared, which is subject to the approval in writing of the Local Planning Authority prior to the occupation of any buildings.

Reason: To ensure that risks from land contamination to the future users of the land and neighbouring land are minimised, together with those to controlled waters, property and ecological systems, and to ensure that the development can be carried out safely without unacceptable risks to workers, neighbours and other offsite receptors.

- 4) No works in connection with site drainage shall commence until a scheme for surface water drainage has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This scheme shall be indicated on a drainage plan. The scheme shall provide appropriate levels of surface water attenuation and shall be implemented prior to the first use of the development and thereafter maintained.

Reason: In order to ensure satisfactory drainage conditions that will not create or exacerbate flood risk on site or within the surrounding local area.

- 5) The development hereby approved shall not be opened to the public until 2 electric vehicle charging space has been provided in accordance with a specification which shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority, such spaces and power points shall be kept available and maintained for the use of electric vehicles as approved.

Reason: To encourage sustainable travel and healthy communities.

- 6) The development hereby permitted shall not be first occupied until 18 additional cycle parking spaces are provided in a sheltered, safe, secure and accessible location to comply with the Council's adopted highway design guide has been provided in accordance with details which shall first be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and thereafter the approved cycle parking shall be kept available for the parking of bicycles only.

Reason: To comply with the Council's parking standards.

- 7) The development hereby approved shall not be occupied or be brought into use until the access, parking and turning facilities have been provided as shown on drawing 481-10-22-PL06.
- 8) The development shall be completed in strict accordance with the recommendations as set out in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Udall-Martin Associates Ltd (unless varied by a European Protected Species (EPS) licence issued by Natural England). All the recommendations shall be implemented in full according to the timescales laid out in the recommendations, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, and thereafter permanently maintained for the stated purposes of biodiversity conservation.

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Reason: To ensure that the proposal results in a net gain of biodiversity.

- 9) Prior to first occupation of the development hereby permitted, a scheme for landscaping shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All planting, seeding or turfing comprised in the approved scheme of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the first occupation of the building or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner; and any trees or plants which within a period of 5 years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: To enhance the appearance of the development in the interest of the visual amenities.

Procedural matters

This application is being reported to the Planning Committee because the site is owned by Worcestershire County Council. As such the application falls outside the scheme of delegation to Officers.