

MC/11/2655

Date Received: 17 October, 2011

Location: Brompton Academy, Marlborough Road, Gillingham Kent ME7 5HT

Proposal: Details pursuant to condition 03 on planning permission MC/11/1218 for Demolition of existing buildings (other than caretaker's house and recently constructed entrance hub area) and construction of a new educational building with outdoor sports pitches, 1 floodlit all weather pitch, car and cycle parking, internal site access improvements, repositioning of northern academy boundary, landscaping and ancillary works

Applicant: BAM Construction Ltd

Agent:
Ward Gillingham South

Recommendation of Officers to the Planning Committee, to be considered and determined by the Planning Committee at a meeting to be held on 16 November 2011.

The application is reported as an urgent item as agreed with the Chairman. The reasons for the urgency relates to the need to get Planning Committee approval to the materials and to get the decision within a timeframe to allow the work programme for the provision of the new Academy to be met.

Recommendation - Approval

For the reasons for this recommendation for approval please see Planning Appraisal Section and Conclusions at the end of this report.

Proposal

Planning permission MC/11/1218 for the demolition of the majority of the current Academy buildings and the construction of a new building with associated development was granted in August subject to a number of conditions. Condition 3 of this permission required the submission and approval of external materials and detailing and the current application has been made in order to seek approval of these details.

It is proposed to finish the majority of the walls in brick. Originally a buff brick was proposed but this has now been altered to a Yellow London Stock which has a deeper yellow colour with dark specks. Black through colour concrete is proposed for the upper section of the sports hall and the curved LRC (Learning Resources Centre) would be finished in white painted concrete. The windows and curtain walling would be dark grey aluminium. There would be a relatively small area of blue

glazed brick below the main entrance canopy. The majority of the roof would be roof ballast (with a finished appearance of crushed stone) although there would be a standing seam aluminium roof to the sports hall and a dark grey single ply roof membrane to the canopies. Finally the roof plant would be screened with light grey steel screening.

Relevant Planning History

MC/11/2653	Details pursuant to conditions 07 & 27 of planning permission MC/11/1218 Undetermined
MC/11/2274	Details pursuant to conditions 06, 19, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31 & 32 of planning permission MC/11/1218 Undetermined
MC/11/1218	Demolition of existing buildings (other than caretaker's house and recently constructed entrance hub area) and construction of a new educational building with outdoor sports pitches, 1 floodlit all weather pitch, car and cycle parking, internal site access improvements, repositioning of northern academy boundary, landscaping and ancillary works Approved 4 August 2011

Representations

Although no formal consultations are necessary in connection with this submission of details pursuant to the planning condition the views of English Heritage have been sought.

English Heritage confirm that this is not a matter in which they would expect to have a deciding role but in the spirit of trying to resolve what should not become an impasse that might delay or endanger provision of the new school the case officer has provided a limited view. He confirms his believe that either brick (buff or red/brown) could be acceptable and that it is not necessary or possibly desirable to use a mix of the two. Whilst red/brown bricks are common in the surrounding area there are many other brick colours. By the nature of its use the design of a school is particular and not to be easily confused with other types of building. He thinks this is true no matter what brick is used. Retention of a building already built in buff brick does seem to point to using this for the new building. He confirms that the planning committee is perfectly entitled to take a view about design issues but that English Heritage has a more limited locus. Unless English Heritage is convinced that a particular design or choice of materials is significantly harmful to the character or appearance of a conservation area they try not to be too controlling of such decisions as brick colour for new buildings. If the applicant is firmly wedded to their choice of brick they would not normally object to this. Finally he confirms that, personally, he would not like to take such a case as this through an appeals inquiry with confidence of winning.

Development Plan

The Development plan for the area comprises the South East Plan 2009 and the Medway Local Plan 2003.

Planning Appraisal

Background

Planning permission for the redevelopment of the Brompton Academy buildings was granted by the Planning Committee in August. However, although the submitted details showed the use of a buff brick for the proposed buildings, the Committee raised concern about this brick choice during their debate prior to reaching a decision. In view of this concern an informative was placed on the decision notice to say that 'notwithstanding the architects view of using a buff brick, the details to be submitted pursuant to condition 3 regarding external materials shall detail a red brick to be used'. In this way concern was raised regarding the proposed materials but the main decision to approve the overall form of the development was not held up. The application architect made a presentation to Councillors regarding the originally proposed buff brick on 2 November.

Main issue

The only issue to be considered is the acceptability of the external materials and their detailing. The design and form of the development have already been approved under reference MC/11/1218. The reason given for the imposition of the condition was 'to ensure that the appearance of the development is satisfactory and without prejudice to conditions of visual amenity in the locality and with regard to Policies BNE1, BNE12 and BNE14 of the Medway Local Plan 2003'. The site is in a particularly sensitive location, being within the Brompton Lines Conservation Area and is also within the proposed Chatham World Heritage Site (WHS). In addition it is considered to be within part of the setting of the Royal Naval War Memorial on the Great Lines and the water tower of the former naval hospital (as well as possibly its clock tower), these being Grade 2 Listed, as well as within the setting of the Chatham Lines, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). The part of the application site to the south of the existing playing fields together with the Great Lines also form part of the Great Lines Heritage Park.

The most controversial element of the proposed external materials is the brick type. The applicants had selected a buff brick for a number of reasons, including to blend with the brickwork of the section of the Academy building which is to be retained on its frontage, to enhance the local landscape, to give maximum light reflection for the courtyard area and to give a positive feeling and uplift spirits of students, staff and the local community. The agents and the Academy were concerned that a red brick would not link well with the building to be retained, would provide a dark and overpowering courtyard for the pupils and the long elevations would be more institutional in appearance and difficult to break up. However in light of concerns the proposed brick type has now been amended to a yellow London stock and further amendments have been made to reflect concerns regarding the need to "break up" the long north and south elevations.

It is considered that a yellow London stock brick would be an acceptable material for this location. It would sit well with the lighter buff brick on the section of the building to be retained and would also contrast well with the other external materials to be used for the proposed building – the dark concrete, the white painted pre-cast concrete and the dark grey windows and curtain walling (the mix of contrasting elements is considered particularly suitable for the front elevation, breaking up the long façade and emphasising the public face of the building). In addition there are many examples of the use of yellow stock bricks in the locality, including in Marlborough Road and some of the Royal Engineers buildings.

Thought has been given to the impact of the brick type on the Conservation Area and the proposed Chatham World Heritage Site, as well as to listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments in the area. However it is not considered that either a yellow or a red brick type would result in a significantly lesser impact in these respects. Whichever brick colour is chosen, the building by way of its size and function will be conspicuously different from other buildings in the area which is not in itself undesirable – it is an important education building and will appear as such. In addition as stated above English Heritage do not consider that the use of a buff brick would result in significant harm to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

In summary although the Planning Committee has recommended that a red brick be used the current application for the use of an alternative yellow London stock now has to be determined. The alteration of the previously proposed buff brick to a yellow London stock is considered to be a positive step, being more in keeping with the mix of materials in the surrounding area and yet still resulting in a quality building of distinction. It is considered that the palette of materials now proposed would result in an acceptable appearance for both the building and its setting, being within a Conservation Area and the proposed Chatham World Heritage Site.

Conclusions and Reasons for Approval

For the reasons given above, the proposed external materials are considered acceptable including with regard to Policies BNE1, BNE12 and BNE14 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

This application would usually be determined under officers delegated powers but has been reported to Committee as the proposed brick type is not in accordance with the views of the Planning Committee when they granted the original planning permission, MC/11/1218.

Background Papers

The relevant background papers relating to this planning application comprises: the application and all supporting documentation submitted therewith; and items identified in any Relevant History and Information section and Representatives section within the report.

Any information referred to is available for inspection in the Planning Offices of the Council at Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham.