

Regulatory Committee - 8 June 2021

Conversion and adaptation of existing premises to include external works to form new Special Educational Needs and Disability School

Former RNIB Pears Site (renamed The Warwickshire Academy), Wheelwright Lane, Ash Green, Bedworth

NBB/21CC004

Application No.: NBB/21CC004

Advertised date: 29 April 2021

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Registered by: The Strategic Director for Communities on 20 April 2021

Proposal: Conversion and adaptation of existing premises to include external works, to form New Special Educational Needs and Disability School, to include new boundary fence, introduction of new parking and provision of external unlit sports pitches.

Site & location: Former Pears RNIB Site,
Wheelwright Lane, Coventry, CV7 9RA.
[Grid ref: 433603.284371].

See plan in Appendix A

Recommendation

That the Regulatory Committee authorises the grant of planning permission for conversion and adaptation of existing premises to include external works, to form New Special Educational Needs and Disability School, to include new boundary fence, introduction of new parking and provision of external unlit sports pitches at the former Pears RNIB Site (renamed The Warwickshire Academy) subject to the conditions and for the reasons contained within Appendix B of the report of the Strategic Director for Communities.

1. Application Details

- 1.1 The application seeks planning permission to repurpose existing premises at the former Pears RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) School site, on Wheelwright Lane, Ash Green, Bedworth.
- 1.2 The repurposed school would provide places for 80 pupils at what is to be known as The Warwickshire Academy. The school would provide facilities for children and young people with special education needs and disability (SEND). This would include children with Autism (ASD – Autistic Spectrum Disorder) and / or Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, who are exhibiting behaviours that challenge. The new school would cater for children and young people from Year 5 to Year 14 (ages 9-19). The school would be operated by Thrive Education Partnership.
- 1.3 The site currently comprises of five residential bungalows, a two storey administration (offices) building, a hydrotherapy pool building and main two-storey school building (which extends to around 4500 m² floor space over the two floors), as well as outside space, including car parking and a grassed area. The site is currently largely unoccupied and has not been in use for educational purposes for the last few years.
- 1.4 The proposals for the site going forward are split into two phases. The current proposals (this application) form the first phase of development and would see the main school building, hydrotherapy pool building and much of the external space repurposed into the proposed Warwickshire Academy School. The second phase of development would see the five residential bungalows and administration building brought back into use. Plans for these buildings are still being developed but are likely to include elements of social care. These proposals are likely to be the subject of a later planning application.
- 1.5 The proposals do not involve any increase in floor space at the site and only minimal material changes to the external appearance of the school building. The fundamental changes being new (replacement) external doors to meet the needs of the SEND school. The replacement doors would be aluminium framed with toughened glazing to match the existing external appearance of the building. Internally the school

building would be reconfigured, refurbished and adapted to comply with guidance and legislation relating to SEND and Alternative Provision schools and accessibility requirements. Accommodation provided within the envelope of the existing school building would include: 10 general teaching classrooms; 5 adjoining teaching rooms/break out spaces; 1 Food Technology Classroom; 1 Science Laboratory; 1 Art Classroom; and, 1 Design Technology Classroom. Refurbishment and internal reconfiguration of the school building does not require planning permission.

- 1.6 Externally a number of amendments and improvements would be made to the school site. This would include the provision of additional secure fencing, introduction of additional car parking, provision of two sports pitches and introduction of additional soft landscape planting. These aspects of the proposals require planning permission.
- 1.7 The proposed fencing would be 2.7 metres in height and of weld mesh construction finished green in colour. The fencing would be quite extensive across the site, providing secure boundary treatments as well as separating and segregating individual areas within the site itself. This would include fencing around car parking, the MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) and individual outdoor spaces immediately adjoining the school building. Access gates would be provided at various locations within the fencing to enable pedestrian and vehicular access as well as access for emergency vehicles. Existing boundary fencing would remain in place with the proposed fencing standing inside, and in places along side, the existing fencing. The proposed fencing would separate and segregate the school from the five bungalows and administration building.
- 1.8 The two sports pitches would comprise of:
 - a MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) measuring 42 metres by 18.5 metres surfaced in tarmac and enclosed by 2.7-metre-high weld mesh fencing finished in green.
 - a Sports Pitch measuring 42 metres by 33 metres surfaced with grass.

The sports pitches would not include lighting.

- 1.9 Car parking provision for the school would comprise of 52 parking spaces, including four accessible parking bays as well as 18 pick up and drop off bays. This would include:
 - five existing spaces at the front of the school building;
 - 30 new parking spaces and 18 pick up and drop off spaces located centrally within the site; and,
 - 17 parking spaces located on a reconfigured area of existing hardstanding (which has previously been used for car parking) situated in the north western corner of the site.

A further 52 car parking spaces would be provided on the site for use in connection with phase 2 of the development. This would also comprise of a mix of existing and new parking spaces and would be focused towards the front of the site adjoining Wheelwright Lane. Further supporting information has been submitted to demonstrate that up to 45 vehicles can wait within the site at pick up and drop off times.

- 1.10 Pupils attending the school are likely to predominantly arrive and leave the site individually by private car, taxi or specialist transport.
- 1.11 The application site is accessed off Wheelwright Lane via a dedicated vehicular and pedestrian gated highway access constructed when the former RNIB Pears School was developed. This access would continue in use as the main access into the Warwickshire Academy going forward, as well as into the future phase 2 development. The existing main access gate is a slow-moving automated security gate. The application states that operation of the automated gate into the site from Wheelwright Lane would be adapted to work on a time clock, opening and closing at appropriate times to ensure there is no build-up of traffic on local routes to the site, with provision of an intercom for use at other times of the school day.
- 1.12 New areas of soft landscape planting would be provided in various locations around the site to include a mix of native species.
- 1.13 Once operational the school expects to employ 32 full time members of staff and 22 part time equating to 40 full time positions.
- 1.14 The school would operate from 08:30hrs to 17:30hrs Monday to Friday, with some after school activities.
- 1.15 The main entrance from Wheelwright Lane would be used for vehicles accessing and exiting the site during the construction period.
- 1.16 The application states that the proposed provision of the SEND school would address the need to accommodate SEND / ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) / SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health) pupil places in the area and in addition provide employment for staff at the school. At present the Local Authority obtains SEND provision in the locality by sending the proposed cohort out of the area.
- 1.17 There are 249 state-funded schools in Warwickshire, of which 11 are special schools. The last five years has been characterised by a rapid rise in the demand for services for children with SEND. Between 2015 and 2019 the number of children and young people with an education and health care plan (EHCP) or statement of SEN increased by 38% in Warwickshire, compared to an increase nationally of 47%. In January 2019 there were 13,362 children with special education needs attending a school in Warwickshire, making up 15% of the school population. Of these, 2,847 had an EHCP and 10,515 were receiving

lower-level SEN support in school. Over the past five years, WCC's Special school growth has outstripped mainstream school population growth by around three times the rate. Demand for specialist educational provision is rising in the county, with 261 pupils currently in specialist provision and forecasts showing that a further 259 places will be needed by 2023. From the information collected above it proposed Warwickshire Academy should help ease the growing demand on places for vulnerable young people and enable them to attend a school in the county rather than travel out of Warwickshire, minimising disruption for the pupils and keeping health and social care integrated with their education. Furthermore, this proposal would provide 80 of the extra school places highlighted above.

2. Consultation

2.1 Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council – Planning: no objections based on its impact on NBBC's Borough.

2.2 Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council – Environmental Health : we have had a complaint about noise from the heating system that serves the school. The original CHP was removed, leaving what I assume is the back up system. The system has been running since last year the noise can best be described as 'air type noise' which emanates through the stacks on the roof. In the Design and Access Statement, it is saying that they will continue to utilise the current system with minor modifications. When the site was first commenced a planning condition for noise was included, could this condition still be included?

'Ensure that the contribution of noise generated by plant to the surrounding residential properties is a minimum, of 5dB LAeq below the LA90 of the background noise level when measured at the boundary with any residential properties. The noise should not contain any discrete tones and be non-impulsive in nature'

2.3 Councillor Pete Gilbert: No comments received as of 28/05/2021.

2.4 WCC Equality and Diversity: No comments received.

2.5 WCC Fire & Rescue Service: I can confirm that the existing private hydrant provision is sufficient for this site on the understanding that none will be removed as part of the works. It is not clear from the application if any will be affected - could the developer confirm that please?

2.6 Warwickshire Police – Crime Reduction and Community Safety : I have examined the plans submitted and the applications incorporates what I would recommend in relation to secure boundary treatment and a secure cycle provision. I would assume that there will be a CCTV system on site, if I could have a look at what is being proposed and

pass comment. I would ask that the applicant / agent adopts the principles of 'secured by design' and evidence how they have designed in features to deter crime and anti-social behaviour. Building sites and in particular, site offices and storage areas are becoming common targets for crimes such as theft of plant and fuel. We are currently getting a spate of theft where boilers are being targeted, I would suggest these are not fitted until the home can be properly secured. All plant and machinery should be stored in a secure area. Tools and equipment should be marked in such a way that they are easily identifiable to the company. Consideration should be given to the use of security patrols. Developers are now requested to inform the local Safer Neighbourhood Policing Team, which covers the area of the development that they have arrived on site and provide contact numbers of the site manager for us in the case of an emergency. A grid reference for the site should be provided. This will help to reduce the possibilities of a delayed response.

- 2.7 **WCC Highways:** the assessment of the capacity of the vehicular access to the site shows that the access will work significantly below the capacity of the access. And the assessment showed that drivers would not need to queue for long periods to enter or exit the site, so there should not be a highway safety issue.

The current use of the vehicle access to the site causes problems. The Highway Authority has clear evidence that the existing gate arrangement causes unnecessary delays when entering the site which is having a detrimental effect on the public highway. Bearing in mind the school will not use the whole of the site, the needs of the bungalows and office building need to be considered also. As such, there needs to be a clear strategy conditioned, so that:

- In peak times for movements associated with the school, access to the school should not detrimentally affect the public highway or access to the other uses on site.
- Vehicles waiting to drop-off and pick-up pupils do not obstruct the public highway or access for the other uses on site.

Submitted details demonstrate that up to 45 vehicles can wait within the site, which should be able to accommodate the needs of the school. Some of the spaces should however be moved so that the main vehicular access from Wheelwright Lane is not obstructed. There is also capacity for more vehicles to stack adjacent to the school and parking area. Such contingencies should be included in the strategy. The drop-off and pick-up strategy should also include how the queueing is going to be managed.

No further information appears to have been supplied revising when the roads will be swept during the construction phase. This is recommended as a pre-commencement condition.

It appears that the concerns of the Highway Authority have been overcome.

Therefore, the Highway Authority's response is one of no objection subject to conditions to ensure that; the site is constructed in accordance with the approved plans (access, car parking, manoeuvring and fencing) prior to occupation, a mud and debris management plan has been approved prior to the development commencing and full details of an access / pick-up / drop-off strategy has been approved prior to occupation.

- 2.8 **WCC Ecology:** I have looked through the documentation submitted and there is no objection from Ecology.

The majority of the habitat on site beyond the pond area, which consists of standing water, swamp, amenity grassland and dense scrub will be retained and enhanced, as will the area of dense scrub to the northeast corner just beyond the pond area.

Native hedging and some native tree species are proposed, which appears to balance the BIA metric.

The gain shown in the BIA can be secured through the CEMP and the LEMP, with some minor changes, including extending the period of time covered by the management plan and amending some of the hedgerow species recommended.

The Proposed Ecological Enhancements in the LEMP are appropriate and sufficient to provide appropriate species-specific enhancements to provide onsite shelter for wildlife.

A Great Crested Newt Survey was submitted in support of the application, which included a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) Assessment and an eDNA test. The HSI indicated that the pond had Average suitability to support great crested newts. The eDNA results were returned as a Negative. No GCN, nor evidence of them was observed during the survey visits.

- 2.9 **Sport England :** the proposal will create a new u7/8s football pitch and a MUGA (42m x 18.5m) on an area of land which in viewing google earth imagery has not previously been utilised as playing field land. Due to the nature of the School it is understood that facilities will be for educational purposes only and it will not be available for community use. The proposed dimension of the football pitch is in accordance with the FA's guidelines. To ensure that the playing pitch is constructed appropriately and fit for purpose Sport England would recommend a planning condition to ensure the playing pitch is constructed and laid out to the standards and methodologies set out in the guidance note "Natural Turf for Sport" (Sport England, 2011), and shall be made available for use before the school is brought into use or other specified

timeframe. In relation to the MUGA, the dimensions differ from Sport England's Typical MUGA (36.6x21.35m) meaning that it would not meet the recommended dimensions for certain sports such as netball and tennis. As the site is not proposed to be utilised by the community for competitive sports this is not an issue. No details have been provided in relation to the surface type therefore the applicant should consider Sport England's Artificial Surfaces for Outdoor Sports Design Guidance for the appropriate surface to meet the school's sporting needs. By providing new pitches that could help address established playing pitch deficiencies should the school make the site available in the future, and therefore Sport England supports this application in principle. This being the case, Sport England raises no objection to the application.

- 2.10 **WCC Flood Risk Management:** on review of the existing site plan it appears that there will be an increase in impermeable area due to the new car park and access. Attenuation in the form of an underground attenuation tank, will be provided to manage surface water runoff from 0.32 Ha (50% of grassed pitch and 710m² of the existing car park); prior to discharge to the existing surface water sewer network. Evidence of consultation with Severn Trent Water (STW) has now been provided and demonstrates that subject to proof of the existing method of surface water disposal and testing to discount soakaways, the site has a viable outfall.

Updated calculations to demonstrate the performance of the network have been provided and the network has now been assessed for the 1 in 100-year event plus 40% allowance for climate change. It is noted that minor flooding is experienced and the outflow is marginally increased as a result, this has been justified, as a betterment will still be provided by accounting for the existing car park.

Further explanation regarding flow routing has been provided and explains that minor flooding is expected in the MUGA and car park. This should be supported by plans at a suitable time. Consideration for maintenance and management should be given in the form of schedules including action and frequency, in line with CIRIA C753 The SuDS Manual, at the appropriate time.

It is recommended that the information submitted is sufficient for the LLFA as long as conditions are included to secure: a detailed surface water drainage scheme for the site; and, a detailed maintenance plan for the surface water systems.

3. Representations

- 3.1 Four site notices were displayed at the main entrance gate to the school, as well as on Wheelwright Lane and Blackberry Lane on 28 April 2021.
- 3.2 Neighbour consultation letters were posted to the nearest (28) properties, including residential properties on Wheelwright Lane and Blackberry Lane, as well as adjoining schools and commercial properties.
- 3.3 Two representations received: one from a resident of Wheelwright Lane; and, a second from Exhall Grange Specialist School.
- 3.4 The resident of Wheelwright Lane comments:

Is the fence to the right of entrance where cars are parked, to remain with ship lap boarding fence to prevent headlights from the cars beaming into houses opposite? This was erected by the RNIB when we brought the problem up with them.

Because of the delay sometimes in the entrance gates being opened at busy times of day, i.e pedestrians with children coming and going from Wheelwright Lane Junior School, and people driving to work, it can cause vehicles queuing on the main road and any vehicles coming from Bedworth wishing to turn right into school can cause the traffic to come to a standstill. Additional problems can be caused by vehicles going to wrong address, they are looking for Exhall Grange Special School which was previously on that site and have to turn around.

It also needs to take into account of the times when M6 or A444 are closed off due to accidents and traffic is diverted onto Wheelwright Lane. Events taking place at Ricoh Arena and new housing estate being built on field opposite Bull and Anchor public house which I believe will creating even more traffic.

It might be a lot safer for staff vehicles to be able to use the entrance via Blackberry Lane.

I also believe the council is looking into traffic calming on Wheelwright Lane as cars very often use it like a race track and I have witnessed many near misses regarding children on the Pelican Crossing.

Please take into account large vehicles ie refuse and skip lorries as well as delivery lorries and contractors vehicles gaining access and exiting onto main road.

At the moment due to COVID-19 the road is not too busy, although there are more vans making deliveries to private homes, but when people return to work it gets very busy.

- 3.5 Exhall Grange Specialist School request further detail regarding the boundary fence between Exhall Grange Special School and the Former Pears RNIB site.

The application refers to mesh fencing 2.7 metres high, pedestrian and vehicle, to site boundary for guarding purposes. We would like to clarify exactly what the fence specification is for the boundary with Exhall Grange Specialist School? We are concerned that a mesh fence will not maintain our privacy.

4. Previous Planning History

- 4.1 The former RNIB Pears School / Centre was constructed between 2008-2012 on land which previously formed part of Exhall Grange Specialist School. The site has been in use for educational purposes since the 1950's. Planning permissions allowing the development of the Pears School were granted by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council in 2007 / 2008 (Ref: 011929. New school and children's home for RNIB. Approved December 2007 and Ref: 012762. Amendment to approval 011929. Approved December 2008). A further planning permission was granted in 2016 by NBBC to allow the provision of a hydrotherapy pool on the site (Ref: 033771. Hydrotherapy Pool. Approved January 2016). The Pears Centre operated as a Secondary School with a capacity for 70 pupils. The Pears School closed in 2018 since which time the site has remained largely unoccupied.

5. Assessment and Observations

Location

- 5.1 The former Pears School site is located to the north of Coventry, close to the County boundary, within an area known as Ash Green. The area could be described as urban / rural fringe. The immediate surroundings are residential in character and include a number of educational establishments (schools). The wider surroundings become quite urban including Prologis Park Business Park to the west and the Ricoh Arena to the east.
- 5.2 The former Pears site comprises of five residential bungalows, a two-storey administration (offices) building, a hydrotherapy pool building and main two-storey school building. These buildings are modern in style and design. The boundaries of the site are delineated with a mix of fencing styles, including weld mesh, palisade and bow top, all of which is steel, some finished green, some galvanised.
- 5.3 The school fronts onto the western side of Wheelwright Lane from which it takes highway access. Residential properties are situated immediately to the north and east of the site. To the north, properties fronting onto Blackberry Lane and Wheelwright Lane back onto the school site, whilst properties located east on the opposite side of

Wheelwright Lane face the school and have reasonably uninterrupted views into the site. The south-eastern corner of the site adjoins a public house, the Bull and Anchor. The southern boundary of the former Pears site directly adjoins the grounds of two other schools, Wheelwright Lane Primary School and Exhall Grange Specialist School. Exhall Grange School includes a residential bungalow (Caretakers House) which immediately adjoins the boundary with, and main school building, of the former Pears site. The boundary with Wheelwright Lane Primary School is well vegetated providing a reasonable level of visual screening. The buildings of Exhall Grange School (which include a mix of one and two storey buildings) are located in close proximity to the main school building on the former Pears School site. The boundary between the two is delineated by a 2-metre-high weld mesh fence which is very open and allows clear views between the two sites.

Planning Policy

- 5.4 Paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) February 2019 explains that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and what that means. Where proposals accord with an up to date development plan it means that development should be approved without delay.
- 5.5 In this case the up to date plan is the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Plan 2011 – 2031 adopted in June 2019. The application should therefore be determined (as required by Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) in accordance with those policies unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The courts have made it clear that for the purposes of section 38(6) it is enough that the proposal accords with the development plan considered as a whole. It does not have to accord with each and every policy in the plan. It is a matter of judgement for the Committee whether the proposal accords with the plan, considered as a whole, bearing in mind such factors as the importance of the policies which are complied with or infringed, and the extent of compliance or breach.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.6 The NPPF states that the planning system has three overarching objectives; economic, social and environmental which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.
- 5.7 Paragraph 94 states that it is important that a 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. They should:

- a) give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications.
- b) work with schools' promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.

- 5.8 Paragraph 127 states that planning decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area; are visually attractive, sympathetic to local character and create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.
- 5.9 Paragraph 109 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe. Paragraph 111 makes it clear that all developments that will generate significant amounts of movement should be required to provide a travel plan, and the application should be supported by a transport statement or transport assessment so that the likely impacts of the proposal can be assessed.

Local Planning Policies

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Plan 2011 – 2031 (adopted June 2019)

- 5.10 Policy DS1 – Presumption in favour of sustainable development - When considering development proposals, the council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It will always work proactively with applicants to jointly find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.
- 5.11 Policy DS3 – Development principles – requires that all new development is sustainable and of a high quality. New development within the settlement boundaries will be acceptable subject to there being a positive impact on amenity, the surrounding environment and local infrastructure.
- 5.12 Policy HS2 – Strategic accessibility and sustainable transport – seeks development proposals to ensure adequate accessibility and meet acceptable levels of impact on existing highways networks and the mitigation measures required to meet this acceptable level.

- 5.13 Policy NE3 – Biodiversity and geodiversity – seeks to conserve, enhance, restore and where appropriate create ecological value in sites as well as supporting biodiversity offsetting in order to achieve no net loss of biodiversity.
- 5.14 Policy NE4 – Managing Flood Risk and Water Quality: Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS): New development will be required to implement appropriate SuDS techniques to manage surface water run-off. For all sites, surface water discharge rates should be no greater than the equivalent site-specific greenfield run-off rate, unless otherwise agreed by the LLFA.
- 5.15 Policy BE3 – Sustainable design and construction – requires that development proposals are designed to a high standard and contribute to local distinctiveness and character by reflecting the positive attributes of the neighbouring area.

Policy Considerations

- 5.16 The former Pears school site and buildings were purpose built for educational purposes a few years ago on a site which has been in educational use for many years. The current proposals would bring the school building and part of the site back into educational use, providing for a specific specialist education need, which in principle is acceptable and accords with policy and the aims of sustainable development.
- 5.17 The external appearance of the existing school buildings would be largely unchanged. The proposed additions to the site; fencing, car parking and sports pitches, reflect the character and existing use of the site and are therefore also acceptable in principle.
- 5.18 Wider policy considerations of the Development Plan seek to protect the amenities of neighbouring occupiers and locality as well as the environment. These matters are discussed below and subject to satisfactory controls and measures being put in place it is considered that the development accords with the policies of the Development Plan.

Amenity and Environmental Issues

- 5.19 The external appearance of the existing school buildings would be largely unchanged. The proposed fencing is of a type and style appropriate to the school setting and similar in nature to some of the existing fencing on site. The additional carparking proposed would be sited centrally within the school site and contained within the setting of the existing buildings. The proposed sports pitch and MUGA would be located towards the rear of the site on an area of grass previously believed to have been used informally for sports and recreation. The proposed sports pitches would formalise and improve these facilities.

In visual terms the proposed changes and additions to the site are considered to be acceptable.

- 5.20 The proposals would increase the amount of car parking on site and the more formalised sports pitch and MUGA would be in close proximity to dwellings on Blackberry Lane, both of which could result in increased noise impacts. However, in the context of the overall site and previous educational use of the site it is considered that impact on residential amenity resulting from noise would be limited. The Environmental Health Officer at Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council has been consulted and has raised no specific concerns in this respect.
- 5.21 Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council Environmental Health Department advise that they have received a complaint about noise from the heating system that serves the school. They believe that the original system was removed, leaving what they assume is the backup system. The system has been running since last year and the noise can best be described as 'air type noise' which emanates through the stacks on the roof. The application states that the current system would continue to be utilised with minor modifications. The EHO states that the original planning permission contained a condition to control noise from plant operated on the site and asks that this condition is repeated. This is not unreasonable and a suitably worded condition is proposed. In respect of the current central heating related noise complaints the applicant advises that there are problems with the central heating system and that this is to be investigated as part of the overall refurbishment works.
- 5.22 Exhall Grange Specialist School have expressed concern about the open nature of the weld mesh boundary fencing proposed between Exhall Grange and the application site (The Warwickshire Academy). They are concerned that a mesh fence will not maintain their privacy. The boundary between the two schools is currently delineated by weld mesh fencing which affords clear views between the two schools. The buildings of Exhall Grange School are located in close proximity to the main school building on the former Pears School site. There is also a residential bungalow within the Exhall Grange site close to the boundary between the two sites. The proposed weld mesh fence would stand behind the existing fence, with the existing fencing remaining in place. Although the proposed fence would be quite tight mesh, views between the two schools are likely to remain. Discussions have taken place between the applicant and Exhall Grange School regarding the provision of a screening material which could be attached to the existing fence. There are options in this respect although a final solution has yet to be determined. A solution could be secured by condition and a suitably worded condition is suggested.

- 5.23 A resident of Wheelwright Lane, who lives opposite the site entrance has made observations regarding a close boarded fence previously erected within the school boundary to prevent glare from the headlights of cars manoeuvring on this part of the site. They wish to see this fence remain. The current plans propose no changes to the fencing in this location.
- 5.24 Queuing of cars on Wheelwright Lane has also been expressed as a concern with the existing slow-moving automated security gate located at the main access considered to be a significant factor in this. The application states that operation of the automated gate into the site from Wheelwright Lane would be adapted to work on a time clock, opening and closing at appropriate times to ensure there is no build-up of traffic on local routes to the site, with provision of an intercom for use at other times of the school day. A suitable worded condition is suggested to control this. Wider highway and access issues are discussed below.

Ecology

- 5.25 The submitted application included a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report, Great Crested Newt Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Biodiversity Impact Assessment.
- 5.26 The site largely comprises of short amenity grassland and hardstanding. There is however a pond and scrubby area in the south-eastern corner of the site along with trees around the site. The Ecological Assessment found habitats on the site to be of limited conservation value and no protected species. The proposals would not involve any significant loss of existing trees and vegetation. The assessments undertaken therefore found no significant constraints to the development proposals.
- 5.27 The development aims to achieve biodiversity net gain and a landscaping scheme has been proposed in order to achieve this. With the implementation of the landscaping scheme proposed the Biodiversity Impact Assessment predicts an overall biodiversity net gain resulting from the development.
- 5.28 The County Ecologist agrees with the findings of the assessments submitted and that the BIA would be balanced. The gain shown in the BIA and ecological enhancements proposed can be secured through the CEMP and the LEMP, with some minor changes. This can be secured by condition. Appropriately worded conditions are proposed.

Highway and Parking Issues

- 5.29 The application site (The Warwickshire Academy) would continue to be accessed off Wheelwright Lane via a dedicated vehicular gated highway access constructed when the former RNIB Pears School was developed. This access would also be used to access the future phase 2 development on site. This access is suitable for the proposed school use.
- 5.30 In order to address acknowledged problems with operation of the existing main slow moving automated access, the application states that operation of the access gate would be adapted to work on a time clock, opening and closing at appropriate times to ensure there is no build-up of traffic on local routes to the site, with provision of an intercom for use at other times of the school day. No other changes are proposed to the site access. A condition is proposed in order to agree the appropriate gate opening timings in this respect.
- 5.31 The application proposes additional and reconfigured parking areas in order provide 52 parking spaces, including four accessible parking bays, for the school. In addition, space would be provided for 18 pick up and drop off bays, as students are likely to predominantly arrive and leave the site individually by private car, taxi or specialist transport. A further 52 car parking spaces would be provided on the site for use in connection with phase 2 of the development. The applicant considers that the proposed parking provision reflects the appropriate design standards (Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council guidance contained within The Councils Car Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Document) and that the design and layout of the parking and pick up and drop off areas would afford adequate circulation space in order to prevent queuing vehicles backing up on the highway.
- 5.32 The application was supported by a Transport Statement which assessed and modelled traffic flows on Wheelwright Lane. The Assessment concludes that; there are no accident trends in the vicinity of the site that would be exacerbated by the development; a formal capacity assessment of the site access junction with Wheelwright Lane outlines that the junction would operate well within capacity and as a result it is not considered that vehicle flows associated with the proposed development would bring severe impact upon the highway network; and, that the number of parking spaces proposed is considered appropriate and sufficient for the proposed use.
- 5.33 WCC Highways agree that the site access is acceptable for the level of traffic proposed and that sufficient space exists to allow up to 45 vehicles to be accommodated on site during drop off and pick up times. Therefore, the Highway Authority raise no objection subject to conditions to ensure that; the site is constructed in accordance with the approved plans (access, car parking, manoeuvring and fencing) prior to occupation, a mud and debris management plan has been approved

prior to the development commencing and full details of an access / pick-up / drop-off strategy has been approved prior to occupation.

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 5.34 The proposals include the creation of additional hard surfaces, MUGA and car parking, across the site which would have an impact on the management of surface waters. The application site is located within Flood Zone 1 where the risk of flooding is least. The application included a Flood Risk Assessment which proposes mitigation measures including permeable car parking surfaces and surface water drainage system and as a result concludes that the development would pose a low risk in flood risk terms. Following the submission of further supporting information the Flood Risk Management Team are satisfied with the measures proposed to manage surface waters subject to the inclusion of conditions to secure: a detailed surface water drainage scheme for the site; and, a detailed maintenance plan for the surface water systems. Suitably worded conditions are suggested.

Other Matters

- 5.35 In order to ensure that the proposed playing pitch is constructed appropriately and fit for purpose Sport England recommend that a condition is imposed to ensure the playing pitch is constructed and laid out to the standards and methodologies set out in the guidance note "Natural Turf for Sport" (Sport England, 2011), and shall be made available for use before the school is brought into use or other specified timeframe. This is not unreasonable and an appropriately worded condition is suggested.
- 5.36 WCC Fire & Rescue Service are satisfied that the existing private hydrant provision is sufficient for this site on the understanding that none will be removed as part of the works. The applicant has confirmed that the existing fire hydrant provision on site will remain unchanged.
- 5.37 Warwickshire Police – Crime Reduction and Community Safety are satisfied with the proposals in terms of secure boundary treatment proposed. They presume that a CCTV (closed circuit television) system would be provided on site which they would like to review. The applicant advises that CCTV would be installed on site, although the details of this are not known at this time. CCTV systems largely benefit from Permitted Development Rights and therefore do not require the submission of a formal planning application. It is therefore not considered necessary to impose a specific planning condition in this respect.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The former Pears school site and buildings were purpose built for educational purposes a few years ago on a site which has been in educational use for many years. The current proposals would bring the school building and part of the site back into educational use, providing for a specific specialist education need, which is in principle acceptable and accords with policy and the aims of sustainable development.
- 6.2 The external appearance of the existing school buildings would be largely unchanged. The proposed additions to the site, fencing, car parking and sports pitches, reflect the character and existing use of the site and are therefore also acceptable in principle.
- 6.3 Wider policy considerations of the Development Plan seek to protect the amenities of neighbouring occupiers and locality as well as the environment. Subject to the imposition of suitably worded conditions to mitigate potential impacts it is considered that use of the site to operate as The Warwickshire Academy would not result in significant adverse impact.

7. Supporting Documents

- 7.1 Submitted Planning Application – Planning reference NBB/21CC004
- 7.2 Appendix A – Map of site and location.
- 7.3 Appendix B – Planning Conditions.

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