
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 December 2016

by AJ Steen BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 17th January 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/P1750/W/16/3154843

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Bridge Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 3DD

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Bill James of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School against the decision of Rushmoor Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 15/00964/FUL, dated 14 December 2015, was refused by notice dated 3 March 2016.
 - The development proposed is construction of new classrooms and addition to the main hall.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the expansion in pupil and teacher numbers resulting from the proposed additional classrooms and hall extension on traffic and parking in the local area.

Reasons

3. St Joseph's Catholic Primary School is located on Bridge Road, which extends from Highfield Avenue to a turning area outside the school, with a narrow one way street across the railway bridge from Eggars Hill. The turning area is a substantial area marked with parking spaces that provides space for parking and turning to serve the school, but this does not provide sufficient capacity to meet the school's needs. There is additional parking within the school site available for staff. Consequently, parents park on surrounding roads in a sometimes haphazard manner that leads to conflict between vehicles and pedestrians, including primary school aged children, affecting highway safety in the vicinity of the school.
 4. The proposal would increase the capacity of the school by 140 pupils over a six year period to result in a capacity of 625 registered pupils. The catchment area of the school extends to Fleet and Church Crookham, but the majority of pupils live within Aldershot, the Travel Plan suggests that 96% of pupils live within 1 mile of the school. However, it is clear within the evidence submitted that the private car is a principle means of transport for pupils to access the school.
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5. There are breakfast and after school clubs operating at the school that go some way to disperse the demand for parking across wider periods during the day and dilute the effect of the peak period on parking demand.
6. At present, parents dropping off and collecting children do so in the turning and parking area to the front of the school and on surrounding roads. The capacity of these is discussed in the Transport Statement and its Addendum, but the Council queries whether the capacities suggested are realistic, particularly on Highfield Avenue that is not of sufficient width for parking on both sides.
7. In order to accommodate the additional pupil numbers, the school has suggested a number of measures that would increase capacity to provide space for parking and turning to serve the school at morning drop off and evening collection times.
8. These measures include three "Park and Stride" locations where parents can park before walking their children to school that have been trialled and results presented in the Transport Statement and its Addendum. That at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is a relatively short walk and may prove feasible as an alternative parking location for some. The Traction Club involves walking up and across Eggar's Hill, and Brickfields Park is a longer walk, so are less likely to be used for this purpose. In addition, there is limited information as to whether these locations would be available in perpetuity, particularly Brickfields Park that has limited capacity and would be shared with users of the park. Furthermore, it is evident that this scheme is not popular with parents and these parking locations are not significantly closer than the homes of most pupils, which limits their effectiveness as an alternative to driving to the school.
9. Other measures are suggested including more active supervision of drop off points and physical alterations to the turning and parking areas in Bridge Road, pedestrian crossing patrol officers on Eggar's Hill and Church Lane East, walk once a week (WOW) campaign, car share scheme and park on my drive scheme. A number of these have been trialled and observed as being successful. However, it is unclear how some of these would be implemented and incentivised and how much effect these measures would have on parking in the roads around the school to ensure any additional school traffic can be safely accommodated within the local road network.
10. I understand that the limited number of pupils travelling more than a mile means that bus provision would not be economically viable as an alternative to the private car. As such, no sustainable mode of pupil transport as an alternative to the private car has been demonstrated in this case.
11. The car parks within the school grounds provide parking for teachers and other school staff. The Council have confirmed that the plans show the layout of these parking areas can be amended to provide for the needs of teachers and staff of the expanded school and I see no reason to disagree with their conclusions in this regard.
12. I conclude that the expansion in pupil numbers created by the proposed additional classrooms and hall extension would result in an adverse effect on traffic and parking in the local area that would harm highway safety such that the residual cumulative impacts of development would be severe. As such, the proposal would be contrary to Policy CP16 of the Rushmoor Borough Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) that

seek to secure safe and suitable access to the development, safe operation of the highway network and mitigate any adverse effects on the transport network arising from the proposed development.

13. I note that if the extensions and alterations proposed do not proceed that pupils would attend different schools and this may result in some pupils travelling further than they would to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School. However, this matter would not overcome the highway safety impacts that I have identified.
14. Reference is made in the appeal documents to the three strands of sustainability referred to in the Framework, being economic, social and environmental. In this case, there would be limited economic benefits during the construction of the extensions to the classrooms and addition to the main hall. The provision of additional school capacity would have a positive social impact in contributing toward educational needs in the area. However, the environmental harm arising from the impact on highway safety would outweigh these positive economic and social benefits.

Conclusion

15. For the above reasons and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

AJ Steen

INSPECTOR