

Officer Report – Planning Committee - Application: EPF/1746/26

Site: Chigwell School, High Road, Chigwell, IG7 6DP

Proposal: Redevelopment to include partial demolition, alterations and extensions to the existing Drama School Building to provide a Performing Arts Centre with 340-seat auditorium, associated parking and works

Recommendation: Object

Background

The application proposes a substantial redevelopment of the existing Drama Centre within the Chigwell School campus. Parts of the existing building would be retained and extended to provide a Performing Arts Centre containing a 340-seat auditorium, stage, music and drama teaching rooms, practice rooms and associated facilities.

The building would be considerably larger than the existing Drama Centre. The applicant gives an increase in floorspace from approximately 1,390 sq m to 2,004 sq m, the footprint from 783 sq m to 1,181 sq m and overall building volume from approximately 6,335 cu m to 9,496 cu m.

Green Belt

The existing Drama Centre and proposed development are within the Metropolitan Green Belt.

The applicant states that the site is previously developed land. At pre-application stage, EFDC officers considered that the additional building coverage and massing discussed would not have a greater impact on Green Belt openness and that the scheme could therefore be regarded as not inappropriate development.

The final proposal nevertheless represents a substantial increase in the size of the existing building. EFDC should therefore confirm that the final submitted scheme remains acceptable in Green Belt terms and complies with Policy DM4, particularly in relation to its increased footprint, height, bulk and effect on openness.

Heritage

The Drama Centre itself is a modern building, constructed around 2004. The application documents state that the existing Drama Centre is not a heritage asset and lies outside the Chigwell Village Conservation Area. EFDC's Conservation Officer considered at pre-application stage that it makes only a limited contribution to the setting of nearby listed buildings and the Conservation Area.

The application documents also show the listed buildings outside the application red-line boundary. On the information submitted, this is therefore not an application for works to a listed building, and there is insufficient evidence to treat the modern Drama Centre itself as curtilage listed.

The relevant issue is the setting of nearby listed buildings and the Conservation Area. Following revisions at pre-application stage, EFDC planning and conservation officers are reported as considering that the design and heritage concerns had been resolved and that limited views meant there would be no harm to the significance of the listed buildings or Conservation Area.

For that reason, the Parish Council ask the Conservation Officer to confirm that the final submitted scheme preserves the setting and significance of nearby listed buildings in accordance with Policy DM7, and that its scale and design are acceptable under Policy DM9.

Parking and Traffic

The auditorium increases capacity from 148 to 340 seats. The Transport Statement accepts that a full performance could require around 170 parking spaces and generate up to 96 additional arriving and 96 additional departing vehicle movements compared with an existing event.

The school relies on its existing parking together with an arrangement to use approximately 225 spaces at the nearby BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Temple for larger events. The Transport Statement also acknowledges that weekday evening parking at the school can already approach capacity.

The Parish Council should therefore request that any permission secures an event parking and traffic management plan, including the overflow parking arrangement, to avoid displacement onto High Road, Roding Lane, Grange Farm Lane and nearby residential roads.

Ecology and Landscaping

The scheme proposes landscaping and tree protection measures. The submitted Biodiversity Net Gain assessment calculates an on-site gain of 11.49%, slightly above the statutory minimum.

Great crested newts have also been confirmed in a nearby pond and the applicant has applied to Natural England's District Level Licensing scheme. The ecological report states that relevant works should not commence until the necessary licence is in place.

These matters, together with external lighting and noise from plant and performances, should be appropriately controlled by condition.

Officer Recommendation

OBJECT – STANDARD GREEN BELT OBJECTION, WITH WAIVER

The Parish Council's standard Green Belt objection should be submitted because the application concerns a substantial enlargement of an existing building within the Green Belt. However, the Council notes that EFDC officers have previously indicated through the pre-application process that the site is previously developed land and that the proposal could be acceptable in Green Belt terms.

Accordingly:

The Council **OBJECTS** to applications which may result in inappropriate development in Green Belt whether with or without special circumstances. The Council, therefore, **OBJECTS** to this application. If, however, all relevant Officers deem this application acceptable, whether with amendments or not, then the Council is willing to waive this objection.

Additional comments: If the Green Belt objection is waived, the Parish Council requests that the Conservation Officer confirms that the final scheme preserves the setting and significance of the nearby listed buildings and Chigwell Village Conservation Area. The Council also requests conditions securing an event parking and traffic management plan, tree and landscape protection, the proposed biodiversity measures and great crested newt mitigation and appropriate controls over external lighting and noise.