Allens Croft Primary School, Allens Croft Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 6RP

Erection of a two storey school extension to accommodate 8 classrooms (210 additional pupils) and associated external works

Applicant: Education & Skills Infrastructure Development and Culture, Birmingham City Council, 1 Lancaster Circus, Birmingham, B4 7DJ
Agent: Acivico
1 Lancaster Circus, Queensway, Birmingham, B4 7DG

Recommendation
Approve Subject To Conditions

1. Proposal

1.1. The application is for the erection of a new, two storey school block to provide eight classrooms for up to 210 additional pupils and associated external works. This would make Allens Croft a two form entry school, doubling its size, with a gradual increase of 30 additional pupils per year over 7 years to reach its proposed capacity.

1.2. The building design would consist of a two storey, rectangular, pitched roof building, with central flat roof area to allow rooflights for central corridor space. The main fenestration and longer elevations (23m) would face north west towards the existing school and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), and south east onto the remainder of the playing fields. The 18m wide front elevation would face south west onto Dawberry Fields Neighbourhood Park, with the rear elevation looking north-east onto the existing school playing fields with the residential properties on Waldrons Moor beyond this.

1.3. Proposed materials include rainscreen cladding and render in blocks to break up the overall mass of the building. Profiled metal would be used for the pitched roof, with powder coated metal used for flat roof canopies on both the front and rear elevations. Window frames would be timber/ metal composite, with limited fenestration on both the front and rear elevations. An additional 5m deep x 18m wide x 4.4m high single storey flat roof element would form the front of the building, before it rises to its 8.2m two storey height.

1.4. Internally, the ground floor would house four classrooms and toilets, with a staffroom, office and plant room housed in the single storey flat roof element. The upper floor would have four further classrooms, toilets and a store. Each of the eight classrooms would have 3-4 large, full height windows on a single elevation. Total floorspace 830 sq m and an additional 14 staff would be employed at the school.
1.5. Around the proposed school extension would be a tarmac forecourt approximately 530 sq m in area. This would enable pedestrian access for parents, staff and pupils via a new gate off Dawberry Fields Neighbourhood Park. Maintenance vehicle access would also be across the forecourt, to serve the building and a new sprinkler tank within a 80 sq m compound adjacent to the park. The access for maintenance vehicles would be via a new gate off the existing school site which would result in the loss of category C downy birch tree. A smaller, 125 sq m tarmac area would be at the rear of the building, partly beneath the rear canopy. Access for pupils to the main school building would be via a new walkway across part of the MUGA.

1.6. In order to construct the proposed school extension approximately 25 cherry saplings around 2m high would be relocated within the school grounds/ playing field area. An aboricultural assessment has been prepared in support of the application.

1.7. Concerning parking, the existing 14 space car park on the front of the building would remain and no additional car parking spaces are proposed. There is a 20 space public car park off the single track access which serves the park. A Transport Statement has been provided in support of the application, which summarises that the increased level of traffic would not have an adverse impact on highway safety, however there is an identified need to reduce the number of pupils travelling to school by car.

1.8. Further in support of the application, the agent has provided a statement outlining the rationale for the extension and its location. The main driver is that there is a statutory obligation to deliver school places for all school-age resident children and in Brandwood Ward, 210 places are required for the September 2014 intake due to significant increases in birth rates in this part of the City. Allens Croft school has been identified as the most appropriate site. The current school site is constrained due to its layout, its shared facilities with the Children’s Centre and as the main school site is under a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for a further 18 years, with the PFI operator unwilling to engage with BCC Children, Young People & Families to extend the existing building.

Proposed Plan

Proposed Elevations

2. Site & Surroundings

2.1. Allens Croft Primary School is a 1-2 storey building constructed in buff blockwork and grey cladding, along with the adjacent 2-3 storey Allens Croft Children’s Centre. The building was completed in 2007 (2005/02287/PA) as part of a PFI and is managed by Balfour Beatty. The school itself occupies the south western end of the site and is set back from Allens Croft Road behind a parking area. It has a pitched roof, single storey rear wing running east along the southern boundary of the site with a small landscaped area separating the building from its 2m high palisade boundary fence. Beyond the school building, the land rises up significantly and levels out with a MUGA pitch set on this. The playing field beyond the MUGA rises up slightly from west to east and is landscaped with a gravel path around, grassed mounds and a number of tree saplings. The proposed school extension would be positioned adjacent to the MUGA partly on an area planted with saplings and partly on a mounded area.
2.2. Surrounding the application site to both the east and south is Dawberry Fields Neighbourhood Park, a large expanse of public open space which has been incrementally improved over a number of years as part of the Allens Croft Initiative. Within the park there is a children's play area to the south of the application site, football pitches to the south east and former allotments (which are to be re-laid as part of the initiative), to the east. The public car park for the neighbourhood park is accessed off a single track tarmac road from Allens Croft Road, which runs along the southern boundary of the school.

2.3. The proposed school extension would be over 90m away from the rear elevations of two storey residential properties on Waldrons Moor to the north and over 110m away from two storey houses on Brandwood Park Road, beyond the neighbourhood park to the south.

3. Planning History

3.1. 12/08/05- 2005/02287/PA- Demolition of existing school and new replacement 2-storey school and children's centre with new access car park and new sport pitches/games court off Allens Croft Road- Approved.

4. Consultation/PP Responses

4.1. Sport England- The area is playing field, but the land affected cannot be used to lay out playing pitches, therefore Sport England does not wish to comment on the application.

4.2. Regulatory Services- No objections.

4.3. Transportation Development- No objections subject to conditions regarding construction management plan, travel plan, details of a potential passing lane and other works as per the transport statement, plus scooter and cycle storage.

4.4. Leisure Services- It is important that the security to the park is not compromised by any vehicular access to the school, which the applicant has now addressed. The previous planning application for the school included the laying out of playing fields and a running track, which has been landscaped with mounding and paths installed. This current application compounds the loss of the land for sports activities in the form of the classroom block, and it may be appropriate to consider this as a further loss of playing field land, for which there should be compensation. It may be more appropriate to site the classroom block on the existing MUGA and to resite the MUGA elsewhere on the campus.

4.5. Children, Young People and Families- No comments.

4.6. WM Police- No objections.

4.7. Application advertised as a Departure via site and press notices, surrounding occupiers, Ward Councillors, MP and residents associations notified- One comment received.
A resident living in Waldrons Moor commented that the plans were unclear, additional drawings were sent via e-mail to the resident and no further comments have been made.

5. Policy Context


6. Planning Considerations

6.1. Policy
Within the adopted UPD, policy 3.52A states that proposals which would result in the loss of open space will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, with the availability of public open space nearby taken into account. Policy 3.53 notes that a standard of 2 hectares of public open space per 1000 head of population will be used to assess the adequacy of public open space provision and 3.57 adds that development of playing fields would not normally be allowed, particularly in areas where playing field provision falls below 1.2 hectares per 1000 head of population. The policy adds that in exception circumstances when permission is granted, this will be subject to provision of equivalent long-term recreational community benefit.

6.2. Policy TP9 of the draft Birmingham Development Plan reiterates public open space and playing field space standards in the UDP and states that playing fields will be protected and only considered for development where they are shown to be surplus or alternative provision is provided which is of equivalent quality, accessibility and size.

6.3. Nationally, paragraph 74 of the NPPF states that existing open space, including playing fields, should not be built on unless: - an assessment has been provided showing that the land is surplus to requirements; the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or the development is for alternative sports and recreation provision.

6.4. Principle
The salient issue with the principle of the building is its location on school playing field land. Without provision of alternative playing field space or new sports and recreation facilities, the proposal conflicts with both local and national planning policy guidance. However, there are deficiencies in school places across Brandwood Ward, which combined with limited sites and the difficulties of developing out the main school site due to layout and operational constraints, the use of part of the playing field for a school extension is considered to be the most logical option to address school place shortages.

6.5. Sport England have stated that they do not wish to comment on the application and that the land proposed to be developed could not be laid out for playing field use. The actual location of the extension, adjacent to the MUGA on the edge of the school site and its relatively small 830 sq m footprint and tarmac forecourt, would leave ample space (over 11,600 sq m) for sports pitches if the school wished to lay these out in the future. Within the Brandwood Ward, public playing field provision is 1.62 hectares per 1000 head of population, above the minimum UDP standard of 1.2 hectares. Therefore, I consider that in this instance, there are exceptional circumstances which justify the redevelopment of the school playing field for the school extension without the requirement for alternative sports or recreation
facilities. Although a departure from adopted policy, if considered acceptable, the proposal would not require referral to the Secretary of State for determination under the provisions of Circular 02/2009 as Sport England have not objected to the scheme.

6.6. Leisure Services have suggested that the classroom block be located on the existing MUGA and this relocated onto playing field land to prevent the loss of the playing field area. However, the agent has stated that the cost of relocating the MUGA, plus the layout and operational constraints makes this option unfeasible. Therefore the approach taken by the applicant for the siting of the extension on playing field land is considered rational in this instance.

6.7. **Design and positioning**

In terms of the design, the use of render and cladding, along with the metal deck roof, follows the general design ethos of the main school building. Although limited fenestration is proposed on both the front and the rear, the use of canopies and the single storey element on the frontage adds relief to each elevation. The two storey height is uncharacteristic of the school building itself and the topography of the site, at a higher level adjacent to the MUGA, accentuates the presence of the building onto the wider neighbourhood park. However, the use of two storeys reduces the overall land take on the playing field, keeps the building relatively close to the rear wing of the main school building and effectively frames the MUGA with the other school building, creating a central play area for the school.

6.8. Hard and soft landscaping also plays an important role in the overall design and finish of the building. An appropriate planting screen for the sprinkler tank, coupled with soft planting behind the boundary fence and around the building itself, would help to soften the appearance of the building onto the park. Conditions regarding materials, hard and soft landscaping, boundary treatments and details of works to the mounds within the playing field would ensure an acceptable overall finish to the school extension and its grounds. Both my City Design and Landscape Officers are satisfied with the conditions proposed.

6.9. Concerning impact on surrounding residential properties, the location of the proposed school building, within the playing field area behind the long rear wing of the school, means it is isolated from residential properties backing onto the park, the nearest of which is over 90m away. Therefore the proposal is not considered to have an adverse impact on the amenity of surrounding residential properties by way of overlooking or noise and disturbance. Regulatory Services have also raised no objections to the proposal.

6.10. **Traffic and transportation**

The Transport Statement provided notes that pupils travelling to the school via car is already an issue and that measures such as hatching, improved signage, scooter/cycle racks and a potential passing point on the park access lane should be employed to address the current issues and the increase in pupil numbers. The gradual increase in pupil numbers of 30 per year for the next 7 years until capacity is reached allows the school to plan for potential increases in car trips and to provide encouragement for pupils to use alternative means of transport. Transportation Development have concurred with this view and have suggested conditions in relation to a construction management plan, travel plan, details of a potential passing lane and other works, plus scooter and cycle storage. All conditions are considered reasonable, relevant and necessary.
6.11. **Trees**

An arboricultural assessment has been provided with the application. A category C birch tree, along with 25 cherry saplings require removal to facilitate the scheme. The loss of the category C tree is not considered to impact on the amenity of the area given the strong line of seven black pine, downy birch and horse chestnut trees which would be retained along the southern boundary of the school. The uprooting and replanting of the cherry saplings may be feasible, if not alternative saplings should be planted. My Tree Officer has raised no objections to the proposal and conditions regarding protection of retained trees and details of sapling planting and locations would secure the retention and planting of trees on the site.

**7. Conclusion**

7.1. The design of the school extension is considered to accord with the overall design of the wider school, with its positioning reinforcing the MUGA as a central play area. Circumstances are deemed exceptional to justify the loss of playing field land in this instance, to which Sport England have not raised any objections and consider unsuitable for the laying out of sports pitches. Therefore, subject to safeguarding conditions, it is recommended that your committee approve the application.

**8. Recommendation**

8.1. Approve subject to conditions

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Requires the prior submission of a construction method statement/management plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Requires the prior submission of sample materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Requires the prior submission of hard and soft landscape details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Requires the prior submission of hard surfacing materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Requires the prior submission of earthworks details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Requires the prior submission of boundary treatment details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Protects retained trees from removal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Requires a site for relocated or replacement tree saplings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Requires the prior submission of cycle/scooter storage details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Requires the prior submission of a commercial travel plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Requires the prior submission and completion of works for the S278/TRO Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Prevents occupation until the passing point has been constructed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Requires the scheme to be in accordance with the listed approved plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Limits the approval to 3 years (Full)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case Officer: Neal Allcock
Photo(s)

Photo 1: Proposed school extension location

Photo 2: New vehicular maintenance access, existing park access, MUGA and site beyond
Location Plan

This map is reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright. Unauthorized reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Birmingham City Council. Licence No.100021326, 2010