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Target Date: 22/07/2014
Ward: Erdington

Erdington Skills Centre, Edwards Road, Erdington, Birmingham, B24 9EW

Demolition of existing buildings and erection of two storey teaching and workshop building

Applicant: Birmingham Metropolitan College
c/o The Agent
Agent: GW Planning Ltd
21 Norfolk Road, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, B75 6SQ

Recommendation
Approve Subject To Conditions

1. **Proposal**

1.1. Proposal for the erection of a new 2-storey teaching building fronting Edwards Road and a new workshop behind for Erdington Skills Centre, which is an outreach facility of Birmingham Metropolitan College. The centre provides skills training for a number of construction trades as well as basic skills training in Maths and English. To enable this new-build, the Old Technical School and 1960s teaching block facing Edwards Road, as well as a number of rear workshops would need to be demolished. A recently refurbished building fronting Mason Road would be retained.

1.2. The ground floor of the proposed teaching building would accommodate 4 classrooms, staff room, ICT / library spaces, plant and facilities rooms as well as training areas for bricklaying, plastering, carpentry, tiling, paving, electrical, plumbing and painting/decorating within the rear workshop. The first floor of the proposed teaching building would provide 5 classrooms, a further staff room and a café area with an internal window overlooking the workshop areas. A mezzanine would also be created to part of the rear workshop to provide additional training booths with an informal group teaching/meeting area overlooking the double height workshop area. 1182sqm of existing floorspace would be demolished and replaced with 2730sqm of new floorspace. 22no. existing on-site staff parking spaces would be removed and 6no parking spaces reserved for people with disabilities and for visitors would be provided on the Edwards Road frontage.

1.3. The appearance of the proposal seeks to create a high quality frontage to Edwards Road with a fully glazed ground floor and a sequence of red brick gables above, two of which would project out. The brickwork to the gables would be detailed in Flemish Bond, whilst on the projecting gables the header bricks would be inset to add texture and patterning. Windows are proposed in the return elevations of the gables and in feature brick bays that would face along, not across, Edwards Road. North facing rooflights would provide additional daylighting to the upper floors. The
elevations of the rear workshop and all the roofs would be dark grey colour metal clad standing seam panels.

1.4. The Skills Centre currently has around 420 (full time equivalent) students, with a significant proportion of students aged 16-17. Older students also attend for adult courses or as job centre referrals. Many students are part-time or short course attendees. The applicant advises that the number on site at any one time is typically less than 350, although the total number of student learners per year exceeds 1000. A high proportion of students are local from Erdington and Stockland Green wards. The existing facilities have been assessed by the College in terms of condition and fitness for purpose and score in the lowest category. The proposal would enable the retention and expansion of skills training at this location. Whilst this would initially provide more attractive accommodation for existing courses, in the future it would enable the College to respond to growing demands for skills training from students and from local employers.

1.5. The proposal represents £4 million of capital investment, of which the College was successful in securing £1.33 million funding from the Government’s Skills Training Agency under the Further Education College Capital Investment Fund (CCIF). However, this money has to be spent within the Fund timescale of 2013-2015. As such the College are looking to commence building works in July 2014 with completion by August 2015.

Proposed Site / Ground Floor Plan

Proposed First Floor Plan

Proposed elevations

Visualisation

2. Site & Surroundings

2.1. The 0.325ha site is located within the Erdington District Centre boundary in an area of transition between adjoining commercial and community uses and neighbouring residential streets. To the immediate north is the locally listed 3-storey Fire Station and to the opposite side of Edwards Road is Hart Road surface pay and display public car park. To the west are a number of shops, Erdington Baths and Erdington Library, of which the latter is a Grade II Listed Building. To the east and south are residential streets consisting of modest 2-storey late Victorian/Edwardian terrace housing with on-street parking.

Site location

Street View

3. Planning History

3.1. None of relevance.

4. Consultation/PP Responses
4.1. Transportation Development – No objection subject to conditions relating construction management plan, cycle parking, provision of delivery and service area, gate position, pedestrian visibility, Travelwise and highway works agreement.

4.2. Regulatory Services – No objection subject to operational hours, extraction details and cumulative plant noise rating levels.

4.3. West Midlands Police – No objection and recommend built to ‘Secure by Design’.

4.4. West Midlands Fire Service – No objection.

4.5. Severn Trent Water – No objection.

4.6. Neighbouring residential and commercial premises, local Councillors and MP consulted with site and press notices posted.

4.7. Representations received from Councillors Robert Alden and Gareth Moore, including the results of a survey they undertook, and make the following comments:

   • Loss of staff car park would worsen the parking situation and request season tickets are purchased for staff to park at the Hart Road car park.
   • Demolition of the Victorian part of the school will be a great loss to the local streetscene and cause a loss of public and residential amenity. Request the plans are reworked to keep the façade in the redevelopment and protect a locally significant building from unnecessary demolition.

4.8. One representation in support received from a local resident.

4.9. Four representations received from local residents making the following objections and comments:

   • It should be built where it would allow for the expansion.
   • Lack of parking.
   • Proposed Residential Parking Permit Scheme should be implemented before Planning permission is granted.
   • Design out of keeping.
   • Glazed frontage would be an eyesore and result in loss of privacy.
   • Noise pollution and disturbance during construction.
   • Welcome improvements to cycling access and facilities.

5. Policy Context

5.1. Birmingham UDP, Draft Birmingham Development Plan, Places for All SPG, Car Parking Guidelines SPD and the NPPF.

6. Planning Considerations

6.1. Town Centre Use

6.2. The existing college is a long-established education facility within Erdington Town Centre. The NPPF recognises that community uses are appropriate within such locations, adding to a centre’s vitality and viability. The premises is located within
Erdington District Centre boundary, but outside the Primary Shopping Area, as defined in the Shopping and Local Centres SPD. As such, no objection is raised in principle to the proposed facility improvements, which will represent a £4 million investment and retain this asset in Erdington Town Centre.

6.3. Design and appearance

6.4. The ‘public face’ of the new facility would be the Edwards Road elevation, with the creation of a glazed ground floor and a sequence of red brick gables above. The ground floor glazing would be divided vertically with non-vision glazed spandrel panels reflecting the breaks in the gables above. The applicant have expressed that this façade would be a high quality frontage elevation whilst the rear workshop, which would be predominantly hidden from public vantage points, would be of a more cost-effective workshop structure.

6.5. The fully glazed ground floor would give an active frontage to Edwards Road and the red brick gables would reflect the scale, vertical rhythm and materials of the adjoining late Victorian / early Edwardian terrace properties. Notably, the design approach of the red brick gables is in direct response to that of the Old Technical School building and the repetition of the front gables to the terrace housing, which is a significant positive characteristic of the streetscene. Detailing to these gables, including the inset of the header bricks to the projecting gables would add a visual interest, by means of added texture and patterning, as well as a direct association with the training undertaken at the site. The combination of the 2no. projecting gables with the brickwork detailing and the angled bay windows to the remaining 3no. main gables would provide a suitable façade that would complement and not dominate the site’s context. The new building would be set slightly further forward than the existing 1960s teaching block and would re-establish a building line relating closer to the adjacent terrace housing and fire station. Landscaping also includes 3 new street frontage trees (Silver Birch).

6.6. Whilst the 1960s teaching block and rear workshops are of no architectural merit, the Old Technical School building, dating from the 1910s does have architectural and civic qualities. Options to retain this building have been examined by the College but have proven unviable. It is noted that the building is neither statutory listed or locally listed and is not located within a Conservation Area. Furthermore, the existing building has a number of shortcomings relating to, amongst others, access, thermal efficiency, layout and structural repair. The College has also made it clear that financial reasons were behind the approach to demolish and rebuild. It is recognised that retaining the old technical building would be considerably more expensive and not achievable within the project funding deadlines and the proposed development would become unviable. It is considered that the limited opportunity to secure the investment in these new facilities would be of significant benefit to the College, the local area and future trainees and this is of substantial weight. Also of relevance, is the proposed replacement building which is of a good quality design. The College wishes to ensure some continuity with the past and would reuse the bricks from the Old Technical School on two of the gables on the new building and re-use the ‘Technical School’ lettered stonework within the new building. Taking all these factors into account, whilst the loss of the Old Technical Building is regrettable, the benefits associated with the current proposal outweigh this loss. The City Design Team concurs with this view.

6.7. Neighbour amenity
6.8. Activities associated with the Skill Centre do generate some limited noise and dust at levels that are currently largely contained within the site and have not generated any complaints. The proposed new building would allow for improved ventilation, noise insulation and waste disposal. Regulatory Services raise no objection subject to conditions, including operational hours. However, in view of the presence of an education facility on the premises for some 100 years, this is considered unreasonable. The existing 3-storey teaching block is physically attached to the adjoining 2-storey terrace house and the proposed new building would provide a gap to this house with no adverse impact on neighbour amenity in terms of the 45 degree code or overlooking. Furthermore, the existing buildings have 2 and 3 floors of accommodation facing the houses opposite. The new building would have windows in the return elevations of the projecting gables or in feature brick bays. These would not face directly into the houses to the opposite side of Edwards Road and represent an improvement on neighbour amenity.

6.9. Parking

6.10. Whilst the proposal is to improve existing facilities, in the long-term the College intends to expand the courses available and ultimately the intake of students. Based on the typical number of students on site on any day, the increase in useable teaching and training floorspace (71%) and surveyed modal split, an existing estimated 400 trips to and from the site could potentially increase to around 680 trips with 38% (262 trips) undertaken by car (passenger or driver). The site is located within Erdington Town Centre, which has an excellent level of public transport accessibility, being within convenient walking distance of stops for a variety of bus routes and also within 500m of Erdington Rail Station. The site is also opposite the Council owned Hart Road pay and display car park of approximately 170 spaces with a low level of occupation (approx. 15%). Surrounding roads are predominantly unrestricted and highly subscribed with little capacity to accommodate increased demand. It is recognised that the College is not solely responsible for this and partly attributed to local residents as well as users of the nearby town centre.

6.11. Transportation Development highlight that the likely additional parking pressure from the College would likely be displaced either to the Hart Road car park or to other unrestricted roads. Furthermore, parking behaviour for long stay duration is generally considered less likely to take place in illegal or hazardous locations. It is also noted that a Controlled Parking Zone scheme is proposed in this area, with completion due April 2015. Whilst the proposal would see the removal of 22 spaces currently provided for staff, it is considered that within this highly sustainable town centre location a reason for refusal on the grounds of inadequate parking could not be defended. The potential increase in traffic generated detailed above would not result in a significant adverse impact upon the capacity of the surrounding highway network. Transportation Development also recognises that there is a distinct potential for the site to engender a positive modal switch towards sustainable means of access. The College acknowledge this, including car sharing, a target of 5% modal share for cycling within 5 years and detailed travel plan, with annual revisions. Transportation Development raises no objection to the proposal.

6.12. Other matters

6.13. The application was supported by an ecological survey that identified external features that could be potential habitat for nesting birds and medium potential for bats. Further surveys are due to be undertaken and their findings and, where appropriate, any suitable mitigation for the loss of habitat shall be presented to Members at the meeting.
7. Conclusion

7.1. The proposal represents a £4 million investment to an established education facility within a highly sustainable town centre location. The proposal would have no adverse impact on neighbour amenity or highway safety. There is significant capacity at the adjoining Hart Road Car Park and the implementation of an appropriate travel plan has the real potential to reduce reliance on the private car. Whilst the loss of the Old Technical School building is regrettable, it is not statutory listed, locally listed or located within a Conservation Area. Its retention has been considered, but within the limited funding opportunity available it has proven unviable. The proposed replacement building, and in particular the Edwards Road façade, is of an appropriate quality design. As such the proposal is in accordance with relevant policy and guidance and planning permission should be granted.

8. Recommendation

8.1. Approve subject to conditions.

1 Requires the drainage scheme to be in accordance the approved details
2 Requires the prior submission of extraction and odour control details
3 Limits the noise levels for Plant and Machinery
4 Requires the landscape details to be in accordance with the approved details
5 Requires the external materials to be in accordance with the approved details
6 Requires the level details to be in accordance with the approved details
7 Requires the boundary treatment to be in accordance with the approved details
8 Requires the prior submission of a construction management plan
9 Requires the provision of cycle parking prior to occupation
10 Requires the delivery and service area prior to occupation
11 Requires pedestrian visibility splays to be provided
12 Requires the applicants to join Travelwise
13 Requires the prior submission and completion of works for the S278/TRO Agreement
14 Requires the scheme to be in accordance with the listed approved plans
15 Limits the approval to 3 years (Full)

Case Officer: Peter Barton
Figure 1 – Edwards Road frontage looking north towards junction with Orphanage Road

Figure 2 – Original Technical School building