

Proposed development: Full Planning Application (Regulation 3) for Proposed SEN Classroom extension plus external canopy including internal alterations

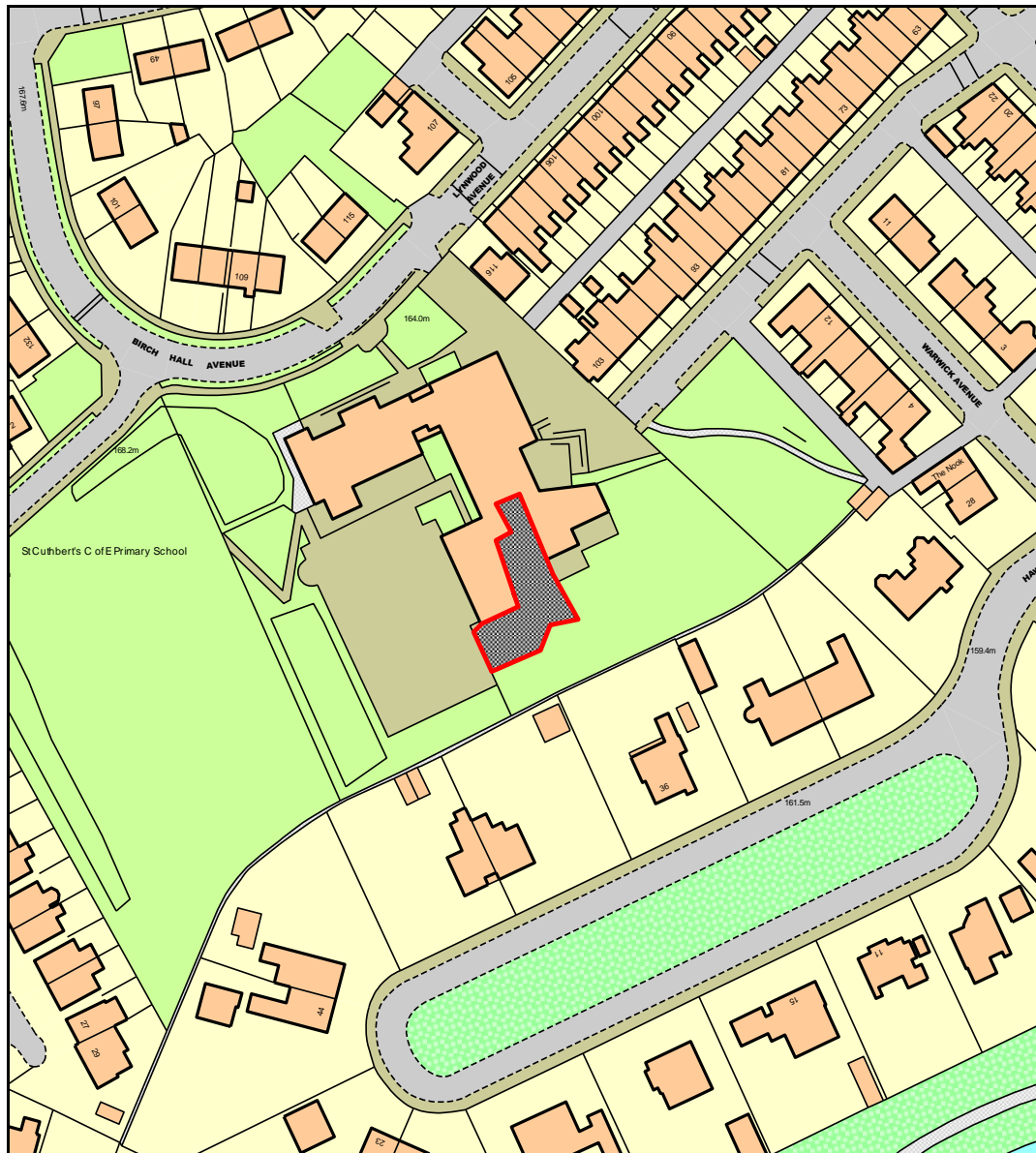
Site address:

**St Cuthberts Church of England School
St Albans Road
Darwen
BB3 0HY**

Applicant: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Ward: Darwen West

Councillor	Stephanie Brookfield
Councillor	Dave Smith
Councillor	Brian Taylor



1.0 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The proposed development is **recommended to be approved** planning permission for the reasons as discussed in Section 3.5.

2.0 KEY ISSUES/SUMMARY OF PLANNING BALANCE

- 2.1 This application is being presented to the Committee on account of the application having been submitted by the Council's Department for Growth and Development.
- 2.2 The key issues to be addressed are as follows:
- The context of the development
 - The design of the development
 - Possible ecological implications of the development

3.0 RATIONALE

3.1 Site and Surroundings

- 3.1.1 The location of the school is on land between Birch Hall Avenue and Hawkshaw Avenue, Darwen. Warwick Avenue, St. Albans Road and Lynwood Avenue are to the east of the site.
- 3.1.2 The proposed development is on the south (rear elevation) of the school, with the rear elevations of the dwellings on Hawkshaw Avenue being a minimum 30 metres from the extension, and the rear elevations of the dwellings on Warwick Avenue a minimum of 75 metres away.

3.2 Proposed Development

- 3.2.1 The proposal is for a single storey extension to an existing classroom of 4.1 metres, with a further projection of 4.2 metres forming a covered play area or canopy. Aluminium-framed west side and rear elevations with black timber cladding provides an open aspect towards the forest school, with pull-down shutters providing security for times when the school is closed. The east side elevation is largely timber-clad with two aluminium-framed openings, also provided with shutters.
- 3.2.2 The flat roof to the classroom extension has a height of 3.9 metres, consistent with the existing classroom, whilst the covered play area has a height of 3.5 metres.

3.3 Development Plan

3.3.1 Blackburn with Darwen Borough Local Plan Part 2 – Site Allocations and Development Management Policies (December 2015)

- Policy 8: “Development and People”
- Policy 9: “Development and the Environment”
- Policy 10: “Accessibility and Transport”
- Policy 11: “Design”

3.4 Other Material Planning Considerations

3.4.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (July 2018):

- Section 8: “Promoting Healthy Communities”
- Section 12: “Achieving Well-Designed Places”

3.5 Assessment

3.5.1 Context: Paragraph 72 of the NPPF requires ‘great weight’ to be given to the need to expand or alter schools.

3.5.2 The proposed development provides for a single storey extension comprising of an extension to the existing SEN classroom projecting out by 4.1 metres from the existing rear elevation, with a further 4.2 metres to form a covered play area opening out towards the Forest School. The flat roof to the classroom extension has a height of 3.9 metres, consistent with the existing classroom, with the covered play area having a height of 3.5 metres.

3.5.3 The Design and Access Statement submitted sets out the thinking behind the proposed development: The school is looking to cater for an additional three to five pupils and if possible to accommodate additional pupils for future proofing. Whilst existing space is sufficient for the existing thirteen pupils there is no allowance for break out, therapy, group teaching, sensory provisions and SEN office, and the facilities needed cannot be accommodated within this area / footprint. The proposal applies option 2 from BwD’s Feasibility Study which seeks to provide a new SEN classroom as an extension of an existing class base plus internal alterations to create sensory and therapy rooms, an SEN office, new staff toilet facilities and a Primary Hygiene Suite. The proposal also allows for the formation of a canopy / external sheltered play and learning area.

3.5.4 The NPPF requires a sufficient supply of school places to meet the needs of existing and new communities, and the approach of LPAs should be to take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach. The proposed development is therefore considered to be in accordance with the NPPF in providing for the development of facilities at the school.

- 3.5.5 Policy 8 of Local Plan Part 2 requires development to incorporate positive measures aimed at the provision of adequate facilities for young people. The extension to the SEN classroom with its additional facilities and the open play area is considered to be in accordance with this Policy in that the development secures additional support for children with particular educational needs.
- 3.5.6 Policy 11 requires development to demonstrate an understanding of the wider context, with Policy 8 requiring neighbour amenity to be protected. The setting of the development is a school located within its own grounds, with the proposed extension set back from the general rear elevation of No. 36 Hawkshaw Avenue by some 30 metres, with a much larger separation distance to Warwick Avenue. The presence of trees in large numbers along the rear boundaries of the school form a screening to the development that is considered to ensure minimal visual impact on neighbouring residences. The proposed extension is single storey and subordinate to the main building.
- 3.5.8 The proposed development is therefore considered to be in accordance with the Local Plan Part 2.
- 3.5.9 *Design:* Both NPPF Paragraph 127 and Policy 11 of Local Plan 2 require development to express a high quality architectural style.
- 3.5.10 The proposed development breaks into the simple architectural rhythm formed by a 'stepped' projection of the single storey classrooms at the rear of the existing building. Classroom 3 projects furthest, at the west end of the school, with each subsequent classroom being set back between 3.5 and 3.7 metres behind its westerly neighbour. The result of the extension to Classroom 2 leaves it projecting some 4.6 metres forward of Classroom 3, rather than 3.5 or so metres behind it.
- 3.5.11 Materials proposed also break with the established fabric of the existing school building. Black stained timber cladding is proposed for the walls, with the classroom extension providing a bold and contemporary addition to the school building, and its walls linking into the covered play area (or 'canopy'). Elements of the materials and design are considered to provide an aesthetic link with the forest school, whilst the open nature of the rear elevation of the covered area is considered to provide the spatial link.
- 3.5.12 The NPPF requires development to be sympathetic to local character whilst not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (Paragraph 127). It is considered that the design and materials work well in understanding the context of the school building projecting out towards its forest school in a manner in which the building and the natural world work together.
- 3.5.13 Moreover, it is considered that the design and layout of the extension and 'canopy' reflect the aspirations of the school, as required by NPPF Paragraph 125.

3.5.14 The proposed development is therefore considered to be in accord with the NPPF and with Policy 11 of the Local Plan 2.

3.5.15 Ecology: Policy 9 of Local Plan 2 requires development to take into account the potential for impact on protected species and their habitats. An Ecology Survey was carried out on behalf of the school and submitted as part of the application.

3.5.16 The sections of the school within the zone of influence of the extension were assessed by a suitable ecological consultancy known the unit. No evidence of bats was found and the building assessed as having negligible bat roosting potential. It is considered that the level of impact to the existing building is small and the design of the building low risk. As individual bats can turn up in unexpected locations it is recommended that an informative addressing the discovery of bats is included in the planning permission.

3.5.17 No impacts on potential bird nesting habitat is indicated on the proposed site layout. As there is however potential bird nesting habitat in close proximity to the development, an informative is also recommended regarding the action to be taken on the discovery of a bird's nest.

3.5.18 Section 170 of the NPPF 2018 states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The development will impact on a very small area of amenity grassland, a low value ecological habitat. The Council's Ecological Consultants consider that gain can be easily achieved through the provision of a small number of bat or bird boxes or the planting of a native tree. It is recommended that an informative be added to the planning permission advising the applicant as to achieving this net gain.

4.0 RECOMMENDATION

4.1 The proposed development is therefore **recommended to be granted planning permission** subject to the following condition:

Materials to match existing

5.0 PLANNING HISTORY

5.1 10/14/0008 – First floor extension. This application was submitted directly by the School Governors and not by the Local Authority. The application was approved under delegated powers on 7th March 2014.

5.2 10/09/1092 – Non-material amendment to application 10/09/0276 to reduce the width of the proposed south elevation. This application was submitted directly by the School Headteacher. The application was approved under delegated powers on 5th January 2010.

- 5.3 10/09/0276 – Extension to existing classrooms. This application was also submitted directly by the School Headteacher. The application was approved under delegated powers on 15th June 2009.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 6.1 Four neighbouring properties were consulted. No comments or objections were received.
- 6.2 GMEU (Ecologists): No significant ecological issues were identified by the developer's ecological consultant. Potential ecological issues relating to bats, nesting birds and landscaping can be resolved via condition and or informative.

7.0 CONTACT OFFICER: John Wilson, Planner – 01254 585142.

8.0 DATE PREPARED: 5th September 2019