

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**MINUTE of MEETING of the PLANNING COMMITTEE held in LARBERT HIGH SCHOOL, LARBERT on WEDNESDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2010 commencing at 7.00 P.M.**

The purpose of the meeting was to hold a pre-determination hearing in terms of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. When sitting in this capacity, the Planning Committee comprises all members of the Council.

**PRESENT:** Provost Reid; Depute Provost Black; Councillors Blackwood, Buchanan, Carleschi, Jackson, Lemetti, C Martin, C R Martin, Meiklejohn, C MacDonald, McLuckie, McNally, McNeill, Nicol, Nimmo, Patrick, and Waddell.

**CONVENER:** Councillor Buchanan.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Alexander, Coleman, Constable, Fry, Goldie, Gow, Hughes, Kenna, A MacDonald, Mahoney, Oliver, Ritchie, Spears and Thomson.

**ATTENDING:** Director of Development Services; Acting Director of Law and Administration Services; Development Manager, Planning Officer (D Paterson); Roads Development Co-ordinator; Roads Development Officer (C Russell); Team Leader, Legal Services (D Blyth); Committee Officer (A Sobieraj), Administrative Assistant (L Forbes) and Modern Apprentices (S Tennant and M Main).

**ALSO**

**ATTENDING:** Development Plan Co-ordinator (D Campbell); Transport Planning Co-ordinator; Transport Planning Officer; Environment Health Officer (S Henderson); Planning Officer (D Thallon); Director of Education; Head of Educational Resources; Property Development Manager; Senior Forward Planning Officer and S Smith, Planning Consultant, Hacrow (applicant's representatives); Jack Aitken, Education Design Co-ordinator; S McEwan, Architect, Education Design; J Sharp, Director, Woolgar Hunter (Structural and Civil Engineering Consultant) and A Spence, Associate, SIAS Limited (Transport Assessment and Travel Plan Consultant).

**DECLARATIONS**

**OF INTEREST:** None.

**P142. ERECTION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY SCHOOL, FORMATION OF MULTI USE GAMES AREA, CAR PARKING AND ANCILLARY DEVELOPMENT ON LAND TO THE SOUTH OF 49 EDWARD AVENUE, STENHOUSEMUIR - P/10/0502/FUL**

There was submitted Report (circulated) dated 5 November 2010 by the Director of Development Services on an application for full planning permission for the erection of a primary school and nursery school, playing fields, car parking, ancillary development and formation of a new roundabout on land to the south of 49 Edward Avenue, Stenhousemuir.

1. The Convener formally welcomed those present and outlined the procedures relating to the meeting.
2. The Development Manager outlined the nature of the application.
3. The applicant representatives were heard in relation to the application.
4. Questions were then asked by Members of the Committee as follows:-

Q(a) Information was sought on the roundabout and whether it would encompass a turning point for buses.

Response by the applicant's representative:-

There will be sufficient space for buses to go round the roundabout.

Q(b) Clarification was sought on whether any work had been done to estimate the volume of traffic on Edward Avenue after construction of the school.

Response by the applicant's representative:-

The worse case scenario is the doubling of traffic at peak hours, namely at drop off and pick up at the end of the school day. Outwith those periods traffic returns to normal.

Q(c) Information was sought to quantify the capacity pressures on both St Francis's and St Andrew's Primary Schools.

Response by the applicant's representative:-

Both schools currently have intakes that exceed capacity and are therefore supplementing existing provision by the use of modular classrooms. While the agreed intake capacity in St Francis is 60 pupils, the figures for the last 3 years were 64, 71 and 75 respectively. With numbers rising this level of intake could not be sustained. If intake continued at the current level further modular classrooms would be necessary for St Francis's Primary School by 2012. In St Andrews Primary School this would be required within 3 to 5 years.

Q(d) Clarification was sought on future measures proposed if parking became a problem in Edward Avenue.

Response by the applicant's representative:-

There will be a full School Travel Plan to encourage parents to get their children to walk to school thus encouraging a healthy lifestyle. There would also be parking restrictions on Edward Avenue which would be enforced by school staff.

5. Section 38A of the Town and Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 together with Regulation 27 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2008 give those persons who have submitted representations on relevant planning applications the right to be heard before a Committee of the Council before the application is determined. On this occasion, in addition to those persons who had submitted representations, other members of the public in attendance at the meeting were permitted to address the Committee.
  - (a) Mr G Farquarson, a supporter of the development, and representing the Parent Council of St Francis Primary School and Nursery and St Andrew's Primary School highlighted that the Parent Council represented 700 families with C.1000 children attending these schools from the catchment areas of Carron, Kinnaird and Tryst and Lower and Upper Braes. These communities were far reaching and not parochial in outlook. Demand for places at the schools meant that some classes already took place in mobile classrooms and this demand would be likely to increase. Mobile classrooms were educationally undesirable and should only be used as a temporary solution to educational demand. St Andrew's school could not be extended due to physical constraints and extension was undesirable at St Francis's. The new application for the school was welcomed within Antonshill, the community had been engaged in its design and this had led to significant improvements. The schools and pupils would be good neighbours and respected their local environment. The new school would be open to pupils of all denominations and none. The 1918 Education Act placed a responsibility on local authorities to provide education for children of the Roman Catholic faith and these schools provided an enviable facility for the education of pupils.
  - (b) Mr G Boyle, a supporter of the development, highlighted the current pressures on St Francis and St Andrew's Primary Schools and that many parents recognised the high standard of education from those schools. HM Inspectorate of Education recognised the consistently high quality of education and the caring and Christian ethos within these schools and had produced glowing reports. Increasingly it had become more difficult for schools to put into practice the learning to achieve policy and the new Curriculum for Excellence as a result of insufficient space and that had a negative effect on the learning and educational environment. This further increased staff stress levels. Local parents wanted the school and children required this school as soon as possible.
  - (c) Mr C Ross, a supporter of the development, Chair of the Parish Council of St Bernadette's highlighted the importance of the school to the Falkirk, Larbert and Antonshill areas. The school would be open to all faiths. It was also recognised that non Catholic parents sent their children to Catholic Schools for various reasons including the Christian ethos, preventing travelling to other schools around the district. The nursery places were also open to all. The present open

space and play area was underused throughout the year including the summer months. Antonshill had a number of open green spaces for community use including the King George V playing field. The land at the school would have an upgraded area as a MUGA pitch. The school would be mainly single stream low rise and not over bearing. This would have far less impact than housing. Following the refusal of planning permission in October 2009, a total of 1200 from supporters were sent to Falkirk Council. The Community Council also supported the application as well as many others. The school would be a good neighbour and a valuable service to the community.

- (d) Mr E Appelbe, Vice Convener, Larbert, Stenhousemuir and Torwood Community Council, in support of the development, referred to the wide ranging consultation by the applicants in relation to the proposals and that the issues that had informed the refusal in October 2009 had been addressed. A traffic survey had or would be carried out, many of the amendments to the application had come about as a direct result of the interaction between the applicants and the community.
- (e) Ms E Coyne, in support of the development, referred to the number of new jobs within the local area which would be created including teachers, school support, school crossing and catering staff. This would therefore provide benefit to the community as a whole.
- (f) Mr H Lynch, a supporter of the development, indicated the high level of support for the new school and requested approval of planning permission. He stated that Councillors who did not approve the application would be democratically accountable.
- (g) Mr I McGuire, an objector to the development, stated that nothing had really changed from the original application. He also had doubts that the number of objectors to the application was as low as that detailed in the report by the Director of Development Services. He also had concern that letters of support had been sent by those who resided outwith the local area and therefore did not have a stake in the community and its concerns. He was of the view that a survey undertaken by Falkirk Council in 2007 had identified that the north eastern area of Stenhousemuir was underprovided with open green space. He said that the local community needed the space which was a valuable community asset and suggested that the Open Space Strategy backed this up. He stressed that at no time was there a local need identified for a new school nor that the current site at Edward Avenue was appropriate, the location was wrong and encroached on green space.
- (h) Mr B Paterson, an objector to the development, Antonshill Action Group, who advised that he represented the majority of residents of the Antonshill area. It was stated that the open space identified for the school site was for local residents' use and should remain as such. It provided a valuable community asset with parkland and playing fields. Concern was also raised that initial work had commenced on site and this illustrated that the local community was being ignored. There was unease that only a low number of local people would have access to the school playing fields and facilities and further clarification on community use was required. It was essential that a school should be at the heart

of the local community, in accordance with CoSLA's joint strategy, and should reflect the needs and aspirations of that Community. Clarification was also requested on the scope of the option appraisal on site selection undertaken by the applicant. It was suggested also that there were old mine workings on site. An example was given of the neighbouring brownfield site which may have been a possible site for the school. The whole process had been very complicated and no-one from the Council had offered any guidance. During the consultation, there was no-one at the public meetings to answer questions. He made reference to a development approved by Clackmannanshire Council including the condition that a new school be built as part of it. The reasons for refusing the previous application were still valid.

- (i) Ms Gowan, an objector to the development, raised concerns in relation to road safety near the site. She also suggested that the nursery alone would generate an extra 320 journeys per day along Edward Avenue and 1600 additional journeys per week leading to concerns over road safety.
  - (j) Mr S Snedden, an objector to the development, raised concerns in relation to safety issues and noise resulting from the close proximity of the school sports area to his property. He said the touchline of the football pitch would be only 1.5 metres from the edge of his property. The site was also a popular area of recreational open space in its current state.
  - (k) Mr S Thomson, an objector to the development, raised concern in relation to the noise and light pollution from the MUGA pitch due to the close proximity to his property. He was opposed to the MUGA element of the school.
6. Responses were given by the applicant's representatives and Officers from Development Services in relation to the issues raised by Members and contributors as follows:-

Response by the Development Plan Co-ordinator:-

The Council's Open Space Strategy was adopted by the Council in October 2010. It was concerned with the quantity and quality of open space within the Council area.

Response by the Head of Educational Resources:-

The MUGA pitch would be available for community use if the community wished it. Should no floodlighting be used the pitch may be restricted to use during daylight hours. In relation to wider community consultation on the proposals, the applicant had considered 8 other sites as options for the school site. All had been unsuitable for a variety of reasons that had been publically documented. With regard to the nursery capacity it was stated that it would not open on day 1 with a full capacity of 40/40 but would grow incrementally.

7. Further questions were then asked by Members of the Committee as follows:-
- (a) Clarification was sought on the extent of consultation that had taken place on the current application.

Response by Development Manager:-

Pre application consultation had been undertaken by the applicant with the local community as required for any major development. Appropriate neighbour notification and advertising of the application had been undertaken by the planning authority in accordance with legislation. It was still available for interested persons to make representations to the planning authority and they would be taken into account in determining the formal recommendations to Council.

- (b) Clarification was sought on the publicity for the Pre Determination Hearing.

Response by Acting Director of Law and Administration Services:-

Written notification of the Hearing had been sent to all individuals who submitted written representations to the Council's Development Services in relation to the application for planning permission. The Hearing agenda and report by the Director of Development Services was also available on the Council website [www.falkirk.gov.uk](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk) and within local libraries.

8. Close of Meeting

The Convener concluded by thanking the parties for their attendance and advised that the matter would be determined by Falkirk Council on 8 December 2010.