DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2017/0522 **Valid 02/10/2017**	**DILHORNE ENDOWED PRIMARY SCHOOL GODLEY LANE DILHORNE**	**PORTABLE BUILDING TO USE AS A CLASSROOM AT OUR SCHOOL.** **(FULL - MINOR)**

MAIN ISSUES

- Appropriateness of development within Green Belt
- Landscape Character
- Design
- Amenity

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site comprises a parcel of land to the east of Godley Lane in the centre of Dilhorne Village. The site contains Dilhorne Endowed Primary School; a Victorian red brick building, with associated car park to the north and large area of open grassland to the east which is used for recreational and educational purposes. The School has recently obtained Academy status, and has seen pupil numbers increase from 18 in 2012, to a current record high of 58, which are currently taught in two classrooms, and a hall which doubles up as a dining hall and classroom.

The site is bounded by the rear gardens of three properties on School Close to the south, separated by a line of existing vegetation and occasional trees, and to the north by a detached property 'Edale'. The northern boundary is characterised by a thick line of trees which prevents any views in or out of the site in that direction. Beyond the rear boundary to the east lies open countryside.

PROPOSAL

The application seeks consent for a portable 'cabin style' classroom to be located to the rear of the school immediately to the south east of the existing building. A Supporting Statement accompanies the application and explains the current environment and the blatant need for a designated space for teaching.

Plans submitted with the application show the proposed temporary classroom to measure 12m x 3.6m, having an overall height of 2.8m. The cabin would have a Wedgwood Blue finish with all other external features painted white.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application.

The local development plan for this site comprises the Saved Policies of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (1998); Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy (adopted 26th March 2014) and any relevant Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's).

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in March 2012 sets out the Governments planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. As stated in paragraph 2 of the NPPF, the document is a material consideration which must be taken into account in planning decisions.

Core Strategy Development Plan Document (Adopted 2014)

S01 Spatial Objectives
SS1 Development Principles
SS1a Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
SS6c Other Rural-areas Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
C1 Creating Sustainable Communities
R1 Rural Diversification
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework

Achieving Sustainable Development	Paragraphs 1-17
Requiring Good Design	Chapter 7
Promoting healthy communities	Chapter 8
Protecting the Green Belt	Chapter 9

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/1978/0703 Extension to provide additional teaching area (Approved)

SMD/2003/0201 Single storey extension (Approved 27/03/03)

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 30th November 2017
Neighbour consultation period ends: 23rd October 2017
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

No comments received

Town / Parish Comments

Dilhorne Parish Council – No objections subject to neighbour approval (27th October 2017)

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

Policy SS1a of the adopted core strategy reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Paragraph 14 of the NPPF sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision taking this means approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or specific policies indicate development should be restricted.

The site is located outside of the defined development boundary and as such is subject to policies SS6c and R1 of the adopted core strategy.

Policy SS6c of the core strategy provides the spatial development strategy for the rural areas. The policy also for community facilities which meet a local need, where that need cannot be met in a settlement within the hierarchy. In such cases the development should be in a sustainable location close to an existing serviced settlement.

Policy R1 of the core strategy refers to proposals located in the rural areas outside of settlement boundaries. The policy states that all proposals will be assessed according to the extent to which it enhances the character, appearance and biodiversity of the countryside promotes the sustainable diversification of the rural economy, facilities economic activity, meets a rural community need and sustains the historic environment.

Policy C1 of the core strategy highlights the importance of creating sustainable communities, and looks to support proposals which protect, retain or enhance existing community facilities.

The site is also part of the North Staffordshire Green Belt and as such is subject to restrictive policies set out within Chapter 9 of the NPPF.

Paragraph 87 of the NPPF highlights that as with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Paragraph 88 of the NPPF goes on to states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the

potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 89 and paragraph 90 of the NPPF lists the type of development which are exceptions to inappropriate development.

The proposed development for a temporary cabin type classroom does not come under any of the exceptions to inappropriate development set out within paragraphs 89 and 90 of the NPPF. As such, the proposed development is defined as inappropriate development. In order to be supported, the applicant must therefore demonstrate the 'very special circumstances' which would clearly outweigh the substantial harm to the Green Belt, by reason of inappropriateness.

In this case, the proposed development for a portable cabin type classroom to the rear of Dilhorne Primary School meets an important local need. The additional classroom will ensure that a key community facility can continue to be run in a sustainable manner and will enhance this educational facility in the longer term. As this is an expansion of an existing school, there is no alternative site available outside the Green Belt.

The applicant has submitted a Supporting Statement which provides a background context of the school, including teaching conditions and classroom numbers which includes predictive forecasts up to the academic year 2020/2021. The 'very special circumstances' which are put forward within this Statement can be summarised as follows:

- *School currently have two classrooms, with pupil numbers that warrant three classrooms; resulting in a hall, primarily used for dining, doubling up as a classroom, disrupting teaching.*

- *Long term intension to extend the school to three classrooms, however this is reliant upon successful financial bids, and planning permission. Current situation is not ideal and has an effect on teaching and learning environment.*

- *As an academy, the school is entitled to bid for Condition Improvement Funding (CIF) but this is a lengthy and costly process which requires the need to demonstrate why funding is needed. The use of this portable cabin would clearly demonstrate that more permanent additional classroom space is required.*

- *The portable cabin classroom would provide for the necessary third classroom and enable the school to save money to contribute to the extension project.*

Paragraph 72 of the NPPF states that the Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. It goes on to state that Local Authorities should take a proactive, positive, and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement and give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools.

Having reviewed the plans and Supporting Statement submitted by the applicant, in line with the policy context set out above, it is considered in this case that the 'very special circumstances' relating to the enhancement and long term sustainability of an education facility does outweigh the substantial harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness.

Landscape Character

Policy DC3 of the adopted core strategy refers to Landscape and Settlement Character. The policy supports proposals which respects and enhances the local landscape character.

Policy R1 of the core strategy mirrors the above policy, stating that all proposals outside of the development boundary will be assessed against the extent to which it enhances the character, appearance and biodiversity of the countryside.

The site is situated outside of the defined development boundary, however does lie within the centre of Dilhorne Village, bounded on both its northern and southern boundaries by residential development. The area is considered to display features of a semi-urban character rather than an open rural character.

The submitted plans and elevations drawing shows that the proposed cabin style classroom would be of a modest size, measuring 12m x 3.6m in area and having an overall height of 2.8m. The main body of the classroom are show to be finished in a Wedgewood Blue with all fascias, corners and jacklegs being white.

The structure would be located in an area which is not clearly visible from the public highway to the front of the school, on an open area of grassland used by pupils for both recreational and educational purposes.

The portable cabin is positioned so that it would be easily read in conjunction with the main school building and would not be an isolated structure in a rural setting.

For the reasons outlined above, it is considered that there the proposed classroom would not result in any significant adverse harm to the landscape character of the area, in accordance with policies DC3 and R1 of the core strategy.

Design

Policy SS1 of the adopted core strategy sets out a number of development principles which new development should adhere to in order to contribute positively to the social, economic, and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands.

Policy DC1 of the adopted core strategy sets out a list of design considerations that new development should incorporate into any new scheme. It states that all development shall be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area.

Chapter 7 of the NPPF highlights the importance of good design, that good design is indivisible from planning and should contribute positively to making places better for people.

The proposed portable cabin style classroom is of a modest scale and is shown to be finished in a colour which could easily blend in with the open grassland to the rear of the school. The height of the cabin is equivalent to a single storey of a dwelling and would sit subordinate to the rear extension of the school which sits adjacent to the location of the proposed temporary classroom.

Whilst the overall design of the cabin does not have much architectural merit, it is designed for a practical temporary purpose, and is therefore considered to constitute an acceptable form of design, in line with policies SS1 and DC1 of the adopted core strategy and relevant policies within Chapter 7 of the NPPF.

Amenity

Policy DC1 of the core strategy requires all new development to protect the amenity of the area, which includes aspects of residential amenity such as a right to sunlight, overbearing and overlooking impacts; shadowing; loss of privacy; and any other harm which is associated with amenity.

Given the modest nature, scale and height of the proposal; its proposed use; and presence of vegetation on both the southern and northern boundaries, it is not considered that any harm to the amenity of neighbouring residents will be affected as a result of the development, in line with policy DC1 of the core strategy.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The application seeks consent for a modest sized portacabin classroom to the rear of Dilhorne Primary School in order to provide additional space to accommodate record pupil numbers and improve the teaching and learning environment, whilst securing the long term sustainable future of the school.

Whilst the School lies at the centre of the village, the site is not located within the settlement boundary as defined on the Saved Policies Map (1998) and is constrained by being located within the North Staffordshire Green Belt.

The proposal supports a number of policies within the core strategy, and paragraph 72 of the NPPF attributes great weight to the expansion of school. However, in line with relevant restrictive policies within Chapter 9 of the NPPF, but the principle of development can only be considered acceptable if the application can demonstrate compliance with these restrictive NPPF policies.

The type of development proposed is not contained within any of the exceptions to inappropriate development set out at paragraphs 89 and 90 of the NPPF and therefore the applicant is required to demonstrate the ‘very special circumstances’ needed to outweigh the substantial harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness.

A Supporting Statement which accompanies the application sets out the 'very special circumstances' for the application which are explored within the report. It has been concluded that in the context of paragraph 72 of the NPPF and the contents of the Supporting Statement, 'very special circumstances' have been demonstrated which clearly outweigh any substantial harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness.

An assessment of the application has considered that the proposed design of the temporary portacabin classroom, whilst not carrying any architectural merit, is of a modes scale and height which has a practical design to serve its purpose as an educational facility, which does not harm the landscape character of the area.

There are not considered to be any significant adverse impacts to the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

Overall, the application is considered to accord with all relevant local development plan policies and restrictive policies relating to the protection of the Green Belt contained in Chapter 9 of the NPPF. The application is therefore considered to constitute a sustainable form of development and in line with policy SS1a of the core strategy and paragraph 14 of the NPPF, is recommended for approval subject to appropriate conditions.

Given the temporary nature of the proposal, and uninspiring but practical design, it is considered appropriate to grant a temporary consent by condition for a period of 4 years, to allow a more permanent solution to be developed

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions

Case Officer: James Stannard
Recommendation Date: 24th November 2017

X B.J. Haywood

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council