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Date: 6 December 2023

Application: SMD/2023/0546
Location: St. Edward's Church of England Middle School, Westwood Road, Leek
Proposal: New 2.4m high fencing to school boundary, new 1.2m high bow top railing to internal macadam paths, and new steps with handrail

The proposal has been reviewed with particular reference to Police CPI's Secured by Design guidance and in accordance with the recognised principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.

The following comments should be considered in the light of the following:

- Under the heading Promoting Safe and Healthy Communities, Para 92(b) of the NPPF 2021 states "Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion."
- Under the heading Achieving Well-Designed Places, Para 130(f) of the NPPF 2021 states "Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments create places that are safe ... and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience."
- Under the heading Planning Should Address Crime Prevention, Design Para 10 of the NPPG states "Designing out crime and designing in community safety should be central to the planning and delivery of new development";
- Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan - Design Consideration, Spatial Objective SO10 – "To deliver sustainable, inclusive, healthy and safe communities";
- The statutory obligation placed on local authorities to do all they reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;
- The 2006 CABI document entitled 'Design and Access Statements: How to Write, Read and Use Them', which states "Statements should demonstrate how development can create accessible and safe environments, including addressing crime and disorder and fear of crime".

The broad proposals have the potential to make a significant difference to the security of the school grounds out of hours and pupil safeguarding during the school day. The fencing and gating seem generally well positioned with the Securus 358 grade welded mesh product of a design which deters climbing generally and at 2.4m, is a height which strikes a reasonable balance. However, it will be important to ensure that the opportunity is taken at this planning stage to optimise security gains, as any lack of attention to detail could unwittingly undermine the effectiveness of the fencing/gating and retain a degree of vulnerability that could have been avoided. To this end, the following observations, comments and recommendations are provided with a view to encouraging minor amendments to the proposals to be adopted or to ensure potential weak points common to many gates are designed out.

The replacement of the wooden fence that divides the pedestrian route from Beggars Lane from the adjacent residential property with a 2.4m mixed mesh/timber fence is welcomed. Aside from the existing fence height, the current fence design has horizontal supporting sections on the driveway side, which constitute an obvious climbing aid. The image provided of the mesh with timber slat infill on the Proposed Works drawing suggests that horizontal climbing points would not be included within the fence design, which would be ideal.

Often it is the gates that are the main vulnerability in a perimeter fencing system when climbing aids can be inadvertently incorporated particularly (but not exclusively) around the locking area and there can be an absence of climbing deterrents. Where manual locking takes place, a square metal box section is typically provided at mid-height to accommodate a sliding bolt and padlock, which enables easy climbing both into and out of a site. The majority of the gates proposed are shown as being automated/automatic opening, with access control etc, which potentially dispenses with the need to incorporate the mid-height box sections. Indeed, the Proposed Elevations drawing does not show any such feature on any of the new gates, which would be ideal. Nevertheless, it would be worth ensuring that if there is no need for such a feature, that it is not inadvertently included.

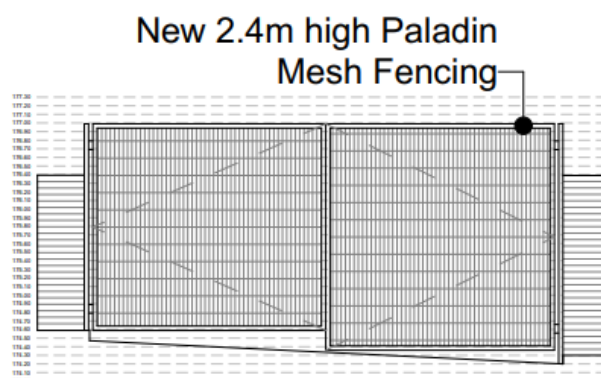
However, the proposals suggest that not all gates will be automated/access controlled. The Proposed Works drawing suggests that the new Westwood Road wide pedestrian gate towards the north-east corner of the site and the double gates on the new internal fence line quite close to this are likely to be manually operated. These gates are not shown on the Proposed Elevations drawing, but it is not unreasonable to presume they might feature the standard mid-height box section and sliding bolt/padlock arrangement, which might introduce an inherent vulnerability that needs to be considered and mitigated. If the gates will only ever be unlocked/locked from inside the school grounds, it should be possible to dispense with the mid-height sections entirely and provide an alternative method of locking. For example, the single gate could incorporate narrow-style mortice deadlock/s within the gate framework and the double gate could incorporate some form of L-shaped brackets/hasp and staple secured by a padlock. If there is no alternative but to incorporate the mid-height box section, then adding a steeply sloping metal cover, which denied foot access to the horizontal box section, but still allowed access to the padlock would be an option to reduce risk.

Another area where improvement could be made in terms of gates would be to address the smooth top common to many (and suggested on the Proposed Elevations drawing), which does nothing to deter climbing. It is recommended that some form of subtle yet effective anti-climb deterrent is added to the top of the new gates, but without creating a fortress mentality. One option might be a series of stubby metal rods (perhaps 50mm high) across the top. Another is some form of sawtooth feature (as shown opposite). Incidentally, the row of blunted metal rods principle is already evident on the wide gate on Westwood Road that is to be replaced towards the north-east corner of the site.



The proposed Westwood Road E1 vehicle gates drawing (see opposite) shows a gap under both gates, the left-hand one being more pronounced. Whether this would allow anyone to crawl under the gates is unclear, but this needs to be assessed and an appropriate counter measure incorporated, should it prove to be a possible issue.

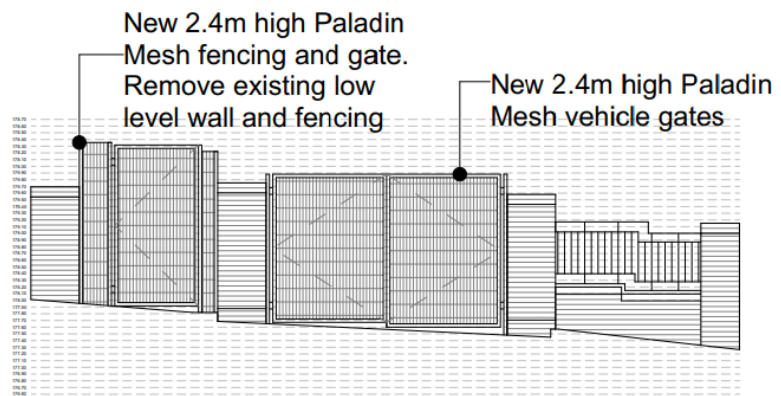
Furthermore, the existing brick piers are to be retained. These will be noticeably lower than the new automated double gates that are to be installed and could provide the means to overcome the gates. If they are to be retained, it would seem opportune to eliminate any possible vulnerability that might attach to them, as part of these proposals. Denying access to them externally by boxing them with a small section of the same 2.4m high welded mesh fence matching the gates would be one obvious option that might accomplish this.



It is considered that there is also scope and need to improve security arrangements at E2 access point on Westwood Road, shown opposite.

Seemingly, potential climbing aids would remain. Certainly, the area to the right with lower piers, low wall and flat-topped railings appears vulnerable. The retained lower pier on the left has a litter bin (not shown) directly in front of it, which in

combination provides perfect stepping/climbing aids. It would seem prudent to revise the proposals for this school entrance. Options could include removal of the left pier at the same time as the proposed removal of the low-level wall/fencing and extend the 2.4m fencing further to the left. Relocating the bin slightly to the left could remove its use as a potential climbing aid. Removing the retained low-level wall and fence, and brick pier on the right, and replacing them with the 2.4m high fencing should be considered.



One might have thought that the changes being considered would provide the perfect opportunity to remove all of the brick piers at E2 including the two unmatched piers either side of double gates. This would certainly be an option to provide some consistency and clean lines, aside from any vulnerability attached to retaining large flat-topped, lower piers. The 2.4m high welded mesh fencing/gating could then be used for the whole width of this area. It would be argued that any 'heritage' value of retaining the brick piers would be negligible. If the two main piers need to be retained, there should be consideration to protect/deny external access to them by extending the 2.4m high welded mesh around them. There would undoubtedly appear to be scope to reconsider what is proposed here to maximise security opportunity and eliminate any residual weaknesses.

Crime Prevention advice is given freely without the intention of creating a contract, and all comments and recommendations are site specific. Staffordshire Police and the Home Office do not accept any legal responsibility for the advice given.

David Elkington
Designing Out Crime Officer

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