

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2023/0546
Valid 08/11/2023

**ST EDWARDS CHURCH OF
ENGLAND MIDDLE
SCHOOL WESTWOOD
ROAD
LEEK**

**NEW 2.4M HIGH FENCING TO
SCHOOL BOUNDARY, NEW
1.2M HIGH BOW TOP RAILING
TO INTERNAL MACADAM
PATHS, AND NEW STEPS
WITH HANDRAIL**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- The impact on the character and appearance of the area
- The impact on residential amenity

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site comprises parts of St Edwards Church of England Middle School in the west side of Leek. The school buildings face Westwood Road to the north which provides two accesses into the site to the school car park in front of the buildings. There are other accesses into the school from Beggars Lane to the south-east of the school buildings. Westwood First School and a park lies to the north to the other side of Westwood Road. To the rear of the school buildings at St Edwards School to the south is Wallbridge Park, a housing estate and Leek Bowling Club. To the east of the school is Westwood Recreation Ground. To the west of the school is more housing. Within the school site, the buildings are in the west part and school pitches/playing fields lie in the east part.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application for new 2.4m high fencing to school boundary, new 1.2m high bow top railing to internal macadam paths and new steps with handrail.

There are two areas where the works would be provided: Area A to the front of the school and Area B around the access off Beggars Lane.

In Area A, both access would have 2.4m high mesh paladin vehicular gates installed with security measures including automatic opening (outwards towards the road) and intercoms. 2.4m high paladin mesh fencing would be installed leading from one of the new gates and would follow the driveway separating it from the school grounds/playing fields to the east. New steps from the other access drive up to the front of the school buildings would be provided with 900mm high vertical bar handrails. New tarmac paths to the front of the buildings would be created and pedestrian routes. Some of the tarmac paths would have 1.2m high bow top fencing, including along a new pedestrian path which runs alongside one of the driveways to separate

it from the path. Some new planting and landscaping would be provided to the front of the school.

In the east part of the site in Area B, new 2.4m paladin mesh Securus fencing with gate would be formed connecting the Beggars Lane access loop with Westwood Road to the north, separating the school ground/playing fields from the east end of the school grounds which is just rough open land with trees alongside the existing wall separating the school from the recreation ground to the east. A new 2.4m paladin mesh Securus gate, with security measures, would replace a low gate on Westwood Road next to the new fence. New 2.4m paladin mesh gates would be placed at the two vehicular accesses off Beggars Lane and the same design of fencing alongside the boundary with Beggars Lane connecting the two accesses. The reason for this fence is because the existing wall which separates the recreation ground from the school grounds can be scaled and so the new fence is required to prevent intruders gaining entry onto the school playing fields. The agent explains that the rough area of grassland between the existing wall and the new fence will be maintained by the school. There are proposed secure palisade gates in the new fence and along Westwood Road to allow the school access into this area.

A new 2.4m paladin mesh pedestrian gate would be placed at the entrance to the pedestrian access to the rear of the school, off Beggars Lane which runs along the side boundary off The Cottage, a residential property adjacent to the school premises. A 2.4m high timber slat and paladin mesh fencing would be placed alongside the path to the other side of an existing timber fence separating the school from The Cottage i.e. on the side of the school property not the neighbouring residential property, as confirmed by the agent and as clarified on amended elevational drawings.

All the above fencing would have a black metal finish apart from the timber and mesh fencing which would have sections of timber slats and mesh separated by green metal posts.

All the works are shown on amended plans received on 12.1.24 and 22.1.24. Amendments were made in response to comments from the Police Designing Out Crime Officer and concerns raised from an adjacent neighbour. This mainly includes the raising of the exiting brick gate piers up to the height of the proposed gates i.e. 2.4m and the lowering in height of the bottom edge of one set of gates to reduce the gap between the gates and the ground.

Thick orange/brown lines have appeared on the amended site plans. The agent confirms these are not fences but ground level/below ground ductwork (presumably for the electric wires) and the latest drawings (Rev E) add this detail to the Map Key.

Amended plans also show changes to the blue line which marks the boundaries of the school property to clarify the extent of ownership in relation to a neighbouring residential property, The Cottage.

Further amended plans were received on 18.3.24 showing the removal of the existing fence separating the school from the adjacent residential property, The Cottage to be replaced by the new proposed fence.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (Adopted September 2020)

C1 – Community Facilities
DC1 – Design Considerations
NE2 – Trees, Woodland, Hedges.

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023)

Sections 12 (Design).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None relevant.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 5.1.24
Neighbour notification expiry date: 5.1.24
Press advert: N/A

Public Comments

Two letters were initially received from local residents neither supporting or objecting to the application.

One is from a local resident raising concern about the use of rough grassland area with trees within the school grounds next to the recreation ground wall, where anti-social behaviour has occurred and which would be hemmed in by the proposed fence. The writer considers the proposed fence should be placed adjacent to the recreation ground wall to prevent access into this area.

The other letter is from an adjacent resident (of “The Cottage”) to the west of the site on Beggars Lane. He points out that his driveway is included within the blue line of the applicants ownership and that this is incorrect. He also asks for some clarification how the proposed fence along Beggars Lane joins up with the side boundary fence of his property which is shared with the school. He also requires confirmation that another fence belonging to him will be accommodated in the works. Finally, he asks that the school give him prior notice of works commencing.

Amended drawings were received to show additional detail and clarification of the fencing adjacent to the neighbours property (The Cottage), along with an amended location plan showing the removal of his property from the blue line and also confirmation that he would be given prior notice of works and that his other fences would not be affected by the works. He was renotified of the amended/additional plans and information on 31st January 2024.

In response, on 27th February, the neighbour raised an objection to the amended plans received in late January 2024. He considered that the placing of the new fence alongside his existing side boundary fence would lead to a climbing aid encouraging intruders onto his property.

He also stated that his driveway had not been removed from the blue line boundary. However, this was due to the amended location plan not being put on the website. Once he was provided with a copy of this plan, he was satisfied with the alteration.

The school decided to resolve the neighbours objection by suggesting the existing fence along his side boundary be completely removed and replaced with the new fence.

They also confirmed via the same email that no other existing fences or access points would be affected by the new fences which would be installed carefully to not affect the other fences of the neighbour.

In response, the neighbour via email on 8th March stated he was happy for the existing fence along his side boundary to be removed and was happy with the other points raised by the school re. no other fences being affected.

Amended plans showing the removal of the side boundary fence were subsequently received. No further notification was required.

Parish/Town Council comments

None.

Local Highways Authority

No objection.

SCC Schools/Education Section

"No comments to make on this proposal."

Staffordshire Police Designing Out Crime Officer

The Officer commented as follows: *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.*

The Officer also made some further recommendations to optimise security.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The proposal is in connection with improving security at the school and prevent intruders after alleged incidents of anti-social behaviour in the grounds. The perimeter fencing

The works would not cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area where some form of fences and gates already exist. The fencing at 2.4m would be taller than much of the fencing in the area but any concerns about visual impact are outweighed by the security needs of the school. The fencing is either timber and mesh fencing separated by green posts or black palisade and mesh fencing or black railings which is not inappropriate in this area and not out of keeping. It would in any case be mostly screened by existing hedges along both roads and although the fencing would exceed the height of the current hedgerows, a condition can be placed to grow the hedges up to the height of the fences.

The Staffordshire Police Designing Out Crime Officer considers the scheme would be effective in increasing school security but has also advised further improvement measures as follows:

- 1. Raising of brick piers to the same height as the fencing*
- 2. Closing of gaps underneath the proposed vehicle gates on Westwood Road to no larger than 100mm.*
- 3. Extension of 2.4m high fencing along Westwood Road.*
- 4. The inclusion of some form of deterrent along the top of gates to prevent scaling i.e. stubby metal rods or sawtooth features.*
- 5. Relocating the bin slightly to the left could remove its use as a potential climbing aid*

The first three of the list above have been taken on board in the amended plans. With regard to recommendation 4, the agent commented that school safeguarding projects no longer tend to use metal rods/sawtooth fixings as an anti-climb deterrent due to the liability falling to the school should an intruder be injured. With regard to the fifth recommendation, the agent commented that the litter bin is owned by the local council and is not the schools responsibility to relocate.

One of the local residents commented that the 2.4m palisade fencing should be placed against the existing recreation ground wall to prevent intruders using the rough grassland area with trees within the school grounds. However, the school claims it will be responsible for the maintenance of this area and there are gates proposed to allow them entry into this area for this purpose. I also consider that

fencing against the wall (which is notably higher than the wall) would not be acceptable in appearance terms.

The agent has also confirmed that there would be no mid-height protruding padlock sections on the sides of gates facing outwards (i.e. facing the road), which could be used as a “climbing aid”.

Although a couple of parking spaces in the school car park would be lost, the local highways authority raises no objection to the application.

CONCLUSION/PLANNING BALANCE

The proposal would not significantly harm the character and appearance of the area and would achieve its overall purpose in enhancing school security. The proposal would comply with the Council’s Local Plan and the government planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston
Recommendation Date: 27.3.24

X *B.S. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council