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Hengoed CF82 7WF

Tredomen House,
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Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol - Economi a'r Amgylchedd
Corporate Director - Economy and Environment

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**Head of
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Planning**

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**Pennaeth Adfywio a
Chynllunio**

SPA/22/0007
E Rowley

rowlee@caerphilly.gov.uk

19.04.2022

Dear Mrs Williams

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990
REFERENCE NO. SPA/22/0007

Change the use of former comprehensive school for vulnerable learners for up to 100 pupils aged 11 to 18 to include the refurbishment of the former grammar school building, with two small extensions to provide an entrance lobby and store to the existing hall and a new plant room and erect new sports hall building on the lower plateau to provide facilities for the school and local community after school hours at: Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School, Coed-Cae-Ddu Road, Pontllanfraith, Blackwood, NP12 2YB.

I refer to your enquiry received on 25 January 2022 and provide the following advice for your information:

PLANNING HISTORY 2010 ONWARDS

17/0840/NOTD - Demolish all school buildings - Granted 25.10.2017.

13/0701/LA - Locate an external insulated cabin to serve food to pupils to include shelter in the form of sails - Granted 26.09.2013.

POLICY SUMMARY

National Planning Guidance particular (but not exhaustive) the requirements of:

- Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (2021);
- Planning Policy Wales Edition 11 (2021);
- Technical Advice Note 2: Planning and Affordable Housing (2006);
- Technical Advice Note 5: Nature Conservation and Planning (2009);
- Technical Advice Note 12: Design (2016);
- Technical Advice Note 16: Sport, Recreation and Open Space (2009);
- Technical Advice Note 18: Transport (2007);

DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

The following policies of the Caerphilly County Borough Local Development Plan are relevant to the determination of this application:

Strategic Policies

- Policy SP2 Development Strategy - Development Strategy – Development in the Northern Connections Corridor (NCC);
- Policy SP4 Settlement Strategy;
- Policy SP5 Settlement Boundaries;
- Policy SP6 Place Making;
- Policy SP10 Conservation of Natural Heritage;
- Policy SP18 Protection of Strategic Leisure Network;
- Policy SP21 Parking Standards; and
- Policy SP22 Community, Leisure and Education Facilities.

Countywide Policies

- Policy CW1 Sustainable Transport, Accessibility and Social Inclusion;
- Policy CW2 Amenity;
- Policy CW3 Design Considerations - Highways;
- Policy CW6 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerow Protection;
- Policy CW5 Protection of the Water Environment;
- Policy CW8 Protection of Community and Leisure Facilities; and
- Policy CW15 General Locational Constraints.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Relevant Guidance can be found in Supplementary Planning Guidance;

- LDP 4 Trees and Development;
- LDP 5 Car Parking Standards; and
- LDP 6 Building Better Places to Live.

The documents can be viewed on the website link provided below.

[https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/Business/Planning-and-building-control-for-business/Local-Development-Plan/Supplementary-Planning-Guidance-\(SPG\)](https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/Business/Planning-and-building-control-for-business/Local-Development-Plan/Supplementary-Planning-Guidance-(SPG))

INITIAL POLICY ASSESSMENT

Assessment

The submitted preliminary enquiry form and associated plans indicate the refurbishment of the previous grammar school building that forms part of the wider site associated with the former Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School together with the erection of a small entrance lobby and store to the existing hall on the south eastern elevation and erection of a plant room on the north eastern elevation to provide the pupil referral unit to support up to 100 vulnerable students between the ages of 11 - 18 who require additional learning needs.

On the lower plateau to the east of the building the existing play yard and sports hall would be demolished and a replacement sports hall would be constructed together with the installation of a 30 metres x 43 metres Multi Use Games Area (MUGA). A bus collection shelter, 5 x mini bus bays and 38 staff and visitor car parking spaces are also proposed. The existing gated access fronting onto Penllwyn Lane would be widened to provide two way vehicular access to and from the lower plateau.

The following pre-application advice is based on, and limited to, the information and details submitted as part of your enquiry. For clarification purposes, despite the Local Planning Authority inviting the opportunity to pay for detailed consultee comments in respect of this pre-application enquiry, that offer was declined by yourself and therefore the following comments that I can provide are somewhat constrained to an in principle discussion relating to re-development of the enquiry site.

It should be noted that this enquiry does not relate to the whole of the site associated with the former Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School site and it is not known whether Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre and its associated outdoor playing provision was connected with the former school in terms of the provision and consequently there may have been a change in circumstances to the current operating model of the leisure centre and outdoor MUGA used by the local community since the school closure whereby access and use of the services is now more readily available to the community in the possibility that the former school's reliance on the leisure and playing facilities has now been relinquished. Existing and proposed levels of car parking provision along with policy considerations relating to potential loss of leisure facilities are additional matters that may not be for consideration as part of this pre-application enquiry, however they are policy considerations pertinent to the determination of any future planning application. Further clarification is required regarding the future aspirations for the wider development site as a whole so that all policy considerations can be addressed to ensure that there would be no detriment to any existing or proposed uses in the future.

With regards to the proposed extensions to the former grammar school building, their footprint appear to be small scale and subservient to that of the host building. However,

in the absence of any elevations and specified finishes no further comments can be provided. In the absence of any specified boundary treatments, it is presumed that the school would have some sort of internal enclosures from a safety perspective and it is not known whether any new boundaries or upgrade works to any existing boundaries are proposed, therefore their visual impact cannot be considered as part of this enquiry. The visual impact of the proposed development and its relationship to the host building and the wider surrounding area is a material planning consideration and particular attention should be paid to ensuring that the original character of the building is not unduly harmed.

In terms of the proposed development on the lower plateau of the site, the sports hall and MUGA would be accessed internally from within the site via a ramp or steps from the classroom blocks above. Vehicular access into the site is also proposed via Penllwyn Lane. It is understood that this gated access has not recently been in use to serve vehicular traffic and would require widening to provide two way traffic in and out of the site for collection and drop offs, along with staff and visitor parking.

In terms of the sports hall, this would have a maximum footprint measuring 34 metres wide by 35.5 metres long with a maximum height of 7.85 metres above ground level. The overall scale and massing of the building is considered to be acceptable and given the separation distance away from the rear gardens of Brynhyfryd Street, it is not considered that the building would give rise to any adverse overbearing or overshadowing impacts on adjacent properties. With regards to the design this appears to be acceptable although the external finishes of the building have not been specified. However it is noted that the proposed development fails to take advantage of solar gain and photovoltaic opportunities.

With regards to the proposed MUGA as identified on Dwg No. A103 Site Layout Plan it should be noted that there is no scale on the plan and it also indicates not to scale the plan, on that basis the distance of the MUGA from the rear gardens of Brynhyfryd Street remains unknown. It is also noted that there is an intervening area of land adjacent to the rear lane serving Brynhyfryd Street that is occupied by dense scrub, hedgerows and trees and large section of that area would be lost. Consequently the MUGA would be closer to the rear gardens of the properties than that of the former school yard. The Fields in Trust (FIT) Standards provides specific advice relating to outdoor sport and play and they recommend a minimum buffer zone of 30 metres between the activity zone and the boundary of dwellings. Based on the limited detail provided the required distances do not appear to have been met. It is understood that the proposed MUGA would be available for use outside of school hours and therefore issues in respect of noise and external illumination require full consideration. Whilst it is acknowledged that a replacement planting scheme is proposed, any landscaping buffer would require a significant number of years for it to establish to provide sufficient screening.

Detailed Policy Considerations

Policy SP2 (Development Strategy – Development in the NCC) requires development proposals to promote sustainable development. Specifically proposals in this area should: focus significant development on both brownfield and greenfield sites that have regard for the social and economic functions of the area; reduce car borne

trips by promoting more sustainable modes of travel; make the most efficient use of existing infrastructure; and protect the natural heritage from inappropriate forms of development.

The enquiry site is located within the settlement boundary of Blackwood identified within the Council's Adopted Local Development Plan (LDP) up to 2021 and also states that the boundaries are defined in order to define the area within which development would normally be allowed, to promote the effective use of urban land and to prevent fragmented development and inappropriate development in the countryside.

The proposed development is to be located within the former school grounds and therefore in policy terms would be considered as a brownfield site.

Policy SP4 (Settlement Strategy) defines the settlement hierarchy for towns and villages across the county borough and identifies those areas where development would be supported and enhanced based on the specified role and function of a particular area. The Strategy seeks to concentrate new development to respond appropriately to the economic, social and environmental needs of individual settlements and thus settlement boundaries are identified accordingly to indicate the potential areas where development is likely to be permitted. The application site is within walking distance of Blackwood Principal town centre, a designated service, employment, retail and population centre. The proposed development in this location would therefore accord with this function together with serving the local and wider community.

Policy SP5 (Settlement Boundaries) promotes resource efficient settlements, indicating where growth will be permitted through the delineation of settlement boundaries. Settlement boundaries define the area within which development would, in principle, be allowed, taking account of all relevant planning policy and material planning considerations. The site is within the settlement boundary and therefore the principle of development is deemed to be acceptable, subject to all other material considerations being met.

Policy SP6 (Place Making) requires development proposals to contribute to the creation of sustainable places by having full regard to the context of the local, natural, historic and built environment and its special features.

The visual appearance of the proposed development, its scale and its relationship to its surroundings and context are material planning considerations. The visual impacts of the development have been discussed in the initial assessment above.

Policy SP10 (Conservation of Natural Heritage) recognises the natural heritage as a positive asset that enriches people's quality of life. In this context Policy SP10 indicates that the Council will protect, conserve, enhance and manage this asset in the consideration of all development proposals.

The application site is enclosed by natural stone boundary walls and a traditional stone finish is replicated in the former grammar school building. Any extensions that are physically attached to the former grammar school building should be sympathetic in terms of their design and external finishes. In the absence of any elevation details of the proposed extensions no further comments can be offered. Furthermore, the site is

bounded by significant trees and scrub which may be impacted as a result of the development in addition to any associated ecology implications.

Policy SP18 (Protection of Strategic Leisure Network) states that the Council will protect important networks of public open space, natural green space and recreational facilities from inappropriate development to avoid their loss to more profitable developments such as housing.

It may be the case that the leisure centre and its associated MUGA are additional facilities as opposed to replacement facilities, this is a matter that will need to be fully addressed as part of any future application. Whilst it is possible to develop the site in a piecemeal fashion, it would be useful to provide a masterplan of the wider site to ensure any existing uses would not be compromised in the future, nonetheless based on the extent of this enquiry it is noted that no land or buildings are being lost for a higher value use, such as housing.

Policy SP21 (Parking Standards) states that the 2008 CSS Parking Standards sets out the parking requirements for all development proposals within the County Borough. In a change from former standards operated by the Council, these standards are not only specific to land uses, but are also related to where the proposal is physically located. Consequently the respective zones need to be identified in order that the respective parking requirements can be applied. The Parking Zones have been identified in accordance with the zone types and parameters set out in the CSS Parking Guidelines.

A breakdown of existing and proposed parking levels for the wider site will need to be provided to ensure that the relevant parking provision can be secured for any existing and proposed uses.

Policy SP22 (Community, Leisure and Education Facilities) states that the Council has safeguarded suitable land for the development of community, leisure and education facilities in order to ensure that an adequate network of provision can be made at accessible locations across the County Borough to contribute to the health, social care and well-being.

Whilst the proposed sports hall and MUGA are proposed for community use outside of school hours, this operating model will need to be explained. In addition clarification as to whether the existing leisure facilities and MUGA at Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre will remain available to the community or whether the new facilities are intended to replace existing facilities.

Policy CW1 Sustainable Transport, Accessibility and Social Inclusion requires development proposals that are likely to generate a significant number of trips to be designed to ensure that car borne trips are kept to a minimum. It is therefore important to ensure that provision is made within the development to actively encourage walking and cycling, and that appropriate infrastructure is included in the layout to facilitate short trips on foot.

In this instance the proposed extension is likely to generate additional trips for pupils. The proposed extension would allow for up to 100 vulnerable students and without the extra provision, these pupils may need to travel outside of the county borough. There

are good existing pedestrian routes to the school, and it is noted that cycle storage is provided as part of the proposals. The proposed development satisfies the requirements for sustainable transport, however it should be noted that it is not likely that additional learning needs students are likely to travel on foot, rely on the local bus service, travel unaccompanied to school or from the former school catchment area, consequently access to and from school for any students is likely to be different to the former students attending the school from the local catchment area. Whilst it is noted parking areas for mini-buses and shelters are proposed on the lower plateau, the Highways department may require a travel plan to accompany any application.

Policy CW2 (Amenity) indicates that development proposals must ensure that the proposal would not result in over-development of the site and/or its surroundings. Furthermore, the policy indicates that the proposed use would need to be compatible with the surrounding land uses and not constrain the development of neighbouring sites for their allocated use.

In principle, the provision of the school extension would be compatible with adjoining uses. In terms of the proposed development on the lower plateau the sports hall and MUGA are considered to be acceptable in principle, but the proximity to the neighbouring gardens to the rear of Brynhyfryd Street may present issues that will need to be addressed in that its proximity does not comply with the FIT Standards

Whilst it is not considered that the indicative layout results in overdevelopment of the site or its surroundings, car parking provision to serve the wider site needs to be fully considered and should not be left without adequate provision. In addition schemes for on-site refuse and recycling arrangements will also need to be indicated.

Policy CW3 (Design Considerations – Highways) states that development proposals must meet a number of highways requirements including car parking and access.

The submitted details indicate that a new vehicular access would be created off Penllwyn Lane, it is acknowledged that there is a gated access there already but this has not been used for vehicular access for many years. Given the proximity to the roundabout below together with trees the existing stone boundary wall and highway infrastructure outside of the site, achieving the relevant visibility splay may likely to present some issues. Furthermore, there would also be a requirement to provide a linked pedestrian access from outside and within the site. Inevitably, any widening works is likely to result in the loss of a section of the stone boundary fronting Penllwyn Lane in addition to the loss of established mature trees, which conflict with policies SP6, SP10, CW2 and CW6.

Advice in respect of the access configuration within the site and parking requirements across the site as a whole in accordance with SPG LDP 5: Car Parking Standards should be sought by the Transportation and Engineering Manager.

Policy (CW5 Protection of the Water Environment) states that development proposals will only be permitted where they do not have an unacceptable adverse impact upon the water environment, and where they would not pose an unacceptable risk to the quality of controlled waters (including groundwater and surface water). In that regard given the overall construction area of the development exceeds 100 square

meters the proposed development requires Sustainable Drainage Approval. The Site Layout Plan indicates that sustainable drainage measures have been considered from the outset however you are advised that any Sustainable Drainage systems required has to meet the requirements of National Standards. Further information is available on the Council's website in this respect. However, it is recommended that any drainage proposals are discussed formally and to seek through pre-application advice from the outset to ensure that the requirements of the National Standards does not have any significant bearing on the proposed site layout.

Policy CW6 (Trees, Woodland and Hedgerow Protection) states that development proposals on sites containing trees, woodlands and hedgerows, or which are bordered by one of more such trees or hedgerows, will only be permitted provided that:

- A Where arboricultural surveys are required, they are submitted and approved, including any mitigation, compensation or management requirements, as part of the planning application.
- B Root systems will be retained and adequately protected for the duration of all development activity on site.
- C Development proposals have made all reasonable efforts to retain, protect and integrate trees, woodlands or hedgerows within the development site.
- D Where trees, woodlands or hedgerows are removed, suitable replacements are provided where appropriate.

The lower plateau is enclosed by established trees and vegetation and they provide a positive contribution to both the natural and built environment by enhancing the amenity value of the site in addition to providing vital habitat for biodiversity. The proposed development would result in the loss of trees and vegetation bordering the site and because of their potential size are likely to have a major influence on the planning layout and use of the site. The enquiry submission details do not appear to be accompanied by any arboricultural surveys to evaluate the potential impacts and therefore it is not possible to for any trees considered to be worthy of retention to be highlighted. Many trees within the site may also be considered as worthy of retention. Detailed assessments, including topographical surveys, tree surveys / categorisation, tree constraints plans and arboricultural implications assessments, provide important information on the quality and quantity of trees present and identify mitigation of the potential impacts of development, including the construction process, on trees and hedgerows and their root systems. In addition, any replacement trees would need to be of a similar size. Further advice should be sought from the Council's Tree Officers in that the current iteration is likely to present conflict between, siting, design, visual amenity and highway safety.

Policy CW8 (Protection of Community and Leisure Facilities) states that proposals that would result in the loss of a community and/or leisure facility will not be permitted except where:

- A A comparable replacement facility can be provided by the developer either on or off site, and within easy and convenient access on foot or by bicycle, or
- B It can be demonstrated that the facility is surplus to requirements

Whilst Policy CW8 may not apply, in that the information is not available as part of this enquiry, the policy implications are brought to your attention. Please disregard any of this advice if the proposed development would result in the loss of any leisure facility on the adjacent site.

In respect of criterion A, a replacement facility is not included or referenced as part of this enquiry and therefore the proposed development is perceived as additional leisure facilities within walking distance of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre.

In respect of criterion B if the proposed development intends to provide a replacement facility, any replacement facility will need to be of a comparable nature, the proposed MUGA appears to be significantly smaller than that of the MUGA associated with Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre. Furthermore, in order to demonstrate that it is comparable the Local Planning Authority will also require evidence to be submitted that demonstrates that any new facility will be available for use by existing users. This information will need to form an integral part of the application when submitted, if relevant.

Policy CW15 (General Locational Constraints) states development proposals will not be permitted if they prejudice the implementation of wider comprehensive redevelopment or constrain the development of any adjacent site for its allocated land-use. Any phased development as part of the wider site should be well thought out as part of this enquiry to ensure that appropriate provision to serve any existing or proposed uses within the remainder of the site is secured in advance of submitting a formal planning application.

Advice from Consultees

The additional service requiring the comments of the consultees has not been sought and therefore no comments have been provided. It is therefore advised that you may wish to engage in correspondence with the following departments regarding individual matters and further clarification:-

- Strategic Planning;
- Highways;
- Environmental Health;
- Ecology (Parks and Open Spaces);
- Landscape Architect (Parks and Open Spaces);
- Tree Officer (Parks and Open Spaces);
- Sports and Leisure;
- Public Services;
- Land Drainage; and
- Education.

Notwithstanding please be advised that there is a duty placed upon yourself to take into account any responses received by the statutory consultees and officers would then consider the weight to be afforded to any competing interests at application stage.

Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions

Not applicable.

Any other material planning considerations

- The visual appearance of the proposed development, its scale and its relationship to its surroundings and context are material planning considerations.
- The site is located within both a high risk coal mining development referral area and therefore a Coal Mining Risk Assessment is a validation requirement of the Coal Authority.
- The proposed construction area would exceed 100 square metres and development of the site would be subject to Sustainable Drainage Approval.

Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010 requires surface water drainage for new developments to comply with mandatory National Standards for sustainable drainage (SuDS). It also requires surface water drainage systems to be approved by a SuDS Approving Body (SAB), before construction work with drainage implications may begin.

It is important to advise that there may well be drainage implications with the site as a result of previous development on the site and it is recommended that separate pre-application advice is sought from the SAB.

- Based on the floor area, proposed the development falls within the classification of Major Development, and as such there is a requirement to carry out a statutory pre-application consultation on planning applications for major developments in Wales. Further advice on how to meet the pre-application consultation requirements can be found within the following documents:

Pre-application Community Consultation: Best Practice Guidance for Developers.
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-12/planning-major-developments-guidance-on-pre-application-consultation.pdf>

Development Management Manual (See Section 6.4).
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-10/development-management-manual.pdf>

Requirements to accompany a planning application

- Application Form.
- CIL Form.
- Collated pre-application consultation report.
- The correct fee.
- Site Location Plan.
- Detailed drawings of the scheme including:-
- Existing and proposed block layout plans including parking provision (this shall

also identify parking to serve other area outside of the site) to ensure that adequate car parking provision would remain elsewhere;

- Existing and Proposed Elevations and Sections;
- Existing and Proposed Levels;
- Proposed Floor Plans; and
- Specification details of any existing and proposed external finishes,
- Fenestration and boundary treatments.
- Coal Mining Risk Assessment.
- Confirmation of future proposals for the existing leisure facilities so that the LPA can ascertain whether the proposed facilities are to be replacement or additional facilities.
- Details of any outdoor lighting to serve the MUGA and its compliance with the FIT Standards.
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal as a starting point;
- A tree survey, arboricultural impact assessment and tree protection plan, in accordance with SPG LDP4 and BS5837:2012; and
- Any other consultee requirements that you will need to seek out directly.

To conclude, the principle of development is considered to be acceptable, however to reiterate previous advice in order to ensure that the proposal can comply with the relevant policies referred to above there will be a requirement to ensure that the proposed developments can be provided without disadvantaging the local community. Implications in respect of highways, loss of trees and impact on current levels of residential amenity received (associated with MUGA) are likely to present conflict with local plan policies. Furthermore, the existing leisure centre and MUGA at Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre is a matter that will need to be clarified as to whether the longevity of these current uses will continue or whether the proposed facilities on the lower plateau of the site are intended to be replacement facilities and if so it would need to be fully justified that these are comparable facilities for community use. This information will need to form an integral part of the application when submitted.

If it is the case that the proposed development is to replace existing facilities appropriate mechanisms will need to be secured to ensure the delivery of any replacement facility in a timely and appropriate manner. It is not normally appropriate for the Council to enter into a S106 Agreement on its own developments and further legal advice should be sought on this matter. Careful consideration, therefore, will need to be given to the phasing of any development proposals forming part of the wider site in this respect and to any necessary consents, including planning permission and SAB approval,

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Liz Rowley

Prif Gynllunydd | Principal Planner

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Caerffili | Caerphilly County Borough Council

Please note that this is the informal opinion of an Officer, given on the basis of the information currently available to the Officer in relation to your query. The opinion is given on a without prejudice basis and is not binding upon the Authority. All planning applications will be subject to formal determination based upon consideration of the merits of each application, current planning policy, legislation, relevant consultation responses and other material planning considerations.