Varna Street Primary School – Outline Planning Application

PPG 17 Statement.

The outline planning application in respect of a new Varna Street Primary School, seeks approval to build a new 1 Form Entry primary school to replace the existing school located on Barrass Street. The development site lies to the south side of Ashton Old Road, within the Bradford Ward, in the east part of Manchester. The existing school has a site area significantly in deficit of the DCSF recommended target gross site area and has many issues of unsuitability with both the current layout and quality of spaces.

The proposed development is for a two storey primary school with soft, hard play areas and landscaping. The proposals include a number of facilities on the ground floor suitable for community access ie halls and meeting rooms. The landscape proposals surrounding the building include Multi Use Games Areas, attractive gardens and external seating areas and vegetable garden. The scheme aims to enhance community facilities for people in the Bradford Ward area of the City.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 requires that Local Authorities should undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities. In the absence of a robust and up-to-date assessment by a local authority, an applicant for planning permission may seek to demonstrate satisfactory land use through an independent assessment of the land or buildings the subject of the application. Manchester City Council has undertaken such an assessment, the findings of which are currently being finalised and a Strategic Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study for Manchester is programmed to be published in May/June 2009. Indeed local standards of quantity, quality and accessibility of open spaces, sport and recreation facilities were endorsed by the Community and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2009. Under these circumstances we do not feel it would be necessary to undertake an independent audit, but could rely upon relevant extracts from the Local Authorities own assessment.

Specific relevant extracts from the study are as follows:

- The study has audited the open space areas immediately to the south of Ashton Old Road (bounded to the east by Chisholm St) as amenity open space. This site falls within the study's east area with local standards showing existing small quantitative surplus of amenity spaces. Across the east area there are currently some small deficiencies in quantity of outdoor sports facilities. Looking at the area around the site (within the agreed 10 minute walk catchment area for amenity spaces) the area is quite well served with existing amenity spaces, local parks with some children/young people facilites within the parks, and outdoor sports facilities.

- The key issues for the east area of the city are currently predominately about enhancing the quality of existing open spaces and facilities and providing in areas of local deficiency additional facilities for children and young people. There will also be areas of local deficiency where it will be important to retain existing provision (At this stage of the study Planning Strategy are unable to look at detailed local provision within accessability catchment areas but when the study is complete will be able to do this). However current data supports the view that this area is reasonably well served.
- Study evidence supports Leisure Services priorities for the area regarding the need to focus on improving the quality of existing provision and where appropriate extend provision of children/young peoples facilities.

Taking each of the above points in turn we will describe how the proposals for the new Varna Street Primary School Court will comply with the anticipated recommendations of the open space study.

Loss of Amenity Space

The site is currently undeveloped although historical data shows previous occupation by a mix of small scale housing and large scale mills. The site is currently 100% covered by natural landscape with grass and trees.

Whilst the proposals would mean a small loss of amenity open space (1.22 Ha approx.) it would have no significant negative impact in the context of the overall setting, especially when taking into account the improvements that are proposed to the quality of the space.

It is proposed that the school site boundary, west elevation, will be reviewed to enable improvement to the disused canal. Sufficient area will be provided to enable the future development of a cycle way or other such development.

Whilst designed to provide suitable external space, sport and recreation facilities for the school the proposed external areas would however be accessible to the wider community with managed and controlled access by the school.

Quality of Amenity Space

The proposals will improve the quality of space by providing external landscaped areas and facilities that are managed and maintained by the school.

The facilities will include landscaped areas ie activity spaces, Multi Use Games Areas, wildlife areas and allotments, all of which will provide valuable and desirable settings for school activities and accessible to the local community. The completed external works will improve and lift the appearance of the surrounding area, adding interest and raising the overall quality of the environment.

- The school will provide managed access to Multi Use Games Areas suitable for five-a-side football, basketball, netball etc.

- The proposal to identify sufficient space to enable the future development of the disused canal will provide a long term benefit to the local community and respond to the City Councils Development Plan.

- Internal spaces ie hall and meeting rooms will support community engagement, particularly extended school activity.

- The provision of a vegetable garden within the scheme, primarily for the children, meets another area of increasing demand identified by the study. These areas will also serve to promote healthy activity in older people living in the nearby residential home as well as the opportunity to promote intergenerational work in the area.

An additional finding of the study was that there is a deficit throughout the City of sports facilities and provision of facilities for children. We believe that our proposals address this deficit and feel that they aim to meet the needs of the local community in general in addition to the provision of sports and children's facilities.