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Development Management
Wiltshire Council
County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
BA14 8JN

Dear Sir/Madam,

Proposed Biomass Boiler House including Associated Ground Works
The Corsham School, The Tynings, Corsham SN13 9DF

On behalf of The Corsham School Academy Group, I am pleased to submit a planning application for the "*Erection of a plant room to accommodate two biomass boilers and associated works"* at The Corsham School.

The scheme is supported by the following documents:

- Existing and Proposed Plans and Elevations (Emmett Russell Architects);
- Design and Access Statement (Emmett Russell Architects);
- Biomass Management Plan (ReEnergise Group);
- Air Quality Report (Air Quality Assessment Ltd);
- Arboricultural Report (Wessex Tree Consultancy); and
- Tree Protection Plan ((Wessex Tree Consultancy).

Proposals

The School has recently been awarded a Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) grant to deliver a biomass district heating system at the school, in order to provide heat and hot water to the various buildings on the site. The project is part of a wider Estate Decarbonisation Plan (EDP) for the Corsham Academy. The Academy comprises two schools; The Corsham School, which is a secondary school of 1179 students, and the Corsham Regis Primary School with 159 students. Estate decarbonisation is an essential step towards becoming a net-zero school.

A report was prepared by ReEnergise analysing the School's energy use and assessing heat decarbonisation opportunities and their associated power implications. The report sets out to develop a plan to remove each school's reliance on fossil fuels for all its estate power, heat and transport needs, thus eliminating greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) being emitted in the running of their estates. The report made a number of recommendations including the introduction of a biomass heating system in a newly constructed energy centre. This current proposal comes out of the implementation of that recommendation.

It is important for the school that the works to implement the biomass boilers and the boiler house can commence during the school holidays, when students are off-site.

The key elements of the scheme are as follows:

1) Construction of an external boiler house (plant room) which will accommodate the biomass boilers and a below ground auger chamber;
2) Reinstatement of footpath, planting of new hedge in front of the boilerhouse and making good of lawn;
3) Installation of buried heat mains to carry hot water from the boiler house into the five school building;
4) Internal plant room modifications within the school, such as the removal of existing boilers connecting the heat main to the building distribution system via a heat exchanger (N.B as these works are internal, they do not require planning permission.

N.B We are of the view that items 3 and 4 are subsidiary elements that do not require planning permission, but nevertheless are shown on the plans for information.

The Site and Context

The school occupies a large site with extensive playing fields and a range of buildings built over the life of the school. The most recent building is the sixth form building that sits about 35m to the East of the site for the biomass building. The school site is surrounded on three sides by residential development and on the fourth side by the Springfield Campus. The actual application site is located within the school grounds, and is not within a Conservation Area or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are no Listed structures or other heritage assets on the site or within the school grounds.

The site for the new biomass building is close to the western boundary of the site parallel with the end of Beechfield Road. There is a large beech hedge between the site and the road. On the far side of the road is the car park for the Springfield Community Campus sports centre. The site is adjacent to one of the main vehicular entrances to the site. The site is currently a grass area with a single Silver Birch tree. Outside the red edge site, but within the school grounds are a numerous trees of varying species and maturity (which are detailed in the accompanying Arboricultural Report). None are protected by a Tree Preservation Order.

The Proposals

The development proposes the construction of a new single storey boiler house to accommodate two biomass boilers (463KW) and the accompanying wood chip fuel store. For safety and security reasons there will be a new fence enclosure around the South and East side of the site to match the existing security fence. There is already a fence and hedge along the north west side of the site.

It is proposed that a new hedge will be planted in front of the fence to provide a landscape buffer in from of the building. The building will be serviced from the existing vehicular entrance and car park to the south of the site.

The boiler will be fuelled by sustainably-sourced woodchip.

Further details of the design of the boiler housing can be found in the Design and Access Statement. Further details of the operation of the biomass boilers can be found in the Management Plan.

Access and Servicing

Vehicular access for fuel deliveries will be from the existing school gates on Beechfield Road.

Trees

The implementation of the proposed boiler house would result in the loss of 1no. Silver Birch Tree, due to the fact that it stands within the proposed footprint of the new plant building. It is proposed to provide a

replacement tree within the school grounds. The application is supported by an Arboricultural Report and Tree Protection Plan that provides more detail on these particular issues.

Planning Policy

- National Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF), in Chapter 14, actively encourages renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure. Paragraph 158 is clear that in determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:

a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and

b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

- Local Planning Policy

At the local level the Local Development Framework includes the Wiltshire Core strategy (WCS) 2015, and the 'saved' policies of the North Wiltshire Local Plan (NWLP) 2011 (adopted June 2006). A number of the NWLP policies continue to be saved to sit alongside the policies of the Core Strategy. These policies will be subject to further review as part of the Core Strategy Partial Review process. A list of saved polices can be found within Appendix D of the Core Strategy.

Principle of Development

The site is located within the framework boundary and built up area of the Corsham as shown on the Council's Core Strategy Policies Map. Core Strategy Policy 1: Settlement Strategy identifies Corsham as a settlement where development is acceptable in principle.

Core Strategy Policy 41: Sustainable and low-carbon energy actively promotes design measures such as the proposed on-site biomass facility to reduce energy demand. Core Strategy Policy 42: Standalone renewable energy installations are actively supported, subject to site specific constraints.

The site of the proposed boiler house and biomass is not within any sensitive landscape areas, is not within a conservation area or Green Belt, is not directly adjacent to residential development. It will be neatly tucked into the school grounds and will closely resemble the existing 6th form building.

A few key benefits of the proposals are as follows:

- Annual consumption: 1,362,000kWh of energy (gas) converted to 1,167,000kWh of energy (biomass woodchip);
- Energy efficiency measures included as part of the overall project scope are LED lighting and cavity wall insulation in school buildings to save 436,000 kWh energy;
- 277,000kg CO2e saved across the life of this project;
- The woodchip supplier is to be locally sourced from an approved Salix/BEIS supplier.

Design of the Proposed Building

Wiltshire Core Strategy Policy 57: Ensuring high quality design and place shaping, is relevant in consideration of the application and particularly the design of any new building.

The proposed siting, layout and design of the building would relate well to the existing school buildings, particularly the existing 6th Form building, which is the latest addition to the school site. The proposed overall scale, massing and height of the single storey building would respect the domestic scale of the neighbouring residential properties. The existing and proposed hedgerows around the proposed development site would restrict views of the proposed building. As such, it is considered that the high quality design of the proposed structure would comply with the provisions of Core Strategy Policy 57 and Section 7 of the NPPF.

Air Quality

Core Strategy Policy 55: Air Quality states that "*Development proposals, which by virtue of their scale, nature or location are likely to exacerbate existing areas of poor air quality, will need to demonstrate that measures can be taken to effectively mitigate emission levels in order to protect public health, environmental quality and amenity. Mitigation measures should demonstrate how they will make a positive contribution to the aims of the Air Quality Strategy for Wiltshire and where relevant, the Wiltshire Air Quality Action Plan*".

An Air Quality Assessment has been prepared which assesses the operational impacts due to emissions from the proposed biomass boilers. The report concludes that impacts due to emissions from the boilers have been shown to be negligible. Overall, it is judged that the air quality impacts due to the operation of the biomass boilers will not be significant. This conclusion is based on the following:

- The impacts on annual mean concentrations being described as negligible where there is relevant exposure;
- Predicted total concentrations remaining well below the AQALs.

The air quality effects of the proposed development have been assessed and found to be insignificant. There should be no constraints to the use of biomass boilers at the site, with regard to air quality, as the proposed development is consistent with the relevant parts of the NPPF/PPG or Policy 55 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

Residential Amenity

Taking into consideration the low-key scale of the proposals, the existing site circumstances, and the separation between the existing dwellings and the application site, it not considered that the proposed building would adversely affect the residential amenity of nearby residents by way of loss of privacy, overbearing impact, noise, loss of sunlight or loss of daylight. Therefore, the proposals would comply with the requirements of Core Strategy CP57: Ensuring high quality design and place shaping.

Green Infrastructure

Core Strategy Policy 52: Green Infrastructure seeks to ensure the retention and enhancement of Wiltshire's green infrastructure network.

The application is supported by an Arboricultural Report which includes a survey of existing trees within the school grounds, together with an account of potential impacts to existing trees, including losses that might occur, as a result of the proposed plant building, and also the installation of the biomass pipping. The application also includes a Tree Protection Plan and a brief Arboricultural Method Statement outlining what is considered to be reasonable precautionary operational procedures and protection measures, to avoid serious harm to retained trees and noteworthy established hedges during construction activity.

The proposals will unfortunately result in the loss of a single Silver Birch tree, but it is proposed to replace this within the school grounds. Existing beech hedgerows in close proximity to the new building will be retained, and a new hedge is proposed in front of the proposed plant room to provide a landscape buffer.

As such, it is considered that the proposals will comply with the provisions of Core Strategy Policy 52.

Conclusion

The proposals represent a modest scheme to provide a sustainable energy source to the school, which will replace existing gas boilers. It is our judgement that the proposals comply with the aims and objectives of the NPPF, as well as Wiltshire Core Strategy.

If you have any questions or require any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards,



Jayne Harding BA(Hons) BTP MRTPI
Aspect360 Ltd