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Wiltshire Council

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Ref. Design & Access Statement – Willow Tree Nursery Air-Source Heat-Pump / A/C Installation, Kennet Barns, Church Lane, Mildenhall, Marlborough, SN8 2LU

INTRODUCTION

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the installation of air-source heat-pump equipment at Willow Tree Nursery, Kennet Barns, Church Lane, Mildenhall, Marlborough, SN8 2LU.

The proposal comprises the installation of four individual reversible air-source heat-pump systems providing heating and cooling to existing nursery activity and sleeping areas, including four external condenser units, internal units and associated refrigerant pipework, electrical connections, condensate drainage, localised service penetrations and making good.

The submitted A/C Strategy identifies three systems serving Sleeping Areas and one system serving an Activity Area.

The systems are required to provide effective and controllable heating to the existing nursery accommodation, while also providing cooling during warmer periods to reduce the risk of overheating and maintain appropriate internal environmental conditions for children and staff.

The site is located within the Mildenhall Conservation Area. The nursery building itself is not understood to be statutorily listed; however, Kennet Cottage, Grade II listed (NHLE 1183448), occupies a prominent position adjoining the parking courtyard in front of the nursery and facing Church Lane.

The proposal has therefore been developed as a limited intervention to the existing nursery building, with particular consideration given to the siting and visual prominence of the external equipment and its relationship with the surrounding historic environment.

The proposal does not involve a change of use, extension to the building, additional floorspace or an increase in the capacity of the nursery.

SITE AND CONTEXT

Willow Tree Nursery occupies an existing building at Kennet Barns, Church Lane, Mildenhall and is in established nursery use.

The site lies within the Mildenhall Conservation Area, and its surroundings include traditional buildings which contribute to the historic character of the area.

Of particular relevance to the application is Kennet Cottage, Grade II listed (NHLE 1183448), which is located on the corner of the parking courtyard in front of Willow Tree Nursery and faces Church Lane. The statutory list describes Kennet Cottage as a cottage probably dating from the seventeenth century, characterised by roughcast brickwork and a thatched roof.

The significance of the Conservation Area and the setting of Kennet Cottage have therefore informed the approach to the installation.

The proposed external condenser units are located on the existing flat roof of the nursery building, rather than within the parking courtyard or other external areas. This keeps the installation closely associated with the existing nursery building and avoids introducing freestanding mechanical equipment into the courtyard setting.

The proposal does not alter the established use, footprint or overall massing of the nursery building.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Planning permission is sought for the installation of:

- 4 no. external reversible air-source heat-pump condenser units;
- associated internal heating and cooling units;
- insulated refrigerant pipework;
- condensate drainage;
- electrical connections and controls;
- localised service penetrations; and
- associated making good.

The submitted A/C Strategy identifies three systems serving Sleeping Areas and one system serving an Activity Area.

Each external condenser will serve a corresponding internal heating and cooling unit. Associated services will be routed between the internal and external equipment as discreetly as practicable.

Condensate drainage will be connected to suitable existing drainage/waste points where practicable.

The four external condenser units are proposed on the existing flat roof, in the locations indicated on the submitted drawings.

The specific equipment is identified on the accompanying A/C Strategy drawing and manufacturer's technical information is submitted with the application.

DESIGN AND APPEARANCE

The installation has been designed to provide the required environmental control to the nursery spaces whilst minimising its visual impact upon the existing building and surrounding historic environment.

The external condenser units are relatively small-scale items of mechanical plant and are proposed together on the existing flat roof, rather than being distributed around the grounds or introduced as freestanding structures within the site.

The roof-mounted location keeps the equipment closely associated with the existing built form, avoids encroachment into external nursery areas and limits additional visual clutter at ground level.

It also avoids positioning the condensers within the parking courtyard in front of the nursery, which forms part of the immediate visual context of Kennet Cottage.

Associated refrigerant pipework, condensate drainage, electrical cabling and containment will be limited to that necessary for operation of the systems and routed in an orderly and discreet manner.

Service penetrations through the existing building fabric will be localised and limited to those necessary for the installation. Finishes disturbed by the works will be appropriately made good following completion.

The proposal does not involve any extension to the building, increase in floorspace or significant alteration to the existing building footprint, roof form or overall massing.

HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE AND CONSERVATION AREA

The application site lies within the Mildenhall Conservation Area, which is a designated heritage asset. The nursery building itself is not understood to be statutorily listed.

The site is also located in proximity to Kennet Cottage, Grade II listed (NHLE 1183448). The statutory list describes the building as a cottage probably dating from the seventeenth century, with roughcast brickwork, a thatched roof and surviving traditional architectural features.

Its significance derives principally from its age, surviving historic fabric, traditional architectural character and form. Its setting on Church Lane and its relationship with the surrounding buildings and spaces also contribute to the ability to appreciate its historic character.

For the purposes of this application, the principal heritage considerations are therefore the effect of the proposed works upon the character and appearance of the Mildenhall Conservation Area and upon those elements of the setting of Kennet Cottage which contribute to its significance.

The proposed development does not involve demolition, extension or alteration to the established massing or form of the nursery building. It introduces a limited number of functional building-services components required to support the continued operation and environmental performance of the existing nursery.

The condenser units are positioned together on the existing flat roof of the nursery building. This avoids introducing freestanding mechanical plant within the parking courtyard or other external spaces and keeps the equipment visually and functionally associated with the existing nursery building.

In particular, the proposal does not introduce mechanical equipment immediately around Kennet Cottage or alter the cottage itself, its distinctive thatched roof, its principal elevation towards Church Lane or its established architectural form.

Associated pipework, containment, penetrations and fixings will be rationalised and kept visually unobtrusive.

The installation is also largely reversible. The condenser units and surface-mounted services could be removed in the future without fundamental alteration to the form or character of the nursery building, with localised penetrations and fixing points capable of being made good.

The limited scale and nature of the works ensure that the historic building and townscape characteristics which contribute to the significance of Kennet Cottage and the wider Conservation Area remain readily legible.

The proposal is therefore considered to preserve the character and appearance of the Mildenhall Conservation Area and the setting and significance of Kennet Cottage, resulting in no harm to the significance of these designated heritage assets.

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The proposed systems are reversible air-source heat-pump systems providing both heating and cooling to the existing nursery accommodation.

The installation is required to provide effective and controllable heating to the nursery, as well as cooling during periods of elevated internal and external temperatures. This will improve environmental comfort for children and staff throughout the year and provide greater resilience to both cold weather and periods of overheating.

The proposal is consistent with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026), which supports improvements to the environmental performance and climate resilience of existing buildings and gives substantial weight to the benefits of drawing energy from local renewable and low-carbon sources, including heat pumps where these do not already benefit from permitted development rights.

The proposed systems deliver these environmental and climate-resilience benefits through a limited intervention to the existing building, without requiring additional floorspace or substantial alteration to the building fabric.

The proposal therefore balances the need to improve the environmental performance and continued usability of the existing nursery with the requirement to preserve the character and appearance of its Conservation Area setting and the significance of nearby heritage assets.

VISUAL AND RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

The proposed equipment is solely intended to serve the established nursery use and will not result in any increase in the scale or intensity of that use.

The proposed equipment comprises modern reversible air-source heat-pump systems providing both heating and cooling. Manufacturer's technical information for the proposed equipment is submitted with the application, with the specific units identified on the accompanying A/C Strategy drawing.

The external units will be installed in accordance with the manufacturer's requirements and incorporate appropriate anti-vibration mounting to minimise transmission of vibration to the building structure. The equipment incorporates inverter-controlled operation, allowing output to respond to heating and cooling demand rather than operating continuously at maximum capacity.

The submitted A/C Strategy identifies neighbouring properties in proximity to the nursery and shows the proposed condenser units in relation to the existing building. The roof-mounted position avoids placing mechanical equipment within existing external play and circulation areas and consolidates the equipment in a defined location associated with the nursery building.

The systems are required to provide heating as well as cooling and will operate only as necessary to maintain appropriate internal environmental conditions.

Having regard to the nature, scale, location and operational purpose of the equipment, it is considered that the proposal can be accommodated without unacceptable effects upon neighbouring amenity.

Should the Local Planning Authority consider additional control of plant noise necessary, the applicant would be willing to accept an appropriately worded condition relating to plant noise, provided that this allows the systems to fulfil their essential heating and cooling function.

ACCESS

The proposed works do not alter the existing pedestrian or vehicular access arrangements to the nursery.

No changes are proposed to entrances, parking provision or circulation routes as part of the application.

The positioning of the external condenser equipment on the existing flat roof also ensures that the proposed works do not obstruct or interfere with external pedestrian circulation or nursery play areas.

Accessibility to and within the nursery will therefore remain unchanged.

CONCLUSION

Planning permission is sought for a modest installation of reversible air-source heat-pump systems required to provide effective and controllable heating and cooling to the existing nursery accommodation.

The proposal:

- comprises four individual systems serving existing activity and sleeping areas;
- provides essential and controllable heating, improved environmental comfort and greater resilience to periods of overheating;
- positions the four external condenser units together on the existing flat roof;
- avoids introducing freestanding mechanical plant into the parking courtyard or nursery grounds;
- does not involve a change of use, building extension, additional floorspace or increased nursery capacity;
- limits alterations and penetrations to the existing building fabric; is largely reversible;
- does not affect existing access, parking or circulation arrangements;
- has been designed with particular regard to the site's location within the Mildenhall Conservation Area; and
- has considered the setting and significance of the nearby Grade II listed Kennet Cottage.

The proposed development represents an appropriate and proportionate intervention to the existing nursery building. The limited scale of the works and the considered roof-mounted location of the external equipment ensure that the installation remains subordinate to the existing built form and avoids unnecessary intervention within the external spaces surrounding the nursery.

The proposal is therefore considered to preserve the character and appearance of the Mildenhall Conservation Area and the setting and significance of Kennet Cottage, causing no harm to the significance of these designated heritage assets, whilst delivering important heating, environmental comfort and climate-resilience benefits which support the continued use of the premises as a nursery.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Mitchell. Director