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15 October 2015

Your contact is: **Steve Vigar, Planning**

Dear Mr Wilks,

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

Enquiry Reference: 150779

Address: Leighton Park School, Shinfield Road, Reading, RG2 7ED

Proposal: New music and media centre (930m2).

Thank you for your enquiry.

The following advice is in response to revised proposals received 5 October 2015, which in turn respond to the original pre-application response dated 10 July 2015.

Character and Appearance

The revised proposal appears to be far more acceptable than the previous version in heritage terms. The revised layout would create more space to the west of the Waterhouse Laboratories, retaining the Maple and forming the impression of a courtyard space between the new extension and listed buildings. This is a significant improvement on the previous proposals in terms of the setting of the listed building, and the space within which it will be experienced.

The predominantly single storey scale of the revised proposal would ensure the scale of the extension appeared subservient to the listed buildings. The previous response identified important glimpses from the west, through trees and across the northern flank of the theatre, towards the listed buildings. The single storey scale helps retain views of the upper parts of the historic buildings. The east-west views through the building referred to on the revised plans are also welcome. The success of these will depend on the detailed proposals showing sufficient glazing on both sides of the building and keeping internal walls and other obstructions to a minimum. There would appear to be an opportunity to further improve the views through by moving or reconfiguring the office and toilets shown in the foyer on the ground floor and the media/function room at first floor.

The form and appearance of the building is a significant improvement on the initial proposal. The proposal reflects the creative nature of the music and media use of the building and appears far more interesting visually. The acceptability of the proposal will depend to a great extent on the quality of materials and the finer detail and finish proposed and any future application should make these clear. The previous pre-application response suggested that the materials used should seek to reduce the apparent bulk of the building and allow views through, which will require large areas of glazing. Other materials should seek to reflect local distinctiveness and are likely to include elements used on the listed buildings (re-interpreted in a contemporary style). Brickwork is likely to be most appropriate, especially as this has strong historical ties locally. Large areas of render are likely to be less successful, especially close to trees and other shaded areas.

Trees

The new design allows for the retention of the purple Maple which is a positive improvement. However it is considered that the School Oak should be retained in some form due to its historic links with the school and its visual amenity.

It may be appropriate to provide a replacement Oak further from the existing so that it is established should the School Oak need to be removed some time in the future.

The parking to the rear of the building was raised as a concern previously due to the impact on the Cedars. Moving the parking elsewhere should be explored, possibly to the north of the Waterhouse Labs.

Parking and Transport

As advised previously, parking should be re-provided for within the school (subject to an agreed location which doesn't impact on the trees).

Any changes to the existing parking provision and access arrangements should be illustrated on the proposed plans at application stage.

The Council's Transport section also request details of how the facilities will be used or hired out outside of term time, and an explanation of how these events will be managed.

In conclusion it is considered that the proposal could now be submitted as a planning application and, subject to addressing the matters referred to above, and subject to public consultation, would be likely to be acceptable.

Please note that the advice contained within this letter, or attached report, is that of an officer of the Borough Council and is provided without prejudice to the decision of the Borough Council in the event of a formal application for planning permission.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

SDV

Steve Vigar

Principal Planning Officer