



Full Planning Application Design and Access Statement

Site address: Amersham Community Centre,
Amersham Road, Lower
Caversham, Reading RG4 5BP.

Date: 21 December 2015

Contact details

Applicants name

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Agents name

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1. Assessment of site's immediate and wider context

The design and access statement has been prepared to accompany the planning application by Reading Borough Council. The application is for an extension to the existing Amersham Community Centre.

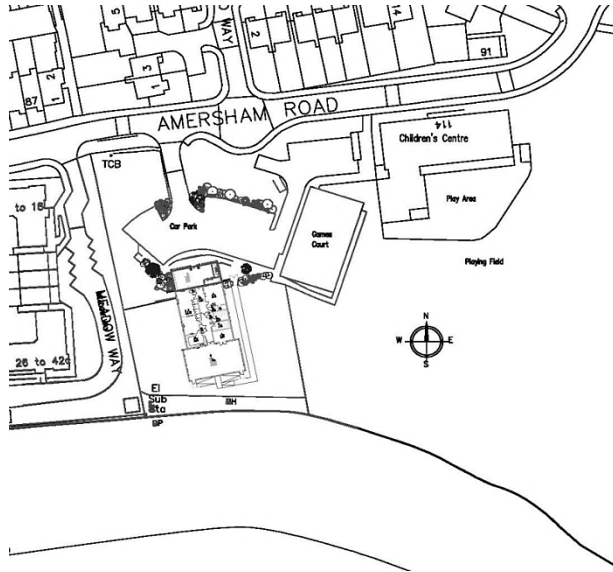
The existing community centre offers numerous community activities organised from or taking part within the centre for the benefit of the local community. Activities includes , self-help sessions, social inclusion & involvement, personal well-being, activities for young people, and physical activities for all age groups

However, the centre looks tired and the main entrance is unwelcoming and austere. The circulation spaces are confusing and visitors struggle to orientate themselves around the building.

We have therefore worked with the Community and Earley Charity to consider how we can improve the look and feel of the centre. We also recognised that the centre lacked a flexible space to welcome visitors and due to the increased participation from the community, both the service providers and customers have suggested that the Community Centre will benefit from an additional space and new facilities. A number of ideas have been discussed to include open, welcoming entrance and use of outdoor space to provide safe play facilities for the children and young people in the area.

The Community Centre is an accessible building with level access to the northern main entrance, floor at uniform level without steps and ramp to the southern exit from main hall. An existing accessible toilet is available in the building.

Existing window cills to undersized windows are at eye level for a standing person, apart from benefitting from some natural light and ventilation, visual link to external spaces is missing.



The centre is located to the south-east of the estate, which neighbours a children's centre & playing fields to the east, River Thames & Marina to the south and residential properties to the west and north.



Vehicular and pedestrian access to the centre is from Amersham Road, the main thoroughfare serving the estate. The building's presence and legibility from the main road is muted due to the low ratio of void to solid wall area.

2. Detail measures taken in respect of Community Involvement and Consultation

An article in the newsletter that reaches every home on the estate invited the residents to view and comment on suggestions for the extension.

The Proposals have been displayed at the Community Centre allowing residents to make comments by filling in the forms provided or by email.

We also ran drop-in session at the Community Centre on Saturday 5 December. A number of RBC officers were present to discuss the scheme and answer any questions.

Flood risk assessment has been commissioned since the site of the proposal is within flood zone 3.

3. Evaluation of information obtained from steps 1 and 2 above

The residents welcomed the design approach and were keen to avoid replicating the austere appearance of the existing building with small windows covered with metal grills that restricting natural light. They were keen to see an improvement to the buildings legibility. They felt that the proposal would help residents and visitors know if the building was open to the public. They also felt the works would help change people's perception of the building. Local resident feel the current design is more akin to the appearance of a corrective institution rather than a welcoming community building.

External space of linking the internal café with external deck seating area was well received by residents, as the aspect is south-west to benefit from the afternoon and evening sun, when the building will mostly be in use. Many comments have been received on improvements to this space; such as relocating the steel container to open the sightlines, providing direct access to the garden area from the decking, extending the soffit to discourage unauthorised access onto the flat roof.

The use of gabion benches received mixed views and some residents felt they were unsuitable for a community centre. The large picture windows with integral shutters to the elevations were well received and residents felt that this would open up the building to views from the street frontage.

The flood risk assessment conclusion recommends safe egress, preferably dry, for building occupants when flooding has happened or is impending. The building administration has signed up to Environmental Agency's flood warning and alert programmes for the Lower Caversham Area; and the design will incorporate flood resilient materials.

4. Design

The design approach is to completely refresh the façade. This will be achieved by obscuring the original building with a screen wall to provide a blank canvas for the projection of the new single storey extension, incorporating greater ratio of void to solid wall surface. Use of closed cell insulated wall panels will provide flood resilient material to the external wall fabric and other resilient materials will also be specified for the internal wall and floor surfaces.

Use of a flat roof to the extension will expose a greater area of the screen wall, to be clad in semi-translucent material that can be used to wash coloured LED light on to the wall surface as a means of signifying the building is open.

Change in ground level will allow for the design of a ventilated suspended floor to both the extension and the deck area for flood water containment; whilst to the east elevation a retaining wall will provide level access to the building and cycle stand at lower ground level. External ground surface leading to the entrance of the extension will be re-graded to provide a level access to the building from the car park.

4(a) Amount

The existing community centre has a net internal floor area of 374m²; the proposed single storey extension will be designed with a net internal floor area of 74m².

4(b) Layout

The proposed extension will allow for tea point and reception to the east, with central access at the north elevation and café seating/community area to the west. Circulation will be designed to allow space for wheelchair manoeuvrability. The café seating/community area will have direct link to external deck and seating area. Large picture windows will be placed on all elevations providing sightlines to external spaces; window to the east elevation will overlook the cycle stand on lower ground level and door/glazed panel to the west elevation provides access to the deck seating area.

Internal layout alteration to provide café and community centre storage to Meeting Room 00.003 and confidential meeting room to Office 00.007.

4(c) Scale

Single storey extension on the north elevation will respect the scale of the existing building.

4(d) Landscaping



Metal fencing on east of the extension to be replaced with timber and gabion panels, for a more warm and welcoming approach to the community centre. Bin store on the west facing the car park to be enclosed in timber fencing and gates.

Surface finish to level approach will also be continued into the new extension.

External lighting using low energy lamps to be incorporated into the extension soffits.

Community notice boards to be integrated into the proposed decking balustrade facing the car park approach.

4(e) Appearance

Open and welcoming building extension in contrast to the austere appearance of existing façade; achieved by use of large picture windows and modern materials.

4(f) Use

Café and community space as an extension and ancillary use to the community building.

5. Accessibility

The following publications and documents were consulted in the writing of this Statement and used as guidance in the design of the building/development:

- ✓ Disability Rights Commission Publications
- ✓ Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- ✓ Building Regulations; Approved Document M, Access to and use of buildings
- ✓ BS 8300 Design of Buildings and their Approaches to Meet the Needs of Disabled People- A Code of Practice
- ✓ RBC Disability Policy

As noted above in 4(f) Use, access to the development and access within will comply with the requirement of Approved Document M, including access and circulation to reception and access to tea point.