

Serpentine Nursery School, Buxton

New Classroom

Justification Statement

(Incorporating design and access)

Serpentine Nursery School provides full time, year round day care provision for children aged 0-5 years and also an after school club. It is one of the largest nurseries in Buxton and has the most places available for very young children (under two years).

There are currently 30 staff employed, 21 of whom are full time.

Economic Contribution

Full time day care is one of the obvious requirements for working parents and the availability of year round day full time care for young children enables many families to earn and survive. This affects not only Buxton families but also provides a necessary service for surrounding rural areas.

Serpentine is one of the larger nurseries in Buxton, as a result of which it is able to offer a flexible childcare service.

The greatest demand for places nationally and locally is for the youngest children aged 2 years and under. Many nurseries are only able to offer places for children aged three and above, which is a problem for parents needing to return to work whilst their children are younger.

The service offered by Serpentine is of particular value within the Buxton area for the following two reasons:

- It is the only nursery without Ofsted restriction on numbers of children aged two and under. This means that the provision is only restricted by the availability of space and the ability to divide and staff it accordingly.
- The nursery also provides an After School Club which picks up from Burbage and St. Anne's primary schools, enabling the wrap around childcare desired by the government and necessary to working parents.

In addition to the obvious service provided to working parents the nursery employs 30 members of staff, 21 of whom are full time. The majority of these are women and some have children of their own. This makes the nursery a valuable employer.

The nursery is based in a converted house, which is beneficial due to its central location and park-side location but it brings difficulties in terms of organising the space around the Ofsted requirements.

Ofsted sets out minimum special requirements for nursery accommodation based on square metres per child. In addition there are staffing ratio requirements. The difficulty with the domestic layout of the nursery is that each room can hold limited numbers of children and staffing needs to be dedicated to each small room as they are unable to see in to the neighbouring spaces. This makes timetabling staff difficult and less cost

effective and places limitations on the numbers of children over and above the spatial ones set out by Ofsted.

A recently approved application enables the entrance and booking in arrangements to be brought up to current standards, as well as rationalising storage, security and toilet arrangements, in line with expectations. It doesn't, however, increase the capacity, which as mentioned earlier, is restricted by the domestic layout. These changes were designed with the intention of linking them to this new classroom block which would replace the unsightly asbestos sheds which currently greet the visitor when approaching the door.

The economic advantages of a new classroom block are as follows:

- A larger open plan space can be used for a greater number of children in one room, making staffing more streamlined and supervision easier.
- The size of the classroom has been very carefully planned and designed to allow for 20 2-3 year olds, 14 babies, or 22 3-4 year olds. The income levels generated by these numbers would be sufficient to justify the additional staff required.
- The building will be super efficient in respect of energy consumption – maximising natural light and thermal efficiency. This will offset some of the difficulties faced by using the older building for the other children.
- Additional space would be freed up inside the main building, safeguarding the After School Club, which takes up slack time later in the day, but brings in a lower income level.
- This all means that up to 22 extra places are created to support local families and the After School Club can be expanded, further helping local families.
- A ten hour day, with seven staff needed for fourteen babies, five days a week generates 350 employment hours weekly, or approximately 9 full time equivalent jobs.

Overall, with job creation, support for working families and energy efficiency savings, the economic justification for the extension is very strong.

Travel and Access

The extra places will inevitably bring about additional traffic and we took the decision to consult the county highways department at an early stage. A copy of their response is annexed to this statement. As you will note they have said that highways are unlikely to object to the proposals.

The request for a travel plan is noted. We have consulted with the nursery staff and have the following comments to offer in respect of this plan.

Travel/Transport Plan

- The nursery has four car parking spaces. These would be retained.
- There is on street parking available directly opposite the nursery and as this is largely used by tourist visitors and park visitors there is generally space available at the beginning and end of the day when nursery children are dropped off.
- In addition to this the large public car park for the Pavilion Gardens is just over the road and spaces are always available.
- It is important to note that the children are dropped off and collected only and the parking is therefore required for a few minutes at a time, so that demand for spaces is never long term.
- Due to the staggered nature of the nursery sessions parking doesn't present a problem. Children are dropped off at either 8am, 8.30 or 9am and then may be collected at lunch time, after school or in fact any time up until 6pm. The numbers of attending children are divided roughly equally between morning, short day and long day sessions.
- Approximately 30% of the children are currently dropped off on foot.
- Approximately 35% of staff arrive by foot and a further 35% by public transport. Of those who arrive by car three share lifts where possible. This is taken in to consideration when staff rotas are prepared and support for lift sharing is always maintained in this way.
- Secure storage for bicycles is available and will be maintained as part of this proposal in the external store.
- The immediate area has the hotel on the corner, with a dual entrance car park, public on-street parking and a large public car park, within a short distance. The impact of nursery traffic in this picture is very limited.

- The nursery principal has confirmed that notes are sent to parents periodically asking that they consider walking to nursery where appropriate. Walk to School Day is promoted. Notes are also sent out to all new parents asking that they be respectful of neighbours when dropping off and collecting children. These notes will continue and will be expanded to provide information on public transport. Bus timetables will be made available in the lobby for information.

Access.

Serpentine nursery has been praised for its inclusive policies and the nursery is open to all children with special needs. Currently there is a level threshold to the main building and downstairs toilets.

The proposal will improve this situation further. The new entrance arrangements already improve the access to provide a wider doorway, additional lobby space for wheelchairs and circulation and central accessible toilet facilities.

The new classroom would have a level threshold with wide entrance doors and a disabled access w/c. All the facilities within the new classroom are on one level, including access to the outside play space.

Design

The design of the building balances the requirements of the conservation area, with the needs of a dynamic business, building cost considerations and Ofsted requirements.

The building is a significant improvement on the existing asbestos sheds which are pictured below.



These buildings can be seen from both Burlington Road and from the Serpentine Gardens and are quite unsightly.

We have designed a simple gabled building. The principal public elevations are in stone and it is covered with a pitched tiled roof to match the main building.

The new building would have the appearance of a separate pavilion within the gardens, so that it avoids creating a large mass. It is further broken down in scale with the main gable set behind a small 'offshot' gable creating a more domestic scale appearance.

The building would also be set down at rear garden level, which is considerably lower than the main house and as such it would be very discreet in height and scale when viewed from the road.

The only opening visible in the road elevation is a small circular window at high level which echoes a detail on the main house and gives the impression of a coach house in the grounds.

The elevation facing the hotel is also in stone and has no openings whatsoever.

Facing the park we have reduced the height of the building with a very simple storage offshot and propose to put a turf roof on this, so that when viewed from the park the greenness of the landscape appears to continue unbroken in to the garden.

We have taken the opportunity with the garden elevation to be a little more imaginative and child friendly. We propose to face this elevation in natural timber cladding and to continue the roof down to create a covered canopy. The overall impression is pavilion like and appropriate to the garden and park setting, but some playful details have been added in the form of the round windows, some of which are at low levels to enable the very small children to look at while playing at floor level.

The building is linked to the main entrance lobby with a canopy. This is important in fulfilling several functions:

- Firstly it enables parents children and staff to access the new separate building from the main lobby without getting wet.
- Secondly it provides temporary dry storage for buggies when being used to take the children across to the park which generally takes place twice a day.
- Finally Ofsted revised guidelines state that outside play should be made available daily with the same spatial requirements per child. Given that the nursery is in Buxton and at the mercy of the local climate it is vital that this external space is covered. The canopy provides covered play space of 29m² which allows for 8 children to play outside at any one time. This coincides with the grouping size the nursery operates for all activities.

Whilst all the public elevations are discreet and use local materials we would like to take the opportunity to introduce some colour in to the garden elevation with painted windows. The canopy would similarly be an attractive feature and the support posts will be used by the children for swinging, weaving between and running around.

Pre-Application Discussion.

A recent application was made for the alterations to the entrance and some internal changes to the main building. During the course of the consultation for this we discussed the intention to apply for a new classroom block in the garden. The officer, Sue Ashworth received the idea favourably and offered her opinion that the classroom should be a separate building and should not take up more than half of the garden. We have taken on board these comments in full.

In addition, as already discussed in the Transport and Access section we have consulted the highways department.

Summary.

This is a very carefully designed and detailed building which presents a discreet face to all public views, sensitive to its location, whilst at the same time providing an interesting and child friendly design appropriate for a nursery. It would represent a considerable improvement on the existing sheds.

The size and layout of the building have been carefully planned to meet the specific needs of Ofsted, both internally and externally and to be practical and affordable for the business to develop.

We have taken on board the comments of both planners and highways as well as Ofsted and parents in generating the design.

The new classroom would make this vital nursery provision more flexible and responsive to local childcare needs, more viable and on a sound economic footing and would create a considerable number of new local jobs.