

**KEY INFORMATION**

**Ward** Strathmartine

**Proposal**

Change of use from Primary School to Class 4 office use including minor external repair works and associated works for car parking and secure cycle racking

**Address**

Downfield Primary School  
East School Road, Dundee

**Applicant**

Economic Development  
Department  
Dundee City Council  
3 City Square  
Dundee DD1 3BA

**Agent**

City Architects  
Dundee City Council  
Floors 11/12  
Tayside House  
Dundee DD1 3RQ

**Registered** 15 Dec 2009

**Case Officer** D Gordon



# Proposal for Council Offices in Former Downfield Primary School

A change of use from Primary School to Class 4 office use is **RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL subject to conditions**. Report by Director of Planning and Transportation

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is concluded that the proposals are in accordance with the requirements of Policy 66B (Protection of Other Open Space) and Policy 68 (Dual Use of Open Space Provision within School Grounds) of the Dundee Local Plan Review 2005. There are no material considerations of sufficient weight to justify the refusal of the application contrary to the provisions of the Development Plan. The application is therefore recommended for **APPROVAL** subject to conditions.

**SUMMARY OF REPORT**

- Permission is sought to convert the main building of the former Downfield Primary School to Class 4 office accommodation for the City Council. The proposals also involve the use of the playground for associated off street car parking (35 spaces) and minor external alterations to the building.
- The statutory neighbour notification procedure has been undertaken and the proposals have been advertised in the local press as "Development Potentially Contrary to the Development Plan". Three letters of representation from neighbouring properties have been submitted. These residents have not objected to the proposed use of the building but have sought clarification on several aspects of the proposed development. These matters have, at the time of writing, been discharged through correspondence with the residents in question.
- It is concluded that the use of the property for office related purposes is in accordance with the relevant land use policies of the development plan. There are no material considerations, including the approved Site Planning Brief for the school and the submitted representations, of such a weight that would justify refusal of the application contrary to the provisions of the development plan.
- The application is recommended for approval subject to conditions.

## DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The application seeks permission to convert the former Downfield Primary School to Class 4 office accommodation for the Information Technology Department of Dundee City Council.

The proposal will mainly involve internal alterations to create new office space including the removal of non-load bearing walls, new reception area, upgrading light systems/ alarm systems and the provision of disabled toilet facilities. A total of 720m<sup>2</sup> of net floor space is to be created to accommodate up to 79 staff.

Minor repairs to the external fabric of the building are also proposed. In addition, the lower sections of the upper floor windows are to be frosted in order to preserve the privacy of residents located to the north of the site.

Vehicular access into the site is to be taken from the existing opening on Bank Avenue. The existing gates are to be retained and will be locked at the end of each day, at week-ends and during public holidays. A total of 35 off street car parking spaces are to be provided (27 staff, 5 visitor and 3 disabled) within the curtilage of the property.

Existing pedestrian accesses on both the Bank Avenue and East School Road frontages are to be retained.

It is proposed that the premises will normally be occupied during office hours from 8.00am - 6.00pm.

## SITE DESCRIPTION

The site is bounded by Strathmartine Road to the east, East School Road to the north and Bank Avenue to the west. Residential properties are located to the south side of the site.

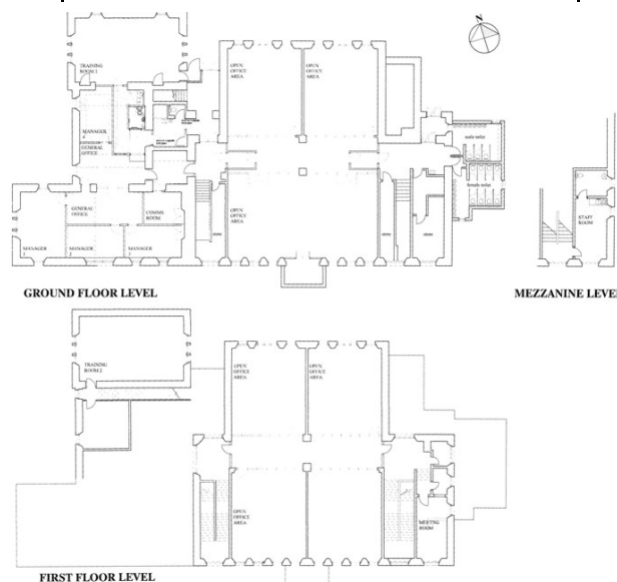
The site forms part of a primary school campus that is split across two sites either side of East School Road. The site under consideration forms the southern part of the campus and accommodates the main school building which is a two storey Victorian stone built property with a

pitched slate roof. The school has a hard surface playground located to the east and south of the main building and the property is bounded by stone walls. The building is not listed but is distinctive and its prominent corner



location adds to the character of the surrounding area.

Vehicular access into the site is taken from Bank Avenue to the west by means of a 4 metre wide access with a metal gate. Pedestrian access is also taken from Bank Avenue and East School Road to the north.



The surrounding area is predominantly residential in character.

## POLICY BACKGROUND

### Dundee and Angus Structure Plan 2001-2016

There are no policies relevant to the determination of this application.

### Dundee Local Plan 2005

The following policies are of relevance:

Policy 1: Vibrant and Sustainable Communities - the City Council will promote vibrant communities, encouraging the development of an appropriate range of services and facilities close to and within housing areas. New development should be in accordance with other policies in the Plan and seek to minimise any affect on the environmental quality enjoyed by local residents by virtue of design, layout,

parking and traffic movement issues, noise or smell.

Policy 66B: Protection of Other Open Space - there will be a presumption against the development or redevelopment of all other open space within the Local Plan area unless:

- a the broad principles of criteria listed in Policy 66A are satisfied; or
- b the proposals are consistent with a park masterplan, strategy or programme approved by the Council to improve the management of open space."

Policy 68: Dual Use Of Open Space Within School Grounds - the Council supports the opening up of outdoor space in school grounds for community use, particularly in areas of deficiency for outdoor sport, recreation and play as identified in Supplementary Guidance.

### Scottish Planning Policies, Planning Advice Notes and Circulars

There are no statements of Government policy relevant to the determination of this application.

Non Statutory Statements of Council Policy

Site Planning Brief - Downfield Primary School (March 2008).

SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

The proposal involves the re-use of a former primary school for Class 4 office purposes. The amount of conversion works to be undertaken are relatively minimal and consequently, it is considered that there are no specific sustainability policy implications arising from this application.

SITE HISTORY

There is no recent history of planning applications that are of relevance to the determination of this application.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The statutory neighbour notification procedure has been undertaken. In addition, the proposals were advertised in the local press as 'Development Potentially Contrary to the Development Plan'.

At the date of writing, representations have been received from 3 adjacent occupiers.

One occupier raised a number of questions relating to the layout of the car parking spaces, ownership/ maintenance of a boundary wall, clarification of the use of the existing vehicular access and gates on Bank Avenue and the hours of operation of the offices.

A second resident, while not objecting to the principle of the use, raised concerns about the potential overlooking of her dwelling by any of the future occupants of the new accommodation, particularly if the premises were to be used in the evenings or week-ends.

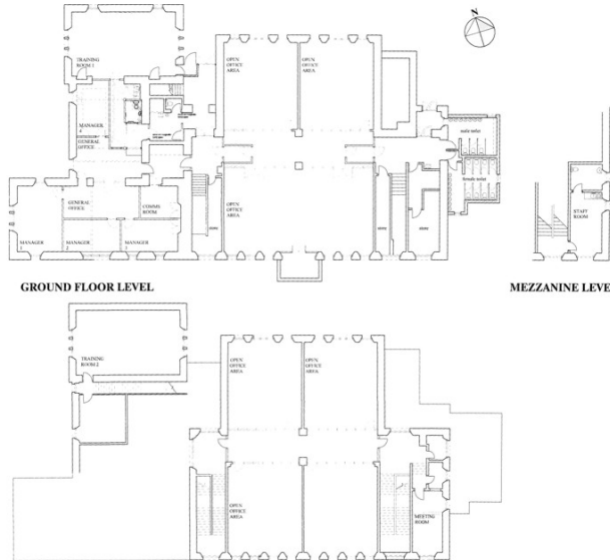
A third resident has concerns about the condition of the roof of one of the sheds in the playground.

Members will already have had access to the above representations and it is intended to comment on the various

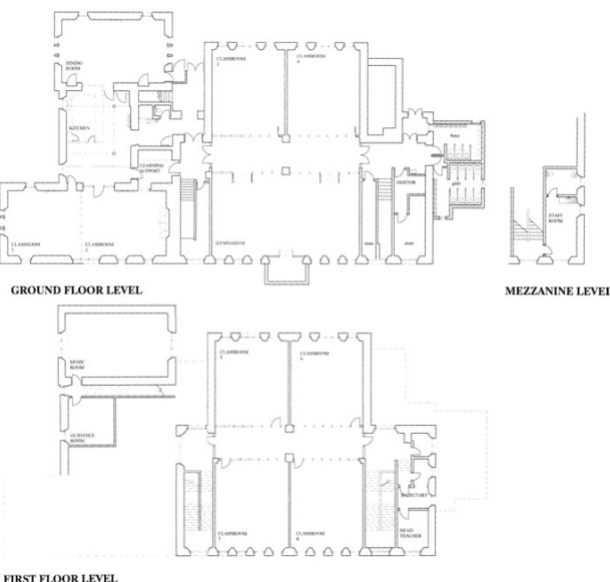
issues raised in the "Observations" section of this report below.

CONSULTATIONS

The Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards has advised that, taking into account the residential character of the surrounding area, a



condition should be attached to any permission granted that requires that the total noise from all mechanical and electrical plant shall not exceed NR 35 as measured 1 metre external to the facade of adjacent residential accommodation.



OBSERVATIONS

Statutory Requirements

In accordance with Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 the Committee is required to consider:

- a whether the proposals are consistent with the provisions of the development plan; and if not
- b whether an exception to the provisions of the development plan is justified by other material considerations.

The Development Plan

The provisions of the development plan relevant to the determination of this application are specified in the Policy background section above

The proposal under consideration involves changing the use of the main building and playground area of a former primary school to Class 4 office accommodation with associated car parking for the City Council. Internal and minor external alterations to the premises are proposed. A detailed breakdown of the development is outlined in the 'Description of Proposal' section of this report above.

Policy 1 of the Dundee Local Plan Review 2005 supports vibrant communities and encourages the development of a range of services and facilities close to and within housing areas. These new developments should seek to be in accordance with other policies in the Plan and should seek to minimise any affect on the environmental quality enjoyed by local residents by virtue of design, layout, parking and traffic movement issues, noise or smell. It is considered that there are no issues relating to layout or smell associated with this proposal.

With regard to design, it is proposed to re-use existing premises for new office accommodation. The retention of the building is welcomed as its prominent location and appearance plays an important role in the character of the neighbourhood. The external works proposed are mainly minor repairs to the building and it is concluded that these will not adversely impact on the environmental qualities of the local area. It is also intended to provide frosted film on the lower panes of the upstairs windows in order to prevent any overlooking of adjacent residential properties from the new accommodation.

With regard to parking and traffic movement issues, the operation of the building as an office will result in reduced vehicle trips during peak times in comparison to its previous use as a school. With the provision of on site parking as part of the proposals, it is anticipated that on-street parking should be less than that generated as a school which had no on-site parking provision. In addition and to further mitigate on street parking, the applicants advice that a Travel Plan is to be prepared to encourage a reduction on staff reliance on single occupancy car use for commuting. The Plan will have regard to staff commuting survey data and incorporate such practices as car sharing registers and advice and information on public transport. The site is also well served by public transport with an 8 minute service frequency from Travel Dundee and a 30 minute service from Strathtay buses. Facilities for staff cycling to work will be encouraged by provision of secure bike racking and washing and changing facilities. The applicants have submitted a Transport Statement in support of the application.

It is intended that there will little or no alterations to the electrical and mechanical services within the site and consequently, there should be no increase in noise from the use proposed. However, it is intended to attach a condition to any permission granted that requires that total noise from all mechanical and electrical plant shall not exceed NR35 as measured 1 metre external to the facade of adjacent residential accommodation.

It is concluded from above that the proposal is consistent with the requirements of Policy 1 of the Plan.

Policy 66B (Protection of Other Open Space) and Policy 68 (Dual Use of Open Space within School Grounds)

These policies generally presume against the development or redevelopment of open space and support the opening up of outdoor space in school grounds for community use, particularly in areas of deficiency for outdoor sport, recreation and play.

The former playground of the school is located to the south and the east side of the main building. The ground is flat and is finished in a hard surface. The proposal is to utilise this land for off

street car parking (35 spaces) associated with the new office use. The ground attached to the former school building is very limited in size and scale, consists entirely of hard standing and it is not located in an area considered to have a deficiency for outdoor sport. Consequently its loss would not impact on the open space provision in the local area.

In addition a Site Planning Brief for Downfield Primary School was approved by Dundee City Council in March 2008. This supports the loss of the playground as open space provision by indicating that, while not listed, there was some merit in the existing school building and that it was worthy of retention, most likely for conversion to residential use. This Brief did not rule out other uses being provided within the site. It should be noted that SportsScotland were consulted during the preparation of this Brief and raised no objections to the proposals.

It is concluded from the foregoing that the proposal complies with the provisions of the development plan.

### Other Material Considerations

The other material considerations to be taken into account are as follows:

- 1 Site Planning Brief - the primary school operated on this site with 246 pupils and between 25 - 30 staff prior to its closure in July 2008, as part of the Dundee school rationalisation programme. In this respect, a Site Planning Brief for the site was prepared as supplementary planning guidance to the Dundee Local Plan Review 2005. The intention of the Brief (March 2008) is not to prescribe how the school site should be developed but to set clear guidelines which will ensure the successful sustainable redevelopment of the site. The Brief identifies housing being the prevailing use in the surrounding area and consequently a preferred use for the site through either a conversion of the existing building or its demolition and a redevelopment of the site. SportsScotland were consulted with regard to the loss of the playground and did not offer objections to the proposals.

While the Brief identifies housing as being a preferred option, it does not specifically prescribe against the use of the site for alternative uses. In this respect, it is considered that as Class 4 office accommodation, by virtue of its characteristics, is generally acceptable within residential areas the re-use of the building for such purposes would not be prejudicial to the terms of the approved Brief. In addition, the proposal does retain the two storey stone building on the site which, due to its prominent location and visual dominance, plays an important role in the character of the area.

- 2 Representations - a representation from an adjacent residential property to the north advised that while in principle there were no objections to the use of the building as an office, concerns were expressed about the potential for overlooking of her property from the new accommodation. The applicants have been made aware of this matter and have proposed that the lower window panes of the upper floor windows be made opaque in order to prevent any loss of privacy for the adjacent properties.

A neighbouring property owner to the south of the site, while not objecting to the application, has sought clarification on several aspects of the new use, in particular access and car parking arrangements, ownership of an adjoining wall and the operational hours of the building. A letter fully responding to the various matters that were raised was sent to the resident on 13 January 2009 and there has been no further correspondence on this matter since that time.

A neighbouring property to the east has raised an issue about the condition of a shed roof located within the playground. This matter will be dealt with outwith the consideration of this application.

It is concluded from the foregoing that insufficient weight can be accorded to the material considerations such as to justify the refusal of planning permission contrary to the provisions

of the development plan. It is therefore recommended that planning permission be granted with conditions.

### Design

The works associated with the proposed change of use are relatively minor in nature and will not adversely affect the character or the appearance of the existing building or the setting of the surrounding area.

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### CONCLUSION

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The proposal involves changing the use of a former primary school to office accommodation for Dundee City Council. The use of the property for the purposes proposed and the alterations associated with the development will have no detrimental impact on either the environmental qualities currently enjoyed by the surrounding occupiers or the appearance or character of the building.

It is considered that the proposals are consistent with the aspirations of the relevant policy considerations of the Development Plan and the approved Site Planning Brief for the site.

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### RECOMMENDATION

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It is recommended that consent be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be commenced within five years from the date of this permission.
- 2 The total noise from all mechanical and electrical plant shall not exceed NR35 as measured 1 metre external to the facade of adjacent residential accommodation.
- 3 That prior to the first use of the building for office use, details of the treatment to the lower panes of the upper floor windows shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the planning authority. For the avoidance of doubt, the treatment to the windows shall be carried in accordance with such approved details prior to the first occupation of the property.
- 4 That any future alterations to the layout of the car parking spaces within the site shall be carried out only in accordance with details

that have been submitted to and approved in writing by the planning authority.

- 5 Prior to the commencement of use, a comprehensive Travel Plan, that sets out proposals for reducing dependency on the private car shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the planning authority. The Travel Plan shall identify measures to be implemented, the system of management, monitoring, review and reporting, and the duration of the plan.

### Reasons

- 1 To comply with Section 58 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997.
- 2 In order to protect local residents from any unacceptable noise generated from the mechanical or electrical plant within the application site.
- 3 In order to prevent any significant overlooking of the adjacent residential properties from the building the subject of this application.
- 4 In order to protect the environmental qualities of the adjacent residential properties and in order to ensure that safe and adequate manoeuvring and parking spaces are available within the site to serve the development.
- 5 To be consistent with the requirements of SPP 17: Planning for Transport.