

Bronte School
Mayfield
7, Pelham Road
Gravesend
Kent
DA11 0HN

Revised B - 20th April 2023

Gravesham Borough Council - Planning

Application for Consent (Reference PP-11865134)

Development of the Car Park of Bronte School

Design and Access Statement

Introduction

Situated on the north-west side of Pelham Road, Gravesend, Bronte School is an independent preparatory school for boys and girls, aged from 3 to 11. There are around 150 children in the School, in 8 classes, from Kindergarten to Year 6.

The premises of Bronte Nursery, the sister setting of Bronte School, are located at 21, Pelham Road.

The School's premises comprise a single, three storey building, which dates from 1875. It is one of the first concrete buildings built in the UK. There is a more modern conservatory attached on the north-west side of the building. The building and the conservatory are Grade 2 listed (Historic England List Entry Number 1376500).

The School site also comprises a front garden, a rear play area/garden and, to the south-west a car park. The car park provides spaces for a minibus, and visitors and staff. Parents can use the school park if they need to visit during the day.

Use of the car park by parents is not permitted for drop-off and pick-up at the beginning and end of the school day. At these times, a few parents sometimes leave cars briefly on nearby Pelham Road single yellow lines, but the vast majority use the car park of the next-door Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Bishop and the members of the church very kindly allow this usage, and this is something for which we are extremely grateful. Having parked, parents enter the School at the car park entrance, and walk through the car park, to the drop-off and pick-up area at the northern end.

The proposed development, for which planning consent is here sought, is the conversion of around 60% of the car park into an attractive, landscaped sports/play area, the remaining 40% being retained for parking.

Background

The School currently has limited land of its own available for sport and play. The play/garden area at the rear is used mainly by younger children. Older ones make use of the adjacent tennis courts, to the north-west. These are owned by neighbouring Mayfield School. By permission of Mayfield's Governors and Headmistress, Bronte children use the courts on a daily basis for play and sports. Much gratitude is owed to Mayfield School for helping Bronte School in this way. A small rent is paid.

Mayfield is a successful school which is growing in numbers. This does mean that there is an increased need for Mayfield to make use of the courts. Bronte's use has continued at a more or less constant level, and the Headmistress and staff of Mayfield have been most supportive in minimising potential problems. Even so, pressure on the courts may well increase and it would naturally be very helpful if Bronte could access its own space for sport/play and thereby reduce usage of the courts.

Extensive searches have been conducted for land close by, although to date this has been successful. Attention has been turned to the car park, therefore, and the idea of converting some or all of that space.

Another factor in the proposal is the attractiveness of the western side of the Bronte School site. This is covered more in the Heritage Statement. At present, the garden School's areas are pleasant, attractive outside spaces, with recently planted plants and trees. The car park, while functional, is not at all attractive, with wire mesh fencing on two of the sides. It has no trees or shrubs. Parents have to walk through the car park each day, often with younger siblings, for drop-off and pick-up. The intention is to create a much more pleasing and inviting space for parents and young children, including wildlife-friendly trees, shrubs and flowers.

The proposed plan therefore has twin objectives: to establish the School's own sports/play area and, in doing so, also to convert the car park as a whole into a pleasant landscaped area, with separate parking and sport/play areas.

The Proposal in More Detail

Staff Parking

The proposed conversion of around 60% of the car park reduces spaces from current 28 (plus minibus) to 9 (plus minibus, plus two visitor spaces). These spaces will be used by administrative staff (caretaker etc) and senior staff.

There is a net loss of 19 spaces. There is no contractual requirement to provide parking for staff, although the School and Nursery are keen to assist staff where possible. Various options are available, especially as the School is on the edge of the central town area, and is close to the bus hub and to the railway station. Some rented spaces may also be available reasonably close by.

As a result of this proposed development, there will be loss of convenience for staff parking, but this is felt to be outweighed by the significant and wide-ranging benefits of the proposals, namely a new sport/play area for the children, a much more attractive western area of the School, and a car-free, attractive waiting area for parents.

Access

Access to and from the car park will be unchanged, insofar as vehicles and pedestrians will still use the car park's existing vehicle and pedestrian gates. Given the smaller number of spaces, vehicle usage of the car park gates will be significantly reduced, which will be of benefit to parents and other pedestrians.

The car park is also used by visitors and for deliveries. It is not anticipated that access for either category will change:

Visitors. The car park does become full during the day. There are currently no dedicated visitor spaces, because only very rarely have there been instances where visitors could not find a space. Under these proposals, nonetheless, the intention is to establish two dedicated visitor spaces.

Deliveries. Vehicles for most School deliveries currently either use the School car park or briefly park on Pelham Road. Food deliveries to the School (2 - 3 times per week) are made to a side door on the south-west side. Currently delivery vehicles can park right outside the door. Under the proposals, the vehicles would be able to park around 3m from the door. Given that the food containers are all portable, it is not anticipated that this additional distance will represent a significant change.

Sports Facility; Access to Mayfield

The sport/play area would be marked out for multi-use. It is relatively small but very suitable for primary-age children's sports, as well as for practices for older children. With the latter in mind, Bronte has said that Mayfield pupils could have use of the facility, possibly with a dedicated gate for easy access.

Parental Drop-off and Pick-up

For drop-off and pick-up, parents (having parked in the church car park if they come by car, which approximately 85% do) walk along the car park space and approach the children's gate to the School, situated at the north corner of the car park. Apart from Kindergarten and Reception parents (who have special passes), parents cannot enter the School by the children's gate. Drop-off is generally quite a brief event, parents arriving and leaving quickly ...but at pick-up, they tend to congregate as they await the children. Teachers recognise parents and hand over the children individually. The 'handover line' when responsibility passes from School to parent (and vice versa) is thus the line of the children's gate.

Under the proposals, the handover line will be the same as now, but with no gate. There will additionally be an (attractive, wooden) gate adjacent to the School building, between the car park and the sport/play area. This will be 'policed' at drop-off and pick-up, as an additional verification that each child is properly accompanied.

A key part of this proposal is to establish a much more attractive and welcoming environment for parents at drop-off and pick-up, both very significant daily events for the school community, when a great variety of positive personal interactions occur. What is sought is an attractive, safe area, well-landscaped, with wildlife-friendly trees, shrubs and flower, inviting seating, and clearly defined boundaries. The sport/play area will also be used for parental drop-off and pick-up, and is designed with those aims clearly in mind.

Boundaries

Boundaries are intended to provide attractive natural screening, opportunities for seating, and also for landscaped beds for plants, in such a way as is compatible with the use of the sport/play area. A higher mesh structure additionally is in place to prevent balls from flying over into the car park or into Mayfield land. By providing brick-bounded beds for plants and for the base (clad with hardwood) for bench seating, there is the opportunity for a natural feel, reflecting local with local Victorian brickwork. This will be explored in more detail in the Heritage Statement.

The ownership of the current mesh fences is not clear, but the Headmistress of Mayfield has said that she is happy for Bronte to replace the fences. We have said that we will share designs with her, to check whether she has any recommendations or objections.

Lighting

There is a need for lighting in both areas of the proposed new car park:

New parking area. The new parking area will require lighting of a similar nature to that currently used for the whole car park. The new lighting will comprise some low level lighting (lights mounted on posts of height around 1m) and some medium level floodlighting (lights mounted on wall of School building, of height around 4m).

New sports/play area. The area will be used at times, mainly early evening in weekdays, when, in the winter months, lighting will be needed. This lighting will comprise some low level lighting (lights mounted on posts of height around 1m) and some higher level floodlighting (lights mounted on mast-type towers, of height around 8- 10m). It should be noted that, given the smaller area of the new sports area, the lighting towers will be smaller and lower than the towers currently in place to light the Mayfield tennis courts.

Summary

The proposal will result in a more attractive parking area, albeit smaller, behind which there will be a new landscaped, sports/play area, with plantings of wildlife-friendly trees, shrubs and flowers, which will double as a welcoming, car-free parental drop-off/pick-up area. There is loss of staff parking capacity, but the School will gain its own dedicated sports pitch, and a valuable additional area for the children.

April 2023