

**ITEM NO.**

5

**COMMITTEE DATE:**

06/09/2010

**APPLICATION NO:**

10/0556/03

FULL PLANNING PERMISSION

**APPLICANT:**

Mr P Harding

South Western Ambulance Service

**PROPOSAL:**

Ambulance dispatch point with portacabin, fence and associated works adjacent to substation

**LOCATION:**

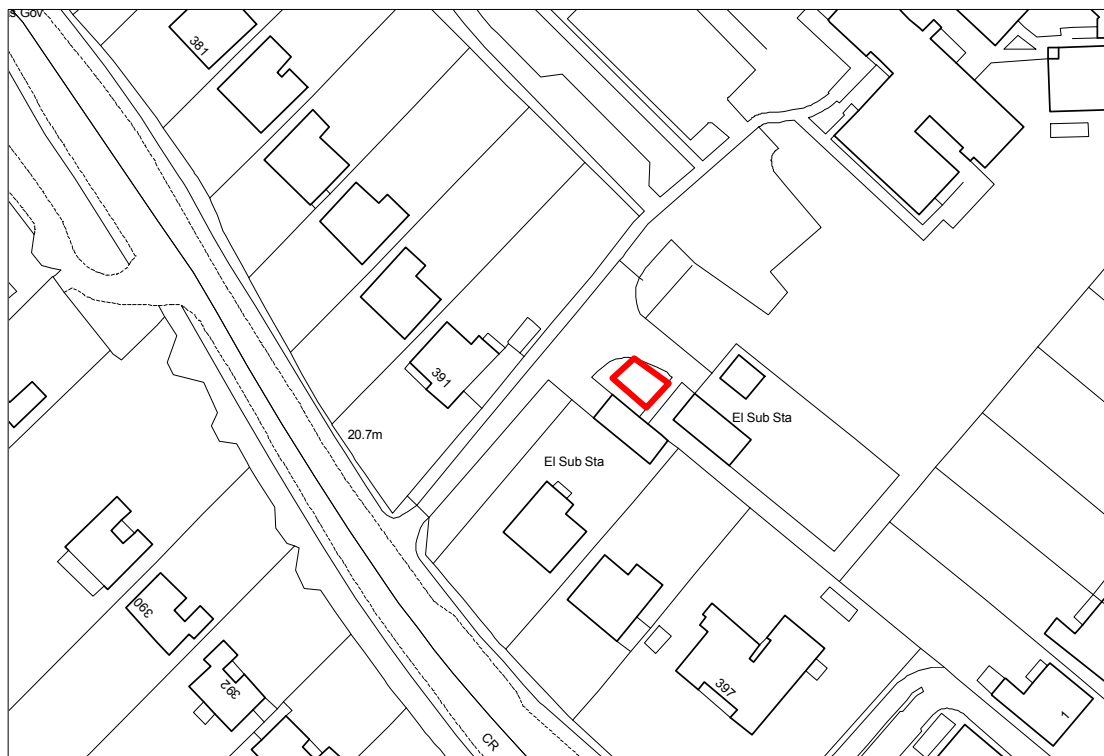
West of England School, Topsham Road, Exeter, EX2 4NF

**REGISTRATION DATE:**

17/06/2010

**EXPIRY DATE:**

12/08/2010



Scale 1:1250

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## **HISTORY OF SITE**

No directly relevant history.

## **DESCRIPTION OF SITE/PROPOSAL**

The application site comprises a small area of grass verge within the West of England School complex. It is situated next to an existing Western Power electricity sub-station with frontage to the secondary/rear access to the school which emerges onto Topsham Road approx 120 metres back from the Countess Wear roundabout.

The proposal comprises the stationing of a portacabin building measuring 7.2 metres long by 3 metres wide on the grassed area in connection with the use of the land as an Ambulance dispatch point. The portacabin would provide rest facilities for the ambulance staff in the form of a WC and small kitchen/rest area. The site could potentially be used for the stationing of an ambulance 24 hours a day 7 days a week. In association with the proposal fencing would be erected along the access road, and between the site and the remainder of the school complex, in order to prevent conflict between the use of the site for ambulance dispatch and visually impaired pupils of the school.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE APPLICANT**

The application is accompanied by a Design and Access statement. This outlines the nature of the existing site and the proposal. The proposal is justified as follows:-

The operation of the Ambulance Service is under pinned by a nationally agreed NHS target of reaching a patient within 8 minutes of receiving an alert call. The current quantity and position of Ambulance Stations do not permit this target to be easily reached without standby ambulances parked in a number of strategically placed roadside points from where they can be more quickly dispatched to a call. Invariably these dispatch points can be at roadside lay-bys and car parks etc. These places do not always have suitable welfare facilities for Ambulance paramedics whilst they wait for the next call and it has become necessary to develop partnerships with local businesses or organisations to share their facilities. This development involves the use of one such area of land within the West of England school's boundary. It is proposed to position a portable building of nominal size 7.2 x 3mtr wide x 2.8 mtrs high onto a grassland area adjacent to the rear access road and approx 50 metres from its Topsham Road entrance.

The cabin will be positioned adjacent to existing vegetation so as to pose minimal visual impact from nearby private dwellings. Access to the cabin will be via a short hard pathway and low steps and is expected to be used only by able bodied staff and will not be open to the general public. The internal layout consists of 22 sq mtr area comprising a WC, kitchen and rest area. The external panel finish will be in Goosewing grey (10A05) with Heritage green (RAL6002) to trims and door with white UPVC double glazed windows.

A low fence (1.2 metres high) is to be installed alongside the raised pavement to protect the school's visually impaired students from coming into conflict with emergency vehicles. The ambulance vehicle will be parked in an agreed position from where it can easily access the Topsham Road highway. The gates will be auto powered to permit opening of the gates in advance of the vehicle's approach and will automatically close once the vehicle has passed through. re-entry will be via a digital key pad.

The Exeter district to be served by this development is principally to the East of the access road and consequently approx 90% of the emergency vehicles will not be turning across the traffic but will be travelling left onto Topsham Road. It is proposed to request of the Highways Department that yellow box marking be laid to the entrance and the carriage way to further mitigate any traffic disruption.

To ensure that additional noise and nuisance are eliminated all emergency vehicles leaving the premises will be instructed not to use their blue lamps or sirens until after they have reached the highway. Also an external vehicle charger will be installed to the cabin which will ensure no vehicle is required to be left with its engine running for purposes of charging on-board equipment.

The proposed scheme primarily enables South Western Ambulance Service to more effectively serve the community surrounding the Countess Wear area of Exeter. As a bonus the scheme also encourages a working partnership with a local charity organisation. This will consequently offer additional opportunities for physically disadvantaged children to engage with one of the local emergency services thereby reducing their own personal anxieties while assisting in improving their general perception of local health care provision.

### **Further Information**

Following the receipt of representations a series of further questioned were asked to clarify the nature of the proposal and the background behind the selection of this site.

The applicant has subsequently confirmed that this application is not part of a systematic roll-out of satellite ambulance stationing points but represents a one-off answer to the particular issue of service delivery in the Eastern area of the City. In terms of the site selection process it has been confirmed that this was governed by the need to site an ambulance within a

limited geographical area based on historical data relating to the exact location of emergency calls over the previous 12/24 month period. In this case this was defined as being within a half mile radius of Countess Wear roundabout. The applicant states that it was concluded that the application site was on the correct side of the highway and afforded a clear exit onto Topsham Road, whilst also having enough infrequently used land to accommodate their operational needs. The building is temporary in nature as a third party constructing a permanent building on their land would not have been acceptable to the school, and a temporary building allows quicker response to changing operational requirements. The applicant has confirmed that the use would be required on a permanent basis 24hrs a day 7 days a week, but would only be expected to accommodate a single vehicle at any one time.

The applicant has also stressed the following -

"Local residents can be assured that resources using any proposed facility at this location would arrive and deploy using audible and visual warning systems only when required. Obviously their use would be minimal during the more unsocial hours.

As our resources have no specific despatch point in the immediate vicinity of this location they are currently forced to remain in their vehicles often with engines running. A more structured facility would be appropriately sound proofed and would have the ability for the vehicle to be placed on charge, negating the need for the engines to remain running."

### **REPRESENTATIONS**

10 letters of objection have been received raising the following concerns:

- inappropriate location
- overlooking/loss of privacy
- noise/light/traffic pollution
- poor visibility at entrance/exit due to hedges and existing road signs
- conflict between use of access and busy pedestrian and cycle route crossing site
- impact on traffic congestion and highway safety arising from new road markings such as a 'no waiting' box
- existence of more suitable sites e.g Middlemoor
- lack of pre-application consultation with neighbours
- incorrect site plan (since which a revised site plan has been submitted, and re consultation taken place)
- absence of tree survey/notice to landowners
- safety of visually impaired pupils
- presence of medical supplies as magnet for unsavoury/criminal behaviour
- suggestion that proposal provides opportunities for children to engage with emergency services means it goes beyond mere stationing of an ambulance and that this would exacerbate impact

### **CONSULTATIONS**

County Director of Environment, Economy and Culture - This application is to provide an ambulance dispatch point with portacabin, fence and associated works adjacent to the substation at West of England School, Topsham Road, Exeter. To meet nationally agreed response time targets this site has been identified as an ambulance dispatch point to minimise the need for ambulances to park on the highway at strategic locations in this area of the City. This dispatch point proposes to utilise the existing emergency access that serves the West of England School and College and a Western Power Distribution Sub-station. Visibility from and of emerging vehicles at the access to Topsham Road is considered adequate to accommodate the type and frequency of vehicles that the proposed use is likely to attract. It is also considered essential that the emergency access to the school and turning area are maintained unobstructed at all times in the interest of public safety and a condition to provide and maintain these facilities is recommended."

## **PLANNING POLICIES/POLICY GUIDANCE**

Central Government Guidance  
PPS1 - Delivering Sustainable Development  
PPG13 - Transport

Devon County Structure Plan 2001-2016  
ST1 - Sustainable Development  
ST10 - Exeter Principle Urban Area  
CO6 - Quality of New Development  
TR10 - Strategic Road Network and Roadside Service Areas

Exeter Local Plan First Review 1995-2011  
T1 - Hierarchy of Modes  
DG1 - Objectives of Urban Design

## **OBSERVATIONS**

The main planning considerations in respect of this proposal relate to its visual impact, the relationship to surrounding properties and the school, and highway matters.

### Visual Impact

The site of the proposed portacabin, and associated hard standing area for the ambulance is not readily visible from public vantage points outside the school complex. It would be set largely behind an existing electricity substation and to some degree screened from view of immediately surrounding properties by vegetation. In this context the visual impact of the proposal is considered to be minimal and acceptable from a planning perspective.

### Relationship to surrounding properties

There are two main aspects to the potential impact of this development upon the amenities of the occupants on surrounding properties. These are a) the physical impact of the building itself and b) the impact of the use of the building in terms of potential overlooking and activity associated with its use.

Given the small size of the building proposed, the existing vegetation, presence of surrounding buildings, and distance of the structure from the immediate neighbouring properties it is not considered that the building would have any significant impact on those properties in terms of being overbearing or resulting in overshadowing.

Given the above it is not considered that the position of fenestration on the portacabin, or the proposed use of it, would result in any significant overlooking, and hence loss of privacy to those properties in the immediate vicinity of the site. Concerns have also been raised in the representations received about noise and light pollution associated with the use. The actual use of the structure as a rest area for ambulance staff between calls would be a low key use that is not considered likely to result in any significant light or noise pollution. Obviously there could potentially be some impact from the ambulance blue light and vehicle noise, including sirens associated with the use. However, the supporting information to the application states that all emergency vehicles using the site will be instructed not to use either the blue lamps or sirens until such time as they have reached the highway.

An external vehicle charger will also be provided within the fabric of the cabin to ensure that there will be no need for vehicle engines to be left running to charge the on-board equipment. It is considered that these measures should minimise any potential for adverse amenity impact upon residents in the immediate vicinity to a degree that the proposal is acceptable from a planning perspective.

## Highway Considerations

Concerns have been expressed about the implications of the proposal for general highway safety conditions in the locality and the safety of visually impaired students using the school access.

The proposal incorporates the provision of fencing along the access road and rear of the site to ensure that all pedestrian traffic is kept segregated from the emergency service vehicles using the site.

Concerns have been expressed in representations regarding the impact of the use on highway safety and congestion in the area. Safety concerns relate to the lack of visibility at the access onto Topsham Road due to vegetation and existing highway signage. In terms of traffic congestion the impact of the associated 'clear box' road markings on Topsham Road, in close proximity to the Countess Wear roundabout, has been questioned. The Highway Authority have provided their formal comments on the application and have concluded that the proposal is acceptable in terms of the use of the access and its potential impact on highway safety conditions in the locality.

## Southern Area Working Party (07/07/10)

Members acknowledged that the impact of the proposal on the residential amenity of surrounding occupants was likely to be minimal, but did raise concerns about the impact upon highway safety and congestion in the area. Given these concerns, and the potential lack of objection from the Highway Authority, Members felt that the application should be determined by the Planning Committee.

## Conclusion

The impact of the proposal on surrounding residential occupiers is likely to be minimal and does not justify withholding consent. In the absence of any objection from the Highway Authority it is not considered that consent should be withheld on highway safety grounds. The siting of a vehicle in this location will assist the Ambulance Service in serving the Countess Wear area and the recommendation is therefore to approve the application.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 1) C05 - Time Limit - Commencement
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall not be carried out otherwise than in strict accordance with the submitted details received by the Local Planning Authority on 9/4/2010 (*dwg. no(s) EXET-01-B241109-CSSWEIR*); 17/06/2010 (*dwg. no(s) 09-13992-03 REV B*); and 16/07/2010 (*site edged red*) as modified by other conditions of this consent.  
**Reason:** In order to ensure compliance with the approved drawings.
- 3) The existing emergency access and on-site turning facility shall remain unobstructed at all times.  
**Reason -** In the interest of public safety.
- 4) No part of the development hereby approved shall be brought into use until road markings and signage have been provided in accordance with details that shall previously have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and Highway Authority and retained for that purpose at all times.

**Local Government (Access to Information) 1985 (as amended).  
Background papers used in compiling the report:**

Files of planning applications available for inspection from the Customer Service Centre,  
Civic Centre, Paris Street, Exeter: Telephone 01392 265223