

Investigation No: ENF 533/48/05

Town Council: Offchurch

Case Officer: John Beaumont

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**Offchurch Village Hall, School Hill, Offchurch**

Alterations to premises and increased width of rear paved access

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This report is brought before Committee in order to request that no further action be taken on these issues.

**BACKGROUND**

In November 2005 it was brought to our attention that a path at the rear of the village hall had been constructed at a width of 1.8m, rather than the width of 0.75m shown on the plans approved under planning permission W20010512 for the erection of extensions granted in July 2001; subsequently approved as 0.9m wide as a 'minor amendment'. The complainants also expressed concern that this minor amendment to application W20010512 had been approved without their knowledge; this amendment also included moving an existing doorway into a new position which they considered should be a fire door only, kept shut all other times. In a letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> February, the complainants reiterated their concerns that the revised door position and increased width of the access to this door could result in an increased use of this rear area by people smoking or for the holding of barbeques resulting in increased noise, disturbance and pollution, thereby causing a loss of residential amenity.

**RELEVANT POLICIES**

(DW) ENV3 – Development Principles (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

DP1 – Layout and Design (Warwick District Local Plan 1996-2011)

DP2 – Amenity (Warwick District Local Plan 1996-2011)

**PLANNING HISTORY**

Planning permission was granted on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2001 for the erection of a single storey extension providing a secondary hall, internal alterations to provide new kitchen, toilets and toilets for disabled at Village Hall, School Hill, Offchurch, reference W20010512. This was granted by the Planning Committee following a Members site visit on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2001.

The approved scheme included the provision of a paved footpath running around the new extension to serve a kitchen door in the new extension and an existing doorway into the existing village hall adjacent to the boundary with the adjoining

attached property known as The School House; this footpath was shown as 0.75m wide. A condition was imposed on the planning permission which stated:-

“Notwithstanding any details submitted on the approved plans, the external door to the kitchen shall be used as a fire door only and be kept shut at all times unless otherwise agreed in writing by the District Planning Authority.”

Subsequently in June 2005, the applicants architect submitted amended plans for approval as a minor amendment showing the proposed kitchen door replaced by a window, the existing rear access door to the existing village hall replaced by a window and a new door to the rear of the village hall sited some 3m off the boundary to the neighbouring house, The School House. The new footpath was shown widened to 0.9m and resited to access the new rear doorway. Insofar as this amendment appeared to reduce the effect of this development on the neighbour, this amendment was approved under delegated powers without neighbour notification. As the new door replaced an existing doorway not subject to planning control, no condition could be imposed on its use.

Prior to this minor amendment, the applicants architect has been informed that proposals for a larger area of hardstanding and larger rear access doors could not be approved as a minor amendment.

## **KEY ISSUES**

### **The site and its location**

The village hall is located within the village of Offchurch and is adjoined to the east by the linked dwelling, The School House.

### **Assessment**

Whilst I am clearly conscious that the complainants consider the rear access footpath now installed is too wide and may encourage people to congregate in this area and indeed to hold outdoor functions/barbeques, this area has always been accessible to the users of the village hall and I consider that a reduction in width of the pathway from 1.8m to the 0.9m approved would not prevent this happening or indeed to make it less likely. The applicants architect has also written to state that “the Village Hall Committee have no intention of using the wider path for any other purpose than access. The minimum width for disabled access is 1.2m and this is in fact the only access suitable for their use as the ramped access to the front access is steeper than the accepted gradient.”

With regard to the new rear access door, this replaced an existing doorway, the use of which was not subject to planning control. The applicants architects have said that this doorway has been fitted with a lock with a thumb turn to the inside and a notice stating ‘fire exit’. Whilst the complainants consider that these are insufficient to ensure that this door is used solely as an emergency means of escape, given that the use of the original rear access door was not subject to planning control and noting that the new doorway is now further from the

neighbours boundary than the original door, I consider this is not a matter over which the Planning Authority can exercise control.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That no further action be taken over the increased width of the rear access footway or the resited rear access doorway.

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