

Item D2

Replacement Single Storey School for Lympne Primary School, Octavian Drive, Lympne, Hythe – SH/07/261

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 17 April 2007.

Application by Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for a single storey school for 230 pupils aged between 4-11 years, to replace the existing Lympne Primary School, which was burnt down in the fire of September 2006. New building to be located on the original site of the school and cited on the original footprint, at Lympne Primary School, Octavian Drive, Lympne, near Hythe. (Ref: SH/07/261)

Recommendation: Planning permission be GRANTED subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Ms. S. Carey

Classification: Unrestricted

Background

1. In September 2006, a fire broke out at Lympne Primary School. The pupils and staff were all led to safety, but the fire took hold of the building and the school was destroyed. The 1.15-hectare school site, located near Hythe, is an irregular shape with vehicular access from Octavian Drive to the east of the site. Although the original school building has been demolished following the fire, the foundations are clearly visible, and all hard and soft landscaping, including access and car parking, remains in situ.

Site

2. The site is bounded by residential properties to the north and west, facing residential properties to the east and Aldington Road to the south. The whole of the school site is within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Special Landscape Area. In addition, the 'green' areas of the school site are protected as playing fields under Policy LR12 of the Shepway District Local Plan. A site plan is attached.

Proposal

3. This application has been submitted by Kent County Council Children, Families and Education and proposes a single storey school for 230 pupils aged between 4-11 years, to replace the existing Lympne Primary School. The building would accommodate 3 reception classrooms, 4 infant classrooms, together with a main hall and ancillary rooms. The new building would be positioned on the original site of the school, and sited on the previous footprint. The access driveway, car parking and hard and soft landscaping would remain as existing, although 1 disabled parking bay is to be included to the front of the school. The access driveway is a 'U' shape, with a one-way circulation flow, which is accessed and egressed from Octavian Drive. Existing parking provision includes 5 spaces to the front of the school site, and fifteen spaces to the side of the school. The applicant advises that cycle storage could be provided adjacent to the existing external stores, which may be replaced. The site is secured by existing boundary fencing and secure entrance gates to both sides of the driveway, which are kept locked when not in use.

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**Replacement Single Storey School for Lympne Primary School,
Octavian Drive, Lympne, Hythe – SH/07/261**

4. The applicant advises that the development has been both functionally and aesthetically designed, set within the existing landscaping of the site, and is to be in keeping with the context of adjacent properties. The architect has reviewed the footprint of the original building, and rationalised the layout in accordance with the user requirements. In addition, the roof layout has been revised, which the applicant suggests provides a simpler design solution. The applicant states that the original roof was a complex system, both structurally and in terms of drainage, which had poor thermal performance and did not allow natural light into the core of the building, or natural ventilation. The proposed roof design would allow natural light and natural ventilation into the core of the building, and the applicant advises that the overall massing of the roof would be reduced allowing it to perform better in terms of thermal capacity. The proposed building would be single storey in height, with a ridge height similar to that of the previous school.
5. The applicant proposes to increase the building footprint by 30 square metres. The line of the external built envelope is proposed to be rationalised along the eastern elevation (facing Octavian Drive) and the northern elevation (facing onto the external stores), in order to facilitate an increase in size of the staff room and infants classroom space respectively. The applicant advises that the distances between the proposed building and critical points such as the boundary of the site and distance from neighbouring properties has been carefully considered. In addition, the western elevation has only high-level window openings to the gable end wall to minimise overlooking issues.
6. The architect, the applicant and the School Head Teacher discussed this application at length prior to submission, and agreed on a number of changes to the design of the school, and the internal layout, which would improve the school aesthetically and functionally. Internal rationalisation of space, and the reorganisation of the internal layout, would allow the school to better function in practice. All circulation routes would allow easy access to all spaces, with doors and entrances clearly visible, and all the classrooms would have direct visual links and access to the external areas.
7. The building is proposed to be split into three wings, and would be terminated with a gable end on the west elevation. The spine of the building, to both the reception and infant areas, has a raised roof to allow natural light into the core of the activity spaces, and to allow for natural ventilation. The roof of the main hall is proposed to be asymmetric in shape, raised to the west side, again to allow natural light into the internal space below. The roof to the main entrance is proposed to be raised to define the entrance area and create a welcome high volume reception area.
8. The applicant advises that the proposed design of the new school would provide a stimulating environment where people can learn, work, and play, and that a conscious decision was taken to deliver a domestic scale building that would be in keeping with the surrounding area. In addition, the building would be constructed using a simple palette of materials including facing brickwork, white coloured render, cedar cladding, timber windows and a clay tiled roof. The fenestration reflects the original window opening locations, but has been rationalised to consist of a limited number of window types, and assembled to give a regular rhythm to the elevations.
9. The project aims to include sustainable design considerations, including sustainable materials and products and the use of sustainable construction methods. The proposed building would be reviewed in terms of its environmental performance considering factors such as the use of natural ventilation, natural light, grey water recycling and rainwater harvesting, recycling, high efficiency lighting, etc.

Replacement Single Storey School for Lympne Primary School,
Octavian Drive, Lympne, Hythe – SH/07/261

Reduced copies of the submitted drawings showing the site layout, floor plans and elevations are attached.

Planning Policy

10. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to the consideration of the application:

(i) **The Kent & Medway Structure Plan: Adopted 2006:**

Policy SP1 - Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's environment and ensure a sustainable pattern of development.

Policy QL1 – Seeks to conserve and enhance the environment through the quality of development and design. Developments, individually or taken together, should respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surroundings.

Policy QL12 -Provision will be made to accommodate additional requirements for local community services. New community services will be located where they are accessible by walking and cycling and by public transport from the area they serve. Wherever practical they will be located in town, district or local centres.

Policy EN4 - Protection will be given to the nationally important landscape of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the primary objective in these areas will be to protect, conserve and enhance landscape character and natural beauty. Development which would be detrimental to the natural beauty, quality and character of the landscape and quiet enjoyment of the area will not be permitted. Development that is essential to meet local social or economic needs should be permitted provided it is consistent with the purpose of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Policy EN5 – The primary objective of designating Special Landscape Areas is the protection, conservation and enhancement of the quality of their landscapes, whilst having regard to the need to facilitate the social and economic well-being of the communities situated within them.

Policy TP19 - States that development proposals should comply with vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by the County Council.

(ii) **Shepway District Local Plan: Adopted 2006**

Policy BE1 – A high standard of layout, design and choice of materials will be expected for all new development. Materials should be sympathetic to those predominating locally in type, colour and texture. Development should accord with existing development in the locality, where the site and surrounding development are

**Replacement Single Storey School for Lympne Primary School,
Octavian Drive, Lympne, Hythe – SH/07/261**

physically and visually interrelated in respect of building form, mass, height, and elevational details.

Policy SD1 - All development proposals should take account of the broad aim of sustainable development - ensuring that development contributes towards ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. This involves meeting economic and social objectives and helping people meet their personal aspirations through accommodating the district's need for commercial and industrial development, new homes and other land uses and improving quality of life for all members of society whilst respecting specified environmental criteria

Policy SC2 - The District Planning Authority will grant planning permission for new or improved social and community facilities where the proposal meets set criteria relating to compatibility with surrounding land uses, access, access for disabled people and acceptability on highway, infrastructure and environmental terms.

Policy CO3- The District Planning Authority will give priority to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, including landscape, wildlife and geological features over other planning considerations. Proposals should protect or enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. Development inconsistent with this objective will not be permitted unless the exceptional economic and social benefits of the proposal outweigh the primary objective of conserving natural beauty.

Policy CO4 - Proposals should protect or enhance the natural beauty of the Special Landscape Area. The District Planning Authority will not permit development proposals that are inconsistent with this objective unless the need to secure economic and social wellbeing outweighs the need to protect the SLA's countywide landscape significance.

Policy LR12 – Proposals resulting in the loss of playing fields will only be permitted where development would not cause an unacceptable loss in local environmental quality and where it also accords with the following criteria:

- a) Sufficient alternative open space provision exists, or new sport and recreational facilities will be provided.....
- b) The land required is for an alternative educational purpose which cannot reasonably be met in another way.

Policy TR12 - Proposals for new development will only be permitted if provision is made for off street parking in accordance with the current maximum vehicle parking standards.

Replacement Single Storey School for Lypne Primary School,
Octavian Drive, Lypne, Hythe – SH/07/261

Consultations

11. **Shepway District Council:** raises no objection, but make the following comments:
- In addition to the imposition of conditions standard to a development of this nature, Shepway District Council would like to see the provision of suitable covered bicycle parking facilities for members of staff, visitors and school children to be included within the detailed design scheme.
 - Shepway District Council requests that the application is conditioned to ensure that the development meets with the sustainable design aims stated in the Design and Access Statement.

Lypne Parish Council: raises no objection to the proposal.

The Divisional Transportation Manager: states that:

‘bearing in mind this is a replacement school with no change to the number of staff or pupils, I confirm I have no objection to the proposals. A condition should be applied to any consent requiring the implementation of an agreed Travel Plan prior to the use of the school commencing, and the maintenance of the Travel Plan thereafter.’

County Fire Officer: no written comments received to date.

Local Member

12. The local County Member, Ms S. Carey, was notified of the application on the 19 February 2007.

Publicity

13. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice, advertisement in a local newspaper, and the individual notification of 24 nearby properties.

Representations

14. 2 letters of representation have been received to date. The main planning comments/points of concern and objection can be summarised as follows:
- requests that for the safety of local residents, the re-build is not permitted to be so close to the boundary of their property;
 - Following a recent extension to the school, the building was only 2-3 metres from a boundary hedge;
 - The experience was very frightening for neighbouring residents, and they are concerned that the outcome could have been very different and that they could have lost their homes;

Discussion

15. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan policies outlined in paragraph (10) above. Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, this proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies,

Replacement Single Storey School for Lympne Primary School, Octavian Drive, Lympne, Hythe – SH/07/261

Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. As this application proposes to replace an existing Primary School, which was destroyed by fire, the precedent for the development of this site has been set. However, although a direct replacement, design alterations have been made, and the proximity of the school to the boundary, and the impact of this on residential amenity with regards to safety concerns, needs to be addressed.

16. Policies SP1 and QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan & SD1 and BE1 of the Shepway District Local Plan, seek to conserve and enhance the environment and require development to be well designed and respect its setting. This is particularly relevant to this site which is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Special Landscape Area, both of which are subject to policy designations which intend to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of the landscape.

Siting and Design

17. As detailed in paragraphs 3-9 above, this application proposes a single storey school to replace the existing Lympne Primary School. The building would accommodate 3 reception classrooms, 4 infant classrooms, a main hall and ancillary rooms, and would occupy the original footprint. As all hard and soft landscaping, car parking and access points are already in situ the only point of discussion is the siting of the school building itself. The foundations are still evident on site, and it is suggested that these could be reused. The applicant proposes that the building footprint would, however, increase by 30 square metres, accommodated by rationalising the line of the external envelope on 2 elevations. However, this would not bring the extent of the built development on the site any closer to neighbouring properties and is therefore considered to be acceptable.
18. Although the school site is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Special Landscape Area, the site is previously developed as a school site, and therefore the principle of the development is accepted, and a precedent already set. The green space within the site is designated under Policy LR12 of the Shepway District Local Plan and, therefore, the location of built development within the site is constrained to existing areas of hardstanding. Under the circumstances, I see no objection from a planning policy viewpoint to the redevelopment of this existing site on the fringes of a settlement within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Special Landscape Area. Moreover, in the light of the negligible impact on the existing green space at the site, I also see no objection on Local Plan Policy grounds to protect green spaces.
19. Utilising the existing footprint of the previous school is the logical siting for the replacement school, although this has met with concern from neighbouring residents who raise objection on the grounds of safety, in the event of any future fire. In particular, local residents express concern over the proximity of the school to the boundary as when the school was alight residents considered that their properties were at risk. They are, therefore, understandably concerned that should a fire break out in the school again, the outcome could be different. Under the circumstances, the County Fire Officer has been consulted on this application but at the date of writing this report a response had not been received. Should comments be received prior to the Planning Applications Committee Meeting then these will be reported verbally to Members for consideration.
20. However, at this time the applicant has advised that the school building will remain on the original footprint, and cannot be moved away from the boundary with properties in Stone Street. With regards to safety and fire risk the applicant advises as follows:

**Replacement Single Storey School for Lympne Primary School,
Octavian Drive, Lympne, Hythe – SH/07/261**

“We understand from the letters that this concern stems from the possible risk of fire spread from the school to neighbouring properties in the event of a fire. Although this did not occur when the school burnt down last September we understand their concerns.

Our client has expressed a desire to reinstate the school on the original footprint, with similar massing to that of the existing, therefore trying to possibly re-use existing substructure.

The new scheme has very much been designed with the fire strategy at the forefront of our, and our clients, minds. The fire strategy is one of prevention, detection and containment that will at minimum satisfy the current regulatory construction requirements. We can also confirm that it is proposed a fire sprinkler system is to be installed at the school which will be linked to the fire detection system.

We would also like to confirm there are no roof voids in the classrooms nearest to the boundary, which could facilitate fire spread through the building. The building is designed in such a way that it is split up into 3 fire compartments of 60 Minutes integrity.

All the above measures will significantly reduce the risk of fire propagation within the new building and will be a significant improvement upon the fire safety standard of the original building.”

In light of the above, I consider that the applicant has taken all reasonable precautions with regards to fire risk, and that in the unlikely event that a fire should break out, the design of the new school would contain the fire and minimise damage. Therefore, I consider that the siting of the proposed school is acceptable, and that the risk of fire is lower in the replacement school than it was in the original school building.

21. In providing a replacement school, the applicant has taken the opportunity to modernise the facilities available by reorganising the internal layout, and altering the roof layout and elevations. These changes are outlined in paragraphs 4 to 9 above, and offer a modern design solution. Although the highest point of the proposed roof would not exceed the highest point of the previous roof, the roof layout has been amended. This means that some areas of the roof are higher than that of the previous building. However, the school would remain a single storey development, which would be sympathetic to surrounding single and two storey residential development in terms of scale, massing and height. The closest residential properties to the rear of the site, located in Stone Street, would now face a gable wall which has high level glazing for natural lighting only. Although this would be more prominent than the pitched roof that previously faced this elevation, I do not consider that the neighbouring properties would be overlooked or overshadowed by the development. In addition, the western boundary of the site is heavily planted, providing natural screening between the development and the closest residential properties. Overall, I consider that the proposed development is acceptable in terms of scale, massing and sighting, and that the changes made to the internal layout, roof layout and elevations are in keeping with the vicinity and allow for the provision of better facilities.
22. The applicant proposes that the building would be constructed using a simple palette of materials, including facing brickwork, white coloured render, cedar cladding, timber windows and a clay tiled roof. The facing brick would match that of the previous school, and the roofing materials would match as close a practicably possible bearing in mind

**Replacement Single Storey School for Lympne Primary School,
Octavian Drive, Lympne, Hythe – SH/07/261**

the pitch of the roof is now lower than that of the previous school. Should Members be minded to permit, details and samples of all materials to be used externally would be required under planning condition. That would ensure that the development was constructed using materials appropriate to the site's location within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a Special Landscape Area and within a residential setting.

Highways

23. The new school would be a direct replacement for the original school. The number of staff and pupils would remain the same, and access and car parking would remain as existing. The Divisional Transportation Manager requests that a School Travel Plan be required under planning condition, and I consider it acceptable to request that this be submitted within 12 months of the date of the permission since that was not a requirement at the time the development was first considered. In addition, the District Council would like to see the provision of suitable covered bicycle parking facilities, which is something that the applicant suggests could be provided adjacent to the existing stores. Therefore, I consider that details of such a covered bicycle parking facility be required under planning condition. The main impact that this application would have on the local highway network would be construction traffic and associated vehicles. Unfortunately, the construction of any development does have short term impacts upon the local highway and this cannot be avoided. However, the impact can be minimised through the imposition of conditions. Should Members be minded to permit, conditions would be imposed to ensure that mud and debris is not deposited on the local highway, and hours of construction works would also be limited.

Conclusion

24. In summary, I consider that there are special circumstances to justify the proposed development within a Special Landscape Area and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. I consider that the siting and design of the replacement school would not have a detrimental effect on the amenity of local residents or the character and appearance of the Special Landscape Area or the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Overall, I consider that the design solution proposed is a sensitive approach to the landscape aspects relevant to this particular location. Subject to the imposition of conditions, I am of the opinion that the proposed development would not give rise to any material harm and is otherwise in accordance with the general principles of the relevant Development Plan Policies. Therefore, I recommend that permission be granted subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

Recommendation

25. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO conditions, including conditions covering:
- the standard time limit;
 - the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
 - external materials to be submitted for approval;
 - a scheme of landscaping, its implementation and maintenance;
 - provision and retention of cycle parking;
 - preparation, implementation and ongoing review of a School Travel Plan;
 - hours of working during construction;
 - prevention of mud being deposited in the highway;

Item D2

Replacement Single Storey School for Lympne Primary School,
Octavian Drive, Lympne, Hythe – SH/07/261

Case officer – Mary Green

01622 221066

Background documents - See section heading
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