

Temporary two-storey modular block of eight classrooms, Gravesend Grammar School.

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

Application by Governors Of Gravesend Grammar School And KCC Children, Families And Education for temporary two-storey modular block of eight classrooms at Gravesend Grammar School, Church Walk, Gravesend (Ref:GR/07/119)

Recommendation: Permission be granted.

Local Member(s): Mrs Jane Cribbon, Mrs Maureen Newell Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Gravesend Grammar School is an 11-18 age Foundation School situated on a large site to the east of Gravesend Town Centre. There are three main vehicle entrances off Church Walk. There is also an entrance from Pine Avenue/Milton Hall Road. To the south of the school there is a residential area, and to the east the school neighbours St John's Catholic Primary School. To the west there are sports grounds and to the north lies A 226 (Milton Road). A site plan is attached.

Proposal

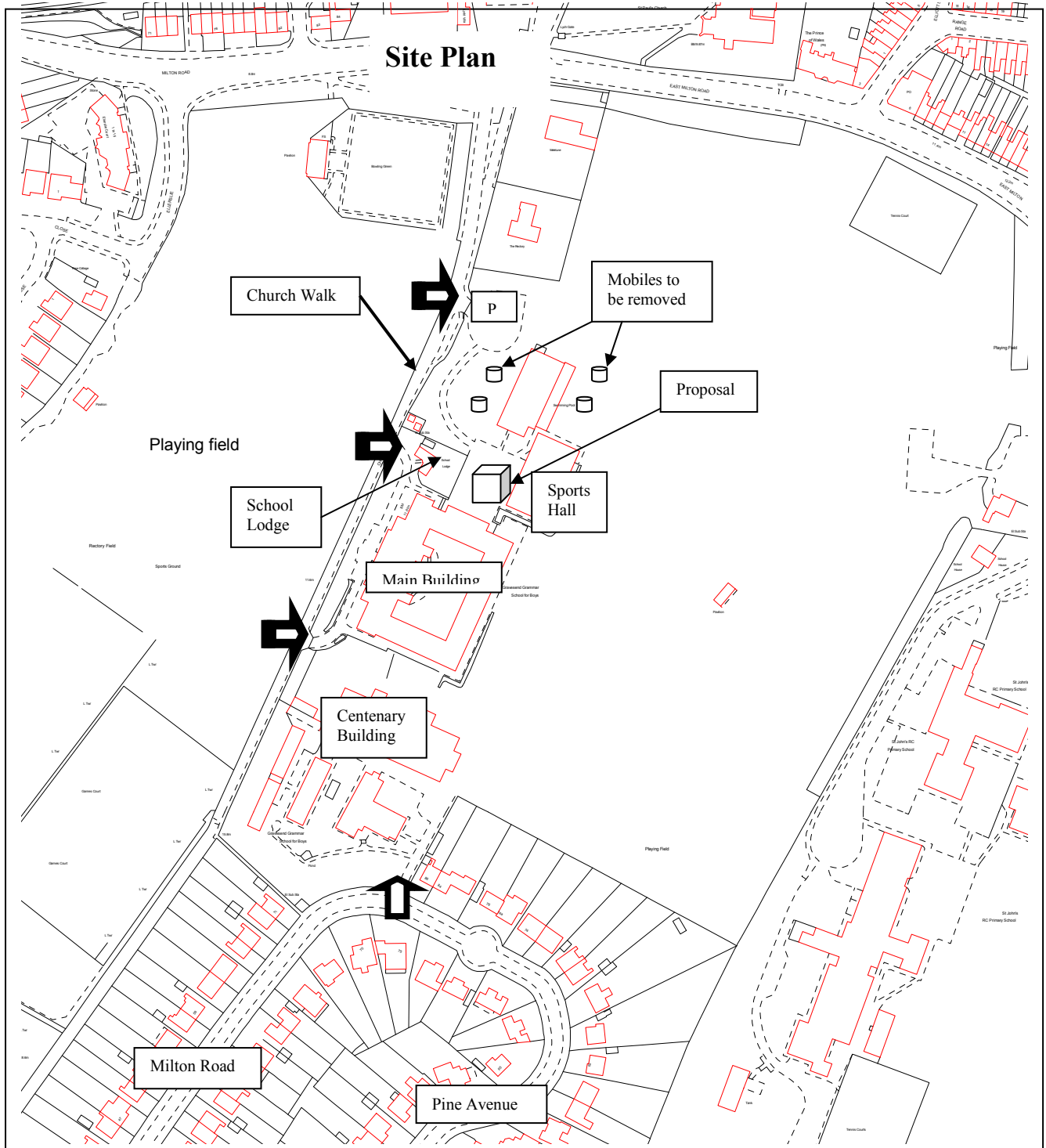
2. The application has been submitted on behalf of the Headteacher of the school and Kent County Council Children Families and Education. The proposal includes removal of 4 dilapidated mobile classrooms and replacement with a double storey 8-classroom modular block, increasing the overall provision by four classrooms (See the attached elevation drawings). The building is needed on the site for a period of 3 years, until the delivery of new permanent buildings, expected in 2010, as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF). The proposal site is currently used as a hard surface area with an informal minibus parking arrangement. The site is occasionally used for an overflow car park during after school hours for about 15 cars.

Background

3. Originally, the accommodation at the school comprised two major buildings. Since the early 1990's an increase in admission numbers to 150 per year and the lowering of the school's intake age from 14 to 11 has led to an expansion of the school roll from 450 to a current pupil count of 1020. The School has extended its buildings by adding seven classrooms in 1993 and two classrooms in 2003. Additionally, four wooden huts and four mobile buildings have been added to meet increasing student intake. The school's sixth form has expanded rapidly in recent years and the applicant advises that the school's accommodation has once again reached a critical situation.
4. The applicant states that the Gravesend Grammar School is due to undergo major rebuilding and refurbishment under the Building Schools for the Future programme. The BSF programme is likely to deliver new buildings at the school for the 2010/2011 academic year. Meanwhile, the school expresses need for additional accommodation to enable the school to operate efficiently and effectively.

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Photo 1 View from car park looking north >

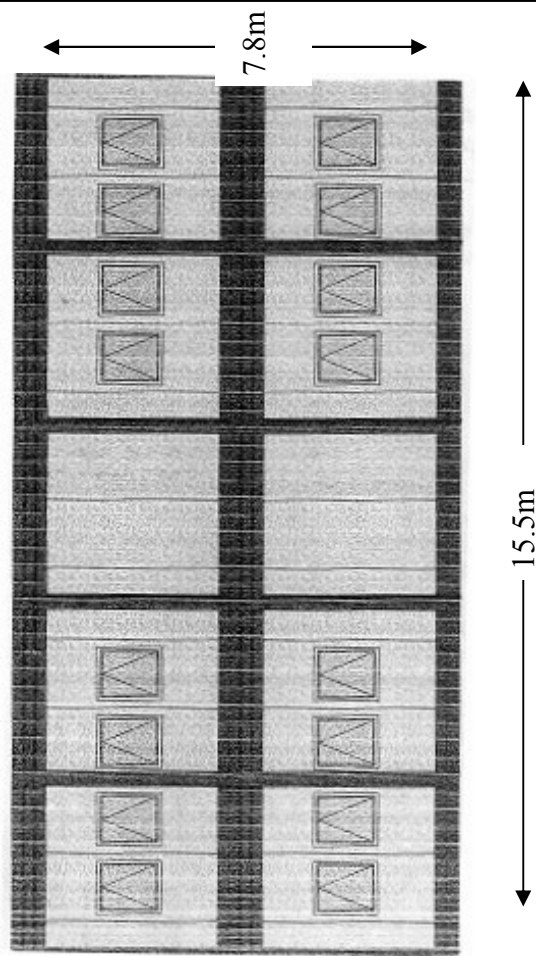
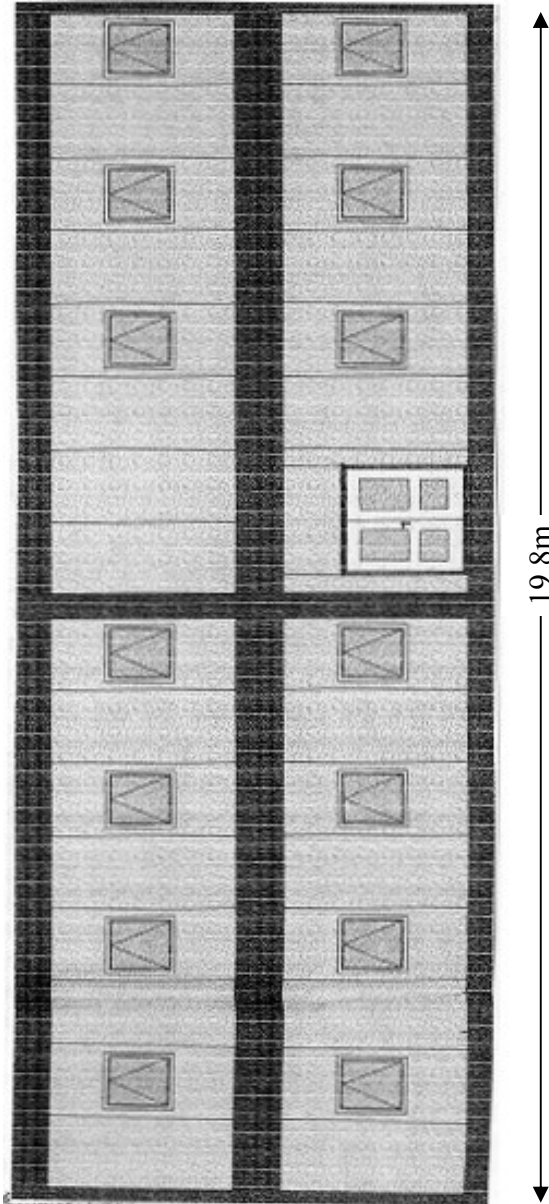


Figure 1 Elevation drawings Front ^and Side >

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Planning Policy

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

The Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006:

- Policy SP1** Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's environment and to ensure a sustainable pattern of development.
- Policy SS6** Seeks to improve the built and natural environment, functioning and appearance of the suburbs of the major urban areas, including the provision of services and facilities that serve local needs.
- Policy QL1** Seeks all development to be well designed and high quality that respond positively to the local character. Development, which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, function or character of the area, will not be permitted.
- Policy QL11** Existing community services (including schools) will be protected as long as there is a demonstrable need for them. Provision will be made for the development and improvement of local services in existing residential areas and in town and district centres, particularly where services are deficient.
- Policy TP3** States that the local planning authority should ensure that development sites are well served by public transport, walking and cycling.
- Policy TP19** States that development proposals should comply with vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by the County Council.

Gravesham Local Plan 1st Review 1994:

- Policy TC1** The scale and massing of the buildings should normally be in keeping with their surrounding. Materials used should be of good quality and sympathetic to the area concerned.
- Policy T1** Planning Authority will consider the impact of the generated travel demand on the transport system as a whole and on the environment.

Gravesham Local Plan 2nd Review 2000 (supports the Local Plan 1st Review):

- Policy T1** The Planning Authority will consider the impact of the generated travel demand on the transport system as a whole and on the environment.
- Policy BE12** A high standard of layout, design and materials will be expected for all new development with particular attention to the scale, massing, height, and proportions of the building.

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- Policy D2** Requires landscaping proposal for all new development that enhance the development in its setting and incorporates the retention of as much of the existing vegetation on site as possible.

Consultations

Gravesham Borough Council: raises no objection in principle, provided that permission is granted for a temporary period only. At the end of this period, the situation should be reviewed and consideration given to the erection of a more permanent building. Additional comments are summarised below:

- No detail has been provided which illustrates the location of the existing mobiles that will be removed (the information has been provided since)
- There is a question as to why the four other wooden huts are not being removed, when four new classrooms are being provided
- There appears to be significant demand for on site parking
- At the time of the site visit, the application site was being used for the parking of two minibuses and around the site there were many vehicles parked
- The Borough Council's Senior Engineer has commented as follows: "The proposal would appear to consolidate classroom facilities on the site and (according to the statement) does not envisage any expansion in the size of the school, pupil or staff numbers. Although the site of the proposed classroom block is sometimes used for parking, the main car parking areas along the western boundary of the school will not be affected. Clearly the removal of the old portable buildings at the north western corner would enable more parking to be provided there and I consider that there is enough parking elsewhere on the site to meet the school's needs. Consequently, the proposal is considered acceptable in highway and access terms and hence no objection is raised."
- It has been noted that the applicant has suggested that the area vacated by the old mobile classrooms may be used for car parking and that various local residents have raised concerns about car parking at the wider school site
- It has been highlighted that the design and access statement contained little discussion relating to the design of the building in relation to its surrounding context.

Divisional Transportation Manager: raises no objection to the proposal. Further comments are summarised below:

- Whilst the area within which the proposed buildings are to be located is not a permanent car park, there is some indication that the area is used as an occasional overflow parking facility.
- If there is no existing or alternative facility available for the use for out-of-hours events, measures may be needed to ensure that there is no adverse effect on the local highway network when any such event is taking place.
- If the area is used for the parking of school minibuses, it is recommended that an alternative facility is secured, which does not take up existing on-site parking spaces currently available for staff/visitors use.

The Environment Agency: no comments received to date

Local Members

6. The local Members, M Newell & Jane Cribbon, were notified of the application on the 7 February 2007.

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Publicity

7. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice on the entrance off the Church Walk and later re-posted on entrances on Church Walk and Pine Avenue at the request of a resident.

Representations

8. 3 letters of representation have been received regarding the proposal. The planning considerations can be summarised as:
 - completely opposed to the above application on the grounds that this school needs to provide many more parking spaces for pupils
 - it is not true that the school presently possesses adequate parking facilities
 - it is a dreadful and quite erroneous statement by the School that they are “confident that the School operates effectively without this space available for parking”
 - the proposed site for the development is presently used to park the school’s minibus, the proposal reduces the number of car parking spaces within the school grounds that are available for the use of students
 - on any school day, the residents of Pine Avenue and Milton Hill Road are subject to the most flagrant abuses of the Highway Code by many sixth form students of the school
 - cars parked outside off Church Walk can cause disruption to funeral arrangements
 - concern about disruption to local residents and increased potential for accidents
 - allowing the proposed development without an increase in suitable parking places for students within the school grounds, KCC would sanction the School’s disregard for the right of the local residents to enjoy quiet possession of their property
 - the School should provide parking facilities within the school grounds for all potential student drivers and staff
 - the school grounds vacated by the present mobile classrooms should be converted into a hard surface parking area

Discussion*Introduction*

9. The application is required to be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan policies, unless other material considerations are of overriding importance. Consideration should be given to the impact upon residential amenity and whether the layout and scale of the development would have an unacceptable impact on highway considerations. Policy QL1 and TR3 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan and policy BE12 and T1 of the Gravesham Local Plan 2nd Review require new developments to be of high quality and well designed, not to lead to the loss of amenity and considers an impact of the generated travel demand on the transport system on the environment. In conjunction with these and other relevant policies, these issues need to be considered in the determination of this application and are discussed below.

Need

10. As stated by the applicant in the supporting statement, the school assessment of the “net capacity” of the school premises resulted in a theoretical capacity 932 students (in accordance with the DfES standard calculations), at the guideline utilization figure of approximately 70% for classrooms. This implies that the school is some 120 pupil spaces short of a sufficient number (i.e. 4 classrooms). Replacing the existing 4 mobiles with 8 new classrooms would bring the school up to the appropriate capacity for the current number of students.

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11. The Borough Council highlighted that the School proposes to install eight new mobile classrooms whilst only 4 old mobile buildings are proposed to be removed from the school site. Consequently, the four old wooden huts would continue to be on the school site. In response to this comment, the applicant states that these buildings would not be removed, as they are still needed to meet the School's needs. I believe that the consideration should be given to the Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policy QL11, which protects community facilities as long as there is a demonstrable need for them.

Car Parking

12. Representations have raised objection to the development, on the bases that it would remove necessary parking spaces, which should be kept available for students to park. However, the applicant notes that the site in question has been used as over-spill car park only, and exclusively outside the hours of normal school operations. Such need would be during evening events around 10 times a year typically such as parents' consultation evenings and open evenings. The applicant confirms that there would be no increase in staff or student numbers and therefore no additional car parking is proposed as part of this proposal.

13. It is noted that there are 119 staff employed at the school however many are part time and this figure reflects a full time equivalent figure (FTE) of less than 90. This figure includes 10 cleaners who do not work at the same time as other staff members. It is stated that many members of staff live locally and do not use a car to travel to work. Further, there are 290 students in sixth form, of which many drive to school but also many are under the legal driving age of 17. The School's current parking arrangement covers 88 regular parking spaces on the school site, including 2 spaces reserved for disabled drivers. Additionally, the School allows parking on the school grass to the north of the old swimming pool, which in most weather conditions is used for additional parking. The Divisional Transportation Manager confirms that whilst the area within which the proposed building is to be located is not a permanent car park, the proposal is considered acceptable in highway and access terms.

14. Having considered the fact that no primary parking is being removed as a result of the proposal, and also that there would be increase in staff or students numbers, I do not consider that this development would significantly affect the current parking situation around the school, especially during school hours. The development site lies within residential area, is well served by public transport, walking and cycling facilities and therefore these alternative ways of travel should be promoted by the School to ease the congestion.

Location and alternatives

15. Two alternative sites were considered for the development. First, the current main school car park has been considered. This location would offer a more compact school site however, it would cause a large knock-on effect of the displacement of almost 40 regular daytime parking spaces. Furthermore, this area has a more complex structural proposition with a sloping site and possible structural uncertainty regarding the retaining wall to the north-west edge of the car park behind the main building. Furthermore, it is expected that this car park could be an area upon which some new buildings may be constructed in the BSF project.

16. The second alternative location considered was the school playing fields, close to the "Centenary Building". This location was not considered desirable, as it would result in loss of playing field space and would lead to less compact site. Also, there is a possibility that the site could be needed for the BSF project.

17. The chosen location for the modular structure is considered to have the least impact on the parking arrangements. If the mobile block is permitted there would still be sufficient

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space to enable the minibus to turn and then be parked at the rear (north-east) of the temporary building. For this reason, it would not have knock-on impact upon parking in the rest of the school. Moreover, it would provide a relatively compact site of the school and it would be the least visible from any public space. Lastly, it has the least probability of being developed as part of the BSF programme.

Design and layout

18. The classroom block is of a temporary nature and is expected to be on site for three years until September 2010, at which point the School hopes to provide a new permanent building through the BSF. The major design drivers behind such a temporary development were speed of delivery of the additional classroom space to meet the demand, cost effectiveness and the ability to select a location that was not expected to compromise the upcoming BSF building projects. The eight mobile classrooms would be installed in a way to result in a single building with a single entrance. The intention of the School is to propose mobile units in the location, which would feel like an integral part of the school and to have the least impact on the visual amenity of residents. The mobile block would be 7.8m high, which is of very similar height to the existing two storey Sports Hall, Main Building and the School Lodge (See site plan and photo 1). The nearest residential property to the development site is 100m to the north and more than 140m to the nearest residential property to the south. The mobile units are offered with double glazing for the purpose of heating and of steel construction and a high level of security, which is much better than the old mobile buildings that are proposed to be removed. The external walls of the building would be Moorland Green, whilst doors are proposed to be Aztec Yellow (Elevation drawing is attached). Other options for external finishes, such as brick cladding to match the existing school buildings, were considered but rejected on the grounds of cost, in relation to the short-term nature of the development.
19. A ramp is incorporated into the design of the ground floor entrance, enabling any potential disabled students and staff access to all four ground floor classrooms. Having in mind that all eight classrooms would have identical facilities, I consider that it would be easy to ensure that any disabled student/teacher would not need to have to access the first floor. This could be achieved by simply swapping classrooms whenever such a situation occurred
20. Finally, in order to install the mobile building onto the site, one tree would have to be removed (see photo1). I would consider that the tree does not contribute significantly to the character of the area and therefore a replacement planting elsewhere on school site would be sufficient to mitigate that loss.

Conclusion

21. Overall, I consider that the proposal would not have a detrimental effect on the highways and residential amenity. Further, the mass and the design of the proposed development is satisfactory for the temporary purpose of the building. I am of the opinion that the proposed development would not give rise to any material harm and is otherwise in accordance with the relevant Development Plan Policies. Therefore, I recommend that permission be granted subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.
22. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions, including conditions covering:
 - Temporary planning permission until the end of September 2010
 - The development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details
 - Replacement of a tree in the nearest appropriate location

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Background documents –See section heading