

**Mobile dining building at Pent Valley Technology College,
Folkestone – SH/09/418**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 14 July 2009.

Application by Governors of Pent Valley Technology College for modular building as a dining hall including associated groundwork at Pent Valley Technology College, Surrenden Road, Folkestone (Ref: SH/09/418)

Recommendation: permission be granted subject to conditions

Local Member(s): Mr. T Prater

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Pent Valley Technology College is located north-west from Folkestone town centre, in a residential area between the A20 Cheriton Road to the south and the M20 to the north. The site is bound by residential properties to the south, west and east while to the north it is bound by Tile Kiln Lane and warehouse units beyond that. The proposal site is on the southern part the school grounds, which currently is used as green amenity space during school breaks (see D2.2). The proposal site slopes gently to the north, towards the school buildings.

Proposal

2. The proposal is for the installation of a modular building to provide a dining facility for the school. The building would be rented rather than purchased. The nearest corner of the building would be 7m from the site boundary and would be aligned with its long axis running north-west and south east to line up along the tennis courts fence.
3. The proposed building is a modern single storey, flat roof building 30m long x 10.8m wide x 3.3m high, consisting of 10 bays and total of 324 m². The building would accommodate approximately 240 students. Due to the sloping ground issue, from the southern side (closest to residential properties) it would be sunk approximately 70cm into the ground and on the northern end it would need to be raised on stilts/blocks to maintain finished floor level. The overall building height with respect to the car park level would be 4m high. Externally the walls would be coated with light grey plastisol with darker merlin grey facia (see D2.3). Timber ramps would be provided to comply with Disabled Access Regulations. It is also offered to plant shrubs along the southern boundary to address the ongoing problem with litter around the boundary.
4. The application is for a temporary planning permission for a period of approximately 4 years until the school will be redeveloped as part of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. The school is on the list of Wave 5 BSF, which is due to start by the end of 2012.

Background & Need

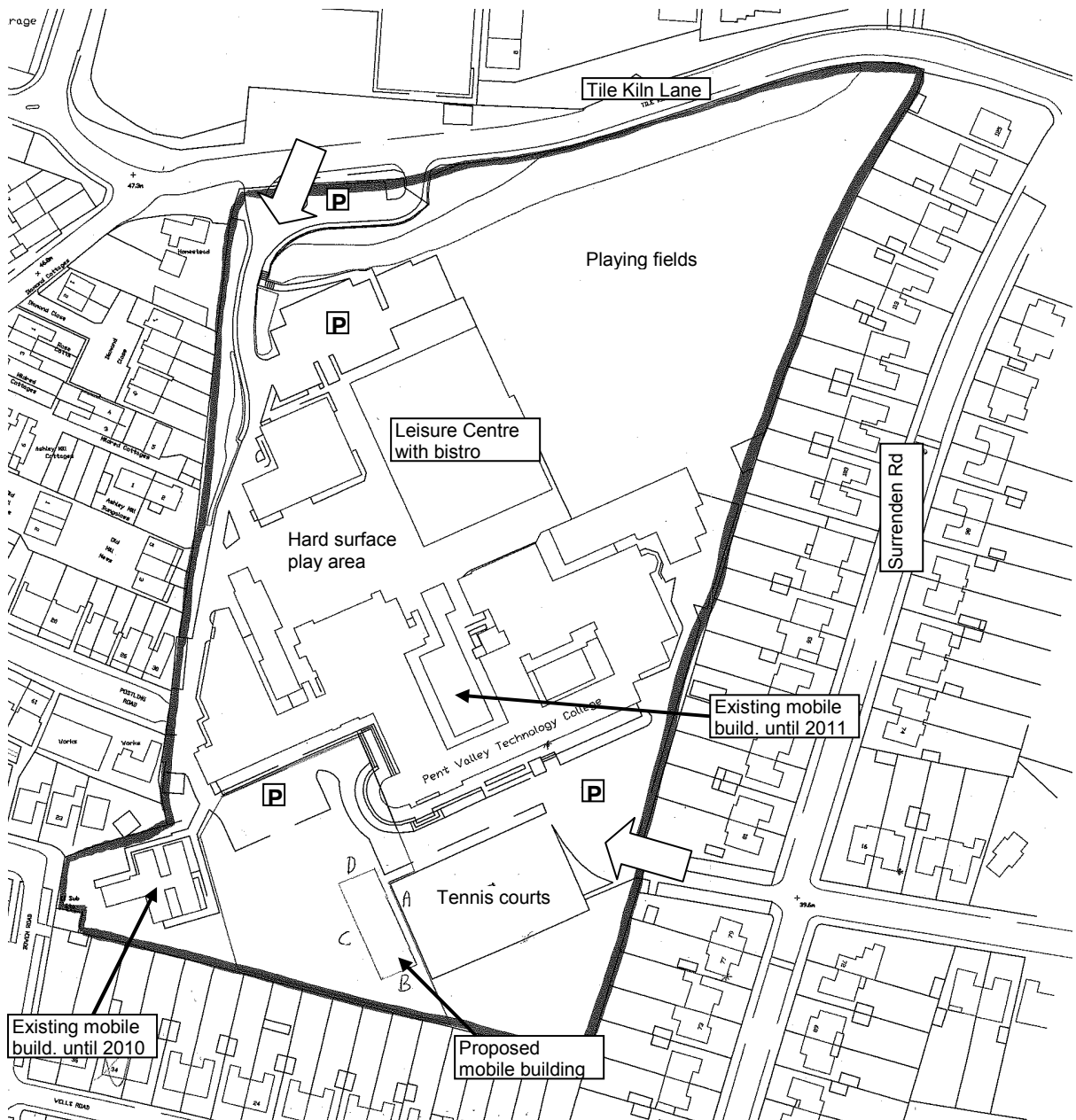
5. In 2003 the School received a planning permission for a new dual use (school and community) Leisure Centre incorporating sports courts, sports hall and new bistro facilities to cater for over 200 pupils at one time (ref. SH/03/837). This building was finished 4 years ago. The bistro facility was designed in accordance with the Government's requirement at the time, which has since changed and Schools are now expected to provide adequate space to accommodate their students. There are approximately 1300 students currently at the school and this is expected to rise to 1400 next year. The School advises that despite some seasonal fall in pupil numbers, this did

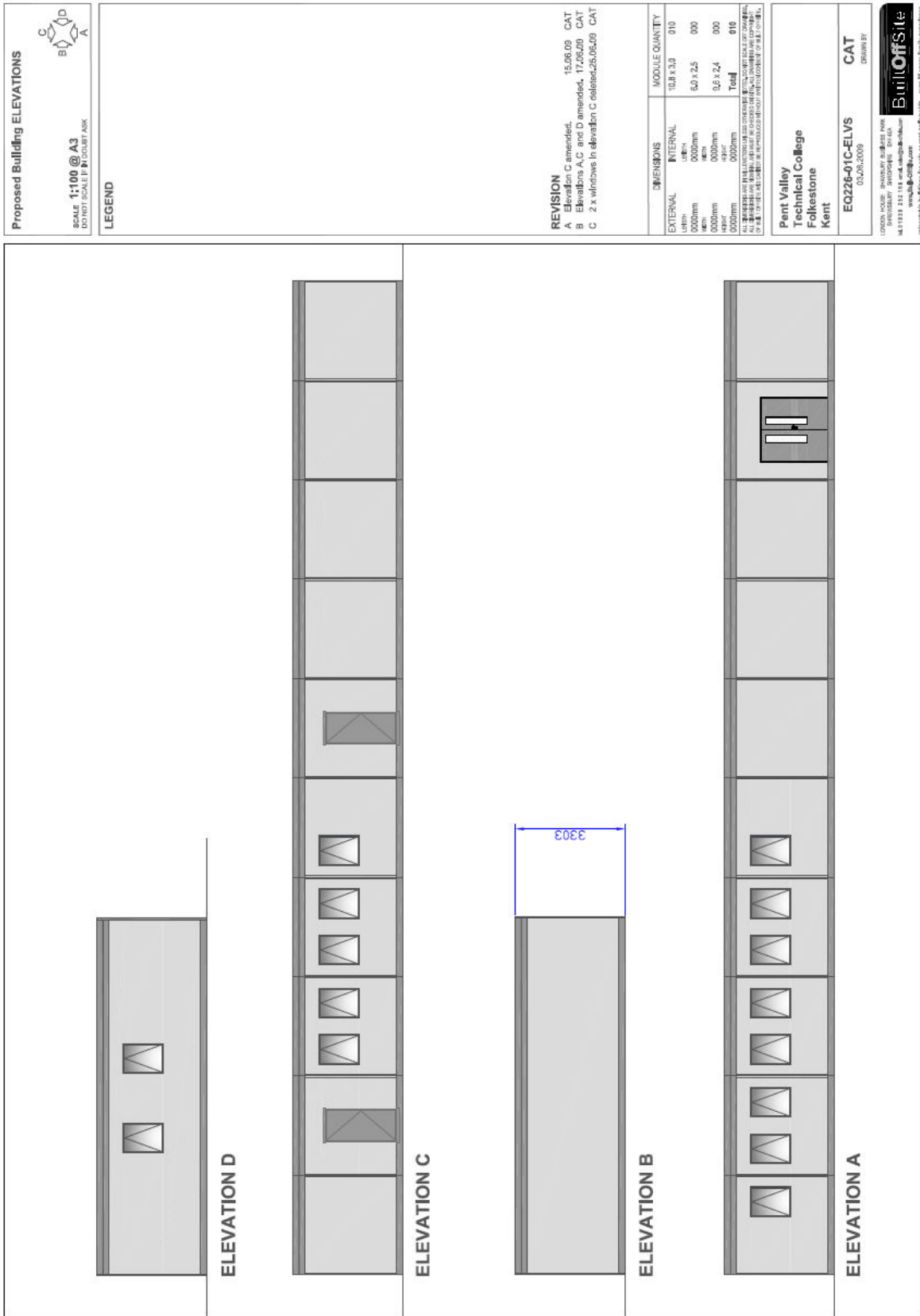
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not result in any class space. Moreover, in recent years the catering requirements for Schools have changed and it is expected that there should be sufficient space within school for all children to have their lunches, either hot or packed.

- 6. The school tried to address the problem of a shortage of dining space in 2007 installing post-free canopies along the south-eastern elevations of the school buildings (planning permission ref. SH/07/634). That proved to be insufficient and the School is looking to add extra floor space to deal with the problem.

Site plan





Proposed Building ELEVATIONS



Scale: **1:100 @ A3**
DO NOT SCALE IF IN QUART ASK

LEGEND

REVISION

A	Elevation C amended.	15.06.09	CAT
B	Elevations A,C and D amended.	17.06.09	CAT
C	2 x windows in elevation C deleted.	25.06.09	CAT

DIMENSIONS		MODULE QUANTITY
EXTERNAL	INTERNAL	10.8 x 3.0
width	width	010
0000mm	0000mm	
0000mm	6.0 x 2.5	000
0000mm	0000mm	
0000mm	0000mm	
0000mm	0.6 x 2.4	000
0000mm	0000mm	
0000mm	0000mm	
	Total	010

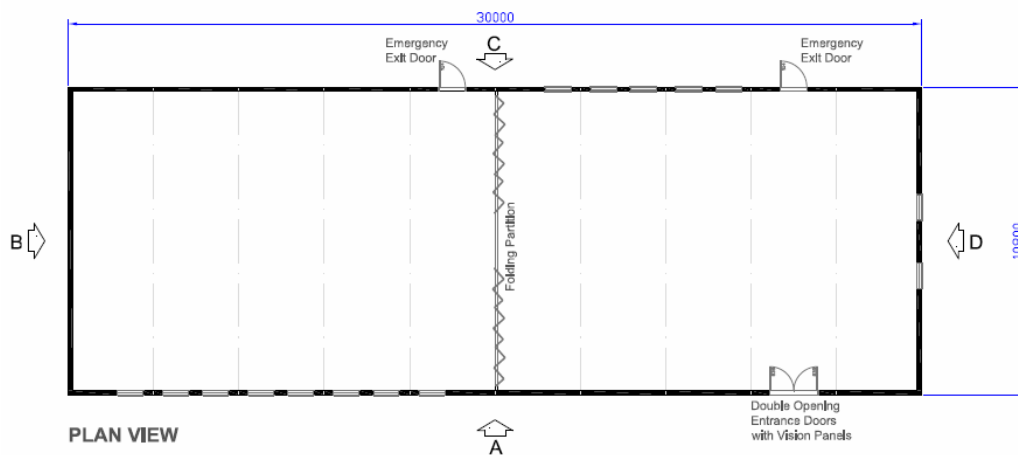
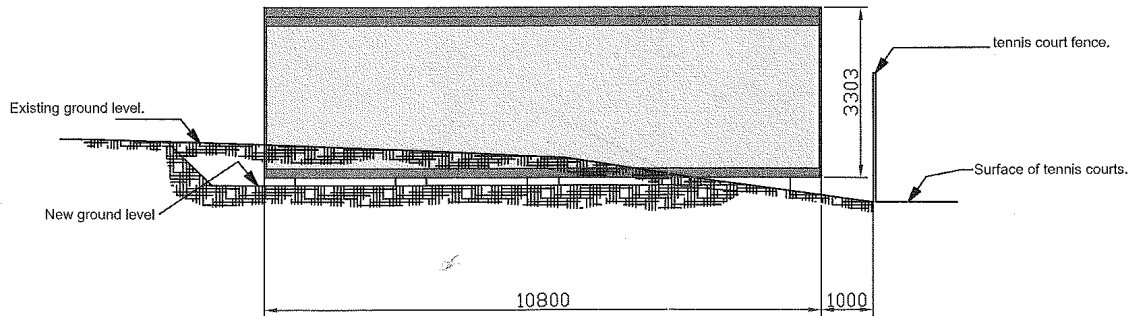
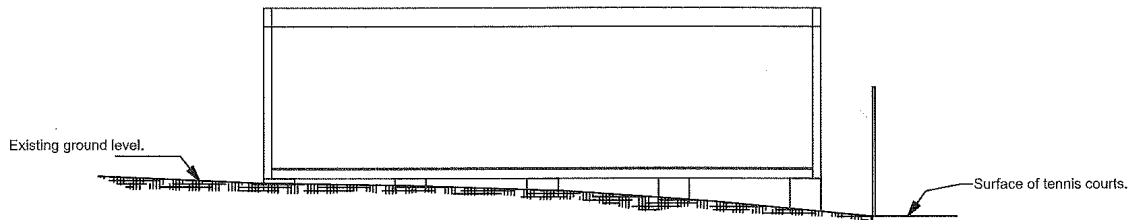
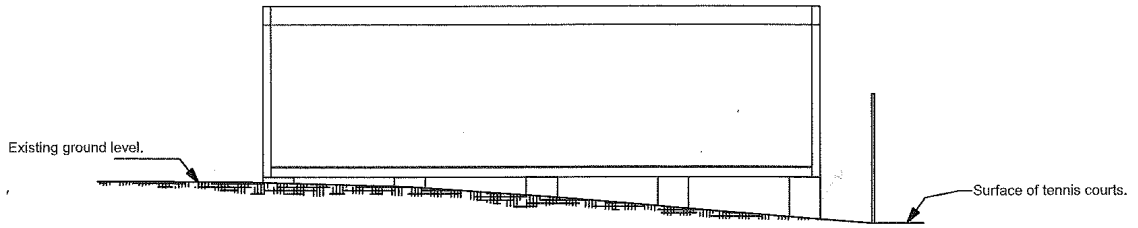
**Pent Valley
Technical College
Folkestone
Kent**

EQ226-01C-ELVS **CAT**
05/JUN/2009 DRAWN BY

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Section drawing



Consultations

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

(i) South East Plan 2006:

Policy CC6 Sustainable communities and character of the environment

(ii) Shepway District Local Plan Review 2006:

Policy SD1 Full range of environmental, economic and social implications of development need to be considered.

Policy BE1 A high standard of layout, design and choice of materials is expected for all new developments.

Policy SC2 Planning permission for improved social and community facilities will be granted where the proposal would be compatible with surrounding land uses, acceptable in highway, infrastructure and environmental terms, accessible by a range of transport alternatives to the car and includes provision for access for disabled persons.

Policy LR12 Development on school playing fields, grass play areas and amenity areas at school sites will only be permitted where development would not cause an unacceptable loss of local environmental quality and where sufficient alternative space provision exists and the land required for an alternative educational purpose which cannot be met in another way.

Policy BE15 Adequate provision should be made within the site for landscaping.

Consultations

8. **Shepway District Council:** raises no objection to the proposal.

Divisional Transportation Manager: raises no objection to the proposal.

Sport England: raises no objection to the proposal as the proposed development affects only land incapable of forming a playing field or part of it.

Local Members

9. The former local Member R. Bliss was notified of the application on the 28th April 2009 and then Mr. T. Prater was notified of the application on the 15 June 2009.

Publicity

10. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice on the site boundary and 11 individual notification letters to private properties.

Representations

11. 12 letters and a petition signed by 17 neighbours were received from the occupiers of adjacent properties. The main planning issues raised by the neighbours can be summarised as follows:

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- It would be overdevelopment of the site and too close to the rear gardens of residential properties resulting in being intrusive and noisy and would affect the quality of life
- It is against Government policy to build on school's recreational grounds especially that the Leisure Centre built 4 years ago halved the provision of sports pitches already
- There is already a mobile building on that part of the school, which was meant to be there for a temporary period but has now been there for 25 years. It is unlikely the new building would be removed any time soon either
- There are no other buildings in this area and the new one would be out of place not in keeping with the rest of the buildings
- It would screen pupils from being seen from the main school buildings and therefore result in greater antisocial behaviour on school grounds
- Object to the design of the building and placing windows facing south-west towards residential properties
- Location on the other side of the school would be more appropriate closer to the existing kitchen facilities
- There should be staggered lunch times at school to accommodate within the existing building as they have done in the past
- There is no need for the building as the school roll is falling and the new mobile would only be used for lunch time. There are educational reasons which would outweigh the loss of open space
- The slightly sloping ground could be levelled and used for needed sports
- There is no information about the hours of use of the building

Discussion*Introduction*

12. In considering this proposal, regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 8 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. In particular, I consider the key determining considerations are the design of the building, the impact of the development on open space and also the impact on residential amenity all balanced against the school's need for additional facilities.
13. A number of neighbours objected to the proposal on the grounds of the impact on noise and visual amenity and on open space, as set out in paragraph 11 above and hence the need for the report to the Planning Applications Committee for determination.

Design

14. Shepway District Local Plan Policy BE1 requires all development to be of high quality, respond positively to the scale, layout and character of their local surrounding. Additionally Policy SC2 of the same plan supports developments for community facilities, where the proposal would be compatible with surrounding land uses, acceptable in highway, infrastructure and environmental terms and includes provision for access for disabled persons.
15. The proposed building is a modern single storey, flat roof building 30m x 10.8m. Externally, the walls would be coated with light grey plastisol with darker merlin grey

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facia (see D2.3). Timber ramps would be provided to comply with Disability Discrimination Act regulations, although not shown on the elevation drawings.

16. The existing school buildings are mostly single storey yellow brick, flat roof buildings. In the south-western corner of the school there is already a mobile building which has been permitted on a temporary basis for at least 10 years and the current permission expires in November 2010. In the context of the site, it is considered that the proposed design of the new flat roof building would be in keeping with the surrounding and the overall appearance of the site. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that mobile buildings are not suitable for schools to provide long term educational facilities. The applicant advises that the School is on the list for Wave 5 of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme, which is expected to proceed by 2012. Therefore, the applicant seeks a temporary planning permission after which the need for the mobile building could be reconsidered. The applicant considered a construction of a permanent solution to address the shortage of space, but eliminated it on the grounds of the likely redevelopment of the site and the potentially abortive cost, especially that the main concern of the School was to deliver the building within the shortest timeframe and with minimal impact on the operation of the school.
17. Under the above circumstances, I consider that the proposed building would be acceptable until a permanent solution could be found, which I am satisfied will be achieved as part of advancing BSF programme.

Open Space

18. Shepway District Local Plan Policies SD1 and LR12 protect playing fields, grass play areas and other recreational areas at school sites. Consideration needs to be given to the impact this development would have on the provision of open space within the school grounds. The school's playing fields are in the north-east corner of the site and the only green amenity grass area is along the southern boundary near the tennis courts. The school's Business Manager advises that there is a shortage of playing fields suitable for games but at the same time the proposal would not have a negative effect on that provision as the land on which the building would be positioned is not capable at this point to be used for any formal games. Sport England supports that view and raises no objection to the proposal. Nevertheless, the building would be positioned on a green amenity space used by students during breaks for recreation. Therefore, it is recognised that the external space within the school grounds available to students would be reduced. On the other hand, the School would benefit from having the additional dining facility to be used during breaks, should permission be granted.
19. Alternative locations for the mobile building, as well as its positioning, were considered. The first option was at the back playground adjacent to the existing Bistro and kitchen to the north of the school buildings, but this would have taken away most of the playground, which is also used for PE, e.g. ball games. The next option was in the rear playing field adjacent to the Sports Centre. This would have taken away the space available for football and outside PE training. In addition, the expected BSF project is likely to be planned around that area of the school grounds and so it would not be practical to block the area. Finally, the Leisure Centre car park was given consideration as a potential site for the new building. The mobile unit would not have worked there given that there is already a shortage of car parking in the area.
20. Summarising, it is acknowledged that the proposed site is indeed used by students during lunch breaks as advised by neighbours and is considered a valuable contribution to the overall open space of the school grounds. Therefore, it is disappointing that one of the last remaining informal recreational spaces available to students needs to be taken by the new mobile building. However, there does not appear to be any alternative to provide the school with a dining hall, which the School's Business Manager says is needed to meet the needs of over 1300 students. In my view, the development would not

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be contrary to the Policies LR12 and SD1 and it is a matter for the School to decide whether this space is best used as dining space or for some other student activities.

Residential Amenity

21. The Shepway District Local Plan Policy SD1, amongst other matters, requires that the amenity of local residents is protected and enhanced unless the negative impact is minimised as far as possible and there is an overriding economic or social need. The local residents raised concerns about the loss of amenity space for pupils, the proximity of the mobile building to dwellings and disturbance in enjoyment of their gardens. Issue of litter along the boundary has also been raised and the potential risk of intensifying the problem. The neighbours are concerned that the mobile building would attract more students to that part of the school site and therefore lead to an increase in noise which would be detrimental to their amenity, as set in the paragraph 11 above.
22. The proposed building would be within an existing school grounds boundary and is intended to provide an eating area for the school pupils. The open grass piece of land gives limited potential for positioning of any new building without compromising the visual or noise amenity of residents. It is desirable to avoid aligning it along the southern boundary with the residential properties as well as positioning the building in a way that makes best use of the space available. It is also important that the chosen location does not compromise the open character of the site to allow staff to continue to oversee activities within the school grounds. Therefore, the position of the building diagonally along the tennis courts is seen as the most suitable. The nearest point of the building would be 7m from the fenced boundary and would move away to 30m at its furthest part. There is also a 2.4m high palisade fence and 2m high close boarded fence dividing the school from the rear garden of the houses. The proposed distances together with the relatively strong boundary are seen as reasonable for this type of development. The School has proposed to plant additional hedging along the southern boundary in order to keep students away from the boundary. This would have the potential to deal long term with the ongoing conflict between the School and the residential land use and would encourage the School to consider it. I recommend including an informative to that effect, should the planning permission be granted. However, it is unlikely that any new planting would have the chance to establish enough to help mitigating the potential visual and noise impacts of the temporary building.
23. Neighbours commented that if the facility is indeed to be a dining hall then it should be near the canteen. However, the School's Business Manager explained that it was not required to place the additional facility near the canteen as it would be a place for students to eat their packed lunches. Nevertheless, the locations on the northern site were considered but were discounted on various grounds, as discussed in paragraph 19. Further, a staggering of lunchtimes was suggested as a solution to address the shortage of space but the applicant advises that it would not overcome the shortage of space problem. Also, the recently installed extensive canopies (permitted in 2007) to the southern elevations to provide additional sitting space for breaks are not enough to deal with the problem.
24. Following various concerns about windows facing the residential properties provoking noise and overlooking issues, the applicant amended the windows layout so as to minimise the amenity impacts. The windows nearest to the southern boundary were moved onto the tennis court elevation. Also the doors to the building have been moved away from the southern boundary. The nearest window facing the boundary would be approximately 20m away from the boundary and over 40m to the nearest house, which is considered acceptable in accordance with the Kent Design Guide recommendations.
25. The site is currently used during lunch breaks and the proposal does not propose to change such use apart from the fact that part of it would now be enclosed. There is some risk that the use of that part of the school grounds would be more intensive,

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although it is unlikely to have any significant impact on noise levels. National guidance on noise impacts (Planning Policy Guidance 24) advises that noise is likely to be significant when there was an introduction of new activity. The proposal does not change the use of the school site. Furthermore, any potential risk of an increase in noise levels would only be during school hours, which could be controlled by a planning condition restricting hours of use of the building. In addition, due to the nature of the building, I would recommend imposing a further planning condition to restrict use of amplified or music equipment in that building, should the permission be granted.

26. Overall, I recognise the value of the space for its contribution to the amenity of the area. Therefore, the potential negative impact of positioning the building should be minimised as far as possible. It is considered however that there is an overriding need for the facility and I am satisfied that no alternative sites are available. The proposed building is unlikely to result in a significant detriment to the amenity of the area to justify refusal of the proposal on these grounds. The issue of litter within school grounds is not a matter controlled by planning regulations and those comments have been forwarded to the School for information.

Conclusion

27. This proposal has been considered against the relevant planning policies, principally those considering design, open space and amenity of the locality. I am satisfied that the proposed design of the building is acceptable for a temporary period until a permanent solution is found as part of the BSF project. The reduction of open space available to students for outdoor informal recreation but this would be outweighed by the provision of a new indoor facility for dining that school is also required to provide. In my view, the development would not result in an unacceptable amenity impact, resulting from a potential increase in noise levels or visual amenity. Overall, I consider that the proposed development would be in accordance with the aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies and I recommend approval of the proposal subject to planning conditions.

Recommendation

28. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions, including conditions covering:
- The building shall be removed from the site by end of 2012
 - No amplified or musical equipment shall be used in the building
 - The building should only be used between 8.00 and 18.00 weekdays term time only.
 - The development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details

And add an informative advising about the boundary planting along the southern boundary to help with the ongoing conflict with the neighbours.

Case Officer –Anna Michalska-Dober	01622 696979
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Background documents –See section heading
