

Two mobile buildings at The Craylands Primary School, Swanscombe – DA/09/583

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

Application by Kent County Council Children, Families & Education Directorate for planning permission for the placement of two, five-bay mobile classroom units at Craylands Primary School, Craylands Lane, Swanscombe.

Recommendation: Temporary planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr. R Lees

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

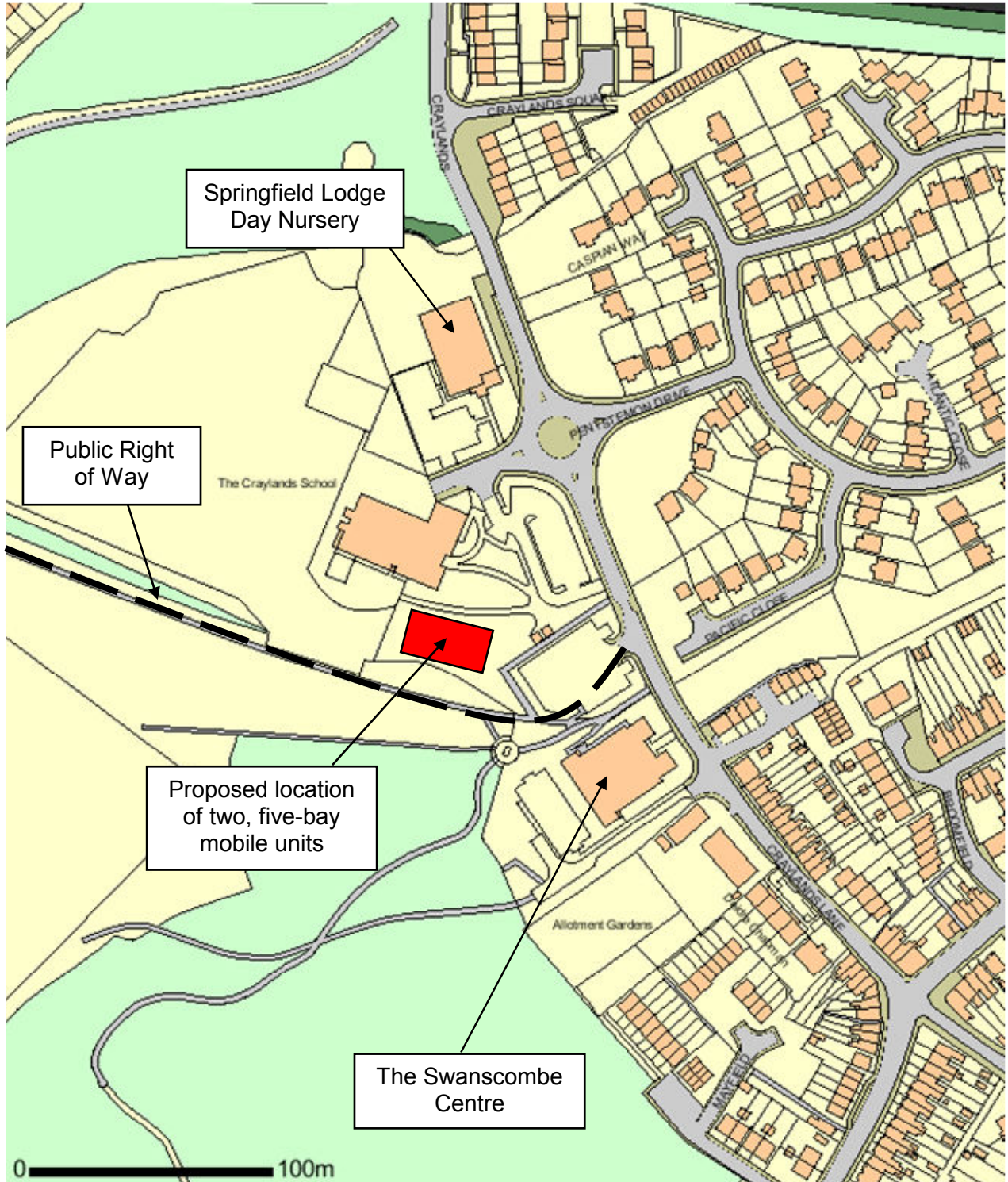
1. The Craylands Primary School is situated on the north-western edge of Swanscombe. The site is accessed off Craylands Lane which leads from the main London Road (A226) that runs between Gravesend and Dartford. The School comprises of a modern new-build campus which opened in September 2003 as a one-form entry primary school. The two new mobile classrooms which this application relates to are proposed to be located on the south-eastern edge of the school grounds adjacent to the car park of the Swanscombe Leisure Centre and the boundary of the school site. The nearest residential properties to the site are located to the east on the opposite side of Craylands Lane. There are no specific land use designations in the Adopted Local Plan which relate to this site, however a Public Right of Way runs along the south-westerly boundary of the school. A site location plan showing the location of the two proposed mobile classrooms is attached on page (D5.2).

Proposal

2. The application has been submitted by Kent County Council Children, Families & Education Directorate and proposes the placement of two, five-bay mobile classroom units for a temporary period to meet a shortfall in accommodation within the main school buildings for extended curriculum services and community events.
3. The applicant has stated that the proposed temporary accommodation will not be used to increase the school roll, but instead improving teaching accommodation to meet an existing need within the school campus over-and-above the existing seven classrooms which from September 2009 will all be in use. The proposed mobile buildings would provide two additional classrooms in each unit, a total of 244m² of floorspace. As noted above, these spaces would then be occupied for teaching activities outside the traditional classroom (for example one-to-one work, group work or speech therapy lessons), together with providing extended services to parents and carers of children attending the school, adult education classes, community events, and the storage of equipment. It is stated within the application that there is intention to replace the proposed mobile units with a permanent extension as soon as funding becomes available.
4. The proposed mobile classrooms would be finished in a typical rough-cast green rendered finish, and would be fully accessible and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant through a series of external ramps and steps to gain access to the buildings.

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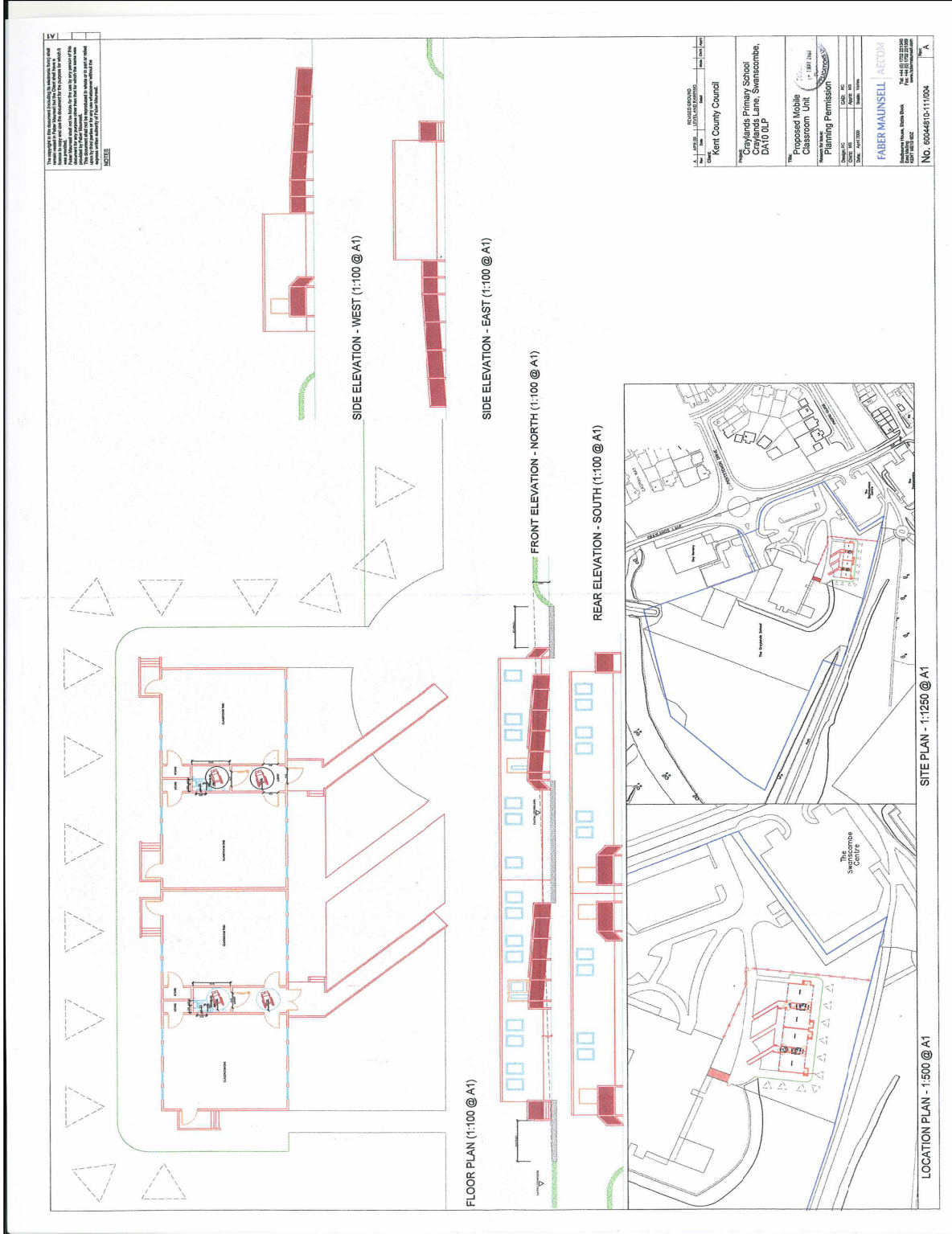
Site Location Plan



Site Location Plan – The Craylands Primary School
Scale 1:2500

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Mobile Classroom Plans



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Additional information provided by the applicant

5. Supporting information received from the applicant states that the proposed accommodation would not be used to increase the school roll. The application notes that the school was originally opened in September 2003 with one reception class. The school has filled year on year, admitting pupils into the reception class annually. By September 2009 the first reception class will have reached year 6 with all classrooms within the school building in use. The activities, detailed above, that would continue in the mobile classrooms already take place at the school; however until now there have been surplus classrooms available in the building to accommodate the extra curricular uses.
6. To demonstrate the need for the mobile buildings the applicant has confirmed that the permanent accommodation provided by Craylands Primary School totals 1,154 m² of floor-space, which met with the standard requirements for a 1 form entry (1 FE) school at the time the building was completed. However, the guidance on school accommodation has subsequently adapted to meet the challenges of the modern curriculum. The current County Council Primary School Design Brief, prepared in the context of the latest Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Guidelines for Schools, recommends the overall accommodation provided in a 1 FE School built today should provide 1,328 m². The permanent accommodation provided within Craylands Primary falls short of this figure by 174 m², which in the applicant considers justifies the proposed accommodation.

Planning Policy

7. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:
 - (i) The adopted 2009 **South East Plan**:
 - Policy CC1** Seeks to achieve and maintain sustainable development in the region
 - Policy CC6** Refers to sustainable communities and character of the environment
 - Policy BE1** Seeks new development to help improve the built environment with design solutions relevant to local character, distinctiveness and sense of place.
 - Policy S3** States that, local planning authorities, taking into account demographic projections, should work with partners to ensure the adequate provision of pre-school, school, and community learning facilities
 - (ii) The adopted 1995 **Dartford Borough Local Plan (saved policies)**:
 - Policy S2** Encouragement will be given to the provision of community facilities where these accord with the details policies of the Plan

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- Policy B1** The following factors will be taken into account in considering development proposals: proposed use, design, materials, amenity, access, infrastructure and water resources.
- Policy RT17** Land West of Craylands Lane will be safeguarded for open space and leisure purposes.
- Policy CF3** Supports the provision of social, community, educational and cultural facilities and infrastructure to meet the current and future needs of the Borough.

Consultations

8. **Dartford Borough Council:** has raised no objection to the proposal.

Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council: makes the following comments, as set out below:

'The Council have no objections to the extension of the school's facilities but would ask that a condition is placed on any approval that no work commences until a heavy duty safety barrier is placed around the current school fence as it is in very close proximity to a busy road and roundabout. The Town Council would suggest that a site meeting is held for the Planning Committee prior to consideration of the application'.

Divisional Transportation Manager: makes the following comments:

'no objections to the proposed mobile classroom units and as the proposal does not increase the school roll nor in itself form a danger to highway users, Kent Highway Services do not support the view of Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council. Their concern seems to relate to the protection of the school property and anyone within it, and I have no doubt the school would already have/should consider such issues as a duty of care, which is separate to the planning system'.

KCC Public Rights of Way: no comments received to date. Any comments received prior to the Committee Meeting will be reported verbally.

Environment Agency: no comments received to date. Any comments received prior to the Committee Meeting will be reported verbally.

Local Members

9. Mr. R. Lees, the local County Member for Swanscombe & Greenhithe was notified of the application on the 12 June 2009.

Publicity

10. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the notification of eight neighbouring properties.

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Representations

11. One letter of representation has been received from Springfield Lodge Day Nursery. A copy of their letter is detailed in Appendix 1.

Discussion**Introduction**

12. The application seeks planning permission for the provision of two mobile classroom units (four classrooms) to provide additional accommodation outside the main classrooms for break out work and other community use activities. The existing permanent accommodation within the school building does not provide appropriate space for these activities. The application is being reported to the Planning Applications Committee as a result of the views expressed by Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council and the adjacent Springfield Lodge Day Nursery, mainly in terms of highway considerations, and concerns over the potential expansion of the school to allow two form entry.
13. In considering this proposal, regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (7) above. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore the proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. In this particular case, I consider that the key considerations are: -
 - siting and design;
 - highway considerations;
 - the need for the development.

Siting and design

14. The application proposes to locate two mobile buildings within an open grassed amenity space, approximately 15 metres to the south-east of the main school building. The school site is bounded by green welded mesh fencing with intermittent landscaping. The location proposed for the development is set at the rear of the school grounds, although it would be visible from the public highway (Craylands Lane), approximately 50 metres from the road. Land to the south of the school boundary is designated as open space for leisure purposes; due to changes in ground level and vegetation the application site is not visible from this direction. The closest residential property would be approximately 90 metres to the east on the far side of Craylands Lane.
15. The proposed development raises material considerations concerning the siting and design of the mobile buildings when considered in the context of the character of the local built environment and open space. South East Plan Policies CC1, CC6 and BE1 seek to ensure a sustainable pattern of development ensuring the physical and natural environment is conserved and enhanced. These Policies also seek design solutions for new development that respect local character and distinctiveness to create high quality built environment. Dartford Borough Local Plan Policy B1 seeks to ensure the proposed

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use is appropriate to its location, achieves a standard of design that respects the surroundings, using good quality materials.

16. I note that the application site is visible from the public highway to the north-east and an adjacent car park, serving The Swanscombe Centre to the east. The location is screened from wider views from outside the school grounds in all other directions by established planting, changes in ground levels and the surrounding built environment, including the school building to the north. Due to the scale of the buildings proposed, the development would only be visible at a local level from Craylands Lane, and would not result in any adverse impacts on residential amenity, through loss of privacy or over shadowing.
17. The design of the mobile buildings would be similar in construction to a number of units used across the County; single storey timber framed units finished with green render, white UPVC windows, wooden ramps and steps providing access. The development of the site would require a limited amount of cut and fill in order to level the ground, setting the building approximately 0.5 metres into a shallow slope that rises to the south.
18. I note that due to the nature of the design, and usable lifespan, the buildings proposed would be unlikely to be considered as an acceptable permanent solution in this locality. The single storey, flat roof construction cannot be said to enhance the character of the existing built environment, nor the recently constructed school building. I note that it is the applicant's intention to seek to provide a permanent solution on site as soon as funding becomes available.
19. Whilst a permanent solution to provide for the proposed accommodation would be preferable, in my opinion the layout and design of the development would be acceptable in the location for a temporary period. Due to the location proposed within the school grounds any visual impact would be kept to a minimum and the layout would not detract from the amenities of nearby residents' properties. Taking into consideration that the proposed buildings would not be prominent in the streetscene, and largely screened from wider views in the landscape by its surroundings, it is my opinion that the structures would not detract from the character of the local physical or nature environment for a temporary period. I therefore consider that the development would be acceptable in the context of the Development Plan Policies in place in terms of its layout and design.

Highway considerations

20. Swanscombe & Greenhithe Parish Council, along with the adjacent Springfield Lodge Day Nursery, have raised highway comments in response to this application. The Parish Council request a heavy duty safety barrier is provided around the existing school fence to increase the protection afforded to people within the school grounds. The Parish has concerns about the proximity of a busy public highway to the school boundary, approximately 2 metres (the width of a standard footpath) away.
21. It should be noted that the school grounds are enclosed by an existing secure welded mesh fence. Craylands Lane has existing traffic calming measures in place including speed bumps and is an unclassified local distribution road. The Divisional Transportation Manager has raised no objection to the application and has commented on the Parish Council's request. He notes that the proposed development would not increase the school roll, nor would the proposal in itself form a danger to highway users,

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on this basis KHS are not in a position to support the Parish Council's request. I agree with the Transportation Manager that the School would already have/should consider such issues as a care of duty.

22. Taking the above comments into consideration and that the development would not change the existing travel patterns associated with the school, I would not recommend the requested condition as this would not be reasonable or necessary. However, I would suggest that the applicant be made aware of the Parish Council's concerns by way of an appropriately worded informative placed on any decision.
23. Comments received from Springfield Lodge Day Nursery note the existing highway impacts associated with parents dropping off and collecting children at the start and end of the school day. Changes in the management of the parking facilities available to the school have allegedly increased congestion on the public highway at peak times, with parents seeking out alternate parking facilities in the area, including the turning area between the Nursery and the School, and the Nursery car park. The Day Nursery is concerned that the provision of four new classrooms within a one form entry school could be a lead up to increasing the size of the intake to two form entry. It is feared that this could effectively double the number of people attending the site, potentially increasing congestion and concerns about highway safety.
24. As noted above, the applicant has clearly stated that the proposed temporary accommodation would not be used to increase the school roll; however it would be used to support the learning of the existing pupils. On this basis, the Divisional Transportation Manager has raised no objection to the application on highway grounds. Whilst the congestion at peak times maybe a problem, this is not something that could reasonably be addressed through the current application as the proposals would not materially alter the situation. However, I note the Nursery's concerns that the buildings could be used to increase the size of the school in the future. Should Members be minded to permit the application an appropriately worded condition could be included on any decision restricting the use of the buildings to that applied for. That would ensure that if in the future plans were put in place to increase the size of the school, they could be considered in an appropriate manner allowing consideration of the potential impacts of any increase in use.
25. Therefore, it is my opinion that the provision of additional accommodation at the school would not generate an unacceptable increase in traffic movements so as to cause significant harm in highway terms. On the basis of the details set out above, I would not raise a planning objection to the proposals on highway grounds, and recommend a condition controlling any subsequent use of the mobile buildings.

Need for the development

26. The application proposes additional accommodation to support existing pupils by creating space for teaching intervention such as group work, one to one support, additional educational needs, speech therapy and nurture groups, alongside providing for existing extended services to parents and carers of the children attending the school, providing support for community events such as those organised by the PTA, and storage of equipment and archives for the school. To date these activities have taken place within the main school building within vacant classrooms, as this relatively new school is only due to reach its full capacity from the new school year.

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27. The applicant has demonstrated to my satisfaction that the school was built to a design brief that has subsequently been superseded. The need for additional break out space and multi use teaching spaces were not adequately provided for in the original design. When compared to the current KCC Primary School Design Brief accommodation within Craylands Primary School is approximately 170 m² under the recommended level. Should the planning permission not be afforded to the mobile buildings, the applicant has indicated that, once the school is running at full capacity, the only other place for extra classroom activities to take place would be the corridors. On this basis, it is my opinion that there is a demonstrated need for the development and that the proposal would be supported South East Local Plan Policy S3 and Dartford Local Plan Policies S2 and CF3.

Conclusion

28. In conclusion, I consider that the mobile classrooms would not have a significant detrimental impact on the character and/or appearance of the surrounding built environment. The application would not result in an increase in the number of people attending the site and would therefore not materially change/ add to any highway congestion associated with the site. I consider that the applicants have been able to demonstrate a case of need for the building to be temporarily provided on site in order to support the curriculum and maintain adequate accommodation for the other community services provided to date within the main school building. Taking into account the provisions of the Development Plan and material considerations raised from consultees as outlined in paragraph (8), I recommend that planning permission for the mobile buildings be granted for a temporary period of 3 years at which point the situation could be reviewed.

Recommendation

29. I RECOMMEND that TEMPORARY PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO conditions, including the following:
- temporary consent for period of 3 years from date of permission;
 - removal of classroom units at expiration of 3 year period and the subsequent restoration of the site thereafter;
 - the development be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
 - the use of the mobile buildings be restricted to ancillary teaching accommodation, community use and storage in connection with a one form entry Primary School.

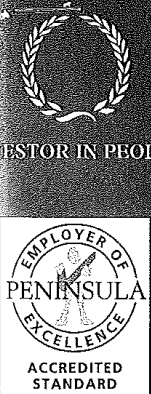
I FURTHER RECOMMEND THAT AN INFORMATIVE be added to the decision notice advising the applicant of the concerns raised by the Parish Council.

Case officer – James Bickle	01622 221068
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Background documents - See section heading
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APPENDIX 1 – LETTER FROM SPRINGFIELD LODGE DAY NURSERY



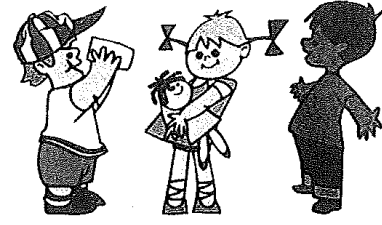
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

EMPLOYER OF PENINSULA EXCELLENCE ACCREDITED STANDARD

Dartford
Powder Mill Lane
Dartford
Kent
DA1 1NT
Tel: 01322 228154
Fax: 01322 319116
Email: enquiries@springfielddn.co.uk

Swanscombe
Craylands Lane
Swanscombe
Kent
DA10 0LP
Tel: 01322 389181
Fax: 01322 389259
Email: springfieldsw@btconnect.com

www.springfielddn.co.uk



SPRINGFIELD LODGE DAY NURSERY

COPY TO D.C.	17/3/09
ACK	✓
LEAFLET SENT	✓

Environment & Regeneration Directorate
Kent County Council
First Floor
Invicta House
Maidstone
ME14 1XX

13th March 2009

Dear Sirs,

Re: Mobile Buildings at Craylands School, Swanscombe
Application Ref. No: PAG/DA/09/TEMP/0004

We write with concern to the above application. Until last week when we received a courtesy call from the Head Teacher, Mrs. Allsop, we knew nothing of the proposal nor were we in any way consulted. We are informed there is a posted notice nearby but surely as we are right next door we should have received written communication and given an opportunity to make comments?

It seems the application is to provide "spare space" for the school – an additional resource. However, why then in the telephone call with Mrs. Allsop were we told "you know this should be a 2 room entry school, and we have had 130 applications for 30 places". This definitely indicates there is a plan to increase the number of classes at the school to accommodate a higher number of children, and not purely "for extra space".

Our first concern is relative to the fact that if another reception class for 3 and/or 4 years children materialises, we will find ourselves losing effectively 2 groups of children to school which will have a major impact on our ability to sustain for the future. As we were put in the position of having to move onto a separate site in the first place, which was not on the original plan by Kent County Council, that situation would be untenable. Indeed we are sure this will also affect other local pre-school provisions.

Our second concern is traffic generation. We have already experienced several changes in the school parking arrangements because the school were having parking challenges with parents dropping off, and in fact parents are no longer allowed to park at all! As a result parents in their desperation are using the turning area between the school and nursery to drop off children. We have also noted lately that parents are using the nursery car park similarly and we are monitoring this. We have no doubt Swanscombe Leisure Centre will be experiencing the same issues.

Head Office: Springfield Lodge Day Nursery (Dartford) Limited, Powder Mill Lane, Dartford, Kent, DA1 1NT
Proprietors: Mrs L M Beriman, Mrs S M McCluskey
Ofsted Registered Company Reg. No: 4653315

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We understand Kent Highways have become involved, and are presently carrying out a consultation in regard to this problem to which they are now trying to find a solution. Therefore, if the school are to increase their numbers (and we are almost certain this is being manipulated) surely this is going to make the problem far worse?

We have often wondered why the school have not put into place a graded time of arrival/leaving system whereby younger children are dropped at a certain time, and then older children earlier or later, thus removing the short term pressure on parking facilities and use of the Highway. Perhaps that could be food for thought?

We are extremely concerned and would require to see a noted limitation on the use of this building for “extra resource space” and not for the purposes of adding extra classrooms to increase the existing number of children at the school.

We should be pleased to receive your acknowledgement to this letter, together with your assurances our concerns are being taken seriously and there is no intention to increase the number of classrooms, and specifically for pre-school.

We have no wish to create a negative atmosphere but you should note we received no written communication from the School, its Board of Governors or Kent Education. However, our understanding of Kent policy is its desire to promote positive and effective partnerships between education, child care provisions, the community and parents.

We look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Yours truly,

PP MRe

Linda Berriman
Managing Director

Cc. The Craylands School
Daniel Rome – Commissions Officer
Karen Coffey – LCSPM
Paul Carter – Kent Education MP
Neil Luxton – Dartford Planning
Rochelle Coe – Faber Maunsell