

New School Buildings and Ancillary Facilities at the Malling School, Beech Road, East Malling – TM/04/3357

A report by the Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Application Committee on 14 December 2004

Application: TM/04/3357 Joint application by Kent County Council and the Kent Education Partnership for the demolition of existing school buildings and provision of new school buildings together with car parking areas, landscaping and temporary mobile classrooms, at the Malling School, Beech Road, East Malling.

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mrs T Dean

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. This application was the subject of a Members' site meeting on 9 November 2004, and the Council Secretariat's minutes of that meeting are included in Appendix 1.
2. Malling School occupies land which was formerly the landscaped grounds of Clare House, a late Eighteenth Century, Grade I Listed Building. The western portion of the school site, surrounding the House and its adjacent enclave of modern houses, contains the school's playing fields and a lake. This land is not included in the present application. Only the site containing the school buildings, southeast of Blacklands path, is included in the planning application, but the bus turning loop on Clare Lane with its footpath connection to the school gate, though outside the application site, is key to the proposal.

Location and access

3. At part of the school included in the application has a site area of 5.5 hectares. Vehicular and pedestrian entrance is gained via Beech Road, a residential cul de sac off New Road. There are existing separate in and out gateways. There is an additional pedestrian entrance from the west off Blacklands. This is in part a cul de sac road off Clare Lane, part a footpath public right of way connecting, via another short cul de sac, to Chapman Way north of the school. East Malling village centre and rail station are approximately 750m from the school entrances and 1km from Larkfield village centre on A20. There are bus services along New Road with stops at Beech Road. A 'walking bus' route to the Millstream Junior School crosses the site.

Surroundings

4. To the south, the site adjoins Mill Stream Junior School's playing field, across which there are glimpses of the site from Mill Street. To the east is the Beech Road area of mainly semi-detached housing dating from the late 1950s/60s. To the north west is Blacklands path, beyond which the remains of Clare House Park, incorporates the school's playing fields and other areas used for recreation, and includes a lake – one of the adaptations to the Malling Stream made in the Eighteenth Century to serve the Mill. There are small groups of houses at either end of the path, along which a 2 metre concrete wall has been erected. Clare House occupies a prominent position in the Park but is partially screened by vegetation. From the level of the House there are glimpses of the application site through a belt of mature trees.

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5. To the west lies Mill Street, an historic outlier of East Malling village centred around Middle Mill, where former paper mill sites have been redeveloped with modern housing. The immediate western boundary is adjoined by two small industrial units (engineering and sheet metal works) and a small group of detached houses at the south west corner. There is an electricity pylon near the south east corner.

Character

6. The school buildings have a spacious parkland setting, reflecting the site's former status as part of Clare House Park. It is characterised by a number of mature trees and other tree groups, both within the site and close to the boundaries, the greatest concentration being along the Blacklands footpath, where trees combine with those outside the site boundary to form a strip of informal woodland. The western boundary is also well screened by trees. Eleven trees and 13 groups are subject to a Tree Preservation Order. The existing buildings are mostly two-storey, dating from the 1960s, flat roofed with bands of tile hanging. The buildings occupy the eastern part of the site while the western part is an open grassed recreation area.
7. The site is shown on the proposals map of the adopted Tonbridge and Malling borough Local Plan as lying within a Green Wedge and an Area of Local Landscape Importance. The adjoining Clare House Park is defined in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens and is in the Clare Park and Blacklands Conservation Area. The latter also includes a group of dwellings close to the school's Blacklands entrance. Parts of Mill Street are also within the Mill Street Conservation Area, while the core of East Malling village forms the East Malling Village Conservation Area.

Topography

8. The application site has a slight slope down to the north, with the valley of the East Malling Stream dividing it from the opposite, somewhat steeper, slope of Clare Park. Recreation areas on the southern part of the site have been slightly terraced into the slope. Views into and out of the site are restricted by the trees and walls (within and outside the site), by surrounding buildings and by its relatively flat topography.

Background

9. KCC has embarked on a programme of upgrading the range and quality of its secondary school accommodation over the next few years, on a scale not seen for several decades. It could ultimately involve over 100 schools. In most cases this will involve demolition of existing inadequate or unsuitable buildings and/or those incapable of cost effective adaptation, and in some cases relocation to a new site.
10. Six schools form the first tranche of this scheme of major building works, to be carried out under the KCC Private Finance Initiative Scheme (PFI). All six schools suffer from inadequate accommodation in ageing and outdated buildings. They will be largely redeveloped within their existing sites, although one or two of the more recent buildings will be retained and adapted. The aim is to provide in each case a high quality new/refurbished school to meet the needs of the modern curriculum, including any specialist status enjoyed or aspired to by the schools, and to promote Adult Education and Life Long Learning for the benefit of the community.

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11. KCC is progressing this work with a private sector provider, known collectively as the Kent Education Partnership. Since KCC continues to have a significant interest in the short term provision, the medium term management and the long term inheritance of these schools, the planning applications are to be determined by the County Planning Authority.
12. The Malling School is a 11-19 co-educational Foundation School with a capacity for up to 1110 pupils including up to 100 sixth form students. A total of 92 staff includes 52 teaching staff. The first school buildings were in place by 1961. Permission has been granted for a number of minor additions and adaptations to the original 1960s buildings, notably the use of a building near the main entrance as a day nursery, and the redevelopment of the sports hall. The school hopes to draw on a wider and more balanced catchment of pupils, who are currently largely drawn from the East Malling side, and sees a more prestigious main entry point to the school on the west side as likely to help in that aim.

Proposal

13. The applicants state that existing buildings on the site are either too small for modern classroom sizes or are of poor quality, constructed in a lightweight systemized manner that is difficult to refurbish in such a way as to meet current school construction standards. There are also problems with suiting accommodation to meet new curricular needs and a lack of assembly spaces. It is proposed to demolish all the existing buildings except for the day nursery, which would be retained, and the sports hall and gymnasium (777 sq m in all). The new 8872 sq m school would be built on the western part of the site currently used for recreation, and close to the western boundary, leaving the area of the demolished buildings to be landscaped. However, the applicant's Design Statement refers to the fact that the Education Authority is currently engaged in public consultation on the proposed amalgamation of St James Infant and Mill Stream Junior Schools and that relocation to the part of the Malling School's demolished buildings is one of the options being considered. The present scheme is however pursued independently of the outcome of that consultation.

Buildings

14. The design of the new school follows the concept adopted for all six current PFI proposals, adapted to the particular requirements of the school and the constraints of the site. The stated aim of the design is to provide contemporary new buildings and a compact form together with clearly defined circulation routes, which would reduce pupil movements between lessons and any associated disruption. The basic layout comprises three 'learning barns' linked at their western end to the assembly hall, dining hall and drama and dance studios, offices and main entrance by covered walkways.
15. The main entrance to the school would no longer be via the Beech Road vehicular entrance, as it is intended to provide an attractive new entrance from the Clare Lane turning loop.
16. Flexibility is a key element – space within the learning barns can be adapted as required by moving internal walls. Additional barns can be added to the main spine. The dimensions of the 'barns' have also been influenced by optimum class sizes and the provision of natural light and ventilation to both sides of the classroom via light wells.

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17. Education objectives requiring to be met in the design included meeting sustainability objectives in low energy design and green specification and achieving design quality within the constraints of affordability.
18. Materials include a combination of brickwork, profiled aluminium cladding, aluminium windows and render. Detailed design features include a selected number of coloured window panes, and the cladding line along the elevations will vary in level. Open canopies and walkways would be provided between the buildings. The roofs will be constructed with a shallow fall to minimise the building height and allow suitable drainage, and will not be generally visible from ground level or surrounding buildings. Fixed galvanised brises soleil above the windows provide shading. For activities in connection best conducted outside but with a classroom lesson, covered outdoor spaces are provided at the end of each learning barn, where a spiral staircase is located.
19. The applicants state that siting has been influenced by the following:
- The existing access is the key constraint on the site, involving a tortuous route through narrow residential roads. The existing pedestrian access linking to Clare Road would provide a 'front door' to the site and an enhanced environment that is intended to establish quality profile and define a setting for the new school. The entrance has been positioned to allow maximum natural surveillance from surrounding areas.
 - Distinctive characteristics of the site offer potential for the school to be viewed in a unique and exciting landscaped environment, helping to change its image and raise its profile.
 - Wasted lesson time can be reduced by tightening up the footprint of the school and facilitate activities outside with some protection from poor weather.
 - Performing Arts Specialist status – in addition to the dance studio, found directly on entry to the school, plans include a sculpted external amphitheatre for external performances. This is shown as being on the western boundary adjacent to the neighbouring industrial properties.

Access and Parking

20. The submitted Design Statement proposes 80 car parking spaces in accordance with KCC Vehicle Parking Standards. However, the submitted Transport Statement refers to the retention of the existing 135 spaces. There is an existing pick up and drop off area within the site which is to be retained, as is the turning loop off Clare Lane which is also used for pick up and drop off. An indicative site for a cycle store is shown, but details are to be submitted for later approval.

Landscaping

21. An indicative landscaping plan has been submitted with the proposal. The area vacated by the demolished buildings is shown as largely soft landscaping with mown grass trails. Existing hard surfaced play areas, car parks and drop off facilities are to be retained, as is the walking bus route.
22. It is proposed to remove a limited number of TPO trees. This would be offset by future landscape planting. Most trees on the site however are shown on the plans as being retained. New planting is proposed in the spaces between the learning barns.

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23. The applicant has also submitted separate assessments of archaeology, ecology and a report on the herpetofauna surveys that have been undertaken.

Phasing and temporary classrooms

24. Temporary classrooms may need to be deployed in the centre of the site during phase 1 of the decant and phasing strategy - the number and precise location would be submitted for later approval. However the applicant has indicated that this is unlikely to be necessary.

Development Plan Policies

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

(i) The adopted 1996 **Kent Structure Plan**:

Policy S1 Seeks sustainable patterns and forms of development.

Policy S2 Seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of Kent's environment.

Policy S9 Has regard for the need for community facilities and services, including education.

Policy ENV2 Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's landscape and wildlife.

Policy ENV15 Development should be compatible with the conservation and enhancement of the character of the built environment. New development should be well designed and respect its setting. The character, setting and separation of towns and villages will be protected.

Policy ENV16 Seeks to balance the best use of land in built-up areas against the objective of maintaining and where possible improving, urban environmental quality.

Policy ENV17 Seeks to preserve and enhance the special character of conservation areas.

Policy ENV18 Important archaeological sites should be protected and where possible enhanced. Where development would affect an archaeological site preservation in situ or investigation and recording will normally be sought.

Policy ENV19 The settings of Listed Buildings will be protected and enhanced.

Policy ENV20 Requires development to be planned and designed so as to avoid or minimise pollution impacts.

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Policy NR3/4 Governs development in relation to groundwater and surface water resources

Policy T17 Development will normally be required to provide for vehicle parking on site in accordance with Kent County Council's Vehicle Parking Standards.

(ii) The Deposit 2003 **Kent and Medway Structure Plan:**

Policy SP1 Seeks to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern and form of development.

Policy E3 Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's landscape and wildlife habitats

Policy E8 Seeks to protect, maintain and enhance important wildlife habitats.

Policy QL1 Development should be well designed and respect its setting.

Policy QL7 Development which would harm the character of a conservation area will not be permitted.

Policy QL8 Seeks to protect and enhance important archaeological sites and their settings.

Policy QL9 The character of the settings of Listed Buildings will be protected and enhanced.

Policy QL12 Seeks to protect existing community services. Flexibility in the use of buildings for mixed community uses and the concentration of sports facilities at schools, will be encouraged.

Policy QL13 Seeks to accommodate local community services within new residential, commercial and mixed use developments.

Policy TP19 Development proposals must comply with the respective vehicle parking policies and standards adopted by Kent County Council.

Policy NR4 Requires development to be planned and designed so as to avoid or minimise pollution impacts.

Policy NR7 Development will not be permitted where it would give rise to an unacceptable impact on the quality or yield of Kent's watercourses, coastal waters and/or ground water resources.

(iii) The adopted 1998 **Tonbridge and Malling Local Plan:**

Policy P2/19 In Green Wedges, development will not be permitted which significantly extends the built confines of rural settlements or

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urban areas, or has a significant adverse effect on the function of the Green Wedge in ensuring the separation of these areas.

Policy P3/7 In Areas of Local Landscape Importance, development which would materially harm the landscape character of the area will not be permitted. (Character defined as an area of mainly open uses which provides an attractive rural setting to the built-up areas of West Malling, east Malling and the Medway Gap).

Policy P3/8 Governs development in relation to the loss of trees and the provision of replacement planting

Policy 3/11 Seeks appropriate surveys and advice to be undertaken where land may be contaminated and where surface and groundwater resources may be at risk

Policy P3/14 Seeks to protect surface and groundwater resources

Policy 3/16 Development will not be permitted where outputs from the proposed use would have an unacceptable adverse effect on the air/land or water quality of the area.

Policy P3/17 Governs development in relation to noise

Policy P4/3 Governs development in relation to sites of archaeological significance.

Policy P4/4 Proposals for land adjoining a Conservation Area should respect the setting of the Conservation Area and views into or out of it.

Policy P4/6 Development will not be permitted which would harm the overall character, integrity or setting of the Historic Parks and Gardens.

Policy P4/11 Development should be well designed and respect its setting

Policy P7/14 Seeks to promote the maintenance and improvement of the existing network of public rights of way and where appropriate seek the provision of new public rights of way

Policy P7/18 Expects new development to make satisfactory provision for the off-street parking of vehicles in accordance with the adopted Vehicle Parking Standards

Policy P8/1 Seeks to permit developments where it can be demonstrated that the service and community infrastructure necessary to the development is available.

The **East Malling Village Design Statement** was adopted by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council in February 2004 as Supplementary Planning Guidance within the Local Plan.

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Consultations

26. **Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council:** Raises no objections subject to the following matters being covered:

Design issues - Investigate the possibility of digging the building into the site the paths through the new school grounds should follow desire lines; KCC should consider carefully the palette of materials and these should be forwarded to TMBC for consideration; applicants should be made aware of the East Malling Village Design Statement;

Archaeology- Submission of an archaeological programme of works;

Ecology- Further studies and mitigation works to be carried out as detailed by the ecological survey and the herpetofauna survey;

Highways issues- Submission of travel plan; speed management of traffic along Clare Lane should be proposed; submission of a programme of construction works traffic movements and timings; construction traffic movements should be carefully considered and signposted from the A20;

Noise and community use - Investigations should be carried out into noise issues from out-of-hours use of the school site and adjoining properties. Involve the Borough Council's Director of Leisure in detailed discussions with regard to the community access for the sports facilities proposed;

Landscaping issues- A full landscaping scheme for the site should be produced, including the removal of the concrete wall to the side of Blacklands path, and also indicating the specific trees that are to be lost. Works should be undertaken to upgrade Blacklands path, including surfacing improvement and lighting, as it is a pivotal feature and needs to be pleasant and inviting. Submission of details of an improved visual approach along the footpath leading to the new school entrance, particularly at its junction with Blacklands. - a joint project should be set up between the School/KCC/PFI operators and TMBC with regard to the management of the lake area;

Youth facility – It is suggested that accommodation to fulfil the need for an out of normal school hours youth facility is provided within the proposal. East Malling is within the 20% most deprived wards in the South East and the subject of an initiative forming part of KCC's Supporting Independence Programme. The community itself has highlighted the deficiency of facilities for young people.

East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council: raises a number of points, some of which concern the accuracy of documents submitted and contradictions therein, for example regarding the number of car parking spaces.

The main points can be summarised as:

- The proposals would result in increased traffic along Clare Lane and traffic calming is requested.
- Blacklands footpath should be improved with suitable lighting and removal of the concrete fence.

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- The Council agrees with East Malling Conservation Group (see below) that the architectural merit of the scheme is totally inadequate, perpetuates the poor quality of what it is replacing, and is typical for industrial or waste management facilities. The buildings have not been designed for the location, and the design is clearly a package being provided on all six sites. Neither the flat roof nor the materials proposed would be aesthetically pleasing.
- The issue of noise impact should be evaluated, as the intention is to intensify out-of-hours and community use of the school. Acoustic measures should be incorporated into the buildings.
- Clare Park and lake – pleased to see it excluded from the proposals, but it needs a long term management plan. Site levels of new buildings should have regard to minimising impact on the Conservation Area.
- Support archaeological trial trenching as a requirement.

An additional letter has been received following the Members' site visit. The Council wishes to re-emphasize certain of the above points and asks that the access from Clare Lane should not be used until it is upgraded, including the footpath along the unadopted private roadway (Blacklands). The Council also asks for a reduction in the speed limit along Clare Lane as the straight approach to the corner encourages speed. It considers that the issues be secured by conditions or legal agreement.

Environment Agency: there is no objection to the principle of a new school or the use of temporary classrooms during construction but objects to the application overall, as insufficient information regarding flood risk has been supplied.

- Flooding. The site is within the 100 year indicative floodplain. The area is vulnerable to flooding from the Malling Stream during particularly wet winters. Flooding problems were known to occur in 2000/2001 and 2002/03 a short distance downstream but the Agency has no information on whether the school site was affected. The rebuilding presents the opportunity to ensure the replacement buildings are designed to mitigate flood risk and to ensure the school can remain open during localised flood conditions, without exacerbating conditions elsewhere. The Agency recommends the applicant completes a Flood Risk Assessment and suggests conditions covering the method of surface water disposal and flood mitigation measures, subject to which, there is no objection.
- Contamination – the requirements for detailed site investigation appears to have been met. If during development, contamination not previously identified is found to be present at the site, then no further development (unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority) shall be carried out until the developer has submitted proposals, and obtained written approval from the LPA, specifying how unsuspected contamination shall be dealt with. Safeguards are regarding removal and disposal of waste materials and redundant drainage and services.
- Groundwater- the site lies within Source Protection Zone 3 and precautions are needed during construction and operation.
- Biodiversity – if the development is likely to impact on the lake or stream, water vole, otter and white clawed crayfish surveys may be needed.

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Sport England: No objection, as the proposal only affects land incapable of forming, or forming part of, a playing pitch or loss of other sporting facility. However, they are unable to confirm support at present, as there is insufficient information to compare the existing facilities with those proposed. (It is hoped that this can be clarified, as the existing sports hall and playing pitches are to be retained).

Transportation Planning, West Kent Area Office: No objection to what is proposed. Since there is to be no change in the school roll, staff numbers, pick-up/drop off arrangements, parking and the location of the main entrance, does not feel that the Highway Authority is in a position to ask for any contributions to any off-site works. Some of the cycle links identified (in supporting Transport Statement) could re-emerge should any part of the site be sold off for development.

County Archaeologist: The site lies within an area which has revealed evidence of occupation and settlement from the prehistoric period onwards. The area of development should be subject to a programme of archaeological trial trenching followed by detailed excavation work of any remains located or a watching brief during development. A detailed plan of any historic landscape features associated with Clare House should be drawn up with a view to their retention, preservation in situ and incorporation into the development scheme. Conditions to ensure these measures are recommended. *A strategy for further investigation has been agreed with the applicant.*

County Biodiversity Officer: advises that no part of the site has a designation for nature conservation. Kent Habitat Survey describes the site as built development and improved grassland with broadleaved woodland, but whilst of little intrinsic value it has the potential to support a number of protected species. The existing buildings have potential to support bats, and no work should be undertaken until the results of further surveys are known. If found, mitigation proposals will be needed. Measures to protect the watercourses during construction are requested, as are further herpetofauna surveys to inform mitigation plans. Trees to be felled should be replaced by at least an equal number of new trees of local native provenance. Tree felling should avoid the main bird breeding season (March to August), and it should first be ensured that they are not used by bats. The opportunity should be taken to provide a net gain for wildlife by measures detailed in the Ecological Scoping Report (e.g. bird and bat boxes, areas of rough vegetation).

Kent Police: Police Architectural Liaison Officer: States that The Malling School, like others in the current PFI scheme has suffered huge losses over the years in relation to growing crime and anti-social behaviour trends. He expresses a number of concerns including:

- Natural surveillance of the Beech Road entrance will be more difficult when the existing buildings are demolished. The existence of the two entrances creates a danger of shortcutting which must be strictly controlled, whilst still welcoming to visitors.
- No lighting is indicated. Lighting is important and needs to be considered in accordance with CCTV cameras to ensure maximum benefit to the school and local residents.
- The shape of the buildings creates hiding places, so all doors and windows should be of a high security standard. Windows are needed on the ends of the wings (learning barns) for natural surveillance.
- The external staircases are vulnerable to out of hours use for anti-social behaviour.
- Location of ICT rooms on the ground floor makes them vulnerable.

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- The car parking areas will need to be carefully thought out to maximise natural surveillance.
- Plastic coated paladin weld-mesh fencing is recommended for boundary treatment.
- Clear and efficient site management (e.g. signing, badges) is needed to make security recommendations effective.

Jacobs Babtie (Landscape): Consider that more detailed landscape drawings would be appropriate at this stage, as it is a sizeable proposal and involves major changes to the external spaces, levels, circulation and views. Detail of the suggested plant species is limited for detailed planning consent.

Regarding the removal of valuable trees with existing TPOs, they consider the removal of the two acers at the northeast entrance would have a negative visual effect that cannot be adequately mitigated, and suggest the cycle storage can be relocated within the immediate area. They further suggest that these two trees be protected from damage during the works. They do not object in principle to the removal of the remaining trees with TPOs for the purpose of constructing the new school buildings. In mitigation, they suggest that three heavy standards be planted elsewhere on site in accordance with Kent Design policy.

The existing site contains varying levels throughout and they consider that more detailed drawings showing the elevations of the resulting buildings and landscape in relation to each other and to the surrounding areas ought to have been provided to adequately assess impact of views in and out. *Revised elevation drawings showing the buildings in relation to ground levels, and perspective drawings have been submitted and forwarded to Jacobs Babtie.* They advise that the treatment of the interface between the proposed earthworks and the buildings is not fully clarified especially in relation to the internal access road.

They further comment that the proposed school is well screened from most views by mature trees, and while the large scale and contemporary building style will have limited impact on views from the conservation areas, it is important that the existing vegetation is protected and managed in order to maintain this screen in the longer term and to provide visual enclosure for the School. They further suggest that additional planting would be required on the southeast corner to screen views from neighbouring properties.

Local Member

27. The Local Member, Mrs Dean, was notified of the application on 28 September 2004 and attended the Members' site meeting on 9 November 2004, following which she has submitted comments emphasizing many of the points made by the above respondents. In summary, she considers that the application cannot be accepted without attention to:

- The condition of the Blacklands entrance in regard to lighting; surfacing of the path and turning loop; removal of the concrete fence; gateway treatment to Clare Lane to slow passing traffic; attention to trees and shrubs to ensure safety of pupils.
- Improvement of the Beech Road entrance's appearance; adequate pick-up/drop-off provision within the gates; enforcement of one-way traffic flow to

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combat dangers of current abuses with clear separation of pupil walking routes from traffic.

- The metal clad upper part of the building is out of place in the grounds of a Grade I Listed Building in a Green Wedge and close to a conservation area.
- Concerns are expressed regarding the noise impact on residents of extended use of the buildings.
- Planning conditions and design should make control of the use of the entrances as easy as possible for the school.

She also understands that the internal arrangement of teaching and community use is open to further discussion, particularly with the Learning and Skills Council. Given the large number of young people in the immediate neighbourhood of the school, believes it is essential that provision for youth activities is part of this application, whether on or off site.

Publicity

28. The application has been advertised by way of an advertisement in the Maidstone Extra, and by site notices on Beech Road, Clare Lane, Blacklands and Mill Street. 180 near neighbours have been notified individually by letter. The advertisement reflects the fact that the proposed development constitutes a departure from the approved Local Plan, affects a Public Right of Way and is likely to affect the character or setting of a Listed buildings and designated Conservation Areas.

Representations

29. The **East Malling Conservation Group** has made a detailed submission, illustrated by photographs, based on aesthetics and the impact of the buildings on the village. They consider that :

- The application fails to meet the requirements of the Village Design Statement.
- The proposed cladding can only be found in industrial parks and tends to have a relatively short life.
- The proposed siting occupies an exposed Green Wedge position in the heart of the village. The new buildings should be located on the lower of the site's three terraces, as is the existing school, and the colour changed, to minimise visual impact.
- Moving the school to the western part of the site and increasing activity would increase noise impact on residents. Location in the middle of the site or lowered into the ground would minimise this impact.
- Treatment of the existing concrete boundary wall should be replaced.
- TPO trees should not be removed.
- Clare Lane drop-off point should be included in the application.

30. Similar points are made in a representation from a Mill Street resident, which is illustrated by photographs of buildings which he considers to be examples of more appropriate modern buildings. These are Brunswick House Primary School, Maidstone, and at Kings Hill, the University of Greenwich, Tonbridge and Malling Council offices and KCC offices. By contrast, an example of the use of profile aluminium cladding from 20/20 Business Park in Maidstone as proposed is supplied. The proposal is considered contrary to many

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of the Development Plan policies related to design quality and landscape quoted by the applicant, and this is considered grounds for refusal.

31. Five other letters from local residents have been received to date.

- A Beech Road resident is concerned with **transport aspects** - access, parking, circulation, drop-off arrangements, and congestion in Beech Road; and whether the school roll would increase, making matters worse.
- A Middle Mill Road resident has no objection to the new school or new entrance, but is concerned with the **neglected state of the area between Blacklands and the lake**, and hopes that PFI money will be made available to tidy this up, in order to discourage current inappropriate behaviour by pupils.
- Two Mill Street residents object to the application on the grounds of **inadequate quality of external design**, failure to follow any aspect of the East Malling Village Design Statement, lack of architectural merit and perpetuation of the poor design quality of the existing school. The proposal is considered typical for industrial estates/waste management buildings. The architecture for modern business parks buildings of similar scale is considered far superior e.g. Kings Hill. The school is set in an area of local landscape importance and the cladding materials (type of brick not specified) are completely inappropriate. They have no generic relationship to the village or surroundings. The village has 5 Conservation Areas and the main construction materials are red brick and/or ragstone under clay tile or slate roofs. The proposal does not make a contribution to enhancement of the area as sought by Structure and Local Plan Policies.
- These residents also question how the level of the buildings will relate to the slope, and consider they will significantly **impact on views** across the village, and glare out on the skyline.
- One considers that **removal of TPO trees** just to accommodate design is unacceptable, and that
- Both feel that the application has not properly considered **noise impact**. Music from the current school hall can be heard most Saturday evenings. Noisy activities will increase and buildings much closer to properties in Mill Street and Middle Mill Road. The southeast corner of the building is considered to be too close to the perimeter fence of properties in Mill Street.
- It is also pointed out that the path to the school from the Clare Lane drop off point is muddy, crosses an unfenced bridge which is inadequate in width.
- The southeast corner of the new building is only 20 metres from the perimeter boundary with properties, is far too close and should be moved.

32. Borough Councillor Mrs L. Simpson has also made a written representation. Mrs Simpson makes a number of points similar to those made by the East Malling Conservation Group, the East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council and the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, set out above. In addition she makes the following points:

- She welcomes the new school as current buildings are in need of replacement
- Considers Local Authorities should not determine their own applications
- There is a feeling locally that the application is being pushed through with undue haste.
- Comments on poor quality and inaccuracy of submitted plans
- Travel plan should be included with the application which cannot be properly assessed without it.

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- The landscape plan is not sufficiently detailed for such an important site. It is not possible to establish what landscaping or boundary treatments are proposed.
- Proposals for management of the school playing fields are needed as this is a historic landscape setting. Partnership proposals between the School, the Borough Council and the Parish Council, previously abandoned, should be revived.
- Community use will inevitably lead to greater conflicts with neighbours regarding out of hours noise and traffic.
- Wishes to see evidence of where the Village Design Statement has been referred to.
- Shiny materials will be intrusive and alternatives should be considered.
- In Beech Road there are continual conflicts between residents and those accessing the school.
- Clare Lane access provides very limited space for dropping off from buses and vehicles. More pupils are likely to come from this side in future.
- The formalised pick and drop off system in Beech Road needs to be properly assessed. The Traffic Assessment is misleading and out of date and does not take into account the effects of parents accessing the nursery school.
- Pedestrian routes from Clare Lane and the Larkfield estates using Blacklands are unmade and unlit, and therefore unsafe for pupils.
- The proposed internal layout does not show paths e.g. between car parks and buildings. This would create desire lines.

Discussion

33. The County Planning Authority, in considering this application will have to examine the proposal in the light of both national guidance and the appropriate Development Plan Policies which apply to this site, together with and any other material considerations that are brought to the County Council's attention or as a result of consultation and publicity. Since the proposed development constitutes a departure from the approved Development Plan, the application would need to be referred to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister should Members be minded to permit it.

Policy Context

34. Development plan policies and Government advice applying to this proposal are aimed at providing for community facilities in a way which helps towards achieving a sustainable pattern of development, making the best use of urban and previously developed land, whilst conserving and respecting Kent's environment. The latter includes landscape, wildlife, heritage, and pollution aspects, protecting natural resources, enhancing urban environmental quality through design, respect for local amenity and traffic safety.
35. There is no fundamental planning policy objection in principle to the rebuilding of the school to the size proposed. The school is well related to local catchment areas and is accessible by public transport. The pupil capacity is not to be increased, and indeed the theoretical size would be reduced over the present situation. Although situated in a designated Area of Local Landscape Importance and a designated Green Wedge, the amount of 'green' space surrounding and adjoining the buildings, though changed, would not effectively be reduced by the proposals. Internal space would be enhanced without the necessity for increasing the built footprint. Great improvements in effectiveness and functionality of the school buildings would no doubt be achieved, and without losing the spacious character of their setting, on the basis that the submitted plans show that the

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site of the demolished buildings is to become a grassed recreation area replacing the existing.

- 36 The key policy issues raised by this proposal relate to the adequacy of the access arrangements and whether the quality of the building and landscape design is adequate in the light of Structure and Local Plan policies requiring development to be well designed and pay sufficient regard to its sensitive setting near to Conservation Areas. These key considerations also form the main substance of the objections raised to this proposal from consultees and local residents.

Design Issues

37. The proposed buildings are uncompromisingly modern and their external finish is likely to be dominated by the profiled aluminium cladding. Given this and their size – average 50m long and 20-30m wide - the initial appearance might seem 'high-tech' which is more commonly associated with a business park situation. However, the buildings are consciously modern and intended to be fit for their purpose as a modern learning environment, so a departure from conventional building form is to a certain extent inevitable. Moreover, very few new secondary schools have been built for several decades so it is merely conjecture to assume that they would have either adopted or continued a quasi-domestic style and detailing by now. The design of institutional and academic buildings elsewhere has evolved considerably since the last major school building programme in Kent.
38. I consider that the overall effect avoids an industrial character, as the proposed cladding is pierced by regular fenestration, and the clear delineation of two storeys suggests more of an office or academic activity. The aluminium cladding is designed for longevity and to remain clean long-term, so the bright appearance will endure rather than fade to an industrial appearance. However, the applicants have indicated that this particular cladding would be non-reflective.
39. I consider that a building of modern style is not necessarily an unsuitable concept for this site. A 'high-tech' appearance in a semi-wooded setting can be very pleasing. As has been pointed out by objectors, there are successful examples in the local area of modern buildings in a spacious landscaped setting. Good quality institutional, as opposed to industrial, examples do often successfully incorporate vernacular features, employing traditional materials alongside the modern. However, the examples quoted by objectors tend to be high profile, high-visibility projects such as those at Kings Hill business park. Whilst the proposed design could be seen as somewhat utilitarian, the site occupies a secluded position which is fully visible only from the school's own entrance points and the rear gardens of the few adjacent houses. Potential impacts on the views from within the Clare House Park Conservation Area are minimal, as the sites of both existing and proposed buildings are largely screened, even in winter, by a mixture of evergreen and deciduous trees, and by the lie of the land. The two parts of the school grounds are visually separate. From ground level at Clare House (privately owned), the eye is taken by a more distant, rural skyline which can be seen above the treetops. The existing buildings are currently more exposed in terms of tree cover than the site of the proposed new buildings.
40. Neither would the proposed school buildings be more than barely visible from the other Conservation Areas. From East Malling village, glimpses of the existing school buildings are obtained from the village playing field, but not from within the historic core. From Mill

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Street, a sight of the existing buildings can be obtained from a small gap between Millstream Junior School buildings, which are not within the Conservation Area, and adjacent dwellings, which are. The site of the proposed buildings would be visible to those using the Junior School playing field, but would not be seen from the public highway. The properties immediately adjacent to the Malling School's southwestern boundary are not within the Conservation Area.

41. Objectors have stated that the quality the external design and appearance of the building is poor and contrary to Development Plan policies requiring good design. They add that the character of the design (off the peg) is not suitable for its sensitive location and would harm the adjacent Conservation Areas, and the landscape character of the Area of Local Landscape Importance, and would dominate the village. They are also concerned that the Village Design Statement has been ignored.
42. The East Malling Village Design Statement is addressed largely to domestic buildings. As regards larger buildings, there are surviving industrial buildings in the village of East Malling but these are mainly from earlier periods of relatively small-scale industrialization, when only traditional materials brick stone and slate were available. Although there are examples in Kent of primary schools in historic settings being designed to echo traditional forms, the concept of modern secondary school of 1000 pupils does necessarily lend itself to such traditional design. Furthermore the school site is not part of the village street scene but separate from it, in a parkland setting. I also consider that a traditional pitched roof would add to the height of the building, making it more, not less, obtrusive. Traditional materials would not altogether sit happily with a flat roof (witness the existing building where traditional tile hanging has been added to a modern box shaped structure). Reducing to a single storey to accommodate a traditional barn-like pitched roof would be inefficient and could effectively double the built footprint on the site.
43. Objectors have also stated that the quality of materials to be used on the exterior of the building is poor. The applicants state that the proposed cladding is designed for longevity, and have the earlier support of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment with whom the proposed designs have been worked up.

Siting Issues

44. Objectors claim that the location of the building within the site is wrong for reasons of noise nuisance, visual intrusion, and proximity to nearest residents. It has been that the building should be located lower into the site either fully or partly on the site of the existing buildings. Practicalities of phasing the new building would argue against either, as it would not be possible to construct on the site of existing school without major disruption, which would harm the continued operation of the school during the re-construction. The applicant has submitted further drawings and sketches illustrating how the new buildings would relate to the slope of the ground. They show that the roof of the learning barn sited at the extreme south western corner of the site would be at the equivalent of between one and one and a half storeys high (approximately 6 metres) relative to the ground level of the adjoining properties, whilst at the northern end of the building would be raised up to 2 metres above present ground level. The implications for noise and privacy impacts are discussed below.
45. It has also been argued that the new buildings should be set lower into the ground to reduce potential visual and aural impacts. However in view of the Environment Agency's

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concerns about potential flood risk on site, this would seem to be undesirable. In setting the level of the building the applicants have had to seek a balance between avoiding flood risk to the school itself and avoiding exacerbating risk downstream. In any event I consider that the likely visual intrusion is acceptable, and that overall noise impacts would be no worse than existing, and may be improved (see below under Noise).

Transport Issues

46. The current main and only vehicular access to the school is at the end of Beech Road, a narrow (5 m) largely residential cul-de-sac. At the end of Beech Road, adjacent to the school gates, a further 7 dwellings have no road frontage. There are separate in and out vehicle gateways either side of a garage block which is used by residents, but objectors point out that there are conflicts at the start and end of the school day between pupils on foot and those being delivered/collected by car, cars accessing the site or delivering/collecting pupils, bicycles (not currently allowed in Blacklands entrance), and residents' parked cars, such conflicts being exacerbated by parents also using the nursery school at the Beech Road entrance. At the Blacklands entrance, lorries also need to access two engineering firms located there. At the Clare Lane entrance, parents and coaches dropping off and picking up can use the loop to turn back into Clare Lane, which is a straight road of reasonable width. However, there is poor visibility where it joins Mill Street, which is narrow and often lined with parked cars.
47. Whilst I am aware of these difficulties, there are currently no apparent possibilities in the short term for creating any alternative access point to this school, whether the current rebuilding proposal proceeds or not. For example, it would not be possible to create a vehicular access off Blacklands as it is a private road, but in any event this would not improve on the existing situation, by merely transferring cars accessing the site to Clare Lane /Mill Street. The rest of the school perimeter other than at Beech Road is effectively landlocked.
48. The school has been established on the site for 40 years and has a capacity of 1000 pupils, even if numbers have recently declined. The site, though it is subject to certain planning constraints, is well located in relation to its catchment area and there is no possibility of relocation to any site less constrained as to access, even if a sustainable one could be found. The mitigating measures suggested by objectors, such as physical traffic calming on Clare Lane and improvements to Blacklands path, would not be likely to solve the fundamental problem of a school site largely landlocked by surrounding built development.
49. The school is an established facility with existing rights of access. Highway conflicts and safety issues would not actually be solved by presuming against the redevelopment of the school buildings. Some objectors have argued that the new building would attract an increase in pupils over the current school roll, which is below the capacity of the present buildings. As proposed, the new school is designed to replicate the current capacity of 1000, although it cannot be foretold with any certainty whether the school roll would increase, stay the same or decrease. Nevertheless the fact remains however that, irrespective of whether the present proposal is permitted, the school roll could increase to its full capacity at any time without benefit of planning permission.
50. The mitigating measures to the transport issues suggested by objectors are outside the application site, and it does not seem to be reasonable to require their implementation where no increase in the capacity of the school is being proposed. Some measures

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would in any case be beyond the remit of the School itself. For example speed limit reduction on Clare Lane, as suggested by East Malling Parish Council, would need to be considered by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council as a separate local highway improvement. Lighting of Blacklands footpath would be problematic, as it is a private road. Nor would such measures be within the remit of the Private Finance Initiative project which relates primarily to new school buildings only.

51. Furthermore, even those off-site measures which could be implemented or aided by the school would necessitate funds being diverted from the new building project to solve problems which exist with the school as it is at present. The applicant has stated that the levels of investment required to carry out the off-site works suggested could prejudice the achievement of an acceptable level of building and landscape design.
52. I consider that mitigation of any access problems experienced at the school and in the surrounding roads and paths should properly be pursued independently of the present application. Investigation would be required as to the efficacy, feasibility and funding of potential measures, which ought to look at a complete range of issues such as traffic calming, parking restrictions, improvements to Blacklands path and alternative ways of accessing the site.
53. A first step to investigating mechanisms to deliver such measures would be the School Travel Plan which the applicants have offered to progress in due course. I have been advised by the Assistant Director (Resources) of KCC Education and Libraries Directorate that he is aware that there may be a need for some localised improvements that have been suggested, and acknowledges the concerns that have been raised. He also expresses the intention to revisit any necessary improvements in the light of the School Travel Plan which is currently being developed with the School and as part of our regular maintenance programmes. They have acknowledged the concerns raised in representations and undertake to revisit any necessary improvements to areas outside the current application site in the light of the School Travel Plan. In addition, a further letter of intent has been received from the applicants regarding the Blacklands entrance. They state "It is the intention of the parties involved to tidy up the access to the school entrance at Blacklands and the footpath leading from the drop-off area at Clare Lane. This will be done by means of laying down type 1 material and with concrete flagstones over, which will provide a more legible and accessible pedestrian route".
54. I agree that the existing gateways to the school are unprepossessing and unlikely to help the image of the new school. The applicants have stated their intention to upgrade the access via Blacklands, but serious improvement to the Beech Road entrance would require radical changes to the residential streets and garage blocks nearby, which is outside the applicants' remit

Flooding

55. The applicant has appointed a consultant to undertake a Flood Risk Assessment during December 2004. The Environment Agency stipulation is therefore met and the matter can be dealt with by condition, should permission be granted.

Landscape

56. The applicant has agreed to relocate the cycle store to a position where it would not affect the root system of either of the protected trees concerned (TPOs 5 and 6). The

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question of internal paths has been raised in some representations. Whilst the level of detail supplied with the application is not ideal, especially as to the treatment of the area left by the demolished buildings and which paths will remain in position to serve the car parking areas etc. I consider that these are matters which can be reserved without prejudice to the rest of the proposal. The applicant has indicated that a more detailed plan is likely to be available during December, and if available, the substance of this could be reported orally.

57. Several objectors have raised issues relating to the maintenance of Clare House Park and Lake. Although part of the school grounds, these areas are not included in the application site, and again, such off-site works are not within the remit of the Private Finance Initiative project which relates primarily to new school buildings only. Nevertheless, KCC Education and Libraries Directorate has expressed an intention to revisit the issues raised. I agree with Jacobs Babbie's landscape advice regarding the importance of the existing vegetation in limiting the impact of the new buildings, and that ensuring long term protection and maintenance is therefore vital. This applies equally to trees which are outside the application site along Blacklands path and around the lake, and I propose that, should permission be granted, this point should be emphasised to the Director of Education and Libraries.

Security

58. The concerns raised by Kent Police have been passed to the applicant who has provided a detailed response for further advice and discussion with the Police adviser. Matters covered include lighting details, CCTV cover, including coverage of the Beech Road entrance, boundary fencing and gate control, signage, window locks, and treatment of the external stairs, which it is proposed to change from spiral to straight. The applicants suggest that the learning barns having no windows within end elevation could be addressed by glazing the escape doors, subject to cost implications.

59. The applicants state that control of the Beech Road access by gates etc will be discussed with the School. The boundary fence running around the perimeter of the school will be inspected and made secure where necessary, they hope will address concerns about Blacklands Footpath. They recognise the potential problem of the ICT rooms being on the ground floor and promise to consider the Police suggestion.

60. I consider that those matters which lie within planning control can be addressed through minor amendment to the submitted plans and through the reserved landscaping details.

Heritage

61. A written archaeological strategy is being agreed in consultation with the applicant. It is proposed to undertake a programme of archaeological work comprising field evaluation (trial trenching and archaeological test pitting) followed by assessment of the findings and agreement of further mitigation measures. The latter could include preservation in situ of important remains, detailed excavation and/or monitoring of groundworks through a watching brief programme. It is intended to set out the details of the heritage requirements in Written Schemes of Investigation (WSIs) to be agreed with the County Archaeologist and the Local Planning Authority. All work, except any watching brief, will be implemented prior to development proceeding on site. Wording for the recommended planning conditions is suggested.

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62. The Archaeology Strategy notes that development proposals should seek to retain historic landscape features where possible, particularly those relating to Clare House, including the wooded areas and the Mill Pond. A plan of historic landscape features is to be provided, together with details of groundworks, including foundations and boundary alterations.

Ecology

63. The applicant has appointed a licensed bat surveyor to carry out immediate surveys on all six school sites. Results may be known in time for the meeting. If bats are identified as being present in any of the buildings, mitigation measures would be needed should planning permission be granted, and a licence may have to be obtained from DEFRA before demolition work can commence.
64. Provision for any mitigation measures arising from further herpetofauna surveys and for replacement tree habitat, would be included in a landscaping scheme, and also secured by condition.

Noise

65. Noise has been raised as an issue in relation to residents on the west side of the school site, as the building complex is proposed to be moved to the western side. The applicants state:

“As a general point, any noise within the site will normally be confined to school hours on school days. Noise emitted from external areas should be at a level similar to the existing, given the acoustic screening provided by the buildings, existing landscaping along the boundary and intervening distance. Noise from within the buildings will be limited through the high quality built form of the buildings that will include double glazing.”

66. It might be concluded that there would be some exchange of noise impact from dwellings to the east of the site and the west. However, on the western side, noise from external activities is more likely to be baffled by the new buildings, which would be built to comply with modern standards of insulation. (The applicants state that the external amphitheatre is a small grassed feature for use only by the School during school hours for structured activities). The impracticalities of moving the building to the centre of the site to minimise disturbance to all residents are discussed above. I do not consider that the potential for noise disturbance over and above that existing is such as to warrant the difficulties this presents, as the any likely benefits in noise abatement terms are doubtful.

Privacy

67. Privacy issues are likely to affect a small group of dwellings at the southwest corner of the site which have access off Mill Street. Plans show the building to be 13 metres from the boundary line at the nearest point. At this point, the building would be dug into the slope so that a little more than the upper storey would be above the ground level of these properties. I agree with the suggestion made by Jacobs Babbie that privacy planting could be included in a landscaping scheme could be implemented in consultation with the adjacent property owners, should permission be granted. Such planting could also

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be designed to provide a foil to soften the appearance of the new building from adjacent gardens. Moving the building further away from these properties does not appear to be an option for the reasons discussed above under siting.

Conclusion

68. After forty years of service, the existing school buildings are unsuitable for a modern secondary school and could not be cost-effectively refurbished. The proposed Private Finance Initiative scheme provides the opportunity to create a purpose-designed contemporary building offering a new image for the school, in a manner which allows the school to continue functioning with minimum disruption during construction. The site is, however, in a sensitive location in terms of landscape and its proximity to built heritage. The entrances to the school are currently unprepossessing and suffer some problems in terms of vehicle and pedestrian circulation and access. The site is landlocked some distance from the main road network and embedded in residential areas.
69. As to the proposed development's appropriateness of design and potential impacts on landscape, built heritage, and the amenity of nearby properties, my view is that the siting of the proposed building complex within the site is certainly no worse than the existing situation in terms of its visibility, and would be less visible from some of its very limited public viewing points. A contemporary design is not inappropriate, and the position of the building means it would have low visibility. However the latter is partly dependent on the existence of the belt of trees along the Blacklands path, which though outside the application site, is within the applicants' control. Its future maintenance is therefore of key importance.
70. Access problems of the existing school cannot be fundamentally solved by deferring the provision of new school buildings, but should appropriately be addressed through a School Travel Plan. I consider that noise impacts of the new school are unlikely to be worse than the existing situation, given the modern standards of insulation to be employed in the buildings. Privacy may be an issue for a one or two dwellings and will need careful mitigation.

Recommendation

71. SUBJECT TO no direction to the contrary from the Deputy Prime Minister and the receipt of the findings of the bat surveys currently being undertaken and subsequent advice from English Nature I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO conditions including:
- the standard time limit;
 - the submission, approval and subsequent implementation of a scheme of landscaping including levels of the proposed building, external materials, tree protection and methodology for working in close proximity to trees;
 - the submission and approval of all materials to be used externally including the details of all walls, fences, gates, lighting or other means of enclosure;
 - the submission, approval and monitoring of a School Travel Plan;
 - the submission of details of the proposed cycle store;
 - submission of a Flood Risk Assessment and details of the method of surface water disposal;

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- submission and implementation of a Written Scheme of Investigations for approval by the County Archaeologist, with a plan of historic landscape features with details of groundworks;
- submission of further herpetofauna surveys and proposed mitigation.

72. I FURTHER RECOMMEND that:

- a) The Director of Education and Libraries:
 - i) be informed of the concerns expressed by the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, the East Malling Parish Council, and others regarding the need for maintenance of Clare Park and the lake and the importance of protecting and maintaining the tree screen between Clare Park and the School buildings; and
 - ii) be asked to include within the School Travel Plan consideration of improvements which may be needed to the approaches to the school, including: Blacklands footpath; the Clare Lane turning loop and the path connecting it to the school; gateway treatment on Clare Lane to slow passing traffic; improvement of the Beech Road entrance's appearance; adequate pick-up/drop-off provision within the gates with enforcement of one-way traffic flow with clear separation of pupil walking routes from traffic.

- b) The applicants and the School be requested to involve the Director of Leisure of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council in detailed discussions with regard to the community access for the facilities proposed, together with attention to any potential noise impact on neighbouring properties;

Case Officer: Sue Atkins

Ext. 01622 221052

Background Documents: See section heading

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APPENDIX 1

APPLICATION TM/04/3357 – DEMOLITION OF EXISTING SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND PROVISION OF NEW SCHOOL BUILDINGS TOGETHER WITH CAR PARKING AREAS, LANDSCAPING AND TEMPORARY MOBILE CLASSROOMS AT THE MALLING SCHOOL, BEECH ROAD, EAST MALLING

NOTES of a site visit held at The Malling School on Tuesday, 9 November 2004.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr J F London (Chairman), Mr F Wood-Brignall (Vice-Chairman), Mrs V J Dagger, Mr J A Davies, Mr J B O Fullarton, Mr A R Poole, Mr G Rowe and Mr J H Tolputt. Mrs T Dean attended as the local Member.

OFFICERS: Mr J Crossley and Mrs S Atkins (Planning) and Mr A Tait (Legal and Secretariat).

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL: Mr R Brown, Ms L Simpson, Mr D Thornewell and Mrs C Woodger. *All four were also representing East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council.*

THE APPLICANT: Kent Education Partnership (represented by Mrs M Harriott, Head Teacher – The Malling School; Mr J Lattimore, KCC PFI Project Manager and Mr M Olliff – Project Architect).

ALSO PRESENT were two members of the public.

- (1) The Chairman opened the visit by explaining that its purpose was to enable Members to familiarise themselves with the application site and to gather the views of the Officers present.
- (2) Mrs Atkins introduced the application. She explained that the school occupied land which had formerly belonged to Clare House. It was sited in close proximity to a number of Conservation Areas, within the Green Wedge and an Area of Local Landscape Importance. Clare House Park was on the national register of Parks and Gardens. Clare House and its land lay to the north, Mill Street to the south west, East Malling Village to the east. Millstream Junior School adjoined the site to the south.
- (3) Mrs Atkins then highlighted other aspects of the proposal. She said that 11 trees and 13 groups of trees were the subject of TPOs. Under the proposals some of them would be removed. Access and parking points would remain as they were, including the pedestrian entrance through Blacklands which would be served by a turning loop in Clare Lane. This (rather than the current one in Beech Lane) would now become the main entrance. The new buildings would be two storeys in height with flat roofs. The sports hall would not be replaced as it had been refurbished some four years earlier.
- (4) Mrs Atkins continued by describing the views of statutory consultees. Sport England had raised no objection. The County Archaeologist had asked for conditions to enable the investigation of important historical remains. The Countryside Policy and Projects Group had suggested amongst other things that there should be measures to protect watercourses during construction and that herpetofauna surveys should be undertaken. Kent Police had submitted a number of points relating to security and crime prevention. Jacobs Babbie (Landscape) had called for three heavy standard

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- trees to be planted in mitigation for those (covered by TPOs) that would be lost. Transport Planning had no objection. The Environment Agency, having now received information on flood risk, also had no objection.
- (5) Mrs Atkins concluded her presentation by saying that East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council had objected to the proposal. As there were four Members of the Parish Council present, she would not explain their views in detail. Tonbridge and Malling BC had raised no objection subject to a number of details being satisfactorily resolved. East Malling Conservation Group had sent in a detailed submission on the design, quality, character and location of the proposal. Four local residents had written to object on the grounds of access, parking, design quality, and the state of the footpath access along Blacklands to the north west of the site.
- (6) Mr Oliff said that the site had been designed in such a way as to achieve a more compact set of buildings, thereby reducing the time between lessons. At present, the buildings were scattered around the site. The school was keen on its pupils walking outside between lessons, so courtyards and covered walkways between buildings had been incorporated into the design.
- (7) Mr Oliff went on to say that the existing main access to the school along Beech Road was very congested. The entrance and exit arrangements had therefore been amended in the application by switching the main pedestrian entrance to Clare Lane/Blacklands. The School would encourage walking and the use of public transportation to minimise the congestion problem.
- (8) Mr Oliff also said that the applicants were addressing the question of the elevation of the buildings. The Environment Agency wanted the buildings to be high enough to mitigate flood risk, whilst the local residents wanted a lower skyline.
- (9) Mrs Dean said that the biggest concerns about the proposed development were over the entrance and exit arrangements. Members needed to see the problems for themselves in order to be able to understand the difficulties.
- (10) Mr Thornewell said that East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council had examined the proposal in the light of its suitability for this particular site. It had concluded that the design of the buildings was inappropriate for this location and would certainly not be aesthetically pleasing. He believed that the buildings for all six of KCC's PFI sites had been developed as a single package. *Mr Oliff said in response that the buildings at each of the sites were not identical, although some aspects of them were similar. Each one had been separately and uniquely designed.*
- (11) Ms Simpson said that she was a Member of the East Malling Conservation Group. Their view was that the proposal had not taken account of its setting or the requirements of the Village Design Statement. She was also disappointed over the lack of a School Travel Plan. She asked Members to bear in mind that there was only one bus that actually made the journey to the school. The result of this lack of foresight would be that children would find themselves walking along dark alleyways during the winter months. *Mrs Harriott said that a Travel Plan had now been prepared.*
- (12) Members then inspected the site. They started by visiting the south west corner, where they were shown the boundary line of the proposed buildings. Mr Oliff said that the residential properties would be at least 22m from the nearest new building on

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- site. In order to mitigate flooding and keep the skyline to an acceptable height, the applicants proposed to elevate the buildings to the north and to cut into the ground in the south.
- (13) Mrs Atkins informed Members that the boundary of the site formed part of a “walking bus” route to Mill Street Junior School.
- (14) Members then walked through the gate to the north west, where the new vehicle and pedestrian main entrance was proposed. To get to this entrance from Clare Lane, through Blacklands would require the pupils to walking along a PROW through the woods. The local Borough Councillors drew attention to the narrowness of the path, the proximity of the trees and that it was unlit at present. Members then inspected the intersection of Blacklands with Clare Lane and Mill Street, where the Borough Councillors drew attention to the blind bend and the lack of a continuous pedestrian footway along the main roads.
- (15) After returning to the proposed new main entrance, Members walked along the north west boundary of the site, which had been secured with both an inner fence and an outer wall.
- (16) Ms Simpson said that the original intention of the local partnership had been to lease the land on the other side of the lake (to the north west) in order to resite the school there. The Parish Council was very keen for the original aims of that partnership to be continued. In this respect she asked for the outer wall to be replace and for an informative to be added to any permission to the effect that measures needed to be taken to prevent the lake silting up.
- (17) The final point of inspection was the current main entrance from Beech Road in the south east. Mr Crossley said that it was effectively an “in and out” loop for traffic but that the roads were not particularly wide and were further restricted by on-street parking. A drop off facility within the site would be provided as part of the proposal.
- (18) A local resident said that from about 3.15 pm every day it was impossible to move on either side of Beech Road because of the number of cars parking there at that time.
- (19) Mrs Dean agreed with the local resident, saying that there had been 21 cars parked in Beech Road at 3.15 pm on the day she had visited. She suggested that the problem could be mitigated through a land swap in which the garages between the two parts of the entrance could be developed.
- (20) Mrs Woodger said that the same problem occurred between 5pm and 7pm when the site was used for Adult Education, Country and Western evenings or for sports at weekends. She maintained that children on bicycles found themselves having to cycle towards incoming traffic in order to get to the bike sheds rather than use the one way system.
- (21) Ms Simpson added that the congestion problems at this entrance made it a hazard. She warned of the possibility that the despite £10m being spent on redeveloping the school, there could still be fatalities due to the access problems not being resolved.
- (22) Mrs Dean said that this was the most complex of the three PFI proposals in the Tonbridge and Malling area. There were a number of difficulties with the proposal which needed to be worked through in round table discussions. The greatest

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difficulty lay in the access arrangements. The main entrance was supposed to be at Blacklands, but most of the children lived nearer to the Beech Road entrance and would continue to use it. Furthermore, those children who did use the Blacklands entrance would find that it was being put forward as a major pedestrian area, even though there were no proposals to improve it. This meant that children would be expected to get to the school through a muddy, unlit footpath.

- (22) The Chairman thanked everyone for attending. The notes of this visit would be appended to the Committee report in due course.