

Extension of the existing car park at Woodlands Infant School, Higham School Road, Tonbridge TM/09/3102

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 13th April 2010.

Application by Woodlands Infant School and Kent County Council Property Group for the extension of the existing car park at Woodlands Infant School, Higham School Lane, Tonbridge (Ref: TM/09/3102)

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mr G Horne & Mr C Smith

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Woodlands Infant School lies to the north of Tonbridge in an area known as Higham Wood. The school is accessed via the Higham School Road off Hunt Road. The Infant school is located within a shared site with the Woodlands Junior School and Roselands Nursery. All sites use the same entrance and internal access road. The Infant school lies to the south of the Junior School and Nursery. The Nursery site has no parking provision and the Junior and Infant school have separate parking provision.
2. The application site is located to the west of the existing car parking for Woodlands Infant School, in front of the main entrance to the school in a raised area, currently grass and trees (see figure 4). A pedestrian pathway from school entrance gates to the Infant school and to the Junior School and Nursery at the site runs to the south alongside the application area (see figure 3). The vehicular access to all schools at the site runs to the north of the application area (see figure 1). A site location plan is attached.
3. There are a number of trees around the school site, including within the application area.

Background

4. There has been a number of planning applications relating to the schools and nursery that occupy this site in recent times, the latest of which related to the installation of an overlapping triangle shade structure on the school field (TM/08/3576) and erection of a white flagpole (TM/07/3706). In 2007, permission was granted for the relocation of the nursery to a new modular building (TM/07/3003) and amendments to the location and design (TM/08/3575) of this proposal were granted in 2008. In 2005, permission was granted (reference TM/05/1293) for the removal of a timber hatted double classroom and replacement with a permanent single storey 2 classroom building at the Infant School site. Also in 2005, permission was granted (reference TM/04/4409) for a two storey extension to the main school building at the Junior School.
5. The Infant School currently has 10 car parking spaces within the site and does not have formal access to any of the car parking spaces provided for the Junior School.

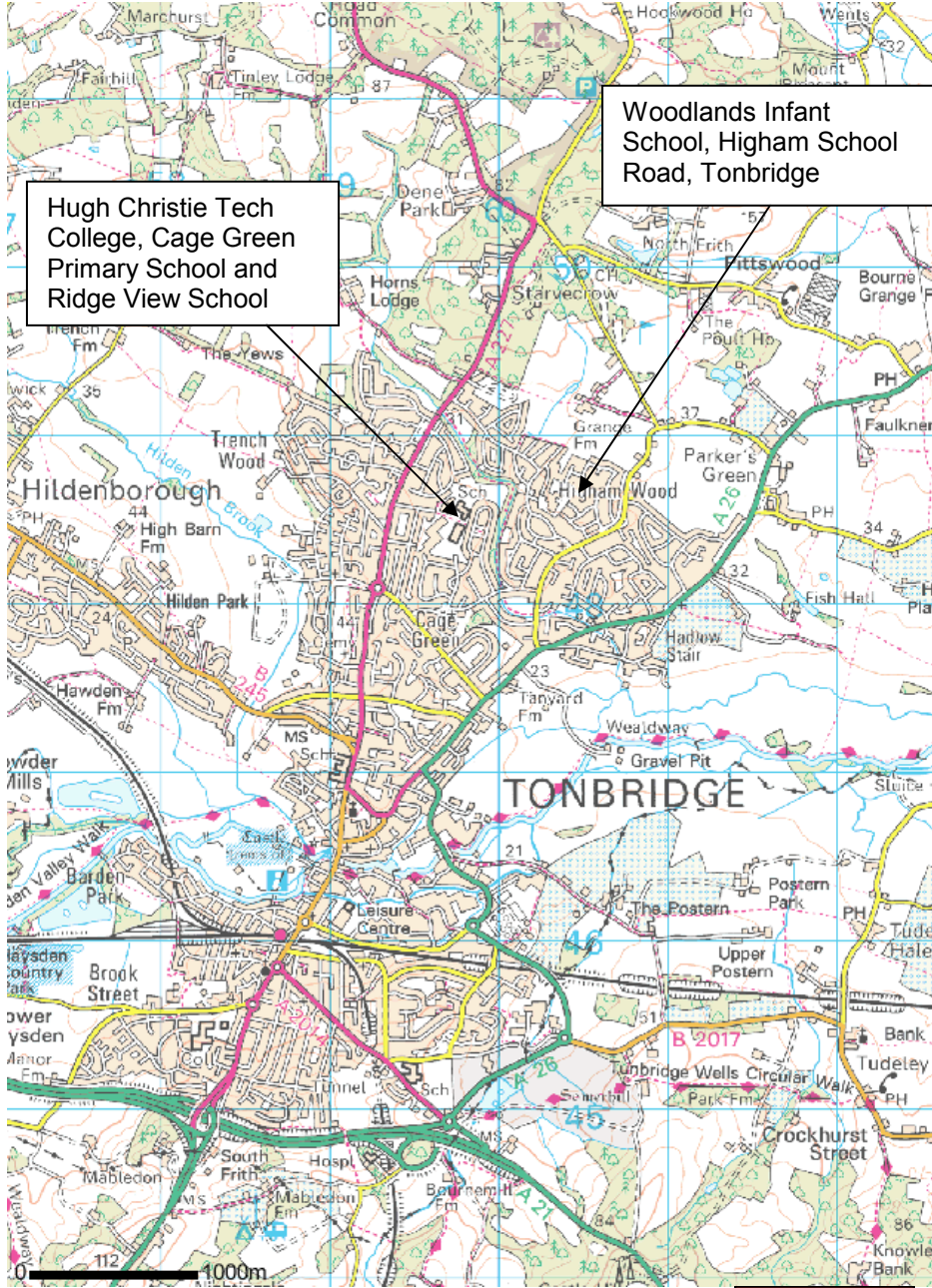
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Proposal

3. This proposal seeks to increase the existing car parking provision of 10 spaces for the infant school by an additional 10 spaces. At the same time, the applicant aims to improve pedestrian access to the site and improve health and safety arrangements in relation to separating pedestrians from vehicular traffic.
4. The proposal would involve some amendments to the existing car parking arrangement. A disabled parking bay would be provided and marked in the existing car park in the location nearest to the school main entrance. Two of the existing spaces would be removed in order to allow an access from the existing car park to the new car park which would be an area approximately 16.5m by 14m although this would still be a slightly higher level to the existing car park. The area would have a tar-macadam surface and be laid to falls and connected to the existing surface water drainage system for the existing car park.
5. A tree survey has been carried out by the Applicant in order to establish how the proposal would affect trees located at the site. The proposal would involve the removal of 5 trees at the application site, two of which are oak and three of which are damson. The applicant has proposed replacement planting of two trees, in grounds adjacent to the site and new hedging to the southern and western edge of the site. Existing benches at the site would be relocated and existing verges built up.
6. It is not intended that the car parking area would be shared by the Junior School or the Nursery at the site.

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Site Location Plan



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Location of proposed extension of existing car park within the Site

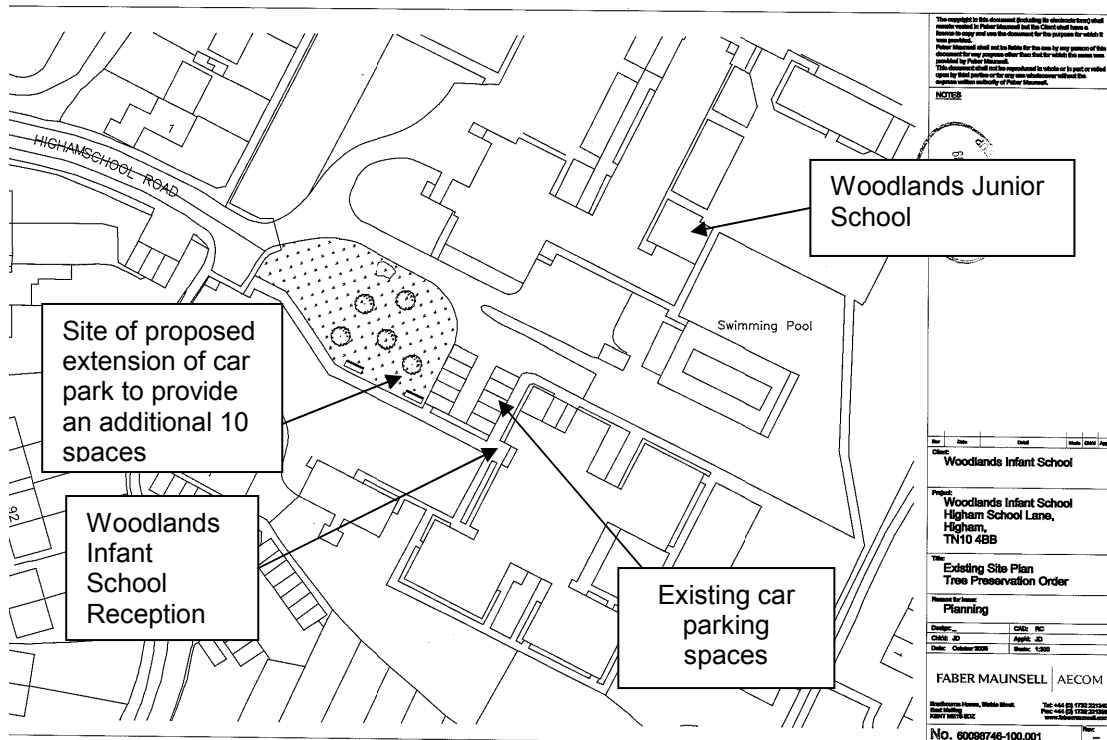


Figure 1 – view showing the vehicular access gates from Higham School Road into the school site and other trees adjacent to the site which would not be affected by the proposal

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Figure 2 – view showing vehicular access into existing car park for Woodlands Infant School in front of Infant School main reception. Five of the trees shown would need removal



Figure 3 – view showing the pedestrian access between the Infant school and the main entrance at Higham School Road

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Figure 4 – view showing the site of proposed extension to car park



Figure 5 – view showing the existing car park and the two oak trees which would be removed in order to create the car park extension

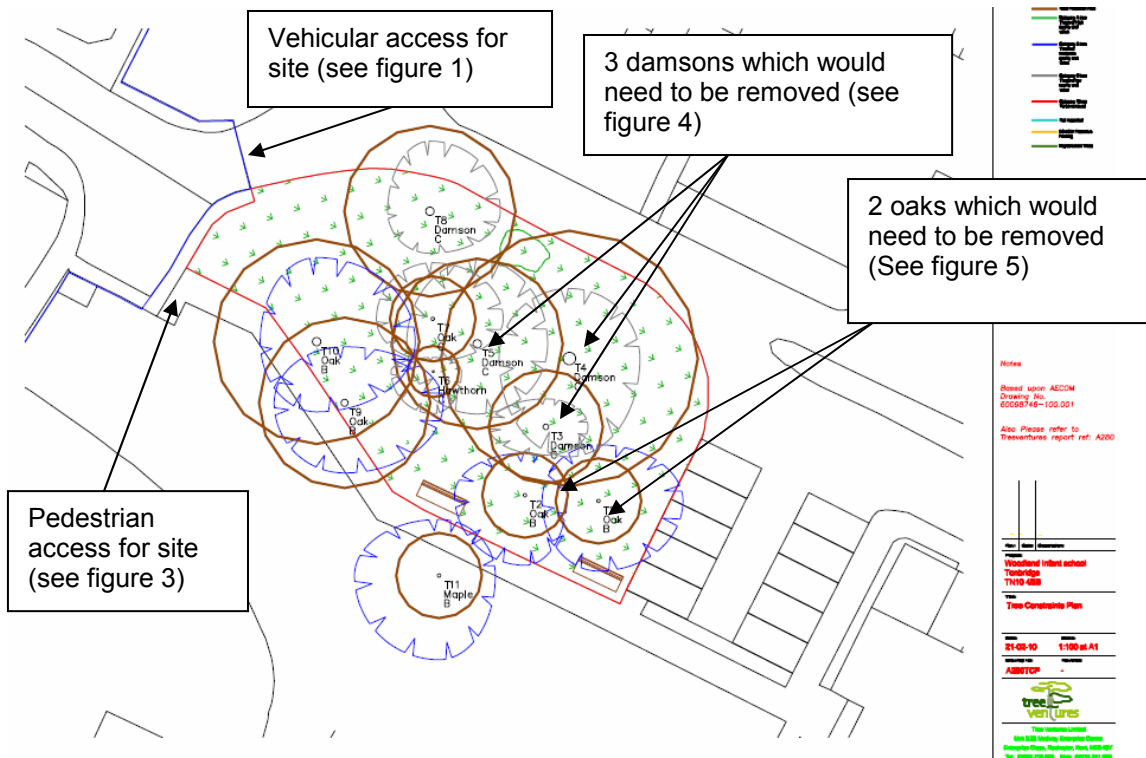
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Proposed layout of car park extension



Plan showing trees within the site



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Planning Policy

8. The Development Plan policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:

(i) **The South East Plan (2009):**

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|-------------|--|
| Policy CC1 | Seeks to achieve and maintain sustainable development in the region. |
| Policy CC4 | Seeks to avoid adverse impacts from developments on the built and natural environment. |
| Policy CC6 | Seeks to create sustainable and distinctive communities via development which respects the character and distinctiveness of settlements and promotes a high quality built environment. |
| Policy BE1 | Seeks to promote and support design solution opportunities with new development that are relevant to context, local character and distinctiveness and sense of place. |
| Policy T2 | Seeks to manage mobility. |
| Policy T4 | Seeks to manage car parking provision at sites and set maximum parking standards in line with PPG13 Transport. |
| Policy T5 | Seeks to encourage the development of travel plans. |
| Policy S1 | Seeks to support healthy communities via the incorporation of cycle lanes and safe footpaths. |
| Policy S6 | Encourages the provision of community infrastructure such as appropriate education facilities. |
| Policy NRM7 | Seeks to manage the impact of development on woodlands. |

(ii) **Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2007:**

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Policy CP1 | Seeks proposals for new development that will result in a high quality sustainable environment. |
| Policy CP2 | Seeks to encourage new development that generates a significant number of trips to be well located relative to public transport, cycle and pedestrian routes, make use of a choice of transport modes, be compatible with the character and capacity of the highway network and ensure accessibility. |
| Policy CP24 | Seeks to encourage development to be well designed and high quality and respect the site and its surroundings in terms of scale, density, layout, siting, character and appearance. |

Consultations

9. The **Environment Agency** raises no objections to the application.

The **Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board** raises no objections to the application.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council raises objections to the application as it would require the removal of two oak trees from the site, which in their view, should be retained. They suggest that if possible the parking layout should be rearranged to accommodate retention of these trees.

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Divisional Transport Manager commented that any additional parking on site will help to alleviate pressure on the surrounding road network.

Local Member(s)

10. The local County Members Mr G Horne and Mr C Smith were notified of the application on the 7th December 2009.

Publicity

11. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 14 residential properties within 90m of the proposal.

Representations

12. No neighbour representations have been received in relation to the proposal.

Discussion

13. This application is being reported to the Planning Applications Committee as an objection has been raised by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

14. Development Plan policies require proposals to be acceptable in terms of the site, context, design and impacts. Decisions are required to be in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The relevant South East Plan and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Development Framework policies are set out above. There are no site specific or area based planning policies in relation to the site.

16. The proposal would require the removal of five trees at the site in order to allow sufficient space for the parking layout proposed. In my opinion, the main determining issues for this application relate to the impact of the proposal on these established trees at the site, and the value of these trees to visual amenity, arboriculture and ecology.

17. The Tree Survey carried out by the applicant indicated that three of the trees were damson. These were classified as "category C" trees of "low quality and value" (according to BS5837 "Trees in Relation to Construction, 2005") and would require regular maintenance in order to improve their quality. However, two of the trees are oak and were classified as "category B" trees of "moderate quality and value". These are young trees, approx. 10m high and in good condition. None of the trees are affected by a Tree Preservation Order.

18. The Survey indicated that there was no evidence of nesting birds or bat roosts on the site although recommended that further inspection would be needed prior to the commencement of any work to trees at the site. This work could be controlled by a planning condition.

19. Six other trees were surveyed near to the site, three of which were "category C" trees and three of which were "category B" trees. Two of the category B trees are larger oaks and are part of a "group" of trees. These trees lie between the site access and the

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proposed location for the car park extension. Retention of these trees would in my view assist in the screening of the school site. The proposal has the potential to affect the roots of a hawthorn one of the “category C” trees. The information submitted indicates that no other trees are likely to be affected by the proposal.

20. There are a significant number of other trees, beyond the application site which were not surveyed. The Tree Survey indicates that these trees would be unlikely to be affected by the proposal because of the distance from the proposal.
21. British Standard BS5837 indicates that the design of the proposed development where feasible should take account of the retention of “category B” trees, although if this is unavoidable, suggests that consideration should be given to replacement planting to compensate for the loss. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council also indicate that they would prefer to see the two oak trees retained at the site and the parking layout reconfigured to accommodate retention.
22. The applicant has carried out a Feasibility Study looking at traffic calming, landscaping, parking, drainage and other services, lighting and safe access for emergency vehicles at the site as well as other possible locations for hard standing car parking at the site. One other possible location for the proposal was considered at the site. Whilst this was close to the school on an area currently grassed and considered to be less intrusive, because it would not require the removal of any trees at the site, that option was rejected in favour of the proposed location. That was both because the area was used by the School for pupil activities during the summer months (being the Infant School’s only clear flat grassed area at the site) and also because the area could not provide enough parking within the site area nor a clear divide between pedestrians using the site and general traffic at the site.
23. The proposed location for the car park was therefore considered by the applicant to be the most feasible location because it involved minimal disturbance when compared to other options within the site which contains a significant number of trees ranging from young to mature, including groups of trees, and trees that are also subject to Tree Preservation Orders.
24. I am therefore satisfied, based on the information provided by the applicant that other options have been considered within the site and that these have not been feasible options due to constraints caused by underground services, health and safety, space and protection of other trees at the site which are of greater amenity value.
25. Whilst the proposed location involves the removal of five trees at the site, two of which are of moderate quality and value, this needs to be balanced against the need to provide sufficient car parking at the site as well as improved safety arrangements for the pedestrian and vehicular traffic flows around the site. I am satisfied that based on the information provided by the applicant, it is not feasible to rearrange the parking layout in order to accommodate retention of these two young oak trees.
26. The applicant proposes replacement planting which would be two oak trees, in the grounds to the south of the site next to another “category B” tree which is a Maple, in order to compensate for the loss of the two oak trees. New hedging would also be planted in order to create natural barriers between pedestrian and vehicles at the site.

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27. South East Plan (2009) policies CC6 and BE1 and Tonbridge and Malling Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2007) policies CP1 and CP24 seeks development that incorporates high quality design solutions that respect the character and distinctiveness of the surroundings and that are relevant to context, local character and distinctiveness of places. I am satisfied that this proposal is in accordance with these Development Plan policies and appropriate to this site.
28. The School currently has a School Travel Plan and is seeking to make improvements to safety and accessibility within the school grounds. Within the school site parking provision is clearly limited. Whilst this proposal seeks to increase parking provision at the site, the provision of car parking for the Infant School at this site would remain below the Kent County Council Parking Standards set for new educational developments and there is an under provision of car parking. I am therefore satisfied that the proposal accords with South East Plan (2009) policy T4 which seeks to manage the provision of car parking at sites. The maximum guideline parking standard at new educational sites is 1 space per member of staff plus 10%. This proposal would increase existing provision from 10 to 20 spaces in total for 48 staff at the Infant School. I am satisfied that the additional parking provision within the school grounds will assist in alleviating pressure on the surrounding highways network.

Conclusion

29. I consider that the proposal is in accordance with general principles and objectives of the Development Plan Policies. Whilst the proposal requires the removal of five trees at the site, this development is to meet the needs of an established use of the site. The removal of two young oaks at the site is regrettable, but within the context of a site which has many trees within the boundary, I consider that the loss is unlikely to have significant adverse impacts on the amenities and character of the area, nor on biodiversity interests.

Recommendation

30. I RECOMMEND that permission BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS including conditions requiring ecological inspection prior to removal of any trees at the site, installation of tree protection measures prior to works commencing for trees that are to be retained at the site and replacement planting and maintenance to be carried out.

Case officer – H Mallett	01622 221075
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Background documents - See section heading
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