

SECTION D
DEVELOPMENT TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Background Documents: the deposited documents; views and representations received as referred to in the reports and included in the development proposals dossier for each case; and other documents as might be additionally indicated.

Item D1

**Installation of a play area at Shorne Woods Country Park,
Brewers Road, Shorne, Gravesend, Kent DA12 3HX -
GR/22/113 (KCC/GR/0024/2022)**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 20th April 2022.

Application by Kent County Council Country Parks for the installation of a play area at Shorne Woods Country Park, Brewers Road, Shorne, Gravesend, Kent DA12 3HX – GR/22/113 (KCC/GR/0024/2022)

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr Bryan Sweetland

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Shorne Woods Country Park is located north of the A2 Watling Street and approximately 4 miles south east of the town of Gravesend, situated south east of the hamlet of Thong and west of Shorne Ridgeway. The park is accessed via Brewers Road to the south and is surrounded by dense woodland on all boundaries including Randall Wood, Brewers Wood and Brummelhill Wood. The site is located wholly within the Metropolitan Green Belt, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Shorne and Ashenbank Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
2. The Country Park is Kent County Council's flagship Country Park covering 292 acres of woodlands, wetlands and meadows. The park comprises a visitor centre, café, volunteer garden, fishing lakes and picnic and play areas, as well as a variety of waymarked trails throughout the park for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians ranging from 1km to 10km and of varying difficulty.
3. The proposed play area is situated on an existing open area of amenity grassland adjacent to the existing play area at the south eastern side of the park. A site location plan is attached.

Recent Planning History

4. Prior to Kent County Council running the facility, Shorne Woods was historically part of the medieval Cobham Hall Estate. In the 1920s the area was used for clay extraction before being used as an army camp during World War II. Kent County Council bought Shorne Wood in 1982 and opened the site as a country park in 1987. KCC bought Randall Woods and Brewers Woods in 2001 and an additional 3 hectares of Brewers Wood in 2013 which collectively created Shorne Woods.

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5. The most relevant recent site planning history is listed below:

GR/04/967	Proposed new visitor centre including interpretative space, cafe, classroom, welfare facilities and administration office. Extension of the existing car park to provide an additional 65 car parking spaces and wind turbine Granted with conditions 21 March 2005
GR/09/972	Change of use of upstairs room (known as the Chestnut Room) for meetings, launches, wedding ceremonies, receptions and other functions Approved 7 April 2010
GR/11/92	Development of a small satellite toilet block with refreshment kiosk to supplement existing facilities in main visitor centre. Proposal includes some minor remodelling of existing car park layout and the introduction of a footpath link from the car park to existing path which runs around the park Granted with conditions 19 April 2011
GR/11/746	Retention and continued use of temporary building. Granted with conditions 2 November 2011
GR/11/961	Permanent change of use of Chestnut Room in The Visitor Centre to permit dual use for both educational activities (already has permanent permission) and functions (currently has temporary permission until April 2012 under permission GR/09/972) Granted with conditions 15 February 2012

Proposal

6. This planning application seeks permission for the installation of play area and associated fencing and surfacing at Shorne Woods Country Park. The proposed play area would be located on an area of existing open amenity grassland, located adjacent to the existing adventure play area at the country park, north east of the main visitor hub and café.
7. The application comprises the installation of accessible play equipment for children aged 12 and under, including both creative and imaginative play elements for toddlers, and more challenging elements for older children such as climbing and balancing. The playground would provide a recreation facility for a variety of ages and abilities, encouraging health and wellbeing whilst respecting the local habitat. The equipment includes cradle swings, a range of slides appropriate for different age groups, as well as a wheelchair swing and wheelchair accessible roundabout.
8. The play equipment would be constructed from sustainably sourced natural softwood timber posts set in metal footings with elements of green coloured plastic, and would all be under 2.5 metres in height.

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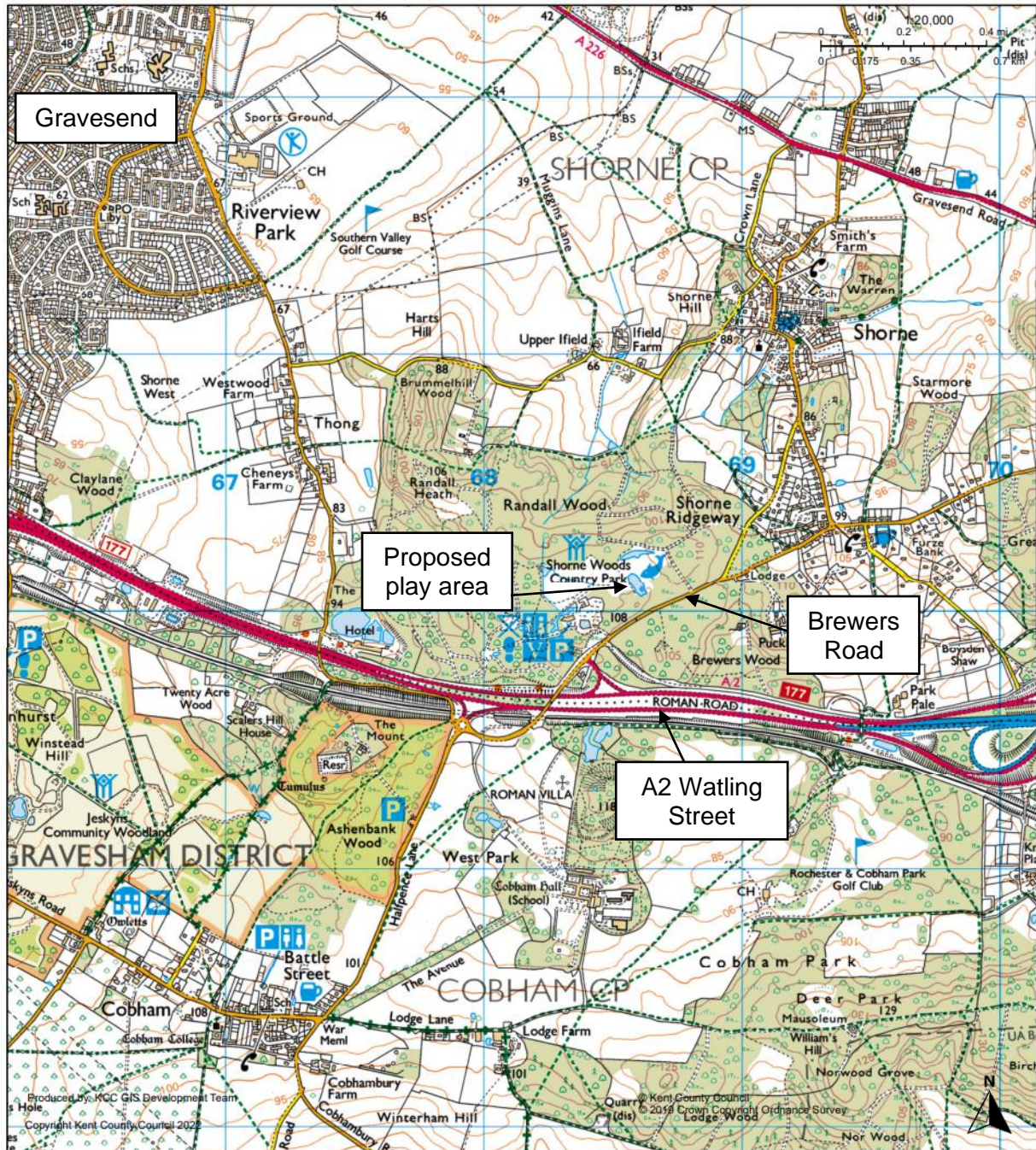
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9. The play equipment would be set on a geotextile membrane, followed by a layer of type 1 sub base and a safety wet pour surface measuring 20 metres by 27 metres, providing a safe access throughout the year. The groundworks required in preparation for surfacing would include removing the top grass layer and levelling of the clay to allow for the surfacing materials. All excavated material would be left on site and mounded in an area where it can be left to revegetate naturally.
10. The application also includes the installation of a 1 metre high timber palisade fence around the perimeter of the proposed play area with metal self-closing gates. The fencing would be natural wood which is the standard fencing used throughout Kent County Council's country parks.
11. The proposed play area is designed to be integrated with the existing play area at the country park, and would be within 60 metres of the main car park and 15 metres of hard standing for emergency vehicle access. The site is within a no cycle and 'dogs on lead' zone, and there are existing pathways in place that would provide access.

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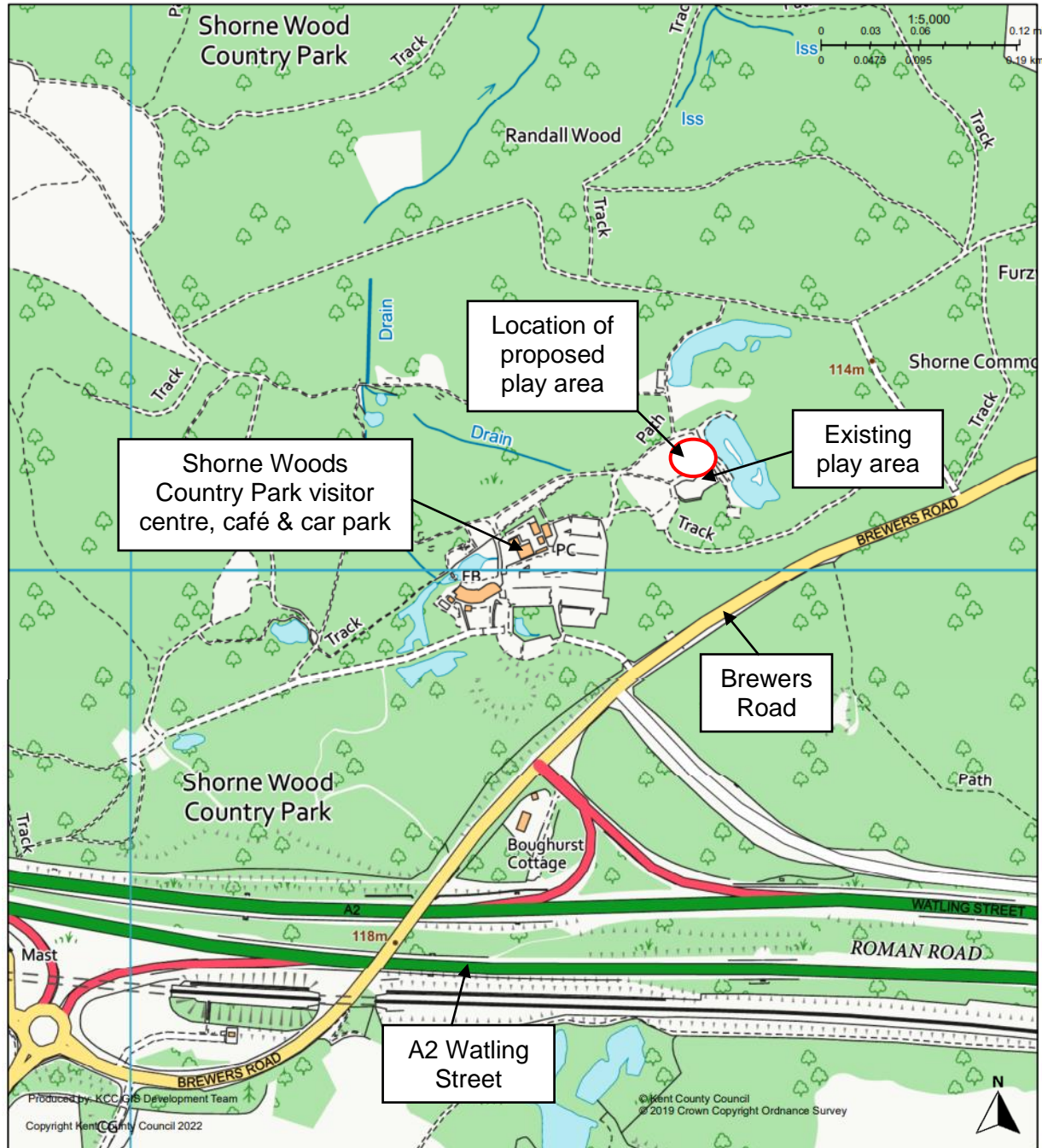
Site Location Plan



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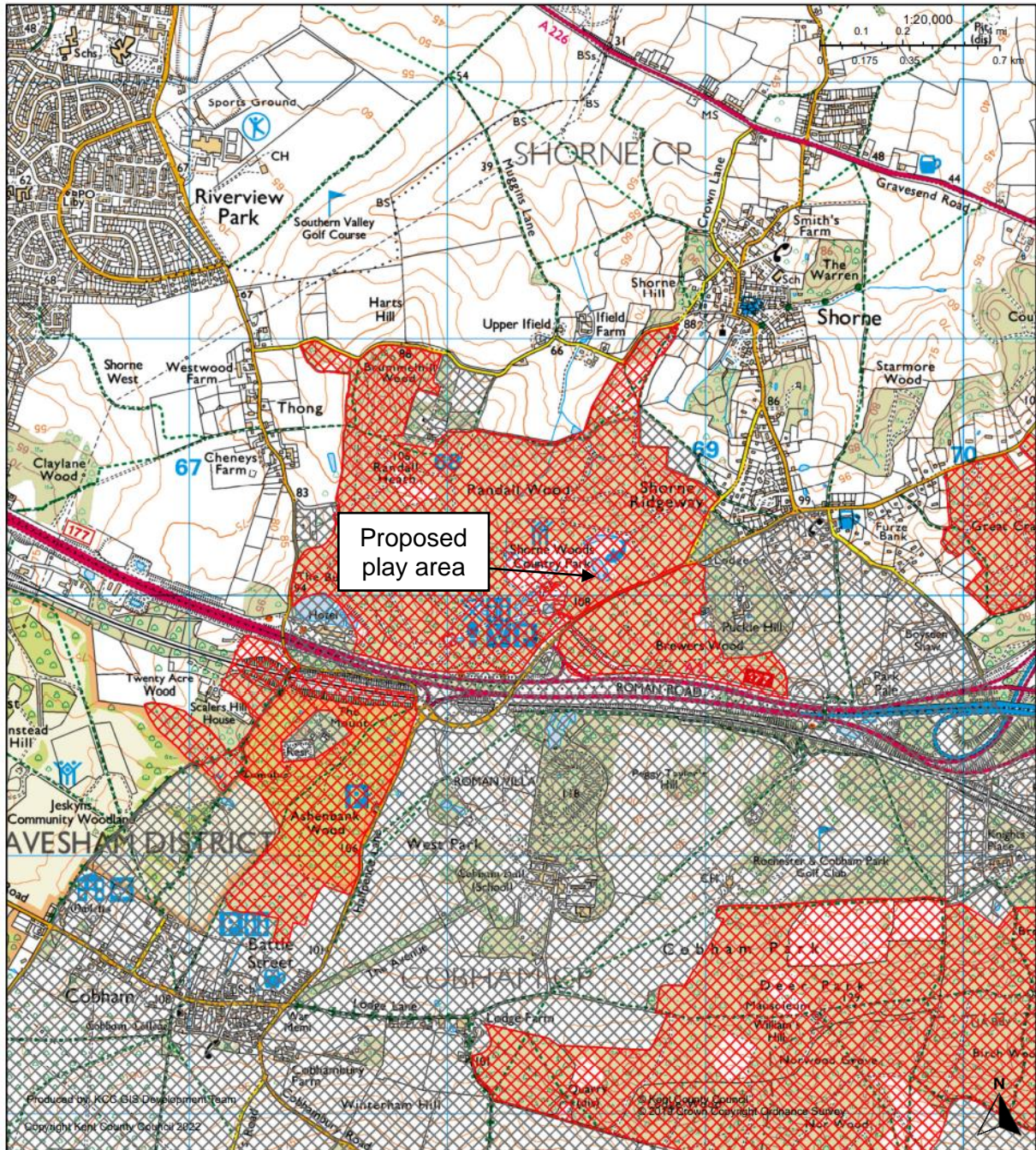
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Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty & Site of Special Scientific Interest

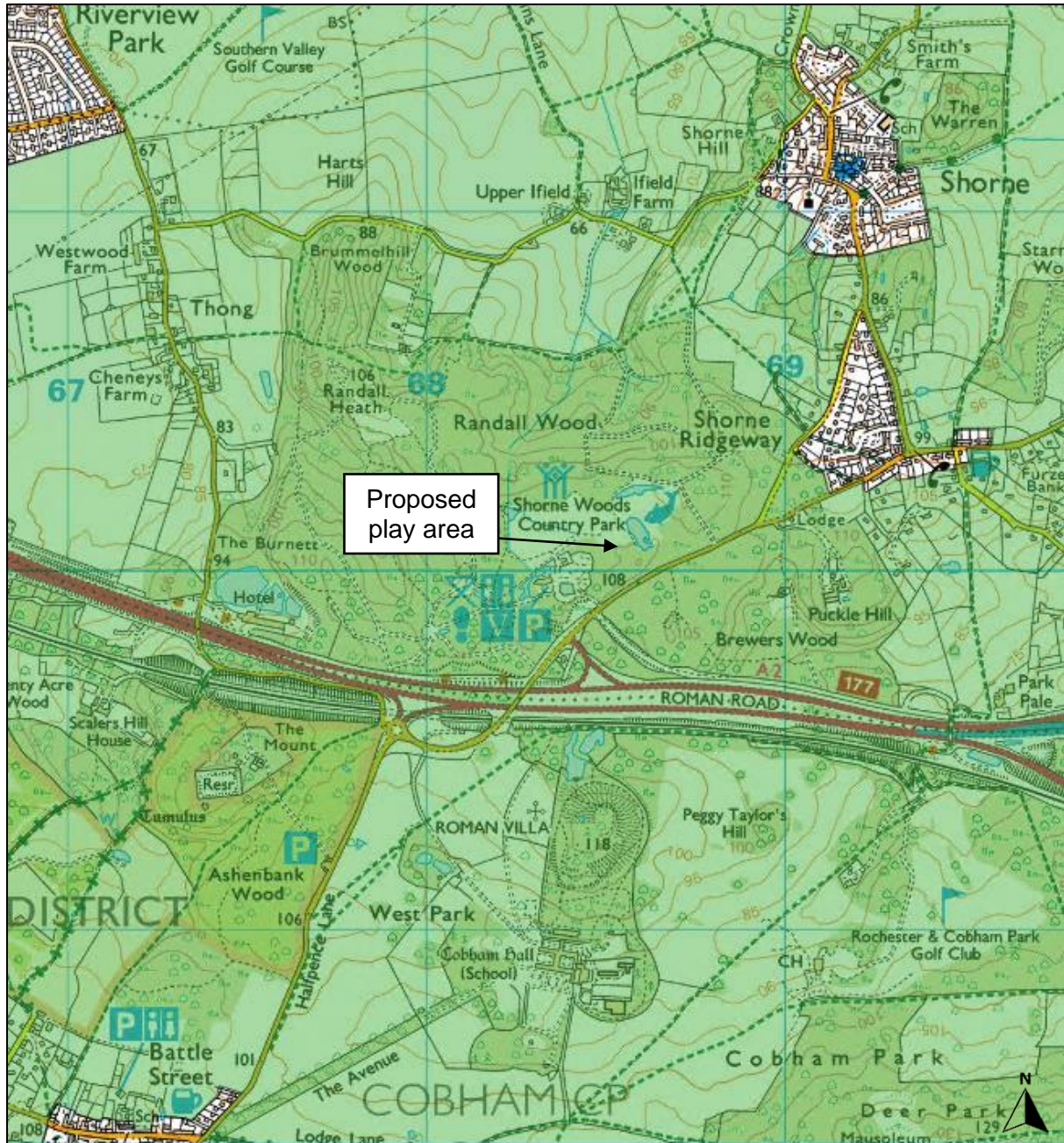



-  Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
-  Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

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Metropolitan Green Belt



 Green Belt

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Proposed Play Area Layout

General Notes & Key

Equipment Key:

- Brook Plus (Green)
- Timber (Double Bay) Twin Swing (As Team) (As Inclusive) (As Tango Seat)
- Inclusive Orbit
- Play Ship 2
- Standard Seat
- Non-Standard Rap Plus (Green)
- Ability Swing (Woodland P.C.R. Oak)
- Timber Cradle Swing
- Log Train
- Play Train

Client Approval

Name	
Signature	
Date	

Received - 3 February 2022
Planning Applications Group

Proposed Play Area for:
Kent County Council - Shorne Wood Country Park
Scheme No: 23143rev1/KEN Date: 13/01/2022 Drawn by: KT
1:200 @ A4
www.playdate.co.uk
MADE IN THE UK
Playdate Playgrounds

Proposed Play Area

Play Values

- Learning about teamwork
- Experiencing high and low level play
- Climbing and climbing fun
- Sitting on logs
- Learning to share and play with others
- Provides a lovely point for rest and relaxation
- Improves balance and coordination
- sensory stimulation
- Experience the sensation of height
- Hiding away

Shorne Wood Country Park
Kent County Council

MADE IN THE UK
Playdate Playgrounds

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Planning Policy

12. The most relevant Government Guidance and Development Plan Policies summarised below are appropriate to the consideration of this application:
- (i) **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) July 2021** and the **National Planning Policy Guidance** (March 2014), sets out the Government's planning policy guidance for England, at the heart of which is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The guidance is a material consideration for the determination of planning applications but does not change the statutory status of the development plan which remains the starting point for decision making. However, the weight given to development plan policies will depend on their consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the development plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

In determining applications, the NPPF states that local planning authorities should approach decisions in a positive and creative way, and decision takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

In terms of delivering sustainable development in relation to this development proposal, the NPPF guidance and objectives covering the following matters are of particular relevance:

- Providing accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities health, social and cultural well-being (paragraph 8);
- Achieving healthy, inclusive and safe places which are safe and accessible and encourage active and continual use of public areas and enable and support healthy lifestyles (paragraph 92);
- Provide social, recreational and cultural facilities the community needs (paragraph 93);
- Provide access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity for the health and well-being of communities (paragraph 98);
- Consideration of whether impacts from the development on the transports network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highways safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree (paragraph 110);
- Achieving the requirement for high quality design, creating places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users (paragraph 130);
- Provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor recreation as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it (paragraph 149);
- Contributing to and enhancing the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing sites of biodiversity (paragraph 174);
- Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues (paragraph 176);
- Consideration of the likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (paragraph 180).

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- (ii) The adopted **Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 (adopted September 2014)** (summarised policies)

Policy CS01	Sustainable Development Seeks to achieve sustainable development whereby planning applications that accord with the Development Plan will be approved without delay unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Policy states that the Borough Council will take a positive approach reflecting the presumption in favour of sustainable development in the NPPF and the Core Strategy and work proactively with applicants to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.
Policy CS02	Scale and Distribution of Development Seeks to prioritise development in the urban area as a sustainable location for development and supports developments inset from the Green Belt.
Policy CS10	Physical and Social Infrastructure Supports proposals and activities that protect, retain or enhance existing physical and social infrastructure or lead to the provision of additional infrastructure that improves community well-being.
Policy CS11	Transport Seeks to ensure that the impact of proposals on the highway and public transport network is managed and that there is sufficient new parking in new development in accordance with adopted parking standards.
Policy CS12	Green Infrastructure Seeks to protect sites designated for their biodiversity value including Sites of Special Scientific Interest as well as to ensure landscape character and valued landscapes are conserved, restored and enhanced, with the greatest weight given to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and natural beauty of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting.
Policy CS13	Green Space, Sport and Recreation Seeks to make adequate provision for and to protect and enhance the quantity, quality and accessibility of green space and enhance existing facilities.
Policy CS19	Development and Design Principles Seeks to manage development and design principles to achieve visually attractive, fit for purpose and locally distinctive new development, which conserves and enhances the character of the local built, historic and natural environment, integrates well with the surrounding local area and meets anti-crime standards.

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(iii) Gravesham Local Plan First Review Saved Policies 2014**Policy P3****Policy for Vehicle Parking Standards**

Seeks to ensure that there is provision for vehicle parking, in accordance with the Kent County Council Vehicle Parking Standards, as interpreted by Gravesham Borough Council, unless justified as an exception. All vehicle parking provision should normally be made on the development site.

Consultations

13. **Gravesham Borough Council:** Raise no objection and advise on imposing suitable conditions on any planning permission granted to ensure that the proposed development would have no adverse impacts on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and on highway safety. These include ensuring that the proposed boundary fencing around the playground is of a more open, rural design, and an amendment to the location of the works compound away from the existing carpark.

Shorne Parish Council: Raise no objection in principle to the proposal and make several suggestions on the proposal including increasing the number of benches within the playground and suggest open and natural coloured fencing with wooden gates as opposed to close boarded fencing as detailed on the plans to be more in-keeping with the surrounding area and existing playground fencing. The Parish Council also advise that parking and traffic are existing issues at the park and the location of the works compound in the carpark would reduce parking availability could lead to increased overspill parking and charge-avoidance. The Parish recommends that consideration is given to the expansion of parking provision coupled with measures to prevent charge avoidance in local roads such as Park Pale. The popularity of the park during peak periods could mean local children have difficulty accessing the play equipment and more visitors, coupled with increased traffic could lead to less biodiversity within the park.

KCC Biodiversity Officer: Raise no objection subject to a Construction Management Plan to ensure that works are designed to minimise impacts on the SSSI (for example through an increase in dust or noise) and any damage to the SSSI through construction traffic is rectified on completion of the works. Biodiversity also require confirmation that on completion of the works, the access route would be surveyed and, if required, carry out repairs to ensure that it remains in good conditions to minimise damage to the SSSI.

Natural England: Raise no objection to the proposal and consider that the proposed development would not have significant adverse impacts on Shorne and Ashenbank Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest. Natural England note that the proposal is located within the Shorne and Ashenbank Woods SSSI, on an area of amenity grassland and recognise that this area was amenity grassland at the time the SSSI was re-notified in 1988, and has continued to be managed as amenity grassland. Whilst the proposal does not directly support the features for which the site is designated (i.e. woodland and an assemblage of invertebrates associated with open water on disturbed sediments), it is included within the SSSI boundary for practical reasons and to provide a buffer for the ponds which support the notified invertebrate interests. Provided that the new playground would not have an impact on the adjacent ponds, Natural England

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considers that the proposed development would not damage or destroy the interest features for which the site has been notified and has no objection.

KCC Highways and Transportation: Raise no objection to the proposal having considered the development proposals and the effect on the highway network.

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit: No comments received to date.

Local Member

14. The local County Council Member for Gravesham Rural, Mr Bryan Sweetland, was notified of the application on 4 February 2022, and no views have been received to date.

Publicity

15. The application was publicised by the posting 3 site notices; posted at the front of the Country Park entrance on Brewers Road, on the Country Park notice board adjacent to the visitor centre café and car park, and on the fencing around the existing play area within the site. There are no properties within the immediate vicinity of the application site.

Representations

16. No letters of representation have been received to date.

Discussion

17. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 12 above. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, the proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. In my opinion, the key material planning considerations in this particular case relate to the siting and design of the proposed development, the acceptability of the proposed development given its location within the Metropolitan Green Belt, and the associated impacts arising from the proposal in terms of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designations.
18. The planning authority has not received any letters objection to this application. On that basis, applications would normally be determined under delegated powers to the Head of Planning Applications. In this instance however, the application is required to be reported to the Planning Applications Committee as a result of governance requirements arising from the applicant, Kent Country Parks, and the Planning Applications Group both falling within the current management arrangement of the Growth and Communities Division of the Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate. In these circumstances legislation requires that the decision is taken by the Planning Applications Committee even though there are no material planning objections to the proposal.

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Siting and Design

19. The proposed play area would be constructed on an existing open area of amenity grassland within the country park, which lies immediately adjacent to the existing play area on a relatively underused area of amenity grassland. The area of amenity grassland has no impact on woodland, woodland species or wildflowers and has been managed as amenity grassland since the country park opened in 1987. The play area in this location would mean that tree clearance is not required, and there would be no impact on tree root protection areas or any loss of habitat that would be detrimental to the Site of Special Scientific Interest. The proposed play area has been designed to be integrated with the existing play area at the country park, situated north east of the main visitor centre and café. Considering the matters above I am satisfied that the proposed location of the play area is considered appropriate within the country park.
20. The play equipment would be constructed of natural softwood timber posts set in metal footings with elements of green coloured plastic which would match the design of the existing adjacent play area. Similarly, the 1 metre high natural wood timber palisade fencing around the perimeter of the play area is used throughout all of Kent County Council's country parks and would ensure that it is in keeping with the country parks style. Shorne Parish Council and Gravesham Borough Council advised that the proposed boundary fencing should be of a more open and rural design as opposed to close boarded fencing. The applicant has addressed this by confirming that the fencing around the perimeter of the play area would be natural wooden timber palisade fencing with a gap between each palisade. Similarly, metal self-closing gates as opposed to wooden gates are required for child safety as they are more effective and secure. There are three benches shown in the submitted application drawings within the proposed play area, and the applicant has detailed the intention to provide further benches in the vicinity as part of future development, but these are not included as part of this application. I am satisfied that the proposed materials are wholly appropriate given the location within the country park and would be in keeping with the surrounding area. The proposal would accord with the NPPF objectives on design and Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) Policy CS19: Development and Design Principles.

Principle of Development in the Green Belt and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

21. The proposed play area is situated within the Metropolitan Green Belt and Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The NPPF and Gravesham Borough Council Core Strategy seek to preserve the openness of the Green Belt and give great weight to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB.
22. In terms of the Metropolitan Green Belt, consideration needs to be given as to whether the development would be classified as 'inappropriate'. The NPPF sets out that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
23. The NPPF states that construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate within the Green Belt, although a number of limited exceptions are identified. Paragraph 149 b) of the NPPF lists the following as an exception:

'the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds

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and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it'

24. Given the proposed development relates to a relatively small playground on an existing open area of amenity grassland occupying a Green Belt location, and that the proposed development would be of a low level adjacent to the existing play area within the country park, constructed of similar materials to match the existing and tie into the surrounding environment, I can see no reason why the proposal would affect the openness of the Green Belt. The proposal would also maintain the use of the land for outdoor recreation and the facilities would preserve the openness of the Green Belt, and would therefore not be considered as 'inappropriate development'.
25. No objection has been raised on Green Belt grounds by the District Authority and I consider that the proposed development would not conflict with the NPPF guidance or Policy CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) and is acceptable in principle.
26. The designation for the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty includes the whole of Shorne Woods Country Park. The proposed play area would have a very limited impact on the wider landscape and setting of the AONB as it would be seen in the context of the existing country park adjacent to the existing adventure play area. The proposed play area would be constructed of materials to match the adjacent existing play area, which would tie in to the surrounding environment and is well screened to areas outside the Country Park by the existing vegetation including dense woodland, hedgerows, and mature trees. Paragraph 176 of the NPPF outlines that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. I am satisfied that the proposed play area is situated within the confines of the country park and would not be open to the wider view of the AONB. Neither the Kent Downs AONB Unit or the Borough Council have raised any concerns about the impacts of the proposals on the AONB and I consider that the proposal accords with the general principles contained in Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) Policy CS12: Green Infrastructure.

Impact on Site of Special Scientific Interest/Ecological Interests

27. Shorne Woods Country Park is located wholly within the Shorne and Ashenbank Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The SSSI is designated due to Shorne and Ashenbank Woods forming a complex of ancient and woodland plantation. The proposed play area would be situated on an area of amenity grassland within the SSSI, which was classified as amenity grassland at the time the SSSI was re-notified in 1988 and has since continued to be managed for this use. The area of amenity grassland has no impact on the woodland, woodland species or wildflowers within the SSSI and the construction of the play area would not require any tree clearance or impact on tree root protection areas. Paragraphs 179 and 180 of the NPPF outlines that development should protect and enhance biodiversity and development on land within a SSSI which is likely to have an adverse effect on it should not normally be permitted. The proposed play area would be situated on an existing area of amenity grassland within an area of high recreational use in the confines of the country park. The play area would not significantly impact on the features that led to the designation of the SSSI and has been designed to

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be integrated with the existing adventure play area at the country park. Natural England consider that the proposed development would not have a significant adverse impact on the Shorne and Ashenbank Woods SSSI and therefore raise no objection.

28. KCC Biodiversity were also consulted on the application and were satisfied that no ecological surveys are required due to the proposed development being located on an area of amenity grassland with limited or no botanical interest. The Biodiversity Officer outlined that the proposed development is located within a SSSI but as the proposal is to be located on amenity grassland and within an area of high recreational usage, are satisfied that the proposal is unlikely to have a negative impact on the SSSI. However, as the proposal would include some groundworks, KCC Biodiversity have recommended a Construction Management Plan be required to ensure that the works are designed to minimise impacts on the SSSI, for example through control of dust or noise, and that in the event of any damage to the SSSI from construction traffic this would be rectified on completion of the works. The Applicant has submitted a Construction Management Plan and has confirmed that photographs would be taken prior to the commencement of any works and any damage caused would be repaired as part of the completion of the project. I am therefore satisfied that the proposed development would not have a significant adverse impact on the SSSI or other ecological interests and is therefore in accordance with development plan policy.

Access, Parking and Highways

29. The Construction Management Plan details that the works compound would be located in the main overflow car park for the duration of construction, with all deliveries and storage in a securely fenced area. Materials would then be moved to the construction area via the existing surfaced access track. Shorne Parish Council raise no objection to the application but have raised concerns that parking availability would be reduced due to the works compound location within the car park, which could lead to increased overspill parking and charge avoidance, especially during peak times such as bank holidays and half terms. The Parish Council also outline that parking and traffic is an existing issue due to the park's popularity, which could be increased by the proposal, and advise that consideration is given to the expansion of parking provision coupled with robust measures to prevent charge-avoidance in local roads. Gravesham Borough Council also raise no objection but have raised similar concerns and advise of an amendment to the location of the works compound, away from the existing car park.
30. Should planning permission be granted, works are scheduled to begin towards the end of April to ensure that there would be no loss of parking provision during the school holidays. It is anticipated that there would be a loss of 6 car parking spaces over the May bank holiday, and it is considered that this would not cause a significant impact on overflow parking. The car park at the country park was expanded in 2006 and currently has capacity for 322 vehicles. The expansion of any car parking is restricted by the country parks designations within the Metropolitan Green Belt, Kent Downs AONB and Shorne and Ashenbank SSSI. The temporary location of the works compound within the overflow car park is considered the most appropriate given the site's location with the Green Belt, AONB and SSSI. The compound would be of a temporary nature, would be situated in an area which has previously been used to store equipment and machinery when work has been carried out within the country park, and would only be present on site for a limited period of time (approximately 1 month).

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31. Highways and Transportation were consulted on the application and have stated that in considering the development proposals and the effect on the highway network, raise no objection. The proposal is in general conformity to Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) Policy CS11: Transport and Gravesham Local Plan First Review Saved Policies (2014) Policy P3: Policy for Vehicle Parking Standards. It is therefore considered that the application does not pose unacceptable impacts on transport, specifically parking provision.

Conclusion

32. The proposal seeks to provide new accessible play equipment adjacent to the existing play area at Shorne Woods Country Park. The Country Park is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Shorne and Ashenbank Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The siting and design of the play area are considered acceptable, and the proposal would not have any significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt, any adverse impact on the landscape character of the AONB or designation of the SSSI.
33. The planning authority has not received any objection to this application. On that basis, applications would normally be determined under delegated powers to the Head of Planning Applications. In this instance however, the application is required to be reported to the Planning Applications Committee as a result of governance requirements arising from the applicant, Kent Country Parks, and the Planning Applications Group both falling within the current management arrangement of the Growth and Communities Division of the Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate.
34. The development is in accordance with the general aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies and the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework and therefore my recommendation is that planning permission be granted, subject to conditions.

Recommendation

35. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO the imposition of conditions covering (amongst other matters) the following:
- i. The standard three year time limit;
 - ii. The development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
 - iii. The development shall be carried out in strict accordance with the submitted Construction Management Plan and accompanying map, including the works survey of the access route and future repairs on completion of the works.
36. I FURTHER RECOMMEND that the following INFORMATIVE be added:
- i. Advice that planning permission does not convey any approval to carry out work on or affecting a public highway and that engagement with KCC Highways and Transportation would be required at an early stage.

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Background Documents: see section heading