

Extension for additional learning space at The Gateway Primary School, Dartford – DA/10/627

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 12 October 2010.

Application by The Gateway Primary School for an extension off the main school for additional learning space, The Gateway Primary School, Milestone Road, Dartford, Kent, DA2 6DW (Ref: DA/10/627).

Recommendation: Planning permission to be granted, subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr A Sandhu

Classification: Unrestricted

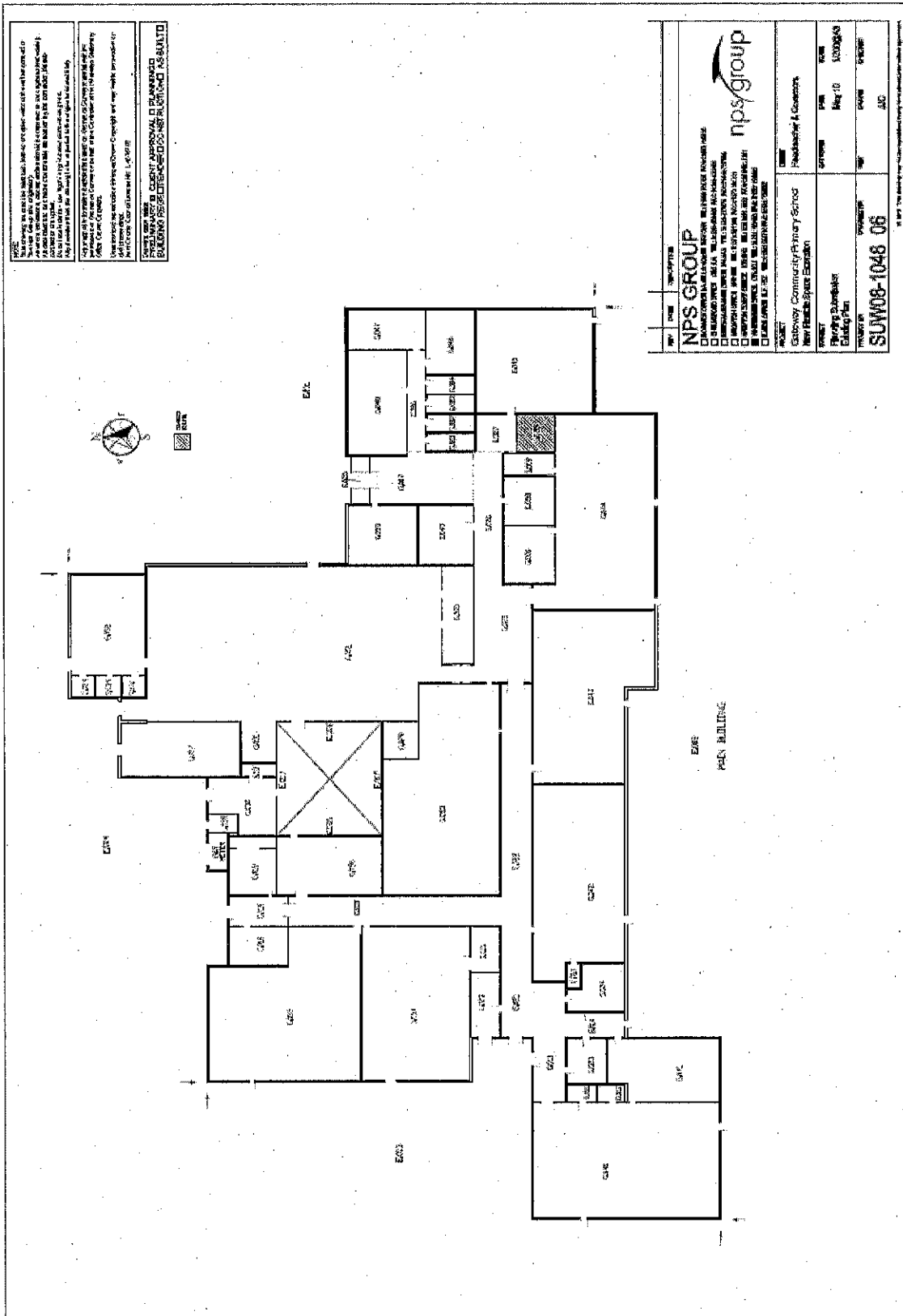
Site

1. The Gateway Community Primary School is located in Dartford, in the Stone Ward. The site comprises of a single storey building, car parking and drop off area, and playing fields. The main entrance to the school is situated at the end of Milestone Road, which is a cul-de-sac, some 210 metres long. Milestone Road is a residential road with little off-street parking available for residents. Parking in the carriageway is evident throughout the day. Although the school is located in the middle of a residential area, there are no other footpaths or alleyways linking it to the surrounding area. The site is bordered by residential properties to the north and south, whilst to the east there is a West Kent Primary Care building called 'Rainbow Lodge'. To the west there is the Dartford Adult Training Centre and a building called 'Tylers' (which used to be a Kent County Council building), both of which are now closed and derelict and are located off Brent Way. The 'Tylers' site has been the subject of a recent appeal for a secure housing development and this proposed development was allowed on appeal. A site location plan is attached.

Background

2. The school site was originally known as the Milestone Special Needs School. This school was moved to a new site in New Ash Green and the school was converted from a special needs school to a community primary school. The Gateway Community Primary School opened on 1 September 1999. The school is a one-form entry primary school (7 classes), which started with one class of children for the 1999/00 academic year, increasing by one class per academic year thereafter up to its maximum size of 7 classes, which commenced in September 2006.
3. A condition was attached to the original planning application for a footpath/cycleway to be provided between Brent Way and the school within 6 months of the school opening. This condition was intended to provide an alternative means of access to the school site and to take the pressure off Milestone Road as being the only vehicular and pedestrian access to the school. It was therefore intended that this footpath/cycleway would be located through the 'Tylers' site and would enter the school playing fields in the south west corner, where an internal footpath would have to be constructed up to the school buildings. However as the school was not expected to reach its full capacity of 210 pupils until all the classes was filled, it was agreed with Kent Highway Services that this footpath/cycleway did not have to be provided until the school was at full capacity. Before the footpath/cycleway could be progressed, the use of the 'Tylers' site changed temporarily and the site was sold off, but no reservation was made with the new owners to safeguard a strip of land to provide this footway/cycleway to the school.

Extension for additional learning space at The Gateway Primary School, Dartford - DA/10/627.



NOTES
 1. This drawing is to be used for the construction of the extension to the school. It is not to be used for any other purpose.
 2. The extension is to be constructed in accordance with the Building Regulations and the relevant parts of the Building Code of Practice.
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 10. The extension is to be constructed in accordance with the relevant parts of the Building Code of Practice and the relevant parts of the Building Regulations.

NPS GROUP	
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PROJECT	Gateway Community Primary School New Flexible Space Extension
CLIENT	Headteacher & Governors
DATE	10/10/2014
SCALE	1:100
PROJECT NO.	SUM08-1048-08
PROJECT MANAGER	JAC

Extension for additional learning space at The Gateway Primary School, Dartford – DA/10/627.

4. A planning application was subsequently submitted by the School in 2007 (planning application DA/07/1218) to remove the footpath/cycleway condition, that was attached to the original 1999 planning application, as the proposed footpath/cycleway link could not readily be provided and it was considered to be no longer needed. This planning application to remove this condition was met with a lot of objection from the residents of Milestone Road and a Members' site meeting was held at the school on 15 January 2008. The outcome of that site meeting was that the requested removal of the footpath/cycleway condition should not be pursued until a suggested alternative pedestrian/cycle access point to the school site had been fully investigated. That planning application has not been determined and was still live at the time of the extension planning application being submitted (please refer to the *Discussion* for an update on that planning application).

Proposal

5. The planning application is for an 116sqm extension to the school to provide an additional teaching room, a meeting room entrance and lobby. It is proposed that this teaching room could also be used as a flexible space that can be used by community groups outside of school hours. The out of hours use of this proposed extension is primarily for before and after school clubs/holiday clubs for the children and parent workshops. The expected hours of use are likely to be 08.30 to 18.00 hours during term time and 09.00 and 15.30 hours during holiday periods. The proposed extension would only be used for small group meetings for the local community and school related business.
6. The proposed extension is to the back of the school site and it would have a flat roof, like the rest of the existing school buildings, and to ensure that it would be unobtrusive. The materials proposed to be used in this extension would replicate the brick, windows and doors used in the rest of the school. The proposed extension would not be visible from the road but would be visible to the rear of the dwellings on High Trees. The proposed extension would not affect the parking area or the emergency access route to the rear of the school as the existing emergency gates are not affected by this proposal. The proposed extension would also not increase pupil numbers at the school, which would remain at 210 pupils. This is the maximum number that the school is allowed to take.

Planning Policy

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

Planning Policy Statement 1 – Sustainable Development

Planning Policy Statement 13 - Transport

Dartford Borough Local Plan (1995)

Policy S2 Provision of community, leisure, tourist, retail facilities.

Policy T21 Agreement for highways improvements related to development proposals.

Policy T31 Provision of pedestrian footways and verges alongside roads.

Extension for additional learning space at The Gateway Primary School, Dartford – DA/10/627.

Members should note that the South East Plan has been revoked and no longer forms part of the Development Plan.

Consultations

8. **Dartford Borough Council** – raised a holding objection, which is as follows:

- “This Council does not raise any objection to the principle of the extension but are concerned that when the school was planned the space required should have been assessed for the anticipated pupil numbers. If the longer term plan is to increase pupil numbers then the school playing area should be increased accordingly.
- No details have been given as to the proposed use by community groups. What is the type of activity proposed outside of school hours and what are the anticipated hours of use of the premises? Any late night activity for parties, etc. could have a detrimental impact on local residents in terms of noise and disturbance as well as additional parking problems over those currently encountered at the school.
- This Council is still keen to see the cycle/footpath provided to Brent Way which was required by the original planning permission for the school and trusts that the proposed extension will not impede this option when considering the access as logistically access to High Trees would not serve many pupils and access to Invicta Road would have a lower impact than Brent Way.”

Stone Parish Council – raises no objections to this application, pointing out that this is subject to the satisfaction of local residents.

Divisional Transportation Manager – raises no objections to this proposal in respect of highway matters.

Environment Agency – raises no objection subject to a condition for a scheme for foul and surface water being submitted and approved, prior to the development commencing.

Local Member(s)

9. The local County Member, Mr Sandhu was notified of the application on the 7 May 2010, and no written views have been received to date.

Publicity

10. The application was advertised by the posting of number of site notices and the notification of 40 neighbours.

Representations

11. Two letters of representation have been received in response to the proposal. The main reasons for objection can be summarised as follows:

- No objection is raised to this particular development but it should only be granted if the outstanding planning conditions relating to the school access are enforced first.

Extension for additional learning space at The Gateway Primary School, Dartford – DA/10/627.

- There are continued concerns over parking in Milestone Road if as the result of this application, more pupils were allowed in the school.

Discussion

12. The application is required to be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan policies, unless material considerations are of overriding importance. Therefore the proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Dartford Borough Council Local Plan policies and Government Planning Policy Statements and Guidance Notes and other material considerations arising from consultation and neighbour notification responses. In this particular case, the determining issue also largely hangs upon the outcome of the previously undetermined planning application that was submitted in 2007 for the proposed removal of an existing planning condition for an additional access point to the school. In particular, the main objections to the current application actually stem from the earlier undetermined application.
13. The Borough Council and local residents have raised concern over the potential expansion to the school as a result of this proposal, and the consequent impact on traffic movements. However, there is no intention to increase pupil numbers as a result of this extra accommodation, since it would simply improve the existing teaching accommodation for the school and allow better facilities for community uses at the school. In particular, the school has already reached its statutory capacity in terms of pupil intake, and it is prevented by both the school site size and the statutory provisions from expanding its school roll. Under the circumstances, there would be no impact on existing traffic movements as a direct result of this proposed development, although some marginal differences in movements might occur as a result of the community use. However, these movements would not add to the peak time traffic congestion complained of and can be partly controlled by the imposition of conditions relating to the hours of community use.
14. The proposed building extension is of a design which closely accords with the host buildings, using compatible materials, window arrangements and roof treatment. The massing, proportions and external appearance of the proposed extension reflect those of the existing buildings, and under the circumstances, I see no objection to the proposed development in terms of its design and compatibility with the relevant Development Plan policies. The proposed siting of the extension is relatively unobtrusive, and whilst close to the site boundary, would be well shielded visually by the mature hedging along the northern boundary and the fact that it would be a lower ground level than the adjacent houses. The concern over access for emergency vehicles is unfounded because the extension would only affect the pedestrian access gates currently within the footprint of the new building, with the existing fire access route to the school field adjacent to the school site boundary being completely unaffected.
15. As mentioned in paragraph 4 above, a planning application was submitted in 2007 to remove an existing planning condition for the footpath/cycleway to be constructed to the school. This condition was attached to the original planning application when the school site was changed from a special needs school to a community school. The reason for this request for an additional access point to the school was to take pressure off Milestone Road, which was the only vehicular and pedestrian access point to the school. However as the school was not actually to its full capacity until September 2006, it was agreed that this requirement could be delayed until then. In the meantime, the area of land where this footpath/cycleway was intended to go through was sold off

Extension for additional learning space at The Gateway Primary School, Dartford – DA/10/627.

and the requirement for this strip of land was not reserved when the 'Tylers' site was sold off.

16. Since the Members' site visit took place in 2008, an option of getting a pedestrian access to the school from the north east corner of the school site was looked into. However following protracted negotiations this access was abandoned because of the prohibitive costs involved. As the only other option of creating a second footpath/cycleway to the school would be to the south west corner, that earlier application has remained undetermined since it was submitted. Also school site security is far more of an issue now and any footpath to the site would be remote from the actual school buildings, making any gate into the school playing fields difficult to manage. There is also the additional requirement of providing an internal footpath from this gate to the school buildings across the school playing fields. This in itself is difficult as the school playing fields has slight level differences and there are a number of trees and shrubs along the school boundary which would have to be removed or a footpath would have to go around. There is the additional problem as the school playing fields are very tight for space and there is a need to maintain the school football pitch and its run-off areas without an internal footpath affecting any of these.
17. However due to the continued concerns of residents over the parking problems in Milestone Road, which are worse in the afternoon when parents collect their children and they are not allowed into the school site, there has been renewed pressure for another access point to the school, all the time this planning condition remained valid. There is also a lot of concern from the Newtown Residents Association about this lack of an additional footpath/cycleway to the school, as it was seen as a means of relieving the parking pressure off Milestone Road. It was seen as providing an alternate area for parents to park their cars away from Milestone Road, whilst encouraging alternate means of getting to the school by encouraging more pupils to walk or cycle if there was another access point to the school.
18. Since the planning application for the proposed school extension was submitted earlier this year, it has re-opened the dialogue with the School, the local residents' group, Dartford Borough Council and Kent County Council's Education and Planning departments about the undetermined planning condition for the footway/cycleway to the school site. A series of meetings have been held to discuss the perceived connection between this application and the previous application to withdraw the planning condition, and as a result the School has now withdrawn the earlier planning application. The School also confirmed that it has no objection in principle to a second access to the site and that the School is committed to undertaking a full consultation and feasibility study of all the issues surrounding the siting, usage and management of a second access.
19. I understand from the Director of Children, Families and Education that the new owner of the 'Tylers' site is aware of the previous discussions about providing a strip of land through his site to provide this footway/cycleway link to the school site and has not indicated that he would resist it from happening. As it looks hopeful that an footpath/cycleway can be pursued through the 'Tylers' site after all, then this option will be actively investigated again by the School and the Director of Children, Families and Education.

Extension for additional learning space at The Gateway Primary School, Dartford – DA/10/627.

Conclusion

20. Having regard to the relevant planning policies and guidance, and the applicants' agreement to withdraw the previous undetermined planning application for the proposed removal of planning consent for an additional access point to the school, and the fact that the other objections have now been resolved, I see no overriding objection to the development and consider that it would accord with the aims and objectives of the relevant planning policies and guidance. In particular, the design of the building is entirely compatible with the existing buildings to which it would be attached in terms of its massing, proportions, materials and outward appearance. I therefore recommend that planning permission is granted, subject to conditions including relating to community use.

Recommendation

21. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS, including conditions to cover the following aspects:

- Standard time limit;
- The development is carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
- A restriction over the hours of use of the proposed extension by the community
- A scheme for the disposal of foul and surface water to be submitted and approved prior to the development commencing.

Case officer – Lidia Cook

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Background documents - See section heading
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