

Removal of a mobile classroom unit and construction of a single storey classroom building – DO/10/507

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 15 February 2011

Application by Goodnestone CE Primary School for the removal of a mobile classroom unit and construction of a single storey classroom building at Goodnestone CE Primary School, The Street, Goodnestone, Canterbury – DO/10/507.

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr. L.Ridings

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Goodnestone CE Primary School is located in the centre of the small village of Goodnestone, near Aylesham. The school site comprises an 'L' shaped plot of land, with access from the main road through the village, The Street, and via School Lane, a narrow access road that is a designated Public Right of Way. The proposed development site is located adjacent to School Lane, and currently is occupied by a mobile classroom building. There are established mature trees to the north west boundary, a recent school extension to the north east, and a residential garage and house to the south east.
2. The school site lies wholly within the Goodnestone Conservation Area. There are a number of listed buildings near to the development site: Avenue Lodge 18m to the west; Weavers Cottage 23m south east; Church Cottages 50m south east; The Fitzwalter Arms 60m south and the Grade 1 Listed village church 70m to the south. The application site is visible from School Lane and the immediate area, but is not visible from the main street. There is a small grassy footpath leading from School Lane, behind the Church Cottages and to the side of the Church; however this is not the main entrance to the Church and is not a designated Public Right of Way.

Background

3. Goodnestone Primary School is a late-Victorian brick building, although it has had a number of conversions and extensions over time. The school caters for children aged 4 to 11 and has a current roll of 81 pupils. There is a large mobile classroom building which provides teaching accommodation and the application proposes to remove this temporary building. There has been a mobile building on this site since 1992, which has had permission renewed on number of occasions.
4. Recent planning history includes the construction of a new reception/administration and toilet block adjacent to the application site, which was granted permission in 2005. This extension is brick-built, and although the main building is not a listed building it incorporates features and is designed to mirror and complement the locality. As part of this project, the original mobile building was removed and a refurbished unit put on site, as the first phase of longer term school improvements subject to funding. In 2006, the

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School applied to replace the mobile unit with a larger 3-bay temporary building. This application was subsequently withdrawn under the advice of the Planning Applications Group due to the objections received, and the potential impact on the Conservation Area.

5. The mobile classroom has been on site for over ten years and has had planning permission renewed on a number of occasions. The most recent application for a two year temporary permission was granted approval at the Planning Applications Committee Meeting in 2007, with the condition that a permanent solution was explored as a matter of urgency due to the number of renewals of temporary permission.

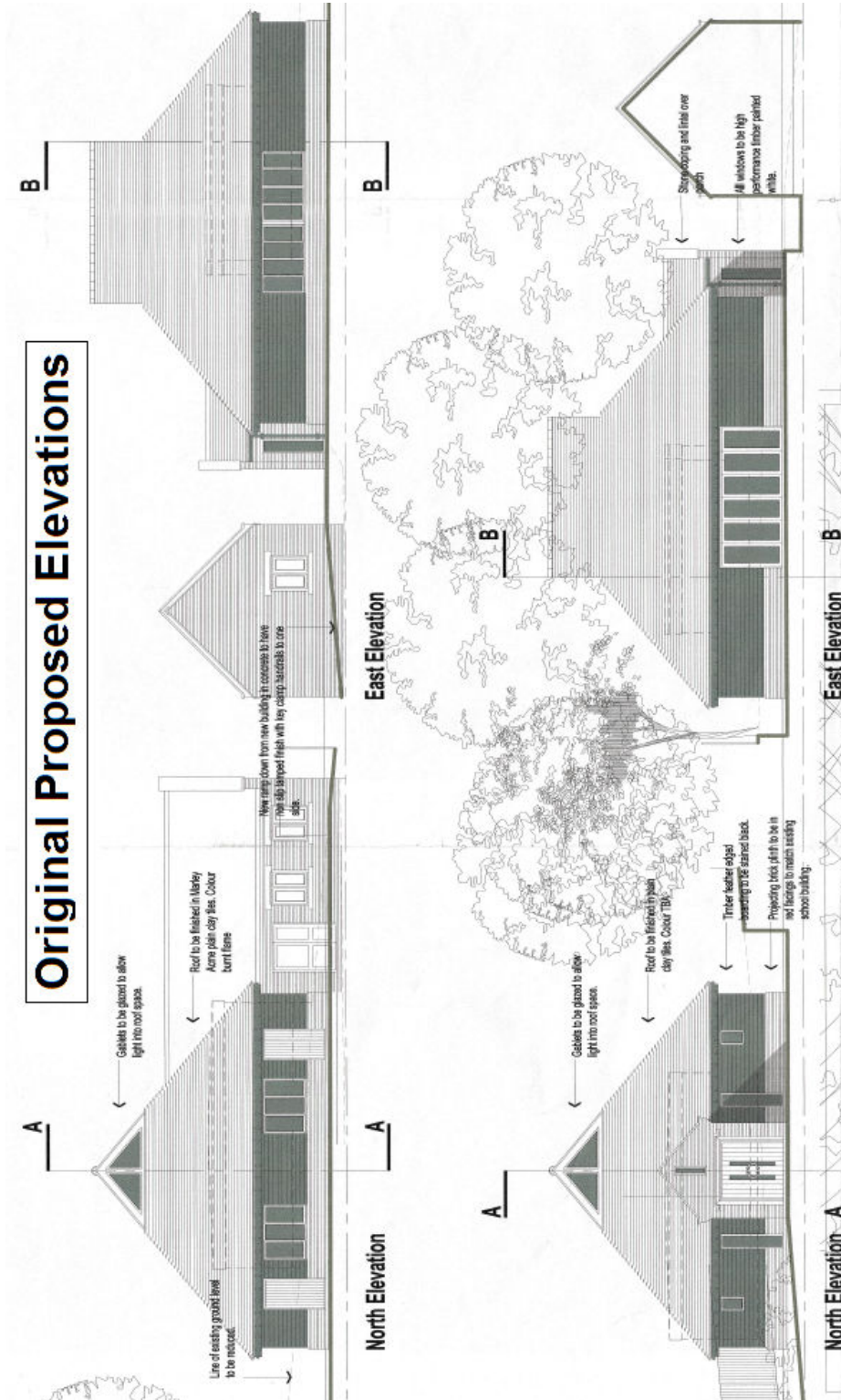
Proposal

6. This application proposes the removal of the existing mobile classroom building, and the construction of a single story building in its place, to provide two modern classrooms capable of accommodating 20 to 25 pupils in each. Pre-application discussions between the agents and ourselves recommended that the design attempts to create a complementary building to the existing school, and have a subservient appearance by adopting the appearance of a barn/outbuilding, thereby not mimicking the existing building, but incorporating some of its architectural features.
7. The submission as originally made proposed a 150sq.m building with black timber boarding to the elevations (built on a brick plinth), and a large clay tile roof with a maximum height of 7.7m. The architect stated the design proposed intended to create an outbuilding/barn appearance, within the budget available. The original submission attracted objections from the District Council, conservation architects and a near neighbour due to the design, materials, bulk and height of the proposed building, and the impact this would have on the Conservation Area and the setting of neighbouring Listed Buildings.
8. In response to the objections, a site meeting was held with the architects, school Headteacher, Dover DC and the KCC Conservation Architect in order to discuss the issues and visualise solutions. The architect redesigned the footprint and roof and put forward 8 different basic forms for the building for discussion amongst consultees. The preferred option was then used to redesign the proposal.
9. The updated submission proposes an identical floor space, but amends the form of the roof to reduce the height to a maximum of 6.08m, by incorporating a dual pitched-roof design (see plans). The overall height of the building is proposed to be reduced in visual bulk by lowering the ground level by an average of 900mm. The roof materials were also amended from machine-made Marley clay tiles, to natural Welsh blue black slate. The building is still proposed to be finished with black timber boarding, and to be on a red brick plinth. The amended design and materials were sent out for consultation, and subsequently the District Council and conservation architects removed their objections, although a near neighbour to the development site maintains and reiterates their objections to the scheme based upon its inappropriate design and impact on the Conservation Area and adjacent Listed Buildings.

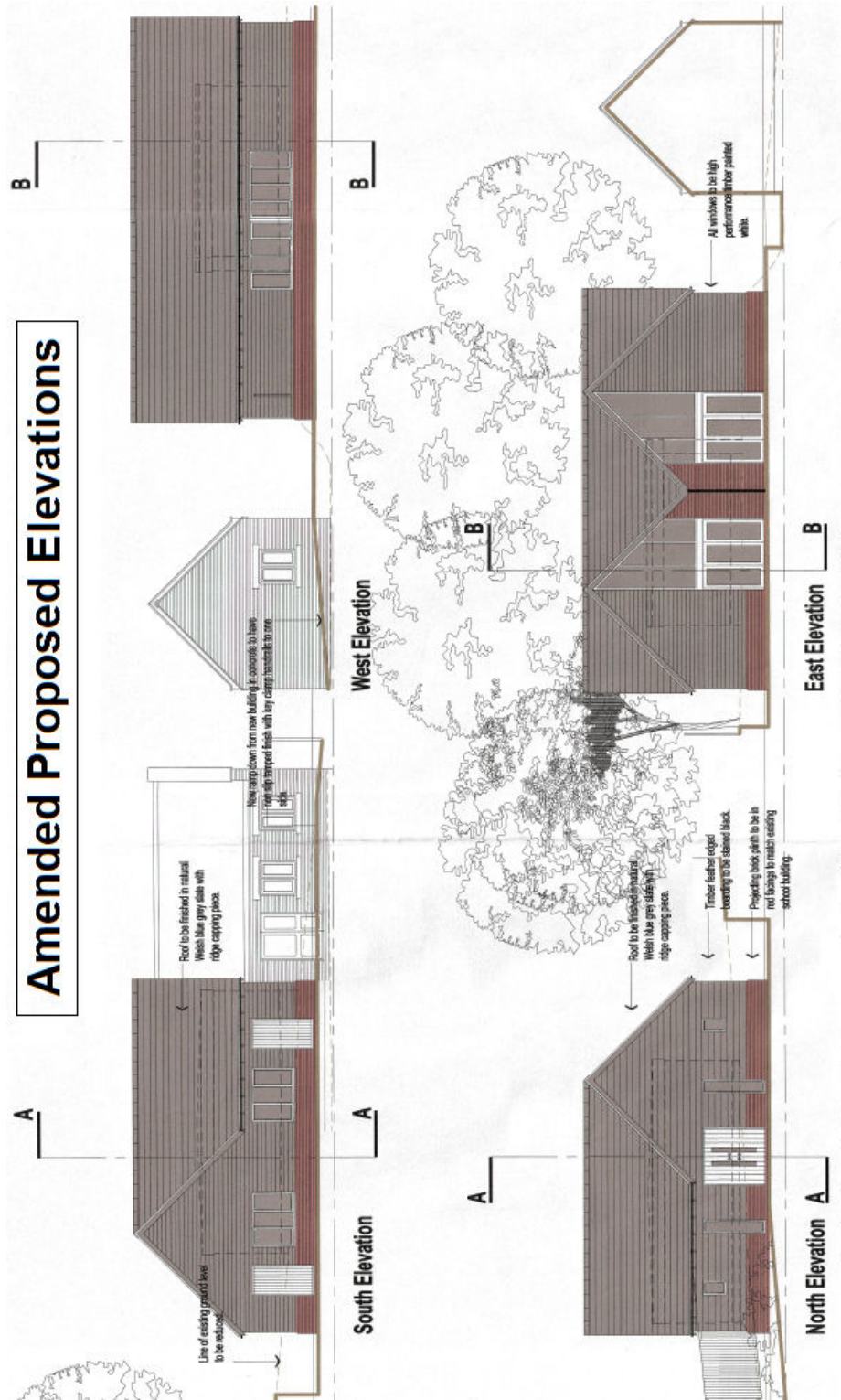
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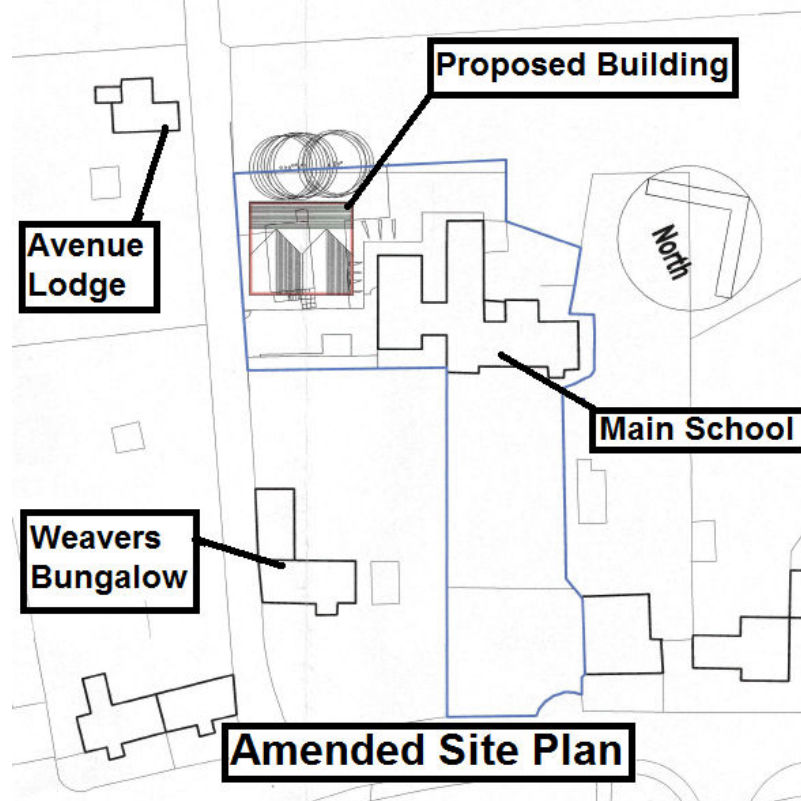
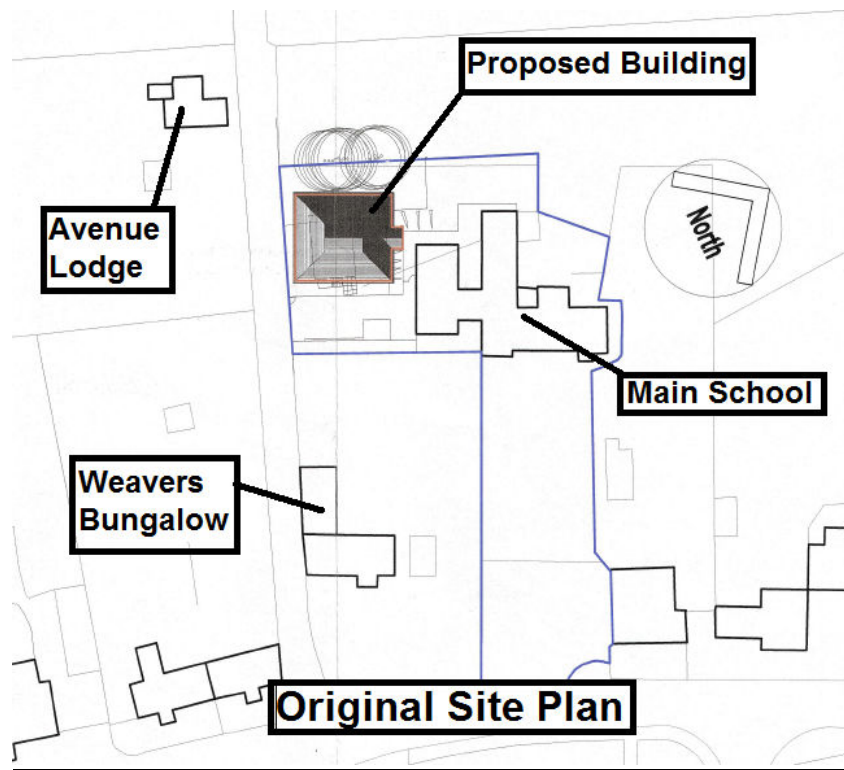
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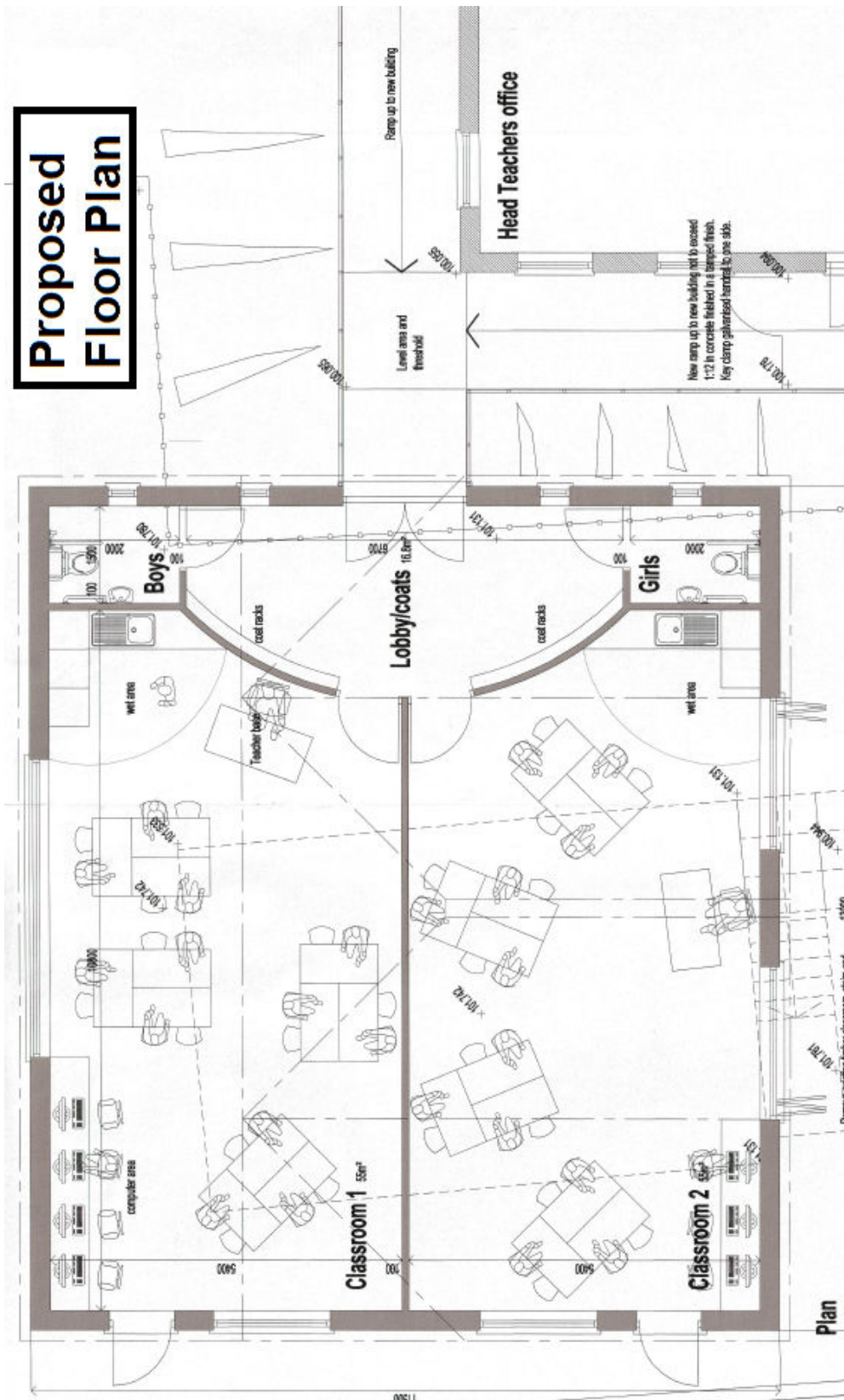
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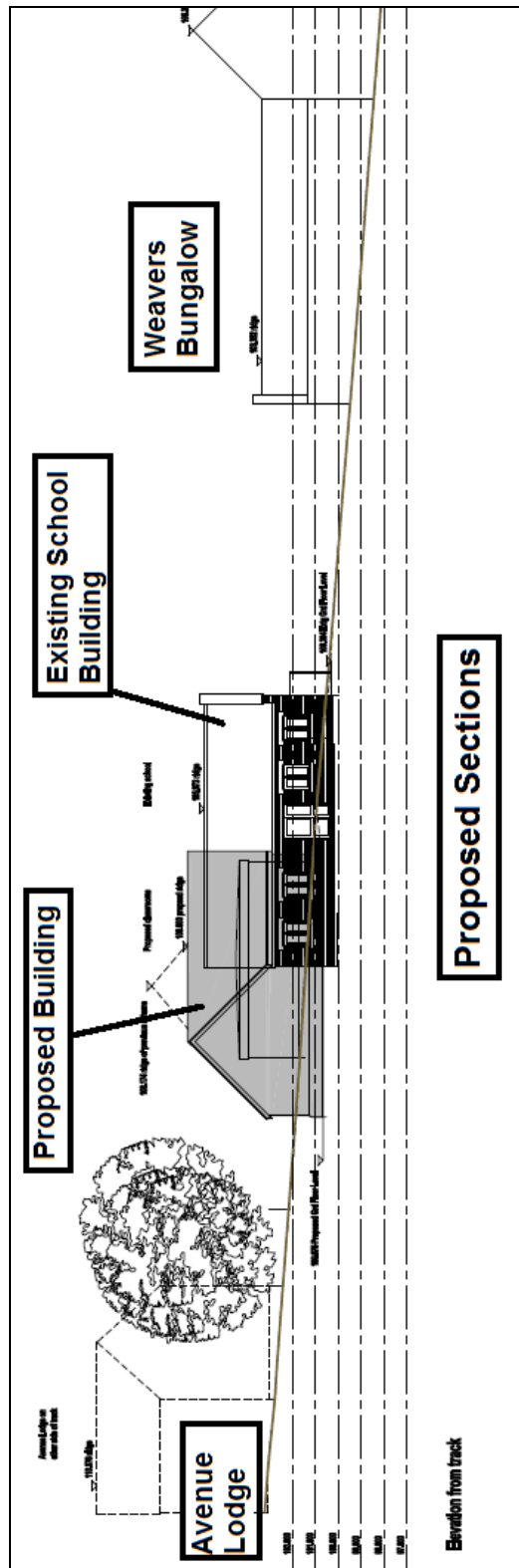
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Planning Policy

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

- (i) **Planning Policy Statement 1: Sustainable Development**
- (ii) **Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment**
- (iii) The adopted **South East Plan**

Important note regarding the South East Plan:

As a result of the judgement in the case brought by Cala Homes in the High Court, which held that the powers set out in section 79 [6] of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 could not be used to revoke all Regional Strategies in their entirety, Regional Strategies (the South East Plan in the case of Kent) were re-established as part of the Development Plan on 10 November 2010. Notwithstanding this, DCLG's Chief Planner Steve Quartermain advised Local Planning Authorities on 10 November 2010 that they should still have regard to the Secretary of State's letter to Local Planning Authorities and to the Planning Inspectorate dated 27 May 2010. In that letter he had informed them of the Government's intention to abolish Regional Strategies in the Localism Bill and that he expected them to have regard to this as a material consideration in any planning decisions. The 10th November 2010 Quartermain Letter is now being challenged in the High Court and must in my view carry little weight until such time as the Court decision is known. This is currently awaited. Department of Communities and Local Government advice on this matter reads:

'Local planning authorities and planning inspectors should be aware that the Secretary of State has received a judicial review challenge to his statement of 10 November 2010, the letter of the Chief Planner of the same date and to the Secretary of State's letter of 27 May 2010 on the ground that the Government's intended revocation of Regional Strategies by the promotion of legislation for that purpose in the forthcoming Localism Bill is legally immaterial to the determination of planning applications and appeals prior to the revocation of Regional Strategies.

The Secretary of State is defending the challenge and believes and is advised that it is ill founded. Nevertheless, pending determination of the challenge, decision makers in local planning authorities and at the Planning Inspectorate will in their determination of planning applications and appeals need to consider whether the existence of the challenge and the basis of it, affects the significance and weight which they judge may be given to the Secretary of State's statements and to the letter of the Chief Planner'.

Policy CC1 Seeks to achieve and maintain sustainable development within the region.

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- Policy CC4** Expects that all development will adopt and incorporate sustainable construction standards and techniques.
- Policy CC6** Seeks sustainable and distinctive communities that respect the character of settlements and landscapes, and achieve a high quality built environment.
- Policy S3** States that local planning authorities, taking into account demographic projections, should work with partners to ensure adequate provision of pre-school, school and community learning facilities.
- Policy BE4** To protect, conserve and enhance the historic built environment.
- Policy BE6** Gives support to proposals which protect, conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the historic environment and the contribution it makes to local and regional distinctiveness and sense of place.

Consultations

Dover District Council - objected to the original proposals on the grounds that the proposed building by reason of its size, height, scale and design would be likely to appear incongruous and obtrusive in appearance, detrimental to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area within which it is located, and the setting of adjacent Listed Buildings contrary to PPS1 and PPS5. However, a less obtrusive building of a design that would be more in keeping with the character of the Conservation Area and setting of the adjacent Listed Buildings, and which would be more sympathetic to the character and appearance of the school building, would be more likely to receive this Council's support.

Following the submission of amended plans, the District Council submitted the following comments:

No objections are raised. It is considered that the height is still rather disproportionate to the existing school; however the overall design is a great improvement over the existing mobile classrooms it would replace in terms of impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and setting of the adjacent Listed Buildings.

Goodnestone Parish Council – were consulted on this application.

Divisional Transport Manager – no objections, provided wheel-washing facilities are provided during construction to prevent mud being deposited on the local roads.

KCC Conservation Architect - recommends that for the building to work in this setting, the roof must take on the profile of a barn, which the (original) proposal does not. The barn design would result in a large tiled roof, but it would be appropriate to the setting and location. It is also important that the tiles are of an appropriate quality because of the sensitive setting – these should be a Keymer tile or similar, not a machine made tile as proposed.

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Following the submission of amended plans and in response to the objections received on the basis of design and conservation, the Conservation Architect submitted the following comments:

“The approach of designing the building to appear like a barn is appropriate in this location and setting. Such building forms are often associated with rural churches where they were used to hold the tithe collection from local agriculture. The use of timber weather boarding on a barn like structure in proximity to the Church is not out of keeping with similar building forms in other semi-rural locations to be found in historic villages around Kent. As such, there is no conflict with the setting and appropriateness of form with adjacent listed buildings”.

English Heritage - recommends that the application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of [our] specialist conservation advice.

Local Member(s)

11. The local County Member for Sandwich, Mr L.Ridings, was notified of the application on the 3 June 2010.

Publicity

12. The application was advertised in the KM Extra Canterbury on 11 June 2010, by the posting of a site notice, and by the notification of 19 neighbours.

Representations

13. I have received one letter of objection from a near neighbour to the site. The main points can be summarised as follows:
 - The Design and Access Statement states that the ‘proposed building will not mimic the Victorian school architecture but have a greater resemblance to an outbuilding or barn, and be clad in black timber boarding’. How does the choice of materials and design preserve or enhance the special character of the Conservation Area? The previous extension to the main building is in the same design as the original Victorian School.
 - The proposed building has been designed to ‘complement the existing school building, not by repeating the Victorian elevations but by a contrasting appearance’. How is this apparent contradiction in terms explained?
 - The scale of the proposed development dwarfs our house and several other listed buildings. At almost 8m in height it would not be possible to soften the impact with landscaping and planting.
 - How can the proposal be described as single storey at 8m in height? The impact of the scale on the surrounding area cannot be justified, and it would be visible

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from the Grade 1 listed Holy Cross Church.

- Do not understand how this proposal can be acceptable considering the scrutiny and strict criteria applied our own recent planning applications. We would be interested in hearing any justification in applying different standards to a much more significant development.
- Do not agree with the conclusion that the building would be 'aesthetically remaining in keeping with the existing buildings and locality in general' and that this statement is not supported by evidence.
- We are supportive of the school and hope that a sympathetic design solution of appropriate scale using construction materials in keeping with surrounding listed buildings.

Following the submission of amended plans, the neighbours submitted additional comments:

- The benefit of the new building over the mobile classroom is not relevant, as the mobile has a temporary permission and is due to be removed as this has expired.
- The conservation issues have not been fully addressed and planning policy has not been consistently applied and therefore objections are maintained.
- The most recent extension was a brick built office, completed in a Victorian style similar to the main school. Why has a similar design solution not been proposed for this application? Cost containment is not an appropriate explanation.
- Given the level of scrutiny we have had with our own applications, we would not get permission to build a large black timber barn in the garden of a listed grade II building.
- The height of the amended proposed building is still disproportionate to the existing school; this could easily be reduced.
- We continue to hope that a sympathetic design solution appropriate to the Conservation Area is found.

Discussion

14. In considering this proposal regard must be had to Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (4) 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, this 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.

15. This application has been brought for determination by the Planning Applications Committee due to the material planning objections of a near neighbour to the planning application site. The objections are outlined above and are based upon the opinion that the proposed building, by virtue of its size, design, scale and materials, would adversely impact the Conservation Area, and the settings of nearby listed buildings.

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Design negotiations

16. The agent, acting on behalf of Goodnestone CE Primary School, had engaged in pre-application discussion with the KCC Conservation Officer and myself. The recommendations made during these discussions were, due to the size of the building required, to design a development that had the appearance of a barn. The rationale for this that it is not uncommon in small rural villages to have a Tithe barn in close proximity to a village church. Therefore, for a large new building on the school site to be sensitive to the Conservation Area and character of the locality, a barn-like structure would not be inappropriate.
17. The original planning application proposed a large building of 150sq.m with a square footprint in order to provide sufficient space for the number of pupils at the school. Due to the size and shape of this footprint, the design solution proposed by the architect for the roof raised the height of the apex of the building to 7.7m. The materials proposed were black stained timber weather boarding to the external walls sat on a red brick plinth, machine made Marley clay tiles, and white painted timber windows and doors. This was communicated as the best solution under the available budget. However, the design as proposed did not replicate the advice given during pre-application discussions and the shape and features of the roof did not give the appearance of a barn. The proposal attracted objections from the District Council, KCC Conservation and a near neighbour.
18. Last June I met with the objecting neighbours on site, in order to discuss their concerns regarding the application, and to assess the potential impact of the proposal on the setting of their Grade II listed house, and the nearby Grade I listed church. Following this discussion, there was a meeting between the Architects, the School Headteacher, Dover DC, the KCC Conservation Architect and myself on site to discuss concerns with the proposal, and table any potential solutions. The discussions were productive and the architect went away to revise the scheme and use group emails to discuss amendments. The amended proposal is the product of these discussions, and subsequently satisfied the objections of the District Council and the KCC Conservation Officer.

Height and Scale

19. The agent and applicant have stated that the size of the proposed building is dictated by the current needs of the School for modernised and sufficient accommodation, as well as by a need to provide appropriate space for the future. The existing mobile classroom (providing 48sq.m) was last renewed when the school roll was 63 pupils, and it has since risen to 81. The current space limitations necessitate mixed-year teaching, and the use of the village hall. Therefore, the applicant has proposed a 150sq.m building to provide two classrooms of 55sq.m each, as well as toilets and a cloakroom under the same roof. Due to this size, the original design proposed a square footprint and a large roof. The current design proposes a dual-roof, in order to reduce the impact of the height.
20. The objections to the amended proposal state that the building is overbearing on the

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existing school building and is out of scale. In my opinion, due to the size of the required footprint, the height of the building is at its most acceptable potential level. The agent has proposed a limited amount of digging in to lower the ground level into the sloping topography. However, it would not be possible to reduce the ground level enough to enable the proposed building to be level with the existing school, as the development site is elevated above the ground level of the recent school extension.

21. The Council Conservation Architect's advice stated that a large new building would best take on the appearance of a barn, so as to be acceptable in the context of the Church and the Conservation Area. The amended design is more akin to this intended aim, as the roof appearance from the southern exposed elevation is similar to the large pitched roof of a barn. The original design proposed a roof that would have had a 'pyramid' appearance when viewed from the south, and an incongruous 'fin-like' appearance from the east and west. The amended plan has also reduced the maximum height of the roof from 7.7m to 6.07m, as well as proposing a greater amount of 'digging-in' to the slope of the construction area.
22. I am therefore of the opinion that the height of the proposed building is at the lowest height possible for the area of the footprint required. The 'barn' design makes the height of the building and size of the roof more acceptable within the Conservation Area, as if evidenced by the comments of the Conservation Architect. The height and bulk is also mitigated by the existing vegetation around the development site. The section drawing submitted by the agents, shows the proposed building in relation to the existing school, Avenue Lodge and Weavers Bungalow. It can be seen from this drawing that the building would be higher than the existing school, but would not appear dominant within the surrounding topography and buildings. Due to the enclosed nature of the site, the height would not be visible from the streetscene or other surrounding buildings. Therefore, I am of the opinion that the height and size of the building would not be overbearing and dominant on the surrounding area.

Design

23. The changes to the proposed design have been explained and discussed above. I am of the opinion that the amended plans are a considerable improvement upon the original proposal. I am also in agreement with the Conservation Architect's opinion that, for a large new building to work in the Conservation Area, it would need to take on the appearance of a barn.
24. The original design of the roof created a 'pyramid' style appearance from School Lane, and an alien fin-like feature when viewed from the east. The amended plans re-designed the roof to adopt a more traditional form when viewed from School Lane, with a dual-pitched roof similar in scale and shape to that of the nearby Weavers Bungalow and of the main school. In order to create this design on the footprint area required, and on the land available, the architect designed a double gable-ended roof form. The advantage to this design is that the roof is lower, and also the northern most roof gable is concealed behind the other, when viewed walking from the Church, or from Avenue Lodge. The appearance, when walking along the footpath from the Church, would be of a single barn-like building.

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Materials

25. The objectors commented that they consider that the proposed building should be constructed from similar materials as the existing school buildings, and mimic its Victorian architecture in order to be sensitive to the Conservation Area. The proposed barn design incorporates black timber weather boarding, in contrast to the brick construction of the main school. This contrast is important in order to give the appearance of a barn, and to contribute to the subservient nature of the 'barn' to the main school building. There are other examples of black timber boarded outbuildings within the village, including adjacent to the nearby listed The Fitzwalter Public House, thereby demonstrating that these materials are appropriate within the locality.
26. The original submission proposed machine made Marley clay tiles. The agent indicated that reclaimed or handmade tiles were considerably more expensive and were therefore not viable within the constraints of the project. Whilst cost is not a consideration for planning requirements, I am of the opinion that the natural Welsh slate now proposed more appropriate material for the roof, as the Listed Buildings within the village contain a mixture of clay tiles and slate.
27. I am of the opinion that the materials proposed are of a sufficient standard for the Conservation Area, and the Conservation Architect agrees with the proposed changes and the move away from machine-made tiles. The quality of the materials can be ensured by the use of conditions including requiring the submission of samples.

Impact on the Conservation Area and Setting of Listed Buildings

28. The objections to the proposal are based on the opinion that the building is detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area, and the settings of nearby Listed Buildings. Concern is also raised about the perceived difference in assessment for other planning applications in this area, I would emphasise that this application has also undergone the same rigorous process of negotiation and discussion and assessment against development plan considerations. However, the proposed classroom building is not within the curtilage of a listed building, so needs to be assessed against considerations that seek to preserve and enhance the character of the Conservation Area and not unduly harm the setting of such buildings.
29. In this case, I am of the opinion that the original design would have adversely affected the setting of the Listed Building and the Goodnestone Conservation Area, by virtue of the inappropriate design and height of the roof. The amended roof design, and materials, is now more akin to a barn, and is considered to be appropriate as it is similar to other buildings in semi-rural locations around Kent, and as such, does not conflict with the setting and appropriateness of form with adjacent listed buildings, nor the Conservation Area.
30. The new building would provide an essential facility in place of a temporary building which has existed on site for a number of years. Dover District Council states that the removal of this building and the replacement with the proposed permanent development

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would benefit the Conservation Area, and therefore help to enhance its character and the setting of the nearby Listed Buildings. Whilst I am in agreement with the neighbours that the removal of the mobile building should not be a planning consideration, as it has a temporary permission which requires its removal, I am of the opinion that the requirement for replacement accommodation, and the conditions on the temporary permission for the School to implement a permanent solution, are material considerations for this application. The current pupil roll at the school would necessitate alternative accommodation, and either a replacement mobile building or an extension of temporary permission would in my opinion be exploited. Therefore, it is prudent to consider longer term and wider impacts of the need to provide appropriate classroom space as a material consideration, and the positive contribution of the current proposal to improving these impacts in relation to the Conservation Area.

Conclusion

31. On balance, the proposed replacement building would enhance the Conservation Area by providing a solution for an ongoing problem for an important community facility, and improving the physical impact of the situation on the locality. The design to resemble a barn is appropriate within the village context and gives the building an appearance as being ancillary to the main school building. The selected materials are acceptable within the Conservation Area, and their quality can be ensured by the appropriate condition. Black timber weather boarding is a common material used in semi-rural Kent, and is evident on other outbuildings/garages/barns within the locality. Whilst the building is 6.07m in height, it is an improvement on the original design and bulk, and relative in size to other buildings within the locality. The building would not be visible from the streetscene and would largely be screened from the nearby Avenue Lodge by established hedgerows and mature trees. I therefore recommend accordingly.

Recommendation

I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO the imposition of conditions covering (amongst other matters) the following:

- The standard time limit condition;
- The development to be completed in accordance with the approved plans;
- External materials to be submitted and approved prior to commencement;
- Adequate facilities to be provided during construction to prevent the deposit of mud on the highway;
- No border trees, hedgerows or shrubs to removed without written approval;

Case Officer: Jeff Dummett

Tel. no: 01622 221058

Background Documents:
