

Three bay modular building at Langton Green Primary School, Lampington Row, Tunbridge Wells- TW/11/855

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 14 June 2011

Application by Kent County Council, for the placement of one, three bay modular building at Langton Green Primary School, Lampington Row, Tunbridge Wells, TN3 0JG- TW/11/855

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr. John Davies

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Langton Green Primary School is situated on the far western edge of the built confines of the village. The village itself is located approximately three miles west of Tunbridge Wells town centre, north of the A264 (Langton Road). The school buildings are all located in the eastern half of the site and are considered to be within the built development of the village, whilst the school playing fields and land beyond to the north, south and west is designated as being within both the Metropolitan Green Belt and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) - see map extract from Tunbridge Wells Local Plan on page 2. The site for the proposed mobile classroom is immediately outside the Green Belt boundary and the AONB. Residential development adjoins the eastern boundary. A site plan is attached.

Background and Proposal

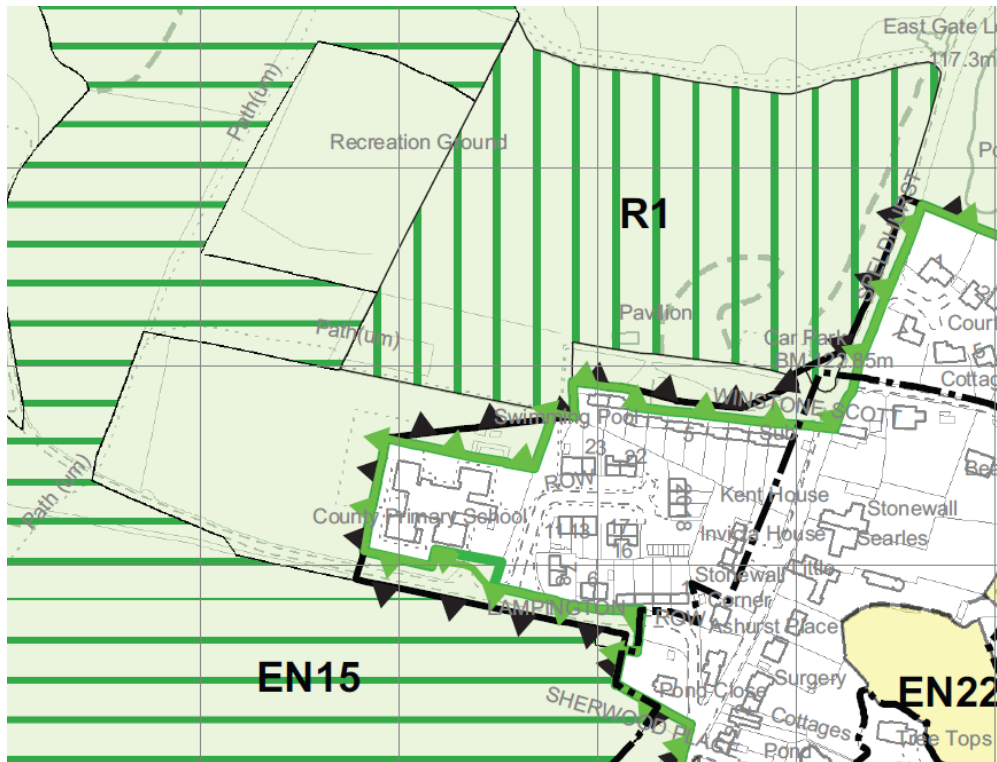
2. The proposal is for the placement of a three bay mobile classroom to be sited south-west of the main school building. Originally the application was for a six bay mobile unit, but this was amended to a three bay during the consultation phase by the applicant. The applicant has stated that the school roll will increase by 10 pupils in September 2011 and the modular building would provide much needed additional teaching space. The mobile classroom would measure 10 metres in length, 8.5 metres in width and have a height of 3.4 metres. The application documents originally specified that the mobile classroom would be of standard design, with a dark green textured finish, aluminium double glazed windows and a black shallow felt pitched roof. However, after consultation with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, the applicant has amended the exterior of the mobile classroom to be cedar clad. There is currently a shelter installed on the playground and this would be relocated (location yet to be confirmed) to accommodate the proposed mobile classroom.
3. The school has undergone a number of developments over the last decade including two single storey extensions to the main school building, one in the north under reference TW/07/45 and one in the south under reference TW/09/1572, the development of a reception class play area under reference TW/02/2744 and the erection of a canopy adjacent to the reception classroom under reference TW/09/2192.

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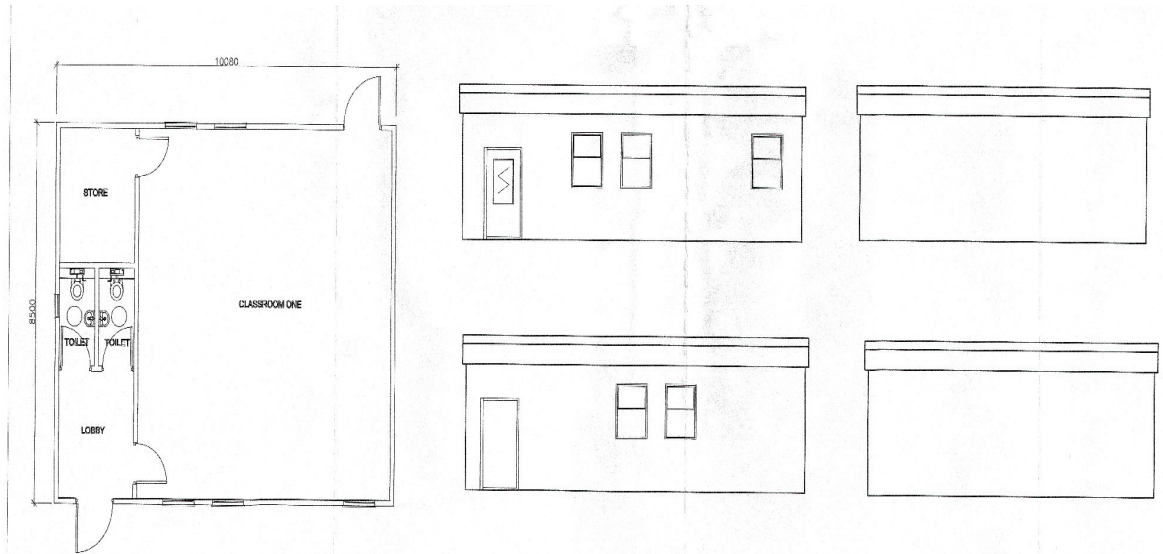
Site Plan



Extract from Tunbridge Wells Local Plan Inset 7- Langton Green
 Metropolitan Green Belt (MGB1) - Denoted by green layer
 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (EN26) - Denoted by black triangles
 Kent Special Landscape Area (EN27) - Denoted by green triangles

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Elevations (standard design)

Planning Policy

4. The development plan policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:

(i) **PPG 2 – Green Belt**

There is a general presumption against inappropriate development within the Green Belt, which is by definition harmful and should not be permitted unless it can be justified by very special circumstances. The construction of new buildings within the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it is for the following purposes:

- agriculture or forestry
- essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreations, for cemeteries, and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purpose of including land in it.
- limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings.
- limited infilling in existing villages and limited affordable housing for community needs
- limited infilling or redevelopment of major existing developed sites identified in adopted local plans.

(ii) The adopted (2009) **South East Plan**

Regional policy is contained within the South East Plan 2009. Members will already be aware of the relevant South East Plan policy considerations in relation to the proposed development, in that The Plan was revoked and later reinstated pending the enactment of the Localism Bill. Members will also be aware that they have to have regard to the policies in the SEP and the Government's intention to abolish the Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) as material considerations. However the weight to be accorded is a matter for the decision makers. The relevant policies to this application are:

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Policy SP5: Any strategy aiming to focus new development into sub-regions and existing settlements needs to be reinforced by a strong policy to maintain separation of settlements.

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

Policy CC4: Expects that all new development will adopt and incorporate sustainable construction standards and techniques.

Policy C3: High priority will be given to conservation and enhancement of natural beauty in the region's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and planning decisions should have regard to their setting. Proposals for development should be considered in that context.

Policy S3: States that Local Planning Authorities should work to ensure adequate provision of school facilities.

(iii) The adopted **Tunbridge Wells Borough Core Strategy 2010:**

Policy CP2: There will be a general presumption against inappropriate development that would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt. Any new development should accord with the national planning provisions of PPG2.

Policy CP4: Seeks to conserve the locally distinctive character of the Borough's urban and rural landscapes, including the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Policy CP5: Requires all new development to employ sustainable design and construction standards and techniques. Developments should also be of high-quality design which will create safe, accessible, legible and adaptable environments, and conserve and enhance the public realm.

Policy CP9: Development must conserve and enhance the landscape and heritage and biodiversity assets, including the surrounding AONB, to secure its special character in the long term.

(iv) **Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2006** saved policies:

Policy LBD1: Most development should be concentrated within the built up area whilst limiting development in the surrounding countryside.

Policy EN1: Expects development to be of a high quality design which contributes to the character of the surrounding environment.

Policy MGB1: The openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt will be preserved and no development which would conflict with the purposes will be permitted.

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Consultations

5. **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council** raises objection to the application on the grounds of the proposed building's siting, design and materials and the impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the character of the adjoining Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Speldhurst Parish Council supports the application.

Local Member(s)

6. The local County Member, Mr John Davies was notified of the application on 24 March 2011, re-notified of the revisions to the proposal on 26 May 2011 and supports the application.

Publicity

7. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 27 nearby residential properties. The application documents were also made available for public viewing on Kent County Council's website. The application was also advertised in the local press because the site location is on the boundary of the Metropolitan Green Belt.

Representations

8. No representations have been received in respect of this application.

Discussion

Introduction

9. This proposal has arisen out of the School's need to provide additional teaching accommodation for the next academic year. The school roll will increase by 10 pupils, bringing the total number of pupils to 226 in September 2011. As stated earlier, the application was originally for a 6 bay mobile classroom but this was reduced to a 3 bay unit during the consultation phase of the application because it was considered that the increase in the school roll did not justify the larger building. The decision to change the exterior of the mobile classroom to cedar cladding was influenced by the objection raised by the Borough Council. As summarised in paragraph 5 above, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has raised objection to the application on the grounds of the proposed building's siting, design and materials and the impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the character of the adjoining Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

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Siting

10. The application area is on the boundary of both the Green Belt and the AONB, but not actually within the designated areas. Whilst this has been acknowledged by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, they are of the opinion that the mobile classroom would have a detrimental visual impact on both the AONB and Green Belt. The north, south and western boundaries of the school are demarcated by lines of mature trees, as illustrated by the photograph below. It is accepted that the trees are deciduous and therefore during the winter months, the trees would not be in leaf, leading to the potential for the school site to be visible from certain vantage points.
11. However, I consider that the proposed location for the mobile classroom is within the general footprint of the school buildings, partially on hard-standing and with a sizeable playground immediately to the west. There are also two reasonably sized sheds immediately to the north of the proposed which effectively extends the line of the built development further west within the site. Although the proposed building would not be inside the Green Belt or AONB, I accept that there are implications for such policies if the development is visible from those areas. However, taking into account the boundary treatment and the footprint of the school's built development, I do not consider that the development would be unduly visible or would significantly compromise the openness of the Green Belt, nor have a significant detrimental impact on the visual amenity of the wider AONB. Therefore I do not consider an objection on the grounds of siting would be justified in these respects.



Aerial photograph of the School site

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Photograph of the site showing the two sheds to the west and the shelter to be relocated

Design

12. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council also raised an objection to the 'utilitarian' design of the mobile classroom in the original planning documents. The design of standard mobile classroom units would generally be considered contradictory to certain local plan policies, arguably not contributing to the character of the surrounding environment, as referred to in Policy EN1 of the Tonbridge Wells Borough Local Plan. However, the applicant has taken measures to mitigate the visual impacts of the building. Mindful of the sensitive location of the school site, the applicant has since amended the exterior of the building to cedar cladding to reflect the natural and built surroundings. Furthermore, in my opinion the mobile classroom would be in-keeping with the general scale and massing of the other school buildings which are entirely single-storey and flat roofed. It is also important to note that any permission granted would be on a temporary 5 year basis, with the expectation that the applicant would review the accommodation situation in the future. For the reasons outlined above, I do not consider that an objection on design grounds would be warranted.

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Example of a cedar clad mobile classroom, similar to what is proposed

Conclusion

13. The applicant's reason for the installation of the mobile classroom will be noted. Whilst the proposal does not fully accord with Development Plan Policies relating to design, given the temporary nature of the building, and the context of the school site, I do not consider that the proposal would have a significant detrimental impact on the openness or visual amenity of the Green Belt or on the surrounding Kent Downs AONB. Moreover, the applicant has made a conscious effort to address the visual impact of the development by improving the external appearance of the building. I also consider that it is otherwise in accordance with the general aims and objectives of other Development Plan Policies, which include general support for the provision of community facilities such as those for education purposes. I therefore recommend that planning permission be granted for a temporary period of 5 years from the date of the permission and conditions relating to the cedar cladding of the mobile classroom.

Recommendation

15. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to a condition requiring the mobile classroom to be removed from the site no later than 5 years from the date of this permission and conditions covering the colour of cedar cladding, specifications of the windows and the fascias on the exterior of the building.

Case officer – Jo Ritter	01622 696100
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Background documents - See section heading
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