

Two 2-bay mobile units, Kingsdown & Ringwold CE Primary School – DO/08/767

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to the Planning Applications Committee on 7th October 2008

DO/08/767 – Application by Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for the provision of two 2-bay mobile units, Kingsdown & Ringwold CE Primary School, Glen Road, Kingsdown.

Recommendation: Planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mrs Eileen Rowbotham

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Kingsdown and Ringwold Church of England Primary School occupies a site fronting Glen Road in Kingsdown. The school site is largely surrounded by residential development, but backs on to open farmland. The main building is of a modern design and the grounds are well landscaped with a variety of trees, shrubs and hedgerows.

Background

2. Kingsdown and Ringwold CE Primary School was built in the mid-1980s. At the time the architect originally designed it to be a five-classroom school, but this was reduced to four classrooms based upon an assessment of the predicted roll. However, the predictions rose shortly after, partly due to the closure of a local public school, and a fifth classroom was incorporated into the design.
3. In 1990 the school once again experienced a jump in numbers, this time attributed to the Education Authority's scheme for the admission of four year-olds. That warranted the need for a mobile classroom, which was granted permission in 1991. In that instance, the mobile classroom was removed after the expiry of its permission in 1994, due to the building of an additional science classroom. The school roll then increased again, beyond the additional capacity created by the new building, requiring further mobile classrooms to be installed on site. It is therefore evident that the school has been either at full capacity, or beyond, since it was built. Recent rolls were 2006 – 203, 2007 – 203, 2008 – 206.
4. The two mobile classrooms proposed for retention within this application have existed on site for a number of years and have had their temporary consents renewed on several occasions. Although installed at separate times, they now form one application for renewal. The most recent permission was granted in 2005 for a period of three years and expired in March 2008.

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5. In 2005, permission was granted for an extension that would have replaced the need for the mobile classrooms. However, that has not been enacted due to lack of funding, but demonstrates the School's commitment to a permanent solution. Funding has been made available to improve the ability of schools in the Deal area to provide sufficient accommodation. Kingsdown & Ringwold Primary, despite making a strong case, missed out on the funding as the money was directed towards providing places at schools within Deal itself.

Proposal

6. The application proposes the retention of the 2 existing mobile classrooms sited within the school grounds, by seeking a new temporary permission. The previous temporary planning permission granted by the County Planning Authority expired on 31 March 2008. The Education Authority has requested a consent for the period of five years, which they state is the minimum time in which they will be able to secure funding for a permanent solution.
7. The mobile classrooms can be considered to be of standard design and are similar in structure and appearance to many other units located at other schools across the County. They are both finished in dark green colour in order to blend into the surrounding vegetation and have a grey/green felt flat-roof material. The units have wooden slatted skirting to cover the void at the base of the units, and to provide airflow.
8. Mobile 1, situated to the rear of the school next to the playground, provides 51.6m² of floor space and stands at a height of 3.3m². It has one tree to the rear, which is kept cut back. The unit is not easily visible from Glen Road.
9. Mobile 2 is of the same dimensions as Mobile 1, and is located to the left of the main entrance gate, parallel to the boundary fence along Glen Road. The unit has various trees around it, which act as screening when viewed from Glen Road, and is not overly noticeable when driving past due to these features. Most of the trees were planted as part of the original consent and are cut back to avoid branches overhanging the roof of the unit.
10. The mobile units presently accommodate Year 3 and Year 4 classes and both were assessed as being in 'fair condition'.

Planning Policy

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

- (i) The adopted **Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006**

Policy SP1 Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's environment and achieve a sustainable pattern of development. Encouraging high quality development and innovative design that reflects Kent's identity and local distinctiveness and promoting healthy, safe and secure living and working environments,

Policy QL1 Requires that all development be well designed and of high quality that respond positively to the local character. Development that would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, function, and character of settlements or the countryside, will not be permitted.

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Policy QL11 Existing community services and recreation facilities will be protected as long as there is a demonstrable need for them.

(ii) The adopted **Dover District Local Plan 2002**:

Policy DD1 Requires proposals that are acceptable in terms of layout, siting, scale, architectural style, materials, spatial and visual character of the area, landscaping, privacy and amenity.

Policy CF2 Planning permission for mobile classrooms will only be granted where there is a proven short term need; they are located so as to minimise visual harm; and their siting would not result in the loss of or damage to important trees.

Consultations

12. **Dover District Council** raises an objection on the grounds that the proposal is considered to be contrary to Dover District Local Plan Policy CF2, which states that mobile classrooms should only be granted for a short-term need. The District Council commented that *as permission for the units has been renewed several times already, and there is no evidence provided that there is any intention to replace the units with permanent classroom accommodation in the near future, this council raises objections to the proposal.*

Ringwold with Kingsdown Parish Council has no objection to the application. However they comment that *permanent classrooms added to the school would be a much better option, and that it is about time that Kent County Council provided these. There is concern that mobile classrooms with low ceilings (and therefore a low cubic volume of fresh air) are unsatisfactory for large numbers of children together.*

Divisional Transport Manager: raises no highway objection to the proposal.

Local Member(s)

13. The local County Member for Dover North, Mrs E. Rowbotham, was notified of the application on the 27 June 2008.

Publicity

14. The application was advertised by the posting of a site notice and the notification of 13 neighbours.

Representations

15. One letter of representation was received from a local resident. The main comments are as follows:

- Although in principle they are not against the school expanding, they would prefer to see a more permanent structure that would be more in keeping with the village.

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Discussion

16. 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.
17. The main issue with this application is that Dover District Council identified that the proposal is contrary to Policy CF2 of the Dover District Local Plan 2002, which states that planning permission for mobile classrooms will only be granted *where there is a proven short term need*. These mobile classrooms have remained on site for many years and have had their permissions renewed on a number of occasions. Thereby demonstrating a long-term need and an intention to keep them beyond the short term.
18. Under the previous Planning Permission granted in March 2005, Dover District Council passed no objection on condition that the permission would last no more than three years. They also included the following comments: *'Bearing in mind Policy CF2 of the Dover District Local Plan and the length of time, some 13 years, that there have been mobiles at the site, despite the permanent extension already built, the District Council would be unlikely to wish to see a further renewal of a temporary permission at this site, particularly bearing in mind the location of the mobile classroom on the frontage to Glen Road. Within this further period the District Council would hope that a more permanent proposal can be put forward.'*
19. The County Council as Education Authority has stated that it is committed to replacing temporary classrooms with permanent accommodation and that Kingsdown and Ringwold is being considered within the Government funded Primary Capital Programme, which will provide funding for replacement/refurbishment schemes over the next 15 years. The teaching space within the school is cramped with most classrooms being undersized and below Primary Brief Standard.
20. The School has commissioned a feasibility report into the provision of permanent accommodation to replace the temporary classrooms and this initial study will inform the extent of investment required. The School requests a consent period of five years, to allow the Government funding to come fully on stream.

Siting, Design and Appearance

21. The siting of the mobile classrooms was a central issue in the discussions leading up to the initial planning permissions. Although the mobile unit located adjacent to Glen Road is in a prominent location, this was considered to be the best position and a degree of planting was done to offer some screening. This planting has now matured and offers effective cover to the mobile when viewed from Glen Road. Therefore the exploration of alternative locations for the mobiles is not appropriate for this application as they can be seen to be in the best locations at present.
22. In considering the design of the mobile classrooms proposed to be retained, in relation to the planning policies, I would advise that the development consists of mobile buildings similar in construction to a number of units used across the County. Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006 Policy QL1 and Dover District Local Plan 2002 Policy DD1 both seek proposals that are well designed, and appropriate in the context of the existing

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pattern of development in the local area. Whilst these buildings are not of an appropriate design to be a permanent feature in the locality (the single-storey flat-roof construction cannot be said to enhance the character of the existing built environment), the retention for a short temporary period would not result in an unacceptable impact on the surrounding built environment. The design of the mobile units is generally accepted as the standard for mobile classrooms in all locations, as long as they are sited only for a limited period.

Need

23. Kingsdown and Ringwould Primary School has a Pupil Admission Number of 210 and has a waiting list of 36 against 30 spaces for the 2009 admission. The KCC Capital Strategy Unit advises that it is essential that the two mobile classrooms be retained to provide sufficient capacity for the existing number of pupils at the school. There is no scope within the existing main school buildings to incorporate the two classes served by the mobile units. There is also no space within schools in the surrounding area to accommodate the 60 pupils who would be displaced if the mobile units were removed. It is noted that Kingsdown and Ringwould CE Primary School serves a wider area than the immediate village.
24. If the 60 pupils were to be displaced by removal of the mobile classrooms then this would result in them being moved to other schools in the surrounding area. As these schools are at full capacity, then this would likely result in mobile classrooms being needed at the other schools.

Conclusion

25. Bearing in mind the observations raised by the Dover District Council to the previous permission mentioned in paragraph (5), the School did actively seek to abide by the informative on that Planning Permission. An application was submitted and approved in June 2005 for a permanent building that would negate the need for the mobile classrooms. That permission was not used due to lack of funding, however it does evidence that the School has in fact accorded with the District Council's wishes since a 'more permanent proposal' was put forward.
26. Although the last permission was granted for a period of 3 years, I would advise that, from the evidence provided, a 5-year consent is required in this instance. During this period the KCC Capital Strategy Unit has committed itself to securing funding to assist in providing an alternative and permanent solution to the mobile classrooms. They have given a minimum time-scale of 5 years; therefore granting a 3-year consent would result in the need for the permission to be renewed yet again. During this period I would urge the applicant to ensure that this school remains a high-priority for modernisation.
27. On balance, I advise that the granting of a further temporary permission, although not desirable, is more acceptable to Development Plan Policies than requiring the removal of the mobile classrooms. Removal of the units would seriously impede the service provided by the School to the community, and would have an adverse impact on surrounding schools. This would be in contravention of Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006 Policy QL11, which seeks to protect and enhance community facilities.

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Recommendation

28. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO the imposition of a condition requiring the building be removed and the site restored within 5 years of the grant of planning permission.

29. I FURTHER RECOMMEND THAT the applicant BE ADVISED of the following informative

- Planning Permission is granted for a further temporary period to enable the preparation of a scheme to provide more suitable permanent accommodation at the school.

Case officer – Jeff Dummett	01622 221071
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Background documents - See section heading
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