A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 18 March 2008.

Application by Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for the construction of a single storey modular building with a flat roof for use as a Children's Centre, including the installation of a canopy, storage units, fencing, and external impact absorbent play area plus replacement of toilet facilities connected to existing nursery at St. Nicholas Primary School, Fairfield Road, New Romney, Romney Marsh (SH/07/1496)

Recommendation: Planning permission be granted, subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mr. F. Wood Brignall

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

- 1. St. Nicholas Primary School is located to the north-west of the town of New Romney, off Fairfield Road. The school site is a split site comprising the main campus being located to the north-west of Fairfield Road, and the school playing fields located on a detached sports field to the west of the main school site. The site contains a variety of current uses, comprising a day nursery, family centre and the main buildings of St. Nicholas Primary School. The application site for the proposed Children's Centre lies to the front entrance (north-east) of the school site on a patch of undeveloped grass directly adjacent to Craythorne Lane, beyond which is a street of residential properties which are primarily single storey bungalows.
- 2. The application site is located within an area at risk of fluvial/tidal flooding and lies approximately 100 metres north-east of the New Romney Conservation Area. *A location plan is attached.*

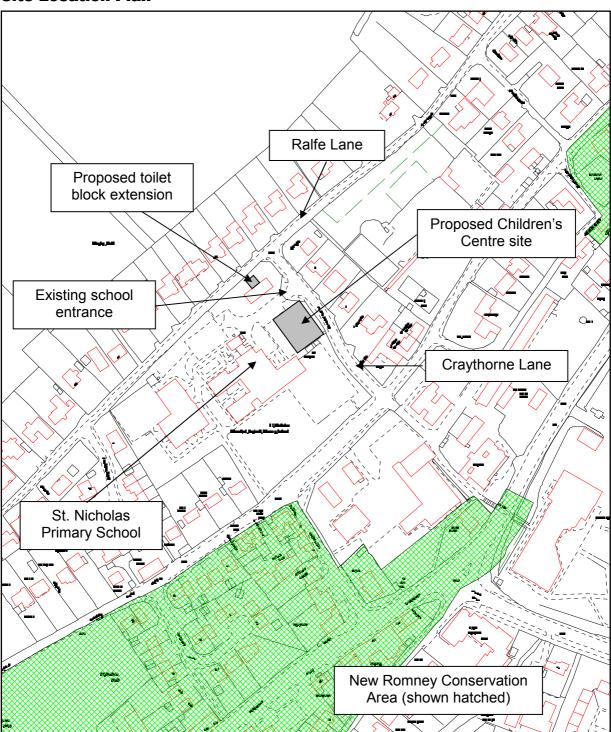
Background

3. The County Planning Authority granted planning permission in 2006 for two temporary mobile classrooms (to be retained on site until October 2011) for the expansion of the existing Family Centre within the school grounds, under reference SH/06/1244.

Proposal

- 4. This application proposes the creation of a half core Children's Centre on a section of grassland adjacent to the main site entrance. The half core Children's Centre is proposed to provide a community facility with a crèche, meeting and staff accommodation, together with external works including the provision of a buggy store and an external impact absorbent play area.
- 5. The application has been made on behalf of the County Council's Children, Families and Education Directorate. The scheme is one of a number of similar applications being proposed across the County as part of Central Government's National Sure Start Programme, funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The main aim of the Sure Start Programme is to increase the availability of childcare for all children, improve health and emotional development for young children and support parents in their aspirations towards employment. The aim of the Children's Centre is to offer a range of health, adult education and family support services for the local community.

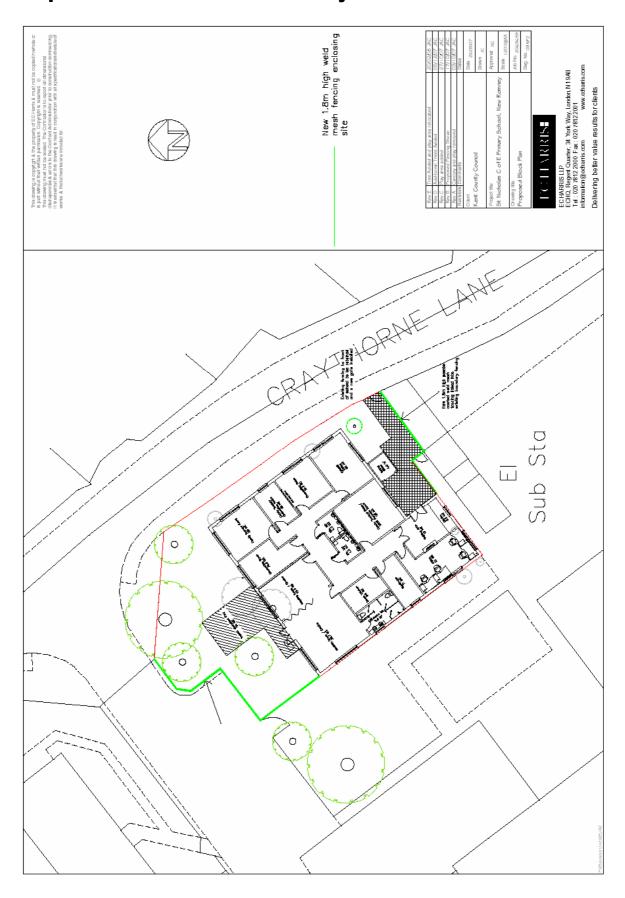
Site Location Plan



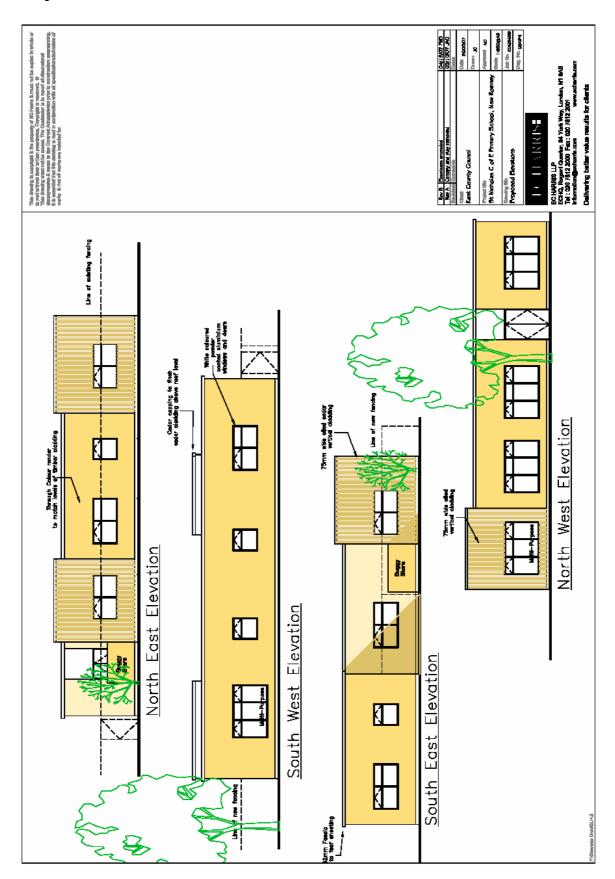
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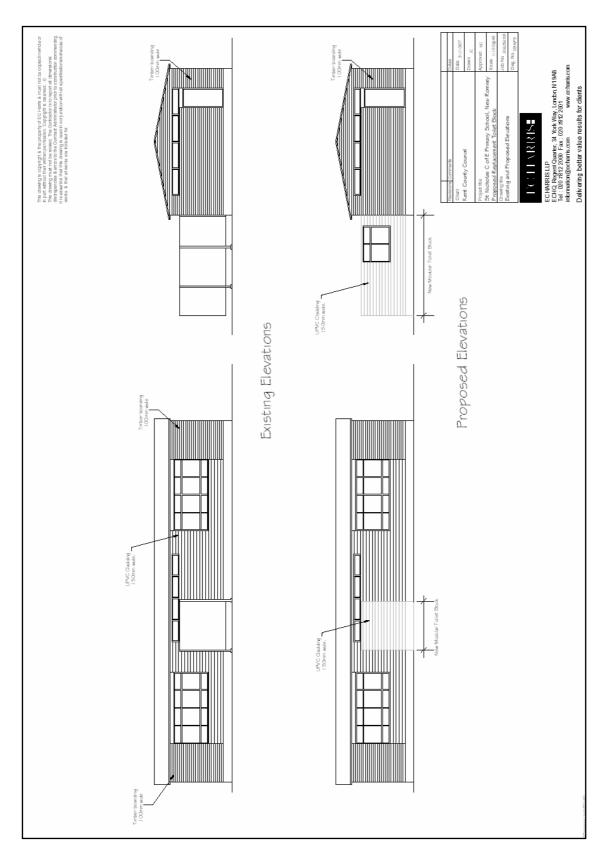
Proposed Children's Centre Internal Layout



Proposed Children's Centre Elevations



Proposed Replacement Toilet Block Elevations



- 6. The Children's Centre would operate as a separate community facility independent from the School, Family Centre and Day Nursery functions within the St. Nicholas Primary School site. The application proposes that the Centre would be open from 08:00 to 18:00 hours, Monday to Friday, 48 weeks of the year. The Centre would employ 3 members of staff on a regular basis with the number rising for special events. The application states that the Centre is expected to generate up to 40 visitors in a normal day, spread out over the 10 hours of operation. It has been stated that only when a particular event, such as a seminar is being provided, would there be a number of people arriving at any one time. However, the application sets out that it is unlikely that such events would occur at the same time as school start/finish times to avoid additional impact on the road network at peak times.
- 7. The proposed Children's Centre is of a modular building type and would be constructed in major sections off-site and shipped to site and fixed on pre-constructed foundations. The unit has been amended by the applicants to benefit from an 'enhanced' design which proposes vertical cedar cladding wrapped around the corners of the unit with a smooth sand yellow render to the rest of the building. The roof is proposed to be a metal flat deck. A plan showing the proposed elevations of the modular Children's Centre can be found on page (D1.4).
- 8. The application sets out that staff employed at the Centre would be employed within the surrounding area and would be encouraged to walk to/from work. In addition the application states that where staff would be expected to drive in they would be offered a parking space within the existing parking provision of the school site. It is noted that the application states that the Centre has been located to minimise travel distances by being located within the community it is intended to serve, and visitors therefore would be encouraged to walk.
- 9. The application proposes that the Children's Centre site be surrounded in green powder coated 1.8m high weld mesh fencing. In addition, it should be noted that as part of the current proposals the application seeks the removal of 7 trees of varying species and age.
- 10. At the same time as the proposed Children's Centre development, the application also proposes the upgrade of the existing Day Nursery toilets on the adjacent site to the proposed Children's Centre. That particular element comprises a small flat-roofed extension (approximately 10 sq. metres) with cladding to match that of the existing Day Nursery building. A location plan and elevations of this particular element of the proposals have been given on pages (D1.2) and (D1.5).

Planning Policy

- 11. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:
- (i) The adopted 2006 Kent & Medway Structure Plan:

Policy SP1 – The primary purpose of Kent's development and environmental strategy will be to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern and form of development. This will be done principally by, amongst other matters:

- protecting the Kent countryside and its wildlife for future generations;

- protecting and enhancing features of importance in the natural and built environment:
- 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 – All development should be well designed and be of high quality. Developments, individually or taken together, should respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surroundings. Development which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, functioning and character of settlements or the countryside will not be permitted.

Policy QL6 – The primary policy towards Conservation Areas is to preserve their special character or appearance and development that would harm the character or appearance of these areas will not be permitted.

Policy QL11 – Provision will be made for the development and improvement of local services in existing residential areas and in town and district centres, particularly where services are deficient. Flexibility in the use of buildings for mixed community uses, and the concentration of sports facilities at schools, will be encouraged.

Policy QL12 – Provision will be made to accommodate additional requirements for local community services in response to growth in demand from the community as a whole. The services will be located where they are accessible by walking, cycling and by public transport.

Policy EN9 – Tree cover and the hedgerow network should be maintained. Additionally they should be enhanced where this would improve the landscape, biodiversity, or link existing woodland habitats.

Policy TP3 – Local Planning Authorities should ensure that development sites are well served by public transport, walking and cycling.

Policy TP19 – Seeks development proposals comply with the respective vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by Kent County Council and Medway Council.

(ii) The adopted 2006 Shepway District Council Local Plan Review

Policy SD1 – All development proposals should take account of the broad aim of sustainable development.

Policy BE1 – A high standard to layout, design and choice of materials will be expected for all new development. Materials should be sympathetic to those predominating locally in type, colour and texture.

Policy SC2 – The District Planning Authority will grant planning permission for new or improved social and community facilities where the proposal would be compatible with surrounding land uses, acceptable in highway, infrastructure and environmental terms, accessible by a range of transport

alternatives to the car and includes adequate provision for access for disabled persons.

Policy TR6 – New development will not be permitted unless provision is made for the needs of pedestrians. The layout and design of development should provide for safe, attractive and convenient pedestrian routes, particularly to public transport routes.

Policy TR12 – New development will only be permitted if it makes provision for off street parking on or near the site, unless the location is well served by public transport and there would be no adverse effect on road safety or traffic management.

Policy TR13 – Where development proposals are considered less likely to have significant transport implications, a travel plan should be submitted with the planning application.

Consultations

12. Shepway District Council: has commented as follows:

"Having regard to the amended design, the Local Planning Authority now considers that the development proposes a more visually acceptable form of development within the context of the existing school buildings and the setting of Craythorne Lane, in accordance with Policies SD1 and BE1 of the Shepway District Council Local Plan Review and SP1 and QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan.

Given the form of construction and temporary nature, it is advised that should permission be granted, consideration be given to ensuring a building of a suitable and sustainable life span.

It is also recommended that should permission be granted, all trees that are proposed to be removed be replaced with suitable species, planted along the front and side areas between the proposed building and the Craythorne Lane highway and the school entrance to visually enhance the street scene and provide some visual relief from the new development.

Based on the amended design, the Local Planning Authority therefore raises no objection to the proposed development".

New Romney Town Council: raises no objection to the amended design of the Children's Centre.

Divisional Transportation Manager: has commented as follows:

"I have no objection to the proposal but recommend that a condition be applied requiring the provision, implementation and maintenance of a School Travel Plan [incorporating both the School and Children's Centre]".

Environment Agency: has raised no objection to the proposal but offers advice to the applicant relating to the site being located within a low lying area which is at risk from flooding. The Environment Agency note that there is no residential use associated with

the proposed application and further understand that there is a local need for these facilities and that no alternative site with a reduced flood risk is available.

In addition, the Environment Agency has suggested the imposition of conditions covering a scheme for the disposal of foul and surface waters to be submitted to and approved by the County Planning Authority prior to the commencement of operations on site, and the use of appropriate pollution prevention methods on site.

KCC Archaeology: has commented as follows:

"As significant remains could be affected by proposal, I recommend that no development shall take place until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work"

KCC Landscape Consultant (Jacobs): has commented as follows:

"We have no objection to the building size or materials proposed, or to the fencing style chosen. We recommend however, that the applicant submits further details relating to the proposal's impact on the existing trees to be retained in terms of their protection during the building's construction and refer the applicants to British Standard 5837:2005 - Trees in Relation to Construction for acceptable protection methods".

Local Member

13. The local County Member, Mr. F. Wood-Brignall, was notified of the original application on the 6 November 2007, and amended application ['enhanced' design proposal] on 17 January 2008.

Publicity

14. The application was publicised by posting a site notice at the main entrance of the site with Craythorne Lane, and the individual notification of 18 neighbouring residential properties.

Representations

- 15. I have received 3 letters of representation to date in connection with this application. The following concerns raised by local residents are summarised below:
 - Main concern is the amount of traffic already parking in Rolfe Lane [north-west of the School site] and the thought of even more cars is worrying. This will only be worse with the proposed building expansion;
 - You have to live in the road to experience first-hand the problems with current traffic levels one day there will be a very bad accident here:
 - Since the Day Nursery opened we have had cars coming and going nearly all day and the thought of more cars does not appeal:
 - Rolfe Lane is a residential area and should be taken into consideration when dealing with the application without addressing the issue of increased traffic could severely jeopardise safety and increase antagonism between the school and the community in Rolfe Lane:
 - Clear safety issue here with no public footpaths in road and children crossing to use the adjacent sports field site;

Concerns regarding loss of trees to make room for the Children's Centre building.
This is a Conservation Area and all residents were sent conservation packs from Shepway District Council explaining what is and is not permitted – is KCC exempt from these laws?

Discussion

Introduction

- 16. The application proposed to seek planning permission for a half-core community Children's Centre and a small-scale toilet block extension to the existing Day Nursery provision currently on site. The application is being reported to the Planning Applications Committee as a result of the residential objections received from nearby local residents. In considering this proposal, regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (11) 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.
- 17. The proposed Centre is one of 52 similar facilities being applied for by KCC's Children, Families and Education Directorate across the County. The aim of the Children's Centre is to offer a range of health, adult education and family support services to provide for the needs of that particular local community.
- 18. The application proposes some associated external works in connection with the Centre to include the provision of an external buggy store and an area of impact absorbent play surface. In order to site the Centre on its proposed location to the front entrance of the school the application proposes the removal of 7 trees of varying species and age.

Location

- 19. The application site falls within the built development of the town of New Romney, however is proposed to sit in a relatively prominent location close to the front boundary of the school site on Craythorne Lane. It is noted that the application site is located some 100m from the New Romney Conservation Area, however views into/out of this area from the application site are limited through existing built development. Whilst I consider that the application would not have an adverse impact on the adjacent New Romney Conservation Area, and subsequently be in accordance with Structure Plan Policy QL6, I consider it to be important to sufficiently address the Centre's prominence within the street-scene from Craythorne Lane.
- 20. The application site at the front entrance to the school has been chosen as the only suitable site for the Centre given that the existing built development occupies a large proportion of the total site area. I note that there is very little remaining space on the main campus site to locate such development elsewhere without interrupting existing sports, education or car parking provision. Members will note however that residential concerns have been raised in paragraph (15) to the chosen site given that the development encompasses the removal of 7 trees of varying age and species. This specific issue is discussed under the 'trees/landscaping' section in paragraphs (33-37).

- 21. It is worth noting that the proposed Centre modular building would stand as a prominent feature within the street-scene from Craythorne Lane given that the chosen site is currently an undeveloped grassed area with a relatively open boundary to the roadway beyond. The application has been amended to benefit from an 'enhanced' design of building (to include cedar cladding and a render finish) as a result of concerns relating to visual prominence within the street-scene. Although I note that the size and bulk of the building has not changed as a result of the alternative design of the unit, given that the floorspace requirements are set by the Sure Start programme, I consider that current proposal goes someway towards achieving a suitable design solution for this particular location.
- 22. I note the consultee response from Shepway District Council on the 'enhanced' design unit where they state that the 'development proposes a more visually acceptable form of development within the context of the existing school buildings and the setting of Craythorne Lane'. I consider that whilst this application proposes bringing the built development of the school site closer to residential properties in Craythorne Lane, given the unit proposed is of a flat-roof design, similar to that of the main school buildings, and the nearest residential properties are separated by a roadway and would be approximately 15 metres from the front elevation of the proposed Centre, I would not raise an objection to this proposal on visual intrusion grounds. Accordingly, I consider the proposal to be in conformity with Structure Plan Policy QL1 and Local Plan Policy BE1.
- 23. The small-scale toilet block extension would be located to the north side of the existing Day Nursery building and occupy a site currently used for temporary 'Portakabin' style toilets. Given that this specific element involves the replacement of the same function with a new extension in the same location as that of the previous temporary building, and a choice of materials to match the existing Day Nursery building, I consider the location and built form of this specific element of the proposal to be acceptable in planning terms. Members will note that there have been no objections received either from statutory consultees or nearby residents with regards to this particular element of the proposal.

Traffic and Access

- 24. Another element of the application that requires consideration is the potential for the proposed Centre to generate additional traffic activity, including movements to and from the site, and whether these would result in an unacceptable impact on the surrounding area. Members will note the residential objections received (see paragraph 15 above) concerning traffic and highway issues, in particular the increase of vehicle movements to/from the site in light of the current proposals.
- 25. The application proposes no new additional car parking facilities at St. Nicholas Primary School in connection with the proposed Centre, but instead suggests that the existing car parking provision on site is sufficient for the current school needs with surplus capacity to absorb the needs of any additional staff parking in association with the Children's Centre. Whilst it is noted that there would be 3 full-time members of staff employed at the proposed Centre, the application sets out that staff would be employed from within a close proximity to the site.
- 26. The application sets out that no visitor car parking would be provided for users in connection with the Centre. However, the applicant states that all the Centres in Kent have been strategically located to minimise travel distances for the majority of the residents they are intended to serve. The Sure Start scheme puts a great deal of

emphasis on "buggy pushing distance" with the users of the centre encouraged to walk. It is estimated that the Centre would have up to 40 visitors in a day, over and above the existing number of visitors using the School, Day Nursery and Family Centre within the site. However, the applicant advises that the visitors for the proposed Children's Centre would be spread out over the 10 hours of operation and visiting primarily via an appointment, rather than all on site at any one time. Only when a particular event, such as a seminar, is being provided would there be a number of people arriving at the site at any one time which would typically be outside of normal school hours. The applicant has also indicated that the timing of events likely to generate significant numbers of users attending the Centre would be scheduled to avoid school opening/closing times to avoid traffic congestion on the local road network at peak times.

- 27. Whilst I note that the Centre has the potential to increase traffic generation to/from the site I note that the Divisional Transportation Manager has raised no objection to the current proposals (see paragraph 12 above), but instead has recommended that the School in conjunction with the proposed Children's Centre prepare, implement and maintain a School Travel Plan. I consider that if the proposal is approved, there is a potential risk that the congestion level might increase on some occasions but it is unlikely for this to be on a regular basis or to be sufficient enough to recommend refusal of this application on these grounds alone. Moreover, the Divisional Transportation Manager is satisfied that the surrounding highways have the capacity to accommodate those movements.
- 28. From a policy point of view, it is considered that the proposal meets the requirements of Policies TP3 and QL12 which require that community facilities be grouped together to reduce the need for travel, be easily accessible by walking and public transport. Bearing in mind the views expressed by the Divisional Transportation Manager in paragraph (12) above, I would not raise an objection on highway grounds and further suggest that a School Travel Plan be conditioned to be produced and implemented within 3 months of the first occupation of the proposed Centre.

Hours of Use

29. The proposed hours of use of the Centre have been stated by the applicants as being between 08:00 to 18:00 hours, 5 days a week for 48 weeks of the year. In reality, the majority of these hours would be within the existing school opening times, including the other activities the school provides. Accordingly, I would not raise an objection to the hours of use proposed by this application, and recommend that these hours of operation be secured by planning condition.

Design

- 30. Members will note that the Centre design has been amended to include an 'enhanced' design of modular building comprising vertical timber cedar cladding and a yellow sand-coloured render. It is noted that this specific design approach has been adopted on a number of such Centres across the County located in sensitive or prominent locations. I am of the opinion that the 'enhanced' design improves the external appearance of the proposed building and accordingly would not raise an objection on design grounds but recommend that the exact details of any external materials be secured by planning condition.
- 31. In addition to the proposed Centre the application proposes a small uPVC clad toilet block extension to the existing Day Nursery on the School site. I note that this toilet block addition has been designed to match the existing nursery, with horizontal cladding,

and replaces a currently dilapidated 'Portakabin' style toilet block. I am of the opinion that the design and external materials of this specific element of the proposal are in accordance with Structure Plan Policy QL1.

32. In addition to the proposed Children's Centre and toilet block addition, the application proposes the inclusion of an impact absorbent play surface and 1.8m high green powder-coated weld-mesh fencing. In design terms I would not seek to raise objection to either of these external elements, but suggest that exact details be secured by planning condition in this case. I note that many of the proposed Children's Centres contain external steel-framed polycarbonate canopies. Taking account of the prominent location of this specific Centre, and in light of no such canopy being proposed, I recommend that a condition be placed on any decision removing the right for a canopy to be erected under 'permitted development rights' without the prior written permission of the County Planning Authority.

Trees / Landscaping

- 33. Members will note that this application seeks the removal of 7 trees of varying age and species in order to situate the Centre in its proposed location, and that several residential concerns have been raised to the removal of such trees. It is noted that contrary to the views expressed by local residents, the application site is not within the New Romney Conservation Area, but is located some 100m from its closest boundary. Therefore special controls relating to trees in Conservation Areas do not specifically relate to the consideration of this application. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the visual amenity impacts arising from the loss of 7 trees.
- 34. Whilst I note that many of the existing trees are relatively small and have not yet matured they provide a pleasant visual screen into the site from the roadway and residential properties beyond. I consider it to be unfortunate that the siting of this unit would result in the loss of trees, but accept that within the current site this location has been selected as the only viable option and note the social and community benefits that such centre would bring to the area. Whilst the removal of trees is in conflict with Structure Plan Policy EN9 encouraging trees to be retained on site wherever possible, I consider that in order to mitigate against the loss of trees I recommend that a condition be placed on any decision requiring the submission and implementation of a detailed landscaping scheme, to include replacement tree planting for all species removed as part of this proposal.
- 35. I note the proximity of a further tree to be retained on site adjacent to an area of external impact absorbent play surface to the north-west of the proposed modular building. Taking account of the advice provided by the KCC Landscape Consultant (Jacobs) in paragraph (12) above, I suggest that details of tree protection measures to be used during construction be secured by planning condition in this case.
- 36. In addition to the removal of existing trees on site and their subsequent replacement with suitable alternatives, I suggest that there is scope for low-level boundary hedge planting between the existing site boundary fence and Craythorne Lane in order to mitigate any adverse visual impacts from nearby residential properties. Accordingly, I suggest that this detail be secured by planning condition and new boundary hedge planting be implemented within the first planting season following the completion of the development.
- 37. On balance, I consider that the removal of 7 trees could be sufficiently mitigated by the approval of an adequate landscaping scheme to include new replacement tree planting

and additional low-level boundary hedge planting along Craythorne Lane. On the basis of a landscaping scheme being secured by planning condition I consider the development to be acceptable and in accordance with Structure Plan Policies QL1 & EN9.

Drainage / Flooding

- 38. Members will note the concerns relating to foul and surface water drainage as expressed by the Environment Agency in paragraph (12) above. The Agency have suggested that a condition be attached to any decision requiring the applicants to submit and have approved a scheme for the disposal of foul and surface waters prior to the commencement of operations on site. Accordingly, I recommend that such condition be placed on any decision and would not seek to raise an objection on these grounds.
- 39. In addition, the Agency has suggested the application site lies within a low lying area which is at risk from flooding. However, since there is no residential use associated with the proposed development and there is a need for such a facility in the locality, the Agency is satisfied that the development is in accordance with their current guidance relating to development and flooding. Accordingly, I would not seek to raise objection on flooding grounds, but suggest that the applicants be advised of the potential flood risk in this locality.

Archaeology

40. The KCC Archaeological Officer has suggested that as significant archaeological remains could be affected by this proposal, no works should take place until the applicants have secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. Therefore, I would not raise an objection on archaeology grounds, given the small amount of ground works proposed for the construction of a modular building, but recommend that the programme of archaeological works be secured by planning condition prior to the commencement of any operations on site.

Conclusion

41. Having regard to the Development Plan Policies, in addition to the material considerations raised by several local residents in this case, I consider that the creation of a community Children's Centre plus the replacement of a small-scale toilet block in association with the current on site Day Nursery is in general conformity with the Development Plan. Whilst I note the views received from local residents in connection with traffic movements to/from site and the removal of trees on site, I am satisfied that these issues can be sufficiently resolved by the imposition of planning conditions as outlined in paragraph (42) below. In addition, I have noted the views of statutory consultees as detailed in paragraph (12) above and have accordingly suggested appropriate conditions. Therefore I recommend that planning permission be granted as set out in paragraph (42) below.

Recommendation

- 42. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO conditions, including conditions to cover the following aspects:
 - the standard time limit;
 - the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;

- details of all external materials, fencing and safety surfacing being submitted to and approved by the County Planning Authority prior to any development commencing on site;
- School Travel Plan be produced and implemented within 3 months from the date of first occupation of the Centre;
- hours of use 08:00 to 18:00 Monday to Friday;
- full landscaping scheme (to include replacement trees and boundary hedge planting) to be submitted to and approved by the County Planning Authority prior to any development commencing on site;
- surface water drainage scheme being submitted to and approved by the County Planning Authority prior to any development commencing on site;
- removal of further permitted development rights in association with Centre unless otherwise agreed in writing by the County Planning Authority;
- programme of archaeological works.

Case officer – Julian Moat 0162

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Background documents - See section heading