

## **Single storey modular building for Children's Centre, Swalecliffe Community Primary School.**

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

Application by KCC Children, Families And Education for single storey modular building for Children's Centre at Swalecliffe Community Primary School, Bridgefield Road, Whitstable (Ref:CA/08/78)

Recommendation: permission be granted subject to conditions

**Local Member(s):** Mark Dance, Michael Harrison

**Classification:** Unrestricted

### **Site**

1. Swalecliffe Community Primary School is located in a residential area of Swalecliffe, between Bridgefield Road to the north east and Swalecliffe Road to the south side. From the south west the site adjoins wooded open space. The north west boundary, between the houses along Southwood Road and the school grounds, is extensively landscaped with trees, shrubs and tall hedge. The vehicular access to the school site is through three leading roads off Bridgefield Road. A site plan is attached (see page D2.3).

### **Proposal**

2. The planning application is one of 52 new Children's Centre across Kent, which is part of the Central Government's National Sure Start Programme. The main aims of the Sure Start programme are to increase the availability of childcare for young children and support parents in their aspirations towards employment. The Children's Centre would offer a range of health, adult education and family support services. Alongside with these services, there would be a nursery facility for 3-5 year old children, which would be managed by the School. The planning application has been submitted by Kent County Council's Children Families and Education Directorate. The Swalecliffe Community Primary School site has been chosen as part of the Kent Strategy as being in an area with demand for the Children's Centre.
3. The proposal is for a new single storey, flat roof modular building together with two canopies and 12 new car parking spaces, one of which is a disabled parking bay (see page D2.3). The proposed building is constructed in sections in a quality controlled factory environment (see page D2.4). The parts are transported to the site and fixed on pre-constructed foundations. The units come with a factory plastisol finish in a light green colour of the external walls. The roof would be felt finish. The applicant states that the proposed building would achieve a minimum BREEAM rating of 'good' with desired target of 'very good'. A minimum life-span of 25 years is warranted by the manufacturer, which is also the requirement of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), which would provide funding for this project. Externally, there would also be two canopies and an impact absorbent play area. Inside, the building would contain crèche/meeting rooms, a playroom, a multi-purpose room, an interview medical room, a snack kitchen, a reception/office area and toilets. The Centre's site would be enclosed with 1.8 metre high weld mesh fencing.
4. The entry to the Children's Centre would be through the existing vehicular and pedestrian access to the site along Buckingham Road. The new car parking bays would be shared between the staff working in the Centre, specifically the community facility and the nursery. No visitor's car parking is provided apart from the one disabled visitor

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space. The aim, as with the other approved Children's Centres, is that the majority of the visitors would live in a walking distance to the Centre and therefore it is expected that users would walk.

5. The expected opening hours are to be 8.00am to 6.00pm, five days a week for 48 weeks of the year. However, the nursery aspect would be open between 9.00am to 3.00pm term time only. The community facility would employ 3 members of staff on a regular basis with the number rising for special events. It is expected that there would be up to 30 visitors to the community facility spread throughout the day. Additionally, there would be 5 nursery staff who would be employed by the School. Although, some of the staff would be moved from the already existing nursery within the school grounds. The nursery would provide care for children age 3-5, 20 in the morning and 20 children in the afternoon session.

**Planning Policy**

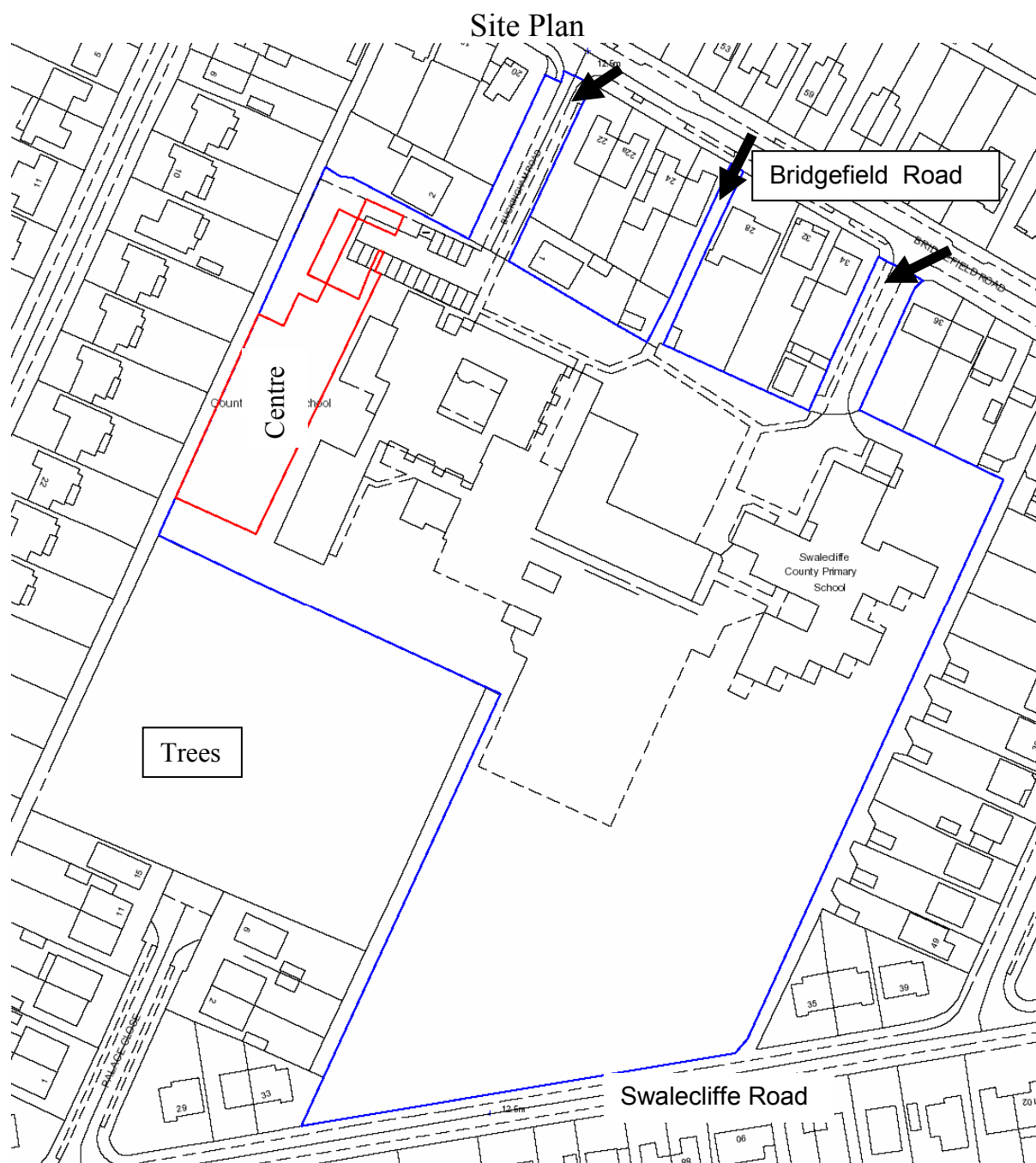
6. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to the consideration of the application:

- (i) The Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006:

Policy SP1	Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's environment and to ensure a sustainable pattern of development.
Policy SS6	Seeks to improve the built and natural environment, the functioning and appearance of the suburbs, including the provision of services and facilities that serve local needs.
Policy QL1	Seeks to ensure that all development is well designed and of a high quality that responds positively to the local character. Development, which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, function or character of the area, will not be permitted.
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 TP3	States that the local planning authority should ensure that development sites are well served by public transport, walking and cycling.
Policy TP19	States that development proposals should comply with vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by the County Council.
Policy NR1	Proposals for development should incorporate sustainable construction techniques.
Policy NE5	Development should not result in an unacceptable level of pollution i.e. noise level.

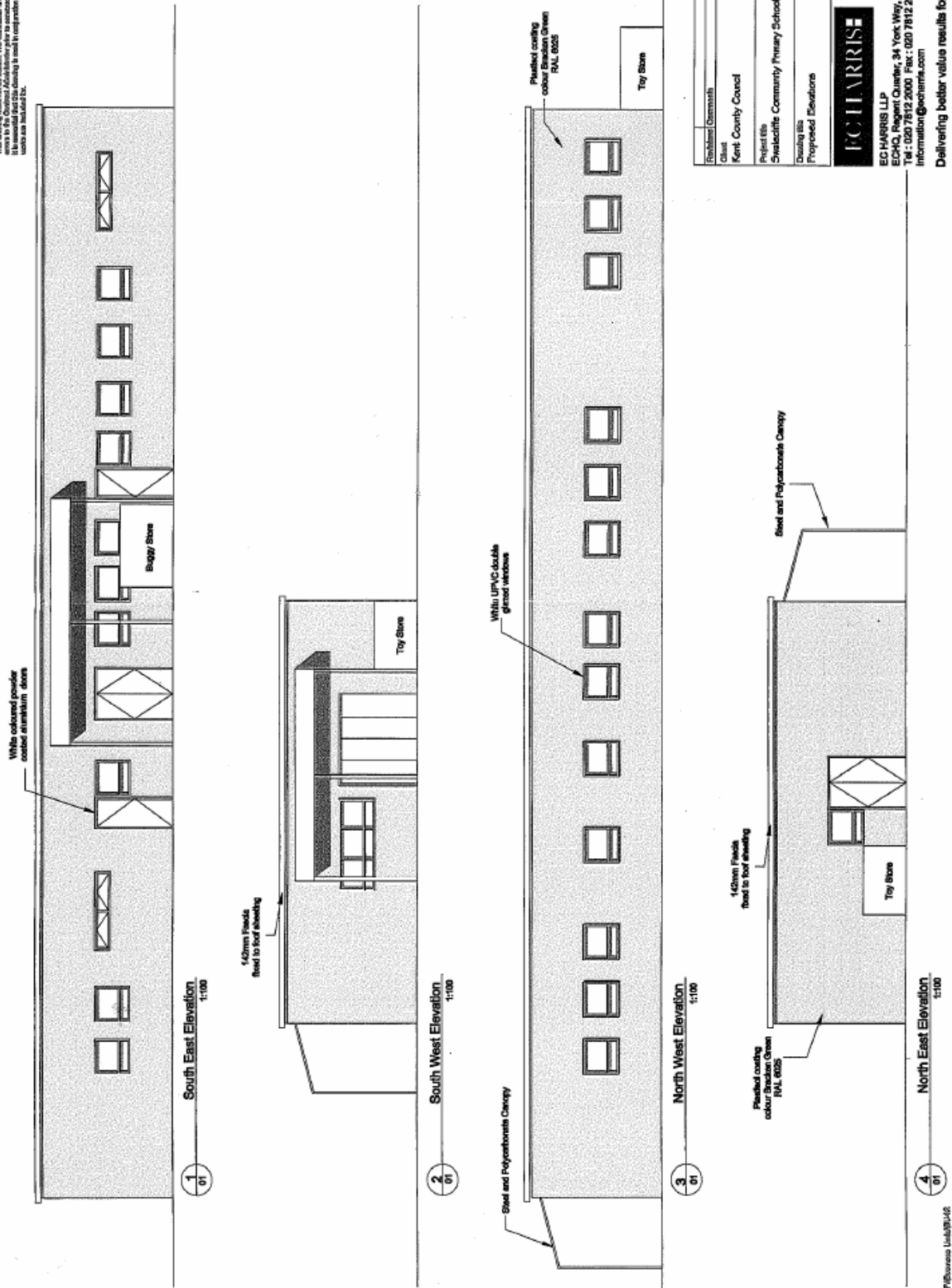
## Item D2

### Single storey modular block for Children's Centre at Swalecliffe Community Primary School, Whitstable – CA/08/78



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(ii) The Canterbury District Local Plan 2006:

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|------------|---|
| Policy C11 | New buildings for local communities to provide social infrastructure will be encourage subject to their appropriate design, location and highway safety   |
| Policy NE5 | The development should be designed to retain trees, hedgerows, woodland that make an important contribution to the amenity of the site  |
| Policy BE1 | Proposals should have high quality design, be accessible and allow for safe movement, protect the amenity and privacy of the existing environment and respond to the objectives of sustainable development. |

**Consultations**

7. **Canterbury City Council:** raises no objection to the proposal.

**Divisional Transportation Manager:** raises no objection to the proposal subject to following conditions being attached to any permission granted:

- Cycle parking to be provided in accordance with Kent Vehicle Parking Standards,
- All spaces within the existing school car park should be made available to the Centre users outside of operational school hours
- A Travel Plan should be submitted for approval, or the existing School Travel Plan revised to include the Centre

**Local Members**

8. The local Members Mr. M Dance and Mr. M Harrison were notified of the application on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2008. No comments received.

**Publicity**

9. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 30 nearby properties.

**Representations**

10. 1 letter of representation was received in response to the proposal. The main planning reasons for objections can be summarised as follows:

- This building would be directly at the rear of one's property and the noise generated by 26 children age 0-5 playing outside would be intrusive, on occasions unbearable and therefore would affect quality of life.
- At present the school's car park is full on a daily basis with teachers' vehicles, some of which are parked outside the bays and in the middle of the car park. Clearly there is not enough space already leading to double parking and additional parking on the surrounding residential streets. At present the respondent's driveway is blocked on a daily basis by inconsiderate parents dropping off and collecting children. The cars are parked on corners and double yellow lines. The Police have recently highlighted the problem in the local media.

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- Bridgefield Road, Southwood Road and Kemp Road are a no-go zone in one direction for an hour a day and hinder deliveries or any vehicle larger than a car. The added traffic on the local roads would cause unnecessary danger to the school children.
- A child was knocked down two months ago leaving the school, due to the parking issues highlighted above.
- Query the hours and days of operation of the nursery aspect of the Centre

**Discussion***Introduction*

11. The Children's Centre Programme is being developed as part of the Central Government's National Sure Start Programme and is founded by the DfES. Kent County Council has been tasked with creating 52 Children's Centres across Kent by March 2008. Having regard to the Kent Primary Strategy, Kent County Council's Children's Centre Team in conjunction with Multi Agency partners has identified suitable sites within areas of deprivation. This proposal represents one of the many Children's Centres planned in Kent.
12. The application is required to be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan policies, unless other material considerations are of overriding importance. Consideration should be given to the impact of the siting, layout and scale of the development as well as impact on playing fields and highway safety. In addition, the design of the proposal and the need for the new community facility should be considered. Policy QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan and Policy BE1 of the Canterbury Local Plan require new developments to be of high quality and well designed, not to lead to the loss of amenity and to consider their impact on the generated travel demand. Further, consideration should be given to the Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policy QL12 and the Canterbury District Local Plan Policy C11 that encourage decision makers to make provision for community facilities. In conjunction with these and other relevant policies, these issues are considered and discussed below. In principle, I see no overriding objection on planning policy grounds, on the basis that site is already well established for the accommodation of children's services.

*Car parking*

13. Currently, there are 81 full and part time staff at the school. The School has two car parks which are used by the staff. There is no provision of car park for parents and visitors within the school grounds. It was brought to my attention that there is a current problem with parents using the nearby roads and private driveways to park their cars during the drop off and pick up hours. Also, parents park on double yellow lines and on corners of roads. There is a concern that the new development would cause an escalation of the situation. The applicant also confirmed that there is no spare capacity to accommodate new staff. In the light of the already existing car parking problem, the proposal for the Centre includes an extra 11 new bays +1 bay for a disabled person. It is argued that that is sufficient to alleviate the risk of the Centre adding to any existing traffic congestion problem.
14. The Children's Centre would employ 3 members of staff on a regular basis with the number rising for special events. Also, there would be up to 5 members of staff employed by the School to run the nursery aspect of the Centre. Therefore, it is considered that the proposed 11 +1 spaces should be adequate for the Centre's staff.
15. There is no provision for visitor car parking proposed, apart from one disabled parking bay. The applicant states that the Centre has been strategically located to minimise

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travel distance for the community it is intended to serve. Also, 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 30 visitors in a day. However, the applicant believes that these visitors would be spread out over the 10 hours of operation. Only when a particular event, such as a seminar, is being provided would there be a number of people arriving at one time. In the event when those events are organised after the school hours, the Divisional Transportation Manager recommends that all spaces within the existing school car parks are made available to the Centre users. Further, the applicant also believes that it is unlikely that these events would occur at the same time as the start and end of school.

16. With regards to the nursery aspect, this would provide care for total of 40 children 3-5 years old. The traffic would be spread by introducing different opening hours for the nursery than that of the school. The current school's core opening hours are 8.30am to 4.15pm, whereas the nursery would be open from 9.00am to 3.00pm. This half an hour in the morning and over an hour in the afternoon should help in minimising the risk of increasing the congestion during the peak time hours. Also, it is noted that the nursery is proposed to meet the demand for childcare within the local community and therefore it is also expected for the parents to walk to the nursery. Following the advice of the Divisional Transportation Manager, a Travel Plan should be prepared to support this aim.
17. From the policy point of view, I consider that the proposal meets the requirements of Policies TP3 and QL12 of the KMSP 2006 and Policy C11 of the Canterbury District Local Plan, which requires that community facilities be located where they are accessible by walking and cycling and by public transport to reduce the need for travel. In the opinion of the Divisional Transportation Manager, due to the nature of the facility the proposal is acceptable and the number of car parking spaces is appropriate.
18. It is acknowledged that residents may already be experiencing some level of congestion around the site during the school times, especially during pick up and drop off times. However, I do not consider the proposed development would cause a significant increase in car journeys to the site sufficient to justify refusal of the proposal on the grounds of an existing and separate traffic congestion issue.

***Location and noise***

19. The proposed site is currently used only as an informal grass play area during breaks between lessons. It is located between the school's buildings and the western school boundary. In the past, the site was used for siting of temporary mobile classrooms. The objection was raised to the siting of the Centre in close proximity to the neighbour's garden and the potential noise impact, which could have detrimental impact on the quality of the neighbour's life. Consequently, the neighbour requested moving the building to elsewhere on the school site. In response, the applicant stated that the location for the Children's Centre was mainly chosen to avoid encroaching on the school's playing field. Also, the proposal site is conveniently located to the site's entrance and the existing car park. The applicant also points out that the impact on the residential houses should be minimal as the site is separated from the neighbouring properties and gardens by approximately 8 metres of thick trees, shrubs and hedges as well as a path.
20. Objection has been raised to the proposal on the basis that the children from the nursery would spend a lot of day time outdoors and therefore generate lots of noise. That is considered by the neighbour to be intrusive and would lessen the enjoyment of their garden. I would point out however, that the nursery aspect of the Centre would be accommodated to the southern end of the building and therefore away from the objector's property. The play area between the car park and the Centre that the



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neighbour might be most concerned about would be used as a crèche while their parents attend the Centre. Due to the smaller size of the rooms and their mixed use for crèche/meeting rooms, it would not accommodate the same numbers of children at any one time as the nursery would. The level of noise it is likely to produce would be even smaller. Notwithstanding that, the building would be approximately 8-9 metres away from the nearest neighbours' boundary and nearly 30 metres away from the actual nearest house. There would not be any play area between the Centre and the School's boundary as the existing trees, hedge and shrubs would be maintained. Only a minor trimming of the boundary shrubs and hedge might be necessary to position the building so the Centre would still be extensively screened. I would recommend securing the maintenance of the trees, shrubs and hedges by a planning condition. For the reasons above, especially due to the distance of the external play areas from the neighbouring properties and the nature of the proposal, I consider this issue to be unlikely to have any significant impact on the quality of the neighbours' life. Consequently I would not recommend refusal on these grounds. Furthermore, the applicant has considered alternative locations within the site and confirmed that there is no other area within the school grounds to locate this Centre without compromising the provision of valuable playing field space.

21. Overall, I consider that the proposal is in accordance with the Policy QL1 and NR5 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006 and Policy BE1 of the Canterbury District Plan, which require all developments to protect the amenity of their local surroundings and not lead to unacceptable noise levels.

*Other considerations*

22. Finally, the above policies and the Government require for the proposed development to consider the needs of all sections of the community and to provide for a safe environment. The applicant aims to achieve this by means of providing level access to the building and a wide corridor within the building. The boundary of the Children's Centre site would be secured by weld mesh fencing from three sides, while maintaining the green boundary to the north west. However, I would recommend that the new fencing should be finished in powder coated green colour to blend in with the green setting of the Centre, and not metal paint as considered in the Supporting Statement. I believe that the detail of the fencing colour finish could be secured by condition on the planning permission, should the proposal be permitted.

**Conclusion**

23. Overall, I believe that the local community would benefit from having the facility, which would provide better access to a range of health, adult education and family support services. It is unlikely in my view that by introducing the Children's Centre within the School's grounds the safety on the nearby highways would be compromised or that it would cause a significant increase in traffic problems during the drop off and pick up times. Additionally, it is considered that any potential noise increase arising from children aged 0-5 playing outdoors would not be significant enough to warrant refusal on these grounds. Consequently, I consider that the proposed development would be in accordance with the aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies.

**Recommendation**

24. Subject to any further views received by the Committee Meeting, I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions, covering:
- Standard time restriction for hours of operation
  - Protection of existing trees and hedges

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- The fencing should be finished in powder coated green to blend in with the landscaped setting
- A Travel Plan should be submitted for approval, or the existing School Travel Plan revised to include the Centre
- Details of cycle parking should be submitted for approval, in accordance with Kent Vehicle Parking Standards
- All spaces within the existing school car park should be made available to the Centre users outside of operational school hours
- Hours of use for the Children's Centre to be restricted to 8.00-18.00 Monday to Friday
- Hours of use for the nursery to be restricted to 9.00–15.00 Monday to Friday term time
- The development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details.

Case Officer –Anna Michalska-Dober
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Background documents –See section heading
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