

Front lobby extension at Seal Church of England Primary School, Sevenoaks – SE/08/132

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

Application by the Governors of Seal Church of England Primary School and Kent County Council Children, Families & Education for a front lobby extension at Seal Primary School, Zambra Way, Seal, Sevenoaks (SE/08/132)

Recommendation: Planning permission be granted

Local Member(s): Mr. N. Chard

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

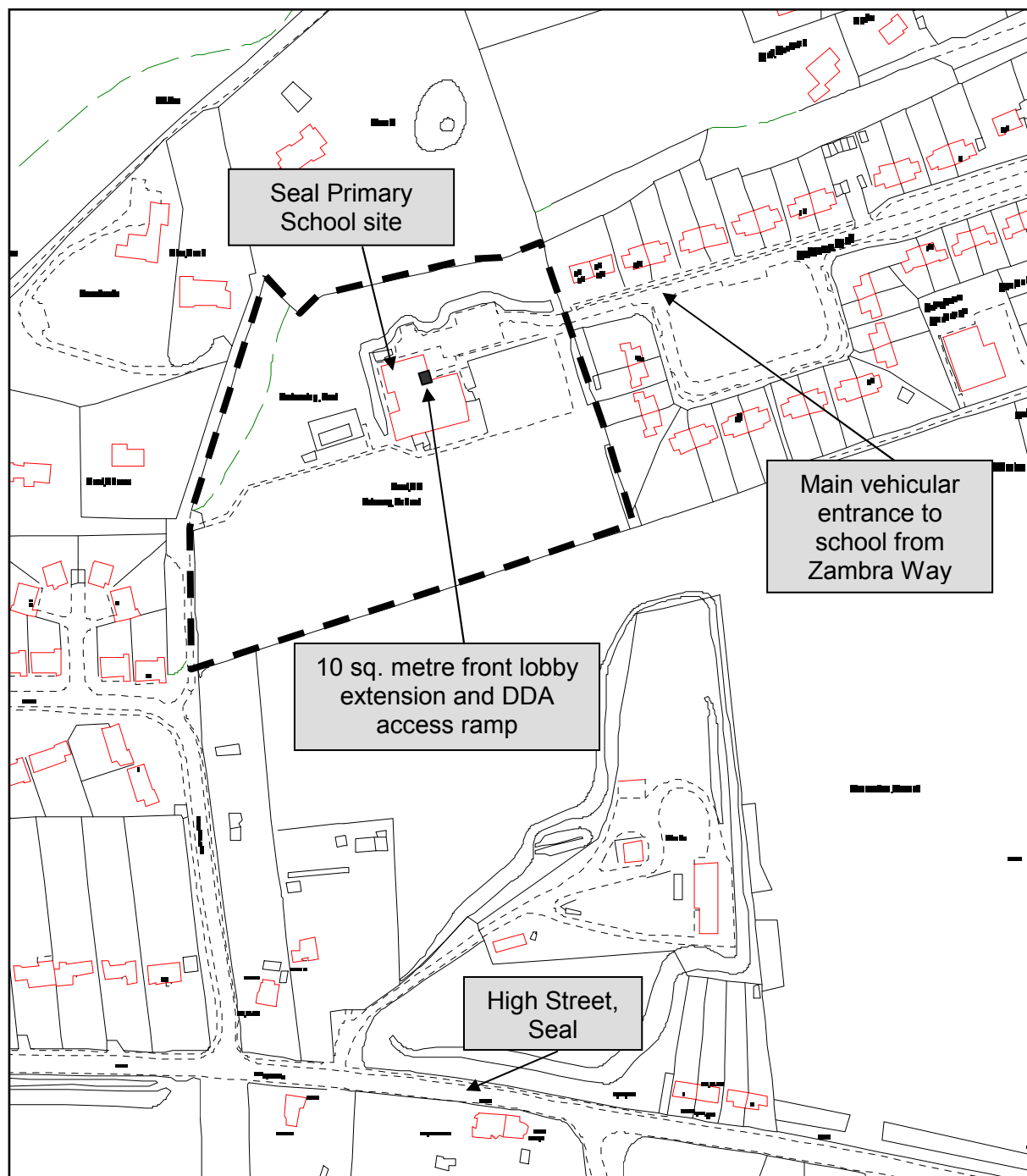
1. Seal Primary School is located to the north of the village of Seal and to the north east of Sevenoaks. The school is located a short distance from the main village itself, and is accessed by both vehicles and pedestrians from its main entrance off Zambra Way. In addition to the primary access route into the site, there is a secondary maintenance access (used solely by occasional maintenance vehicles only) located on Ash Platt Road. The site is bordered to the north-west by a dense tree screen, most of which is protected by a Tree Preservation Order. *A location plan is attached.*
2. The entire Seal Primary School site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt and adjacent to the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (as identified on the site context plans on page 3).

Background and Proposal

3. The application seeks planning permission for a secure and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant front lobby extension to the main pedestrian access point to the school. The lobby comprises of a single storey extension of approximately 10 sq. metres and involves the infilling of an area of courtyard space between three external walls. The proposed works are located some 50 metres from the nearest site boundary. In basic terms the development comprises of a new set of double doors which are fully DDA access compliant with a roof over and a new access ramp providing a gentle slope upwards to the new door threshold.
4. The application has been brought about by the need to secure the front entrance to the school by providing a secure waiting area where visitors can enter and be signed in before entering the main school premises. The DDA access ramp has arisen to meet the needs of a number of families who have disabilities and cannot easily gain access into the main entrance of the school without having to have doors specially held open for them. The proposal intends to fully integrate these families into the life of the school.
5. The application is being reported to the Committee for determination on the basis of a Green Belt Policy objection being lodged from Sevenoaks District Council.

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Site Location Plan



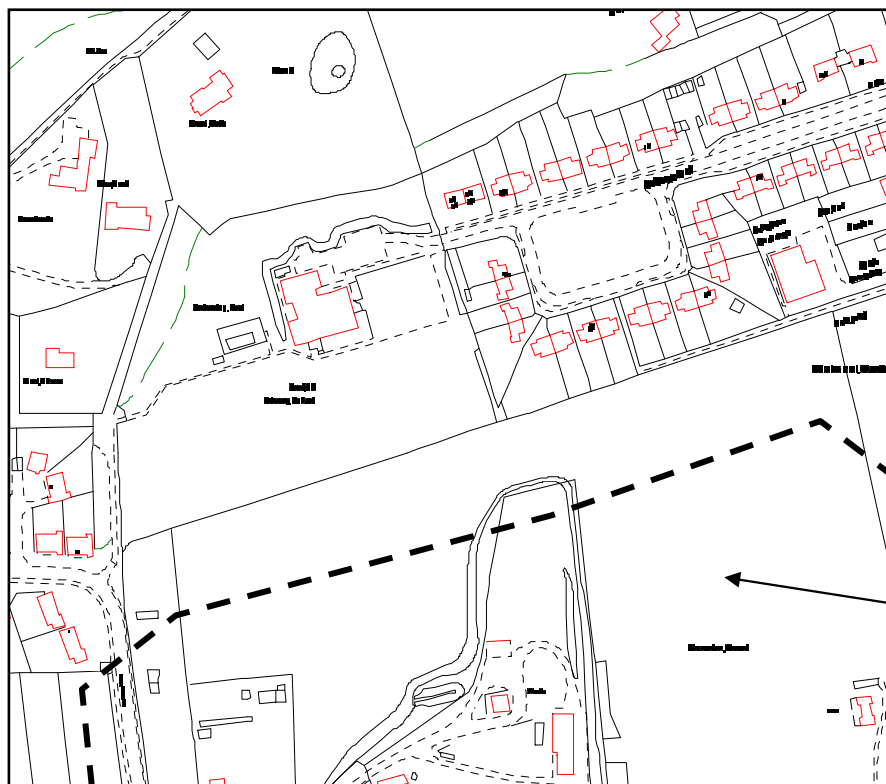
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Scale 1:2500

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Site Context Plans



Area of
Outstanding
Natural Beauty
(AONB)



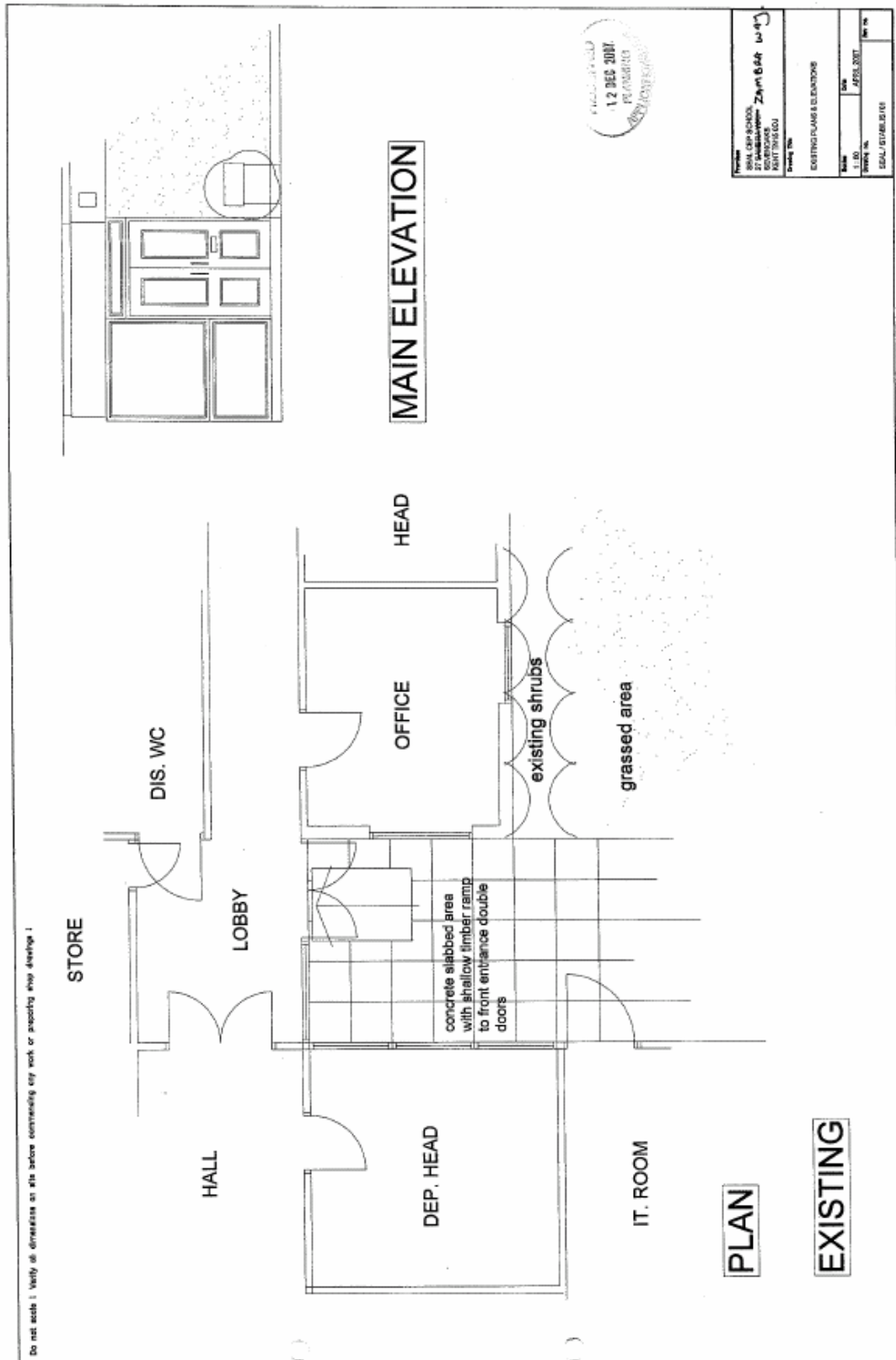
Extent of
Metropolitan
Greenbelt

Site Context Plans not to scale

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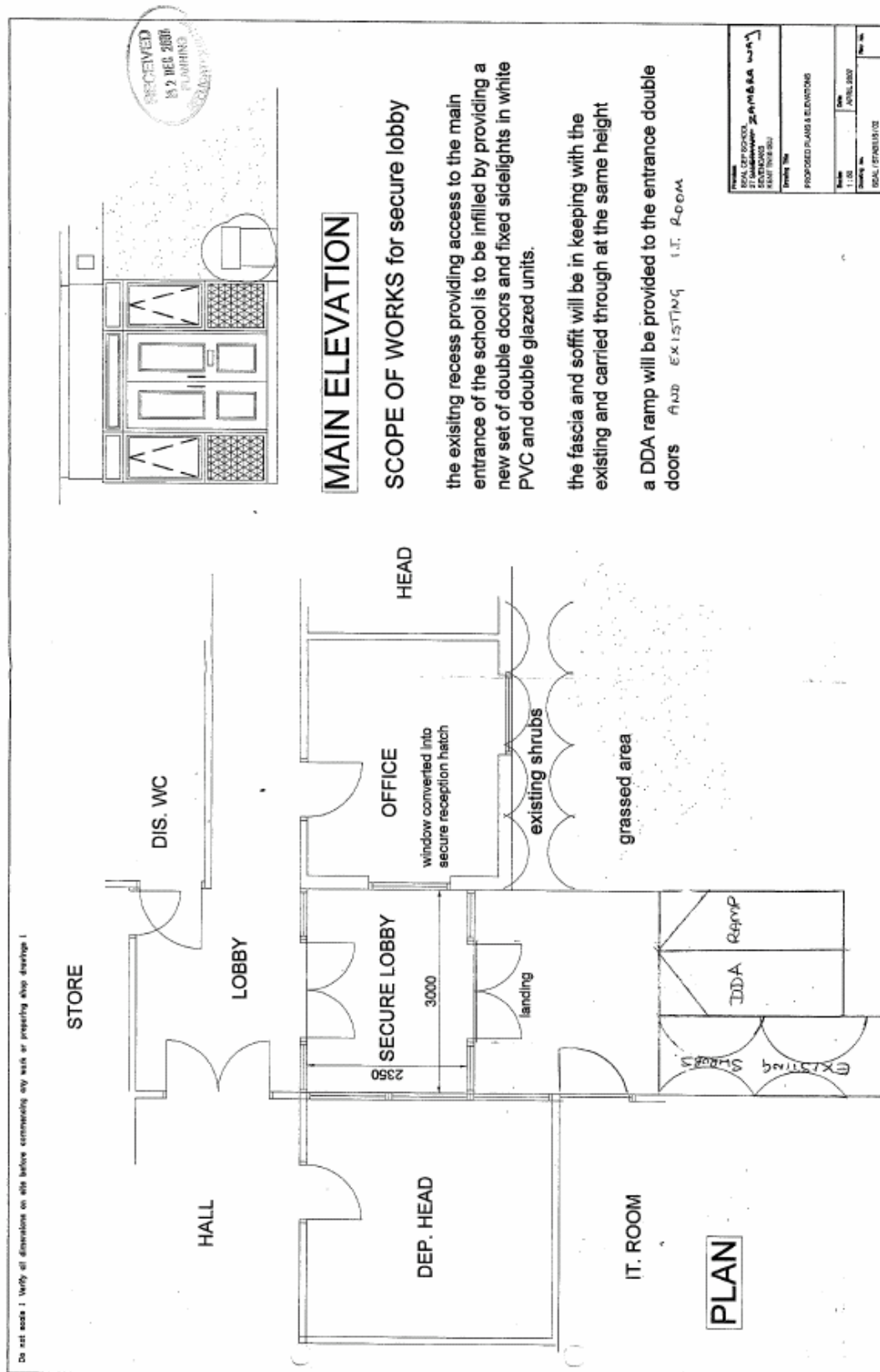
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Existing Plans & Elevations



Front lobby extension at Seal Church of England Primary School,
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Proposed Plans & Elevations



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Planning History

6. At the Planning Applications Committee Meeting on 6 November 2007 planning permission was granted for a section of boundary fence replacement along the western school boundary with Ash Platt Road, under reference SE/07/2536.

Planning Policy

7. 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 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 EN4 – Protection will be given to the nationally important landscapes of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where the primary objective will be to protect, conserve and enhance the landscape character and natural beauty.

Policy SS2 – Within the Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development.

- (ii) The adopted 2000 **Sevenoaks District Council Local Plan**

Policy EN1 – Proposals for all forms of development and land use must comply with the Policies set out in the Plan, unless there are overriding material considerations. The following criteria will be applied, amongst other matters, in the consideration of planning applications:

- the form of the development should be compatible in terms of scale, height and use of appropriate materials;

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- the proposed development does not have an adverse impact on the amenities of a locality by reason of form, scale and height;
- the design of new development incorporates measures to deter crime;

Policy EN6 – Development that would harm or detract from the landscape character of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will not be permitted.

Consultations

8. **Sevenoaks District Council:** has raised an objection to the front lobby extension for the following reasons:

“The land lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt where strict policies of restraint apply. The proposal is inappropriate which is by definition harmful to the maintenance of the character of the Green Belt and to its openness. No very special circumstances have been put forward. The proposal thereby conflicts with Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 and Policy SS2 from the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006.

Seal Parish Council: was notified of the application on 16 January 2008

Divisional Transportation Manager: has no highway objection to this proposal.

Environment Agency: has no objection but offered advice to the applicant regarding the site lying within a Source Protection Zone and precautions to be taken to avoid discharges and spillages to the ground both during construction and subsequent operation.

Local Member

9. The local County Member, Mr. N. Chard was notified of the application on the 16 January 2008.

Publicity

10. The application was publicised by posting a site notice at the school entrance with Zambra Way, and the individual notification of 8 neighbouring residential properties.

Representations

11. I have not received any representations in respect of this application to date.

Discussion

Introduction

12. The application seeks planning permission for a 10 sq. metre front lobby extension and DDA access ramp to the main front entrance of the school. The application is being reported for determination as a result of the whole site being located within the Metropolitan Green Belt, and therefore Sevenoaks District Council has raised objection

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on the grounds that this proposal does not have very special circumstances to allow planning permission to be granted within the Green Belt.

13. In considering this proposal, regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (8) above. Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 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. Issues of particular relevance in this case include the visual impact of the small-scale secure entrance lobby and DDA ramp and their impact on the surrounding Metropolitan Green Belt.

Impact on Green Belt

14. The whole school site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt and in the context of the relevant national Planning Policy guidance and Development Plan Policies that apply, proposals for new built development need to be exceptionally justified by very special circumstances. In particular, Green Belt policy presumes against inappropriate development, which includes any development which is not related to agriculture, forestry, open recreation, or other compatible Green Belt uses.
15. Whilst the proposed extension does not constitute inappropriate development, I consider that it can be justified as an exemption to Green Belt Policy because it has a negligible impact on the openness of the Green Belt, cannot be sited in any alternative non-Green Belt location and is required to meet the Government imposed requirements relating to equal access to public buildings. I note the views of Sevenoaks District Council as set out in paragraph (8) above, but in my opinion consider that there are adequate very special circumstances to justify overriding Green Belt Policy in this particular case. Accordingly, I do not consider the proposed development to be contrary to Structure Plan Policy SS2.

Visual impact of proposed development

16. As noted above, the proposed entrance lobby would be created in an existing courtyard space outside the main entrance to the school. It is proposed to be constructed by installing a set of easily opening double doors (to allow easy wheelchair access) with a flat-roof over. This area would operate as a secure area for visitors, pupils and staff to enter part of the school to sign-in before having direct access into the main school buildings.
17. The external materials of the proposed lobby extension comprise of a set of uPVC double doors and windows, with a flat-roof above. The design of the proposed lobby matches that of the existing school with uPVC windows and a felt flat roof construction. In terms of the DDA ramp this is proposed to be constructed of a concrete ramp to accord with the current DDA slope gradients.
18. It is noted from the site context plans (see page 3) that the application site lies adjacent to the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). However, given the enclosed and secluded location of the works proposed, in my opinion there would be no adverse visual impact upon the wider AONB, or any adverse visual impact from views of the development from outside of the site. Under the circumstances, the application does not need to be judged against the criteria of Structure Plan Policy EN4 and in particular it is clearly not major development for the purpose of this Policy.

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19. Given the small-scale of the works proposed and the concealed location of the development, I consider the proposal to be in accordance with Structure Plan Policy QL1 and Local Plan Policy EN1.

Alternative solutions

20. As previously noted the whole of the Seal Primary School site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and as such no alternative location for a secure lobby and DDA access ramp would be a better location in terms of Green Belt Policy. On this basis, the current location for the proposed development would seem most appropriate at the main entrance of the school.
21. Accordingly, I am satisfied that no alternative solutions have been pursued as better options in Green Belt terms, and consider the current proposal to be acceptable when weighing-up the need for the development at this particular school against national and local planning policy.

Conclusion

22. Having regard to the Development Plan Policies, particularly those policies relating to the Metropolitan Green Belt, and the material considerations received from Sevenoaks District Council, I consider that the addition of a secure entrance lobby and DDA compliant access ramp is in general accordance with the Development Plan. Whilst I note the views received from the District Council with regards to Green Belt Policy, I consider that the very special circumstance of need of a school located wholly within the Green Belt is sufficient to override a Policy objection in this particular case. Accordingly, I consider that planning permission should be granted, subject to the following conditions as set out in paragraph (23) below.

Recommendation

23. 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 handrails and external materials of DDA access ramp be submitted to and approved in writing by County Planning Authority prior to any operations on site.

Case officer – Julian Moat	01622 696978
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Background documents - See section heading
