

**Proposed Children's Centre, Minster-in-Sheppey Primary School – SW/07/1360**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Unit to Planning Applications Committee on 12 February 2008.

SW/07/1360 – Application by Kent County Council's Children Families and Education Directorate for the construction of a single storey modular building for use as a community children's centre, including the installation of fencing, pathways, hard play area, and staff car parking, Minster-in-Sheppey Primary School, Brecon Chase, Minster, Sheppey.

Recommendation: Permission be granted, subject to conditions.

**Local Members:** Mr A. Crowther

**Classification:** Unrestricted

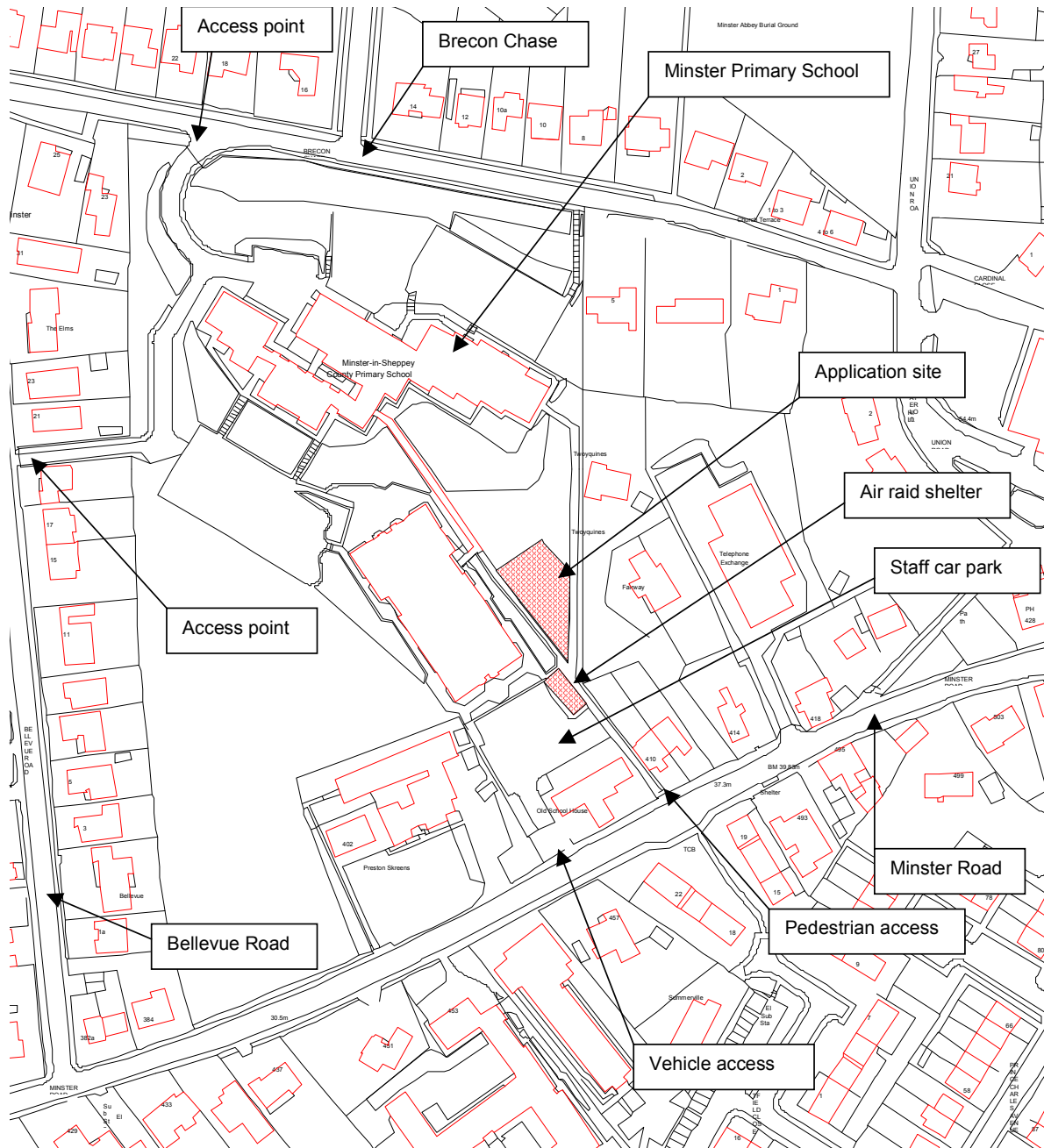
**Site**

1. Minster-in-Sheppey Primary School is located south off Brecon Chase, within the built-up area of Minster. The school site is located on the southern flank of a hillside, with two school blocks located across the slope and the playing field to the south of the school buildings. The school site can be entered via access points on Brecon Chase, Minster Road and Bellevue Road. The Primary School has an overall design capacity for 600 pupils, with a current school roll of 472 children. Residential properties surround the site to the north, south, east and west (see attached plan).
2. The application site consists of an existing workshop/ schoolroom building and adjacent land, located toward the eastern boundary of the school site. The application site slopes generally from north to south toward an existing school building. The application site also includes an area of land adjacent to the main staff car park off Minster Road, which is currently occupied by a redundant air-raid shelter.
3. The closest properties to the area affected by this application are located to the north-east off Minster Road in an elevated position, and to the east fronting Minster Road. The application site is located, at its closest point, within 4 metres of the school boundary with residential property. The boundary treatment in this locality includes mature evergreen planting that screens most of the site from direct views from the north. The façade of the closest residential property would be approximately 12 metres to the north-east in an elevated position in relation to the application site.
4. There are no site-specific land use designations within the Development Plan in association with the site.

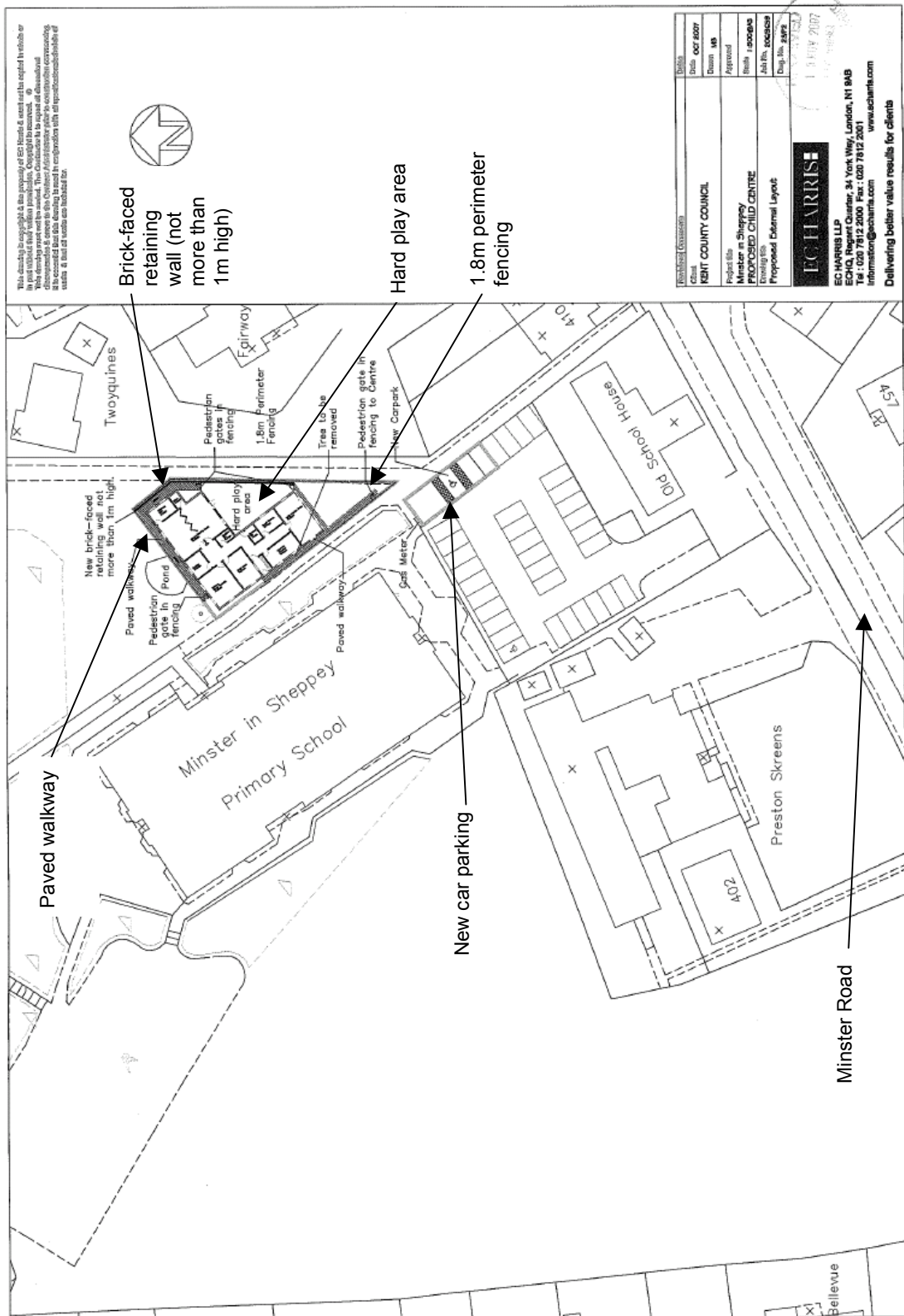
**Background**

5. The recent planning history for the Minster Primary School site includes permission to install CCTV Cameras (under planning reference SW/06/218) and planning permission for works to level part of the existing school playing field (under reference SW/06/351).

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**Proposal**

6. The application proposes the creation of a community Children's Centre within the grounds of Minster Primary School. The Children's Centre would be housed in a new purpose-built single storey modular building that would be constructed off-site and brought to site in sections to be fixed to pre-constructed foundations. The development would involve works to the ground level cutting the built platform into the slope and construction of a retaining wall not more than 1m in height. The building would create approximately 238 m<sup>2</sup> of floorspace for use as part of the proposed function. The building would be designed and warranted for a period of at least a 25-years to meet the applicant's requirements. The supporting information received with the application confirms that the building would be designed to achieve a minimum BREEAM rating of GOOD, with a desired target of VERY GOOD.
7. The application includes the provision of associated hard play space adjacent to the building, and erection of 1.8 metre weldmesh perimeter fencing around the site, to be finished in a green powder coat. The development work proposed would result in the removal of one tree from within the school grounds.
8. 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. 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 toward employment.
9. The aim of the proposed Children's Centre is to offer a range of health, adult education and family support services to the local community. The building proposed would contain a multi-purpose crèche/ meeting room for use by parents attending the Centre, and two additional multi-purpose rooms to be used for informal meetings through to formal seminar style learning. The application also includes a smaller interview/ treatment room, therapy room, staff room, reception area, kitchen and associated toilet and cloakroom facilities.
10. The Children's Centre would operate as a separate community facility independently from the School. The application proposes that the Centre would be open from 0800 to 1800 hours, Monday to Friday, 48 weeks of the year. The Centre would employ 3 members of staff on a full time basis with numbers rising for special events. The application sets out that the Centre is expected to generate up to 30 visitors across a typical day. The Centre would also provide a potential venue for educational events in association with the service, like seminar style training. The application advises that it is unlikely that these events would coincide with the peak movements at the start and end of the school day.
11. Access to the Centre would be via an existing pedestrian entrance gate and footpath that runs between residential property onto Minster Road. Vehicular access would be limited to staff and disabled visitors, and would be via the existing staff car park and gated entrance onto Minster Road. The application includes the provision of three new vehicle parking spaces within the existing car park. This provision would be achieved by the demolition of a disused air raid shelter adjoining the car park.

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**Development Plan Policies**12. (i) The adopted **Kent and Medway Structure Plan** (2006):

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| Policy SP1  | Seeks to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern and form of development.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Policy SS6  | Seeks to improve the built and natural environment, function and appearance of the suburbs of the major urban areas, including the provision of services and facilities that serve local needs.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Policy QL1  | Seeks all development to be well designed and of high quality that respond positively to the local character. Development, which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, function and character of settlements or the countryside, will not be permitted. Seeks development to consider the needs of the community, provide safe environment, protect residential amenity, and adopt sustainable construction techniques. |
| 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.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Policy TP3  | Local Planning Authorities should ensure that development sites are well served by public transport, walking and cycling.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Policy TP19 | Seeks development proposals to comply with the respective vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by Kent County Council and Medway Council.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Policy NR1  | Seeks development to incorporate sustainable construction techniques and prudent use of natural resources.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

(ii) The adopted **Swale Borough Local Plan** (2000) (Saved Policies)

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| Policy G1  | Requires all development to accord with Local Plan Policies, have regard to characteristics of locality, avoid unacceptable impacts on natural and built environments, adopt high standards of design, cause no demonstrable harm to residential amenity, provide safe pedestrian and vehicular access, avoid unacceptable consequences in highway terms, and provide parking sufficient for the traffic likely to be generated. |
| Policy IN7 | Seeks adequate vehicle parking to be available with new development.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Policy C1  | Subject to compliance with other Plan policies, supports planning applications for appropriately located social and community facilities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

(iii) The draft **Swale Borough Local Plan First Review**: Re-deposit Draft (2005):

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| Policy E1 | Seeks all development to accord with Local Plan Policies, have regard to characteristics of locality, avoid unacceptable impacts on natural |
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and built environments, adopt high standards of design, cause no demonstrable harm to residential amenity, provide appropriate vehicle access and, integrate security and safety measures.

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| Policy E19 | Seeks high quality of design and proposals that respond positively to the qualities of the existing environment, in terms of scale, height, massing, landscaping, materials, and natural resources.                         |
| Policy E20 | Seeks development to integrate security and safety measures.                                                                                                                                                                |
| Policy T3  | Seeks new development to provide appropriate vehicle parking.                                                                                                                                                               |
| Policy T4  | Seeks new development to provide appropriate facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.                                                                                                                                       |
| Policy C1  | Supports proposals to improve community services and facilities. Where proposals would meet an identified local need in an accessible location, supports proposals to help maximise the use of existing community services. |

**Consultations**

13. **Swale Borough Council** raises no objection, subject to conditions covering the standard time limit, details of external materials to be submitted for prior approval, times of use, any other conditions recommended by consultees.

14. **Minster-on-Sea Parish Council** raises an objection to the application on the following grounds:

- *'Whilst Minster-on-Sea Parish Council acknowledges the benefit the Centre may bring, there are several traffic implications including how to better control parking near the school which need addressing first.'*
- *'Minster-on Sea Parish Council does not agree with Kent County Council's proposal to carry out a Travel Plan after the Centre opens and demands they prioritise a Health & Safety Risk Assessment and Travel Plan in view of the implications in an area already unsafe and a risk to school children.'*
- *'Minster-on-Sea Parish Council also suggests a zebra crossing would benefit Minster Road.'*
- *'Minster-on-Sea Parish Council advises Kent County Council to delay any decision regarding the proposal until after a Travel Plan, etc. has been completed.'*

15. **The Divisional Transportation Manager** raises no objections to the proposals in respect of highway matters, subject to conditions including the production of a Travel Plan and the changes to the car parking arrangements proposed to be completed before use of the facilities is commenced.

16. **The Environment Agency** has no objection or comments to make on the application.

**Local Member**

15. The Local County Member for Sheppey, Mr. A. Crowther was notified of the application on 16 November 2008.

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**Publicity**

16. The application was publicised by the posting of one site notice and the notification of 12 neighbouring properties.

**Representations**

17. On writing this report, no letters of representation have been received from nearby residents following the above publicity.

**Discussion**

18. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (12) 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.
19. This application proposes the creation of a new purpose built Children's Centre facility at Minster Primary School. The proposed Centre is one of 52 similar facilities being applied for across the County by KCC's Children, Families and Education Directorate. The aim of the Children's Centres is to offer a range of health, adult education and family support services to provide for the needs of the local community and support existing nurseries in the surrounding area.

**Design**

20. The application proposes the demolition of a wooden workshop and construction of a single storey modular building over the general footprint. The proposed development would adopt a modular construction that would allow the building to be largely completed off-site, and transported to site in sections to be attached to pre-constructed foundations. The off-site construction would allow the building to be finished to a specific standard in a quality-controlled environment, ensuring that the specifications meet the applicant's requirements and that the construction period on site is kept to a minimum. The building would be designed to have a minimum usable life of at least 25 years, with a manufacturer's warrantee for this period. The 25-year life span is a requirement of the Department for Education and Skills, who would provide funding for part of this project.
21. The application sets out that the building would be finished in willow coloured panelling with a metal-faced roof. The building would benefit from a finished floor level at the height of the adjacent ground level. This would enable level inclusive access arrangements, reduce the overall height, and move the visual appearance away from traditional 'mobile buildings' by avoiding the need for skirts and void spaces under the building.
22. The building proposed has been specified to minimise the height, in order to limit the visual impact on the surrounding built environment, and to make the most of the existing boundary landscaping to screen and soften the proposal, particularly from residential property to the north-east. The application site follows the general slope of the school grounds, falling from the north toward the south/ south-west of the site, sloping away



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from the nearest site boundary toward a main school building. The proposed building and associated outdoor play area would be cut into the slope by approximately 1 metre. This would further reduce the scale of the development in relation to the surrounding environment, and in particular from the closest residential property. The applicant's agent is currently preparing further detailed drawings on the necessary land forming work.

23. No objections have been received to the design of the building or the site layout as a result of the consultations carried out in association with this application. The Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policy QL1, Swale Borough Local Plan Policies G1, and draft Local Plan Policies E1 and E19 seek development that is well designed of a high quality that respect the character of the surrounding built environment.
24. The design of the proposal reflects the applicant's requirements whilst drawing on the surrounding environment in terms of the layout and scale of development. The height of the building has been kept to a minimum and is in proportion to the workshop building it would replace. The location proposed would benefit from existing mature evergreen landscaping to the north-east / east along the adjacent site boundary, and would be screened to the north and west by the existing school buildings. In the location proposed the building would not be visible in the street scene, although it would still benefit from direct access onto Minster Road. The location identified is relatively close to the school boundary and adjacent residential property. At its closest point the proposed building would be approximately 12 m from the nearest house. However, it would occupy part of the footprint of the existing workshop building that currently occupies the site. Taking account of the existing boundary treatment and the general gradient of the land, which falls away from the closest residential property, together with the scale and layout of the building proposed, I would not wish raise an objection to the location of the development.
25. Whilst the building proposed has a basic visual appearance and officers would have reservations over its use in a more prominent, or sensitive, location, I would consider that the proposed layout respects the character of the surrounding environment and, given the secluded location, the design would not be unacceptable in this particular case. I note that Swale Borough Council has raised no objection to the proposal subject to conditions, including details of high quality external materials to be submitted for prior approval. The development of the site would also require the demolition of an existing wooden workshop building and an air raid shelter. Both of which are in a relatively poor state of repair and do not, in my opinion, enhance the character of the area.
26. Therefore, subject to the submission of all external materials for prior approval, I consider that the design aspect of the proposed development would accord with the appropriate Development Plan Policies, including Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policy QL1, Swale Borough Local Plan Policy G1, and draft Swale Borough Local Plan Policies E1 and E19.

**Traffic and Access**

27. An objection to this application has been received from Minster-on-Sea Parish Council on the grounds of existing traffic problems surrounding the school site, and the potential travel implications of the proposed Children Centre (please see paragraph (14) above). The Parish Council has requested that certain issues surrounding the existing travel implications for the School be addressed, as well as a Travel Plan for the new facilities be prepared, prior to any decision being taken on this application.

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28. Minster is a large Primary School that currently has approximately 472 pupils, with an overall designed capacity for 600 children. The School has dedicated entry and exit points on Minster Road, Brecon Chase and Bellevue Road. The Children's Centre proposed would be accommodated within the school grounds close to the existing access arrangements on Minster Road. The application sets out that the Centre would operate drop in style facilities in support of the Government's Sure Start Programme for young families in the local community, offering a range of health, adult education and family support services. The application details that the Centre would employ 3 members of staff on permanent basis, with an estimated 30 visitors to the Centre spread throughout a normal day, i.e. not all arriving or being present at any one time. The use of the Centre would normally be spread across a 10-hour day, and only when an event like an occasional seminar, is being held would there be several people arriving on site at one time. The information provided confirms that any seminar-training sessions would be unlikely to be scheduled at peak travel times during the school day so other parking facilities on the school site could be used on such occasions. The applicant advises that the Centre has been purposefully located within walking / buggy pushing distance of the community it would serve, with visitors encouraged to walk.
29. Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policies TP3 and TP19 and Swale Borough Local Plan Policy G1 and IN7 seek that any new development be well located to minimise the need to travel, has adequate car parking provision, and ensures access to move sustainable means of travel, like public transport, walking and cycling.
30. I note that the proposed Children's Centre has been located to serve the needs of the local community, positioned alongside an existing community service where there is likely to be crossover in terms of the people using the school with those that would use the proposed centre. The access and traffic problems surrounding the school are mainly centred on the peak movement times at the start and end of the school day. The facility now proposed would not be directly linked to the existing school operating hours, with movements spread more evenly throughout the day, rather than centred on regular peak times. The school site is well located in relation to the surrounding community with access to public transport and the public footpath network, and this particular application would have no bearing on the existing school travel patterns. It would therefore be inappropriate to require this application to remedy congestion issues related to the adjacent school.
31. Further to the Parish Council's comments concerning highway matters the Divisional Transportation Manager has provided additional comment responding to the issues raised. Concerning the request for highway improvements the Transportation Manager advises that the suggested volume of visitors to the proposed Centre during the course of a day would not justify any measures in response to the existing traffic issues raised by the Parish Council. In response to the request concerning the Travel Plan, the Transportation Manager's advice is that, given the relatively low number of visitors that are expected from the proposal, the applicant should be able to prepare and adopt a Green Travel Plan prior to commencing the use of the development. He suggests that a condition be placed on any planning permission to this effect.
32. I note the concerns raised by the Parish Council over the existing traffic problems experienced in association with the school. However, the Centre has been specifically proposed in a location that is easily accessible to the community it would serve. Given the size of the building proposed and the numbers of visitors expected to use the facility, I am not of the opinion that the Centre would result in an unacceptable increase in vehicle movements to this site. The Divisional Transportation Manager has advised that

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the proposed car parking arrangements would be in accordance with the Kent Vehicle Parking Standards for the proposed land use. All other visitors to the Centre would be reasonably expected to walk since they would all live within easy walking distances. However, this could be monitored and facilitated through the development, and ongoing review, of a new Travel Plan for the Centre and the provision of cycle parking facilities. In the event that some visitors might choose to drive to the Centre, taking account of the Divisional Transportation Manager's views, I do not consider that the minimal level of the movements likely to be generated would warrant an objection to the application on highway grounds.

**Hours of Use**

33. The application proposes hours of operation from 0800 to 1800 hours, Monday to Friday, 48 weeks a year. This would potentially extend the use of the site during the school holidays, and to some extent beyond the regular school hours. However, the hours of operation proposed are not extensive and mirror an extended school day. The proposed use of the site would be in harmony with Government initiatives for Extended Schools, making the best use of local facilities for the benefit of the wider community. Given the size of the Centre and the numbers of potential visitors suggested in the application, in my opinion the Centre would not cause an unacceptable impact to the nearby residential properties as a result of the hours set out above.

**Landscaping**

34. The application as proposed would result in the loss of one tree adjacent to the site. The proposals would allow the retention of other existing landscaping, including the evergreen trees that are planted along the north-eastern boundary of the site. I would consider that the provision of a landscaping scheme detailing appropriate replacement planting around the school grounds would be reasonable mitigation for the tree that would be removed. I would therefore make any recommendation subject to the provision of an appropriate replacement planting.

**Conclusion**

35. I consider that the design and layout of the development as proposed accords with the Development Plan, and that there are no material considerations that indicate I should recommend otherwise. I note that the Divisional Transportation Manager has considered the highway implications of the development in the context of the existing school and is not raising an objection to the proposal, subject to provision of the new car parking proposed and completion of a Travel Plan prior to commencement of operations on site. The proposed use would increase the number of visitors to the site, however, I consider that the nature of the operation would naturally distribute these movements throughout a normal day, rather than in peak hours and would not therefore have an unacceptable impact on the congestion experienced at peak travel times. I therefore consider that, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions, the benefits associated with the provision of a community facility outweigh any detrimental impacts the proposals may have and recommend that planning permission be granted.

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**Recommendation**

36. I RECOMMEND that, SUBJECT TO the submission of further information on the land forming work proposed, PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO the imposition of conditions covering:

- the standard time limit;
- the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
- submission of a Travel Plan for the Children's Centre prior to commencement of the use of the Centre, and its implementation and ongoing review;
- details of external materials to be submitted;
- details of a scheme of landscaping to be submitted;
- details of cycle parking to be submitted;
- details of foul and surface water drainage;
- replacement car parking to be provided prior to commencement of use of the Centre,
- hours of use for the Children's Centre to be restricted to 0800 to 1800 Monday to Friday; and
- the use of the building to be restricted specifically to use as a Children's Centre only.

Case officer – James Bickle	01622 221068
Background documents - See section heading	