

**Pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications. The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington, Dartford – DA/07/1120**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 15 January 2008.

DA/07/1120 – Formation of two pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications (including extension of existing car park at the north-west corner of The Grange school site) associated with School Travel Plan. The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington, Wilmington Grange, Parsons Lane, Dartford.

Recommendation: Permission be granted, subject to conditions.

**Local Members:** Mrs A. Allen

**Classification:** Unrestricted

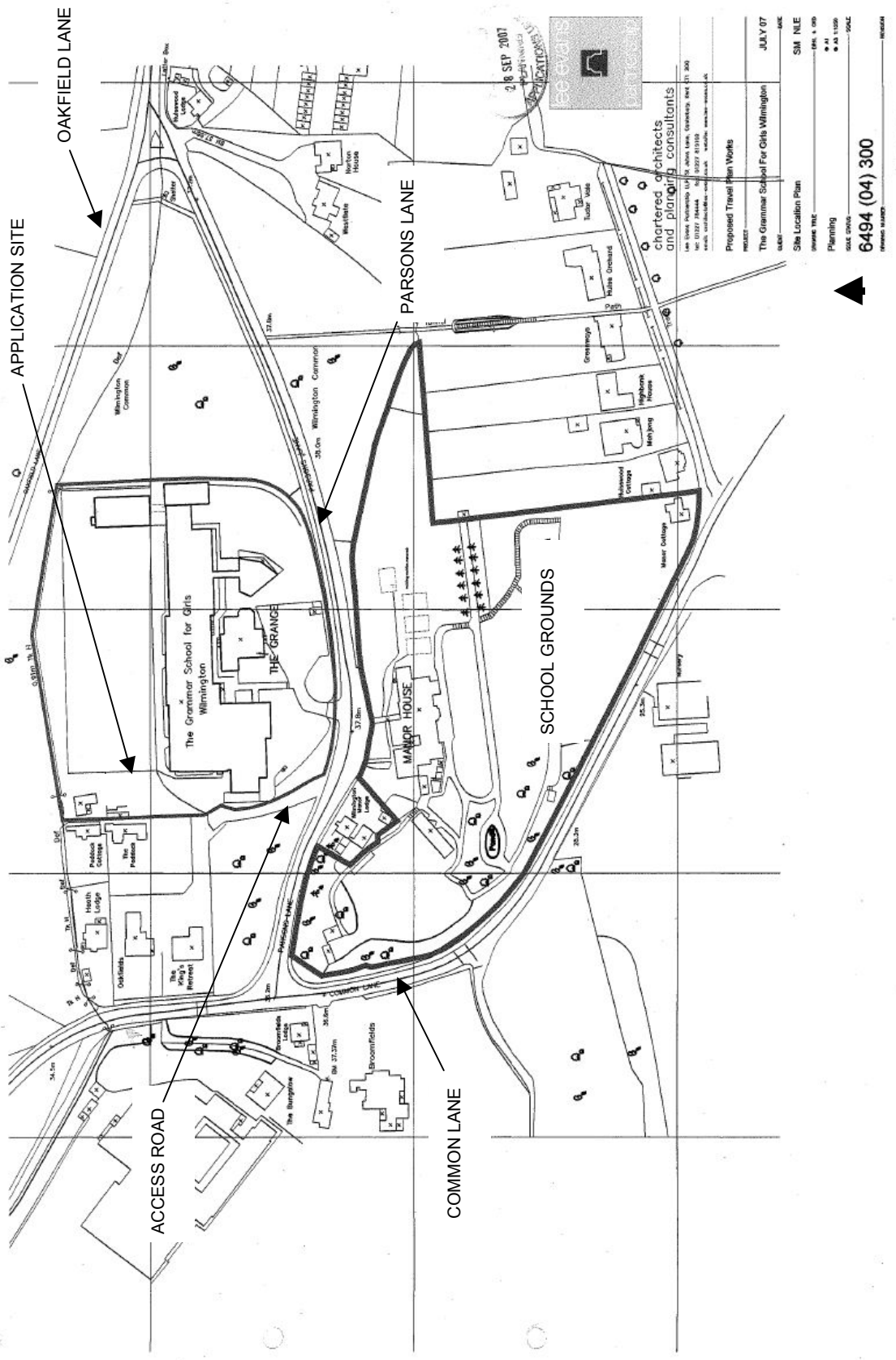
**Site**

1. The application site is located within the grounds of The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington. The Grammar School is located on a campus that is split to the north and south of Parsons Lane, on the edge of the village of Wilmington, approximately 200m south of the A2, and 2km south-west of Dartford town centre.
2. The application site forms part of the land associated with The Grange school building and campus north of Parsons Lane. The site includes land to the south of the school buildings, fronting the public highway, as well as an area toward the north-west corner of the grounds, to the rear of an existing school car park in front of a disused school cottage. The land identified for development in the application forms part of the general landscaped amenity space available to the school.
3. The nearest residential property is located to the north of Parsons Lane immediately to the west of the school grounds and application site. There is also a property positioned south of Parsons Lane, adjacent to the Manor House school campus, directly opposite the privately owned access road that serves the school's rear entrance and car park, amongst a number of residential properties.
4. The school grounds are positioned within the Metropolitan Green Belt as set out with the Dartford Borough Local Plan 1995 Proposals Map.

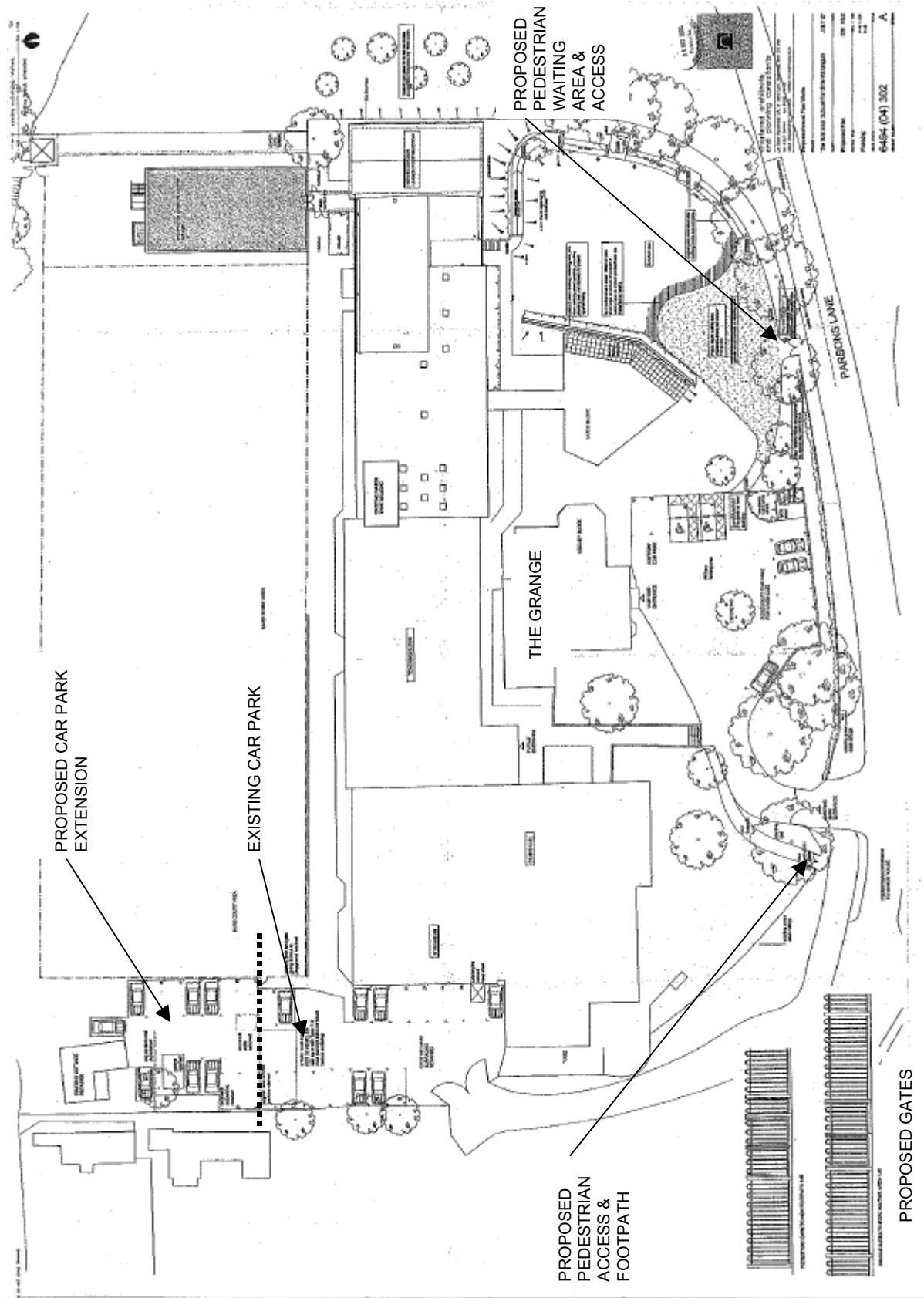
**Background**

5. The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington is a Foundation School that presently has 747 pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 years attending the site. The School employs 53 teaching staff and 29 support staff, as well as ancillary employees, on a full and part time basis.
6. The recent planning history for the school includes permission to construct an 8-classroom extension to an existing school block within The Grange campus (planning reference – DA/06/330). This development has recently been completed, improving existing accommodation and replacing mobile buildings that were accommodated within the school grounds.

**Pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications.  
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington – DA/07/1120**



**Pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications.  
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington – DA/07/1120**





### **Pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications. The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington – DA/07/1120**

---

7. The application proposes the formation of two new pedestrian entrances from The Grange site onto Parsons Lane. One immediately to the west of the main vehicular access onto Parsons Lane, and the second opposite the existing bus and coach parking, toward the eastern end of the school grounds. The application also includes the creation of a pupil waiting area adjacent to the proposed eastern pedestrian entrance, in addition to revisions to the layout of the car park on the forecourt to the south of The Grange school building, and an extension to a second car parking area to the north-west of the school buildings at the rear of the site. The development work is being brought forward in response to a number of objectives identified by a Travel Plan recently prepared by the School.
8. The proposed pedestrian access arrangements involve the removal of existing green steel railing panels and replacement with gates in a matching style, as well as the formation of new internal footpaths that would link the access points to existing pedestrian routes within the grounds.
9. The pupil waiting area would create a hard standing of 225m<sup>2</sup> of bound gravel to the south-east of the campus, fronting Parsons Lane. This space would be made available to pupils attending the site, at the beginning and end of the school day. The arrangement would allow the pupils to wait inside the school grounds away from the public highway until such time as they are in a position to leave the area on the buses provided.
10. The amendments that are proposed to the forecourt car-parking area would reduce the number of marked vehicles parking spaces from 20 down to 12. Providing visitor and disabled bays near the front entrance, and allowing easier movement for pedestrians moving through the forecourt area between different parts of the site.
11. The changes to the car park to the north-west of the campus would involve extending the existing arrangements from 18 to 30 spaces. In part to compensate for the loss of spaces on the forecourt, and to provide additional onsite parking facilities. The development work would involve extending the existing car park north, resulting in minor changes to the site levels. The car parking area would be finished with Type 1 road planings, to be completed with a tarmac finish in the future (subject to the availability of funding).

#### **Development Plan Policies**

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

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

Policy SP1	Seeks to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern and form of development.
Policy SS2	Identifies the extent of the Metropolitan Green Belt, and requires a general presumption against inappropriate development.
Policy EN1	Development in the countryside should seek to maintain or enhance it.

**Pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications.  
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington – DA/07/1120**

---

- Policy QL1 Seeks all development 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.
- 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.

**(ii) The adopted Dartford Borough Local Plan 1995:**

- Policy S4 Presumption against inappropriate development in the Metropolitan Green Belt, protection of the countryside and enhancement of its amenity and recreation value.
- Policy GB2 Presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- Policy T23 Seeks the provision of off-street parking and appropriate rear access.
- Policy C1 Requires development in the countryside to be considered against the following factors: the nature of the proposed use and its appropriateness to a rural location; impact on the rural landscape; contribution the development would make to rural employment.
- Policy C2 Seeks development in the countryside to be sensitively designed and sited, and any adverse impact minimised.
- Policy B1 Seeks development that is appropriate for its location, of a high standard of design, respects the amenity of adjoining properties, has appropriate parking provision, adequate access to the road network, and protects groundwater.
- Policy CF3 Seeks to support the provision of educational facilities and infrastructure, taking account of location, the amenity of nearby properties, design, anticipated traffic generation and adequacy of access, and car parking provision.

**Consultations**

13. **Dartford Borough Council** – raises no objection to the proposal

**Wilmington Parish Council** – raises no objection, and welcomes the provision of on site facilities for staff and visitors, which is addressing an obvious need.

**The Divisional Transportation Manager** – raises no highway objections to the proposal.

**Local Members**

**Pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications.  
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington – DA/07/1120**

---

14. The Local County Member for Wilmington Mrs A. Allen was notified of the application on 30 October 2007.

Views received from Mrs Allen read as follows:

*'I am pleased to support this application and welcome the proposals. I am pleased to note that the plans are sensitive to the rural setting and aspects of Parsons Lane and Wilmington, and will have no negative impact on their immediate neighbours and surroundings.'*

**Publicity**

15. The application was publicised through the posting of a site notice and the notification of 6 neighbouring properties.

**Representations**

16. 1 letter of representation objecting to the proposal has been received from a local resident. The main points raised in relation to this application can be summarised as follows:

- Raises concern that the Travel Plan received in support of the application was prepared in consultation with staff, pupils and parents only, and not neighbouring properties and other road users, and therefore does not portray an entirely accurate picture.
- Identifies the pupil waiting area as a positive aspect of the application, provided that it is used by pupils of the Girls Grammar School only, and not designated as a collection point for other schools in the area.
- Raises concern about the potential impact of the proposed pedestrian access and increased use of the vehicular access on the entrance to the residential property directly opposite on Parsons Lane.
- Considers that the private access road that serves the rear access to the school grounds along with a number of private dwellings is not suitable for the increased traffic proposed.
- Considers the proposed pedestrian access would create a bottleneck of traffic and pedestrians at a point where the vehicle access to residential property and the private access road meet join Parson's Lane. Is concerned that the new pedestrian access would generate a problem with parents attempting to deliver their children as close to the access point as possible, potentially generating increase highway safety and traffic congestion.
- Questions whether the new access point would be better positioned opposite the existing pedestrian crossing to encourage pupils to cross Parson's Lane more safely?
- Points out that delivery vehicles use the existing private access road and potentially struggle to obtain an adequate turning circle. Questions if there are adequate sight lines for the access road?
- Highlights existing highway issues experienced as a result of traffic associated with the school, including inconsiderate parking and parents waiting at peak times. Identifies that vehicles park on the area of grass adjacent to Parsons Lane and often have to reverse back out onto Parsons Lane causing a conflict with other road users.
- Considers that the proposed changes are likely to make the Lane more congested and hazardous, and encourages the school to consider redesigning the access

**Pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications.  
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington – DA/07/1120**

---

arrangements to the site to a safer or more considerate form. Suggests that if the access to the school was to be redesigned arrangements to allow buses to pull off Parsons Lane separating them and the pupils from the public highway could be provided.

**Discussion**

17. 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.

**Siting**

18. The application site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by maintaining the openness of the countryside. Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policy SS2, and Dartford Local Plan Policy GB2 set out a general presumption against inappropriate development within the designated Green Belt area. Planning Policy Guidance 2 sets out that the question of whether a development of this nature is inappropriate is down to the extent of the work and whether the development would conflict with the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land in it. Given the scale and nature of the development proposed by this application, the work is not considered to be inappropriate in terms of the Green Belt Policies. Moreover, the proposal would continue to preserve the openness of the area, and would not prejudice the implementation of the Development Plan Policies in place.
19. In my opinion the development work proposed would not have a significant impact on the rural character or appearance of the local environment. The development would mainly be two dimensional in character extending existing hard surfacing within the school grounds. This work is being proposed to ease congestion around the site, by improving parking facilities and aiding pedestrian access and flow around the grounds and on the public highway at peak times.
20. The position of the car park extension to the north-west of the school grounds would move the existing parking arrangements in this locality closer to the site boundary immediately adjacent to residential property. However, the application proposes to retain the existing boundary screening to the west of the car park, along with an existing brick outbuilding and garage that are positioned immediately on the boundary, and that would form a barrier between the majority of the spaces proposed and residential property. Given the type of use that the car parking area would accommodate, primarily for the benefit of teaching staff at the school, movements in association with the car park are tidal and limited in number. I therefore do not consider that the proposed car park extension would have a significant impact on the amenities of the adjacent residential property.
21. Therefore, subject to consideration of highway matters below, and taking account of the views received from Dartford Borough Council, I consider that the siting of the

**Pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications.  
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington – DA/07/1120**

---

development work proposed is appropriate in the context of the Development Plan, and would have minimal impact on the rural landscape.

**Highway considerations**

22. The reason the proposed development has been brought forward is as a result of objectives identified in a Travel Plan recently prepared by the School. The changes proposed are part of an ongoing commitment by the School to addressing the travel implications of the site. Whilst the proposed changes are not expected to solve the traffic problems and congestion that exist around the site at peak times, the application is proposed in an attempt to ease some of these issues.
23. One letter of objection has been received from a neighbouring property concerning the development work proposed. The letter raises a number of points concerning issues surrounding highway safety and traffic generated by the school site. I draw Members attention to the points set out in paragraph (16) above.
24. Concern is raised by the neighbouring resident that the new pedestrian access proposed to the west of the school grounds, adjacent to the main vehicle access, would increase activity and congestion at a sensitive location on Parsons Lane. A privately owned access road that serves the School's rear access, along with adjoining residential property, joins Parsons Lane to the west of the proposed pedestrian access point, with access to a residential property opposite. The concern raised by the resident is that the provision of an access in this locality would create a bottleneck and potentially increase congestion due to vehicles dropping pupils off as close to the new arrangements as possible.
25. The Divisional Transportation Manager has commented on the position of new pedestrian access. He advises that the prime purpose of the route is to provide linkage between the two school sites, and that if the route was not provided in the position identified there would be a strong possibility that the students would use the vehicular access as a pedestrian route. That would, in his opinion, be the worse case scenario. He comments further that the existing congestion problems surrounding the school are not unlike those experienced around the County, and that the peak congestion is generally only short term.
26. I would point out that the traffic associated with the school that causes congestion on Parsons Lane at peak times already exists; the proposed development would not increase the movements to and from the school site. The provision of a pedestrian access point adjoining the main vehicular access would appear to have been brought forward for highway safety reasons, to separate pedestrians from the vehicle access road. At present the existing driveway doubles as both pedestrian and vehicle access point to the site. In my opinion the provision of the pedestrian access in the position shown is unlikely to substantially change the existing situation, albeit improving pedestrian safety. Visitors would still enter the site in the same general position off Parsons Lane. Further to this, the provision of a second pedestrian access point and pupil waiting area to the east would potentially serve to draw existing use away from this locality by providing an alternate option for visitors. The pedestrian waiting area would also provide facilities that would allow pupils to wait at the beginning and, more importantly, at the end of the school day off the public highway until such time as they are able to depart from the area. This arrangement would potentially reduce congestion on the pedestrian footways adjoining the highway and in turn improving highway safety.

**Pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications.  
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington – DA/07/1120**

---

Taking account of the comments received from the Transportation Manager, I would not raise a planning objection to the pedestrian access arrangements in the locations shown.

27. The letter received from a nearby resident also raises an objection to the increased use of the private access road that serves the rear vehicle entrance to the school site. The rear entrance allows access to an existing car park to the north-west of the school buildings and a delivery point for the School. I note these provisions already exist and the School has an established use of this access route. The proposed car park extension would increase the capacity of this rear car park to compensate for the reduction of spaces within the forecourt area in front of the The Grange, and to increase the overall capacity of the off-street car parking provision. The car park extension proposed would allow for an increase in marked parking spaces in this area from 18 to 30 spaces. The changes proposed would effectively result in 12 additional vehicles using the access road each day.
28. I note the local residents concerns over existing traffic problems and the operational problems potentially experienced by delivery vehicles entering the site. However, these uses are already established and I am unable to justify changes to these arrangements through the current application. It is purely the increase in vehicle use resulting from the changes in the car parking arrangements proposed that needs to be considered in the context of the current application. Given that the Divisional Transportation Manager has not raised objection to the application, and has commented further that he is satisfied that the access to the proposed extended car park is adequate for the purpose, I would not raise a planning objection to this aspect of the application. As indicated above, the movements associated with this car park would not be significant in number and would be tidal in nature, with primarily teaching staff using the facilities.
29. The letter received from the local resident also suggests that the School consider redesigning the main vehicular access to allow buses and coaches attending the site to be accommodated off the public highway. I note the suggestion, however, this would extend well beyond the scope of the proposed arrangements and I can only consider the acceptability of the proposals as set out with the application.
30. Further to the above, the Divisional Transportation Manager has commented on points raised by the nearby resident concerning the preparation of the Travel Plan and the existing issue of vehicle parking on and around Parsons Lane. At this stage, I would note that it is not the content of the Travel Plan that is being considered within this application. The document was provided by way of supporting information as background to the proposals. The Transportation Manager advises that a company or organisation that occupies a property regularly prepare Travel Plans. The plans should reflect the occupiers and their visitors' needs and how the impact of their travel arrangements can be reduced. He advises that he is not aware of a Travel Plan ever having involved the wider community, and suggests that consultation with neighbours of the schools should take a different forum. Concerning the issue of vehicles parking on and around the public highway, the Divisional Transportation Manager comments, that this issue is generally dealt with by the Borough Council, however given the transient nature of the problem, compliance and enforcement can be a problem. He advises that in this instance, given the parking demand in the area, the problems identified would be difficult to resolve without the introduction of waiting restrictions and regular enforcement. He suggests that the provision of additional on site parking within the school grounds should help to ease the on street-parking situation in the area.

**Pedestrian entrances, pupil waiting area and car park modifications.  
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington – DA/07/1120**

---

**Conclusion**

31. The proposed development would provide for improved pedestrian access and waiting arrangements, as well as increasing the overall provision of off-street vehicle parking at the Grammar School. The development is being brought forward following completion of the latest draft of the Travel Plan for the school and is proposed to ease some of the travel issues surrounding the site. The proposals, by virtue of their scale and nature, are not considered to be inappropriate development within the Green Belt. I consider that the proposed development respects the rural character and appearance of the area, and is likely to improve the existing arrangements on site to the benefit of the School and in turn nearby residents. Given the Divisional Transportation Manager's views on the proposal, I am satisfied that the development as proposed is appropriate in highway terms. I therefore consider that the application accords with the relevant policies within the Development Plan and that there are no material planning considerations that indicate otherwise. Subject to the imposition of conditions set out below, I would recommend that planning permission be granted.

**Recommendation**

32. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO the imposition of conditions, including the following:

- the standard time limit,
- the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details.

Case officer – James Bickle	01622 221068
-----------------------------	--------------

Background documents - See section heading
--