

SECTION D
DEVELOPMENT TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Background Documents: the deposited documents; views and representations received as referred to in the reports and included in the development proposals dossier for each case; and other documents as might be additionally indicated.

Item D1

Two storey teaching block, assembly hall and entrance foyer. Astor of Hever School, Oakwood Park, Maidstone – MA/07/1191

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 11 December 2007.

MA/07/1191 – Application by Governors of The Astor of Hever School and Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for a new 2 storey teaching block containing 6 general teaching rooms, classroom stores and office space, a new assembly hall and entrance foyer within a single storey extension, replacement car parking, and temporary relocation of mobile classrooms and eventual removed from site at completion. The Astor of Hever School, Oakwood Park, Maidstone.

Recommendation: Permission be granted, subject to conditions.

Local Members: Mr D. Daley and Mr J. Curwood

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. The application site is located within the grounds of The Astor of Hever School. The school is positioned within the Oakwood Park estate along with a number of other educational facilities and a Kent County Council office/conference facility. Oakwood Park is located approximately 1 km west of Maidstone Town Centre. The school grounds are located on the south-east boundary of the estate adjoining Oakwood Road. Residential property is located to the north, south and east, with Kent Institute of Art and Design and the Westborough Sports Centre to the north and west (please see attached location plan). The boundary of the nearest residential property to the site proposed for development is located approximately 25 metres to the south-east across Oakwood Road.
2. A number of mobile classrooms, part of the school car park, and general open amenity space within the school grounds currently occupy the application site. A number of trees are located within or adjoining the proposed site. The main school building is laid out to the south-west of the site and consists mainly of a flat roofed block built in the 1970s. The application site generally slopes from the north-west toward the south-east, and is located in an elevated position in relation to Oakwood Road, being approximately 2.8 m above the height at the school boundary.
3. There are no site-specific land designations within the Development Plan in association with the site.

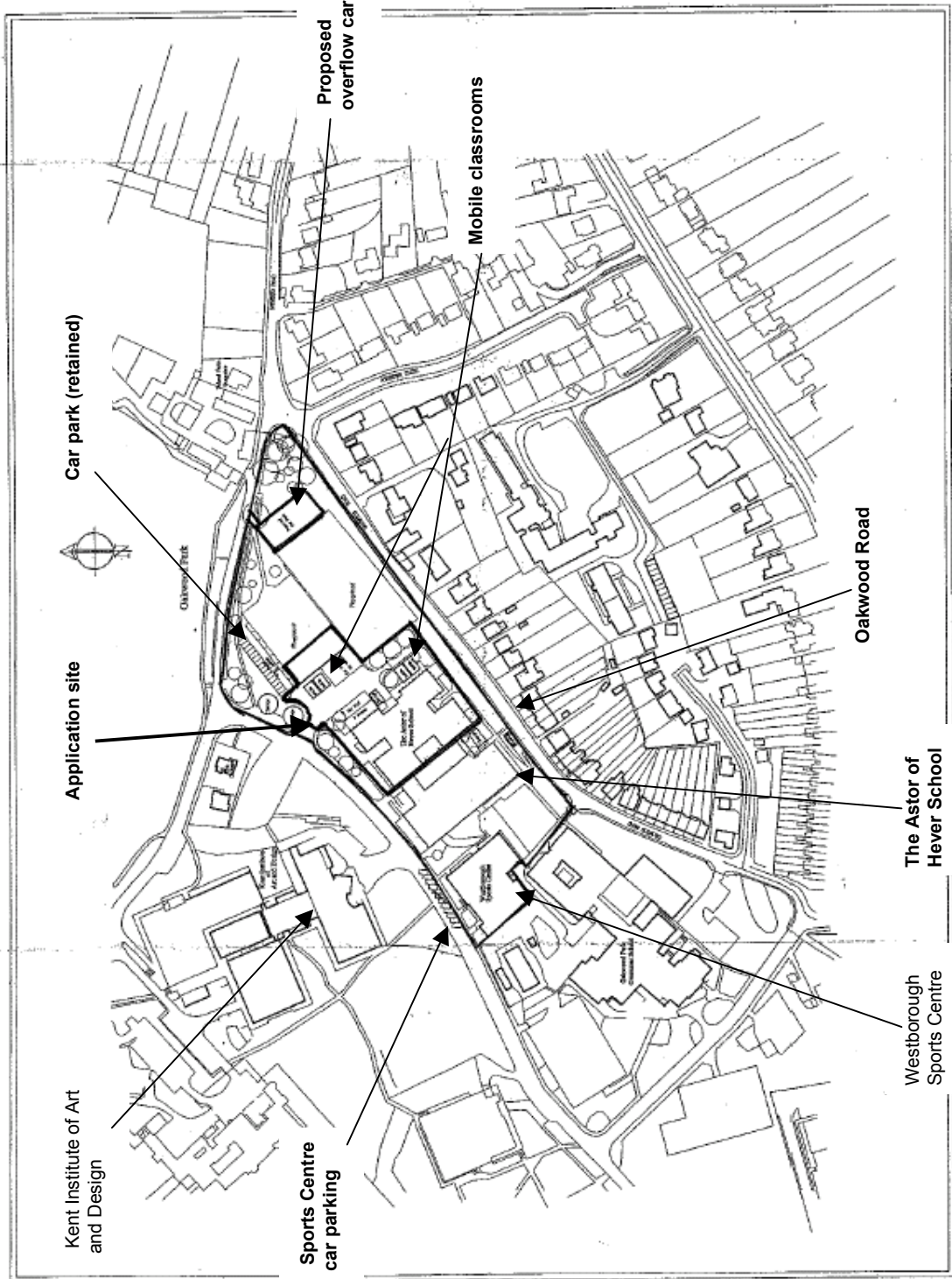
Teaching block, assembly hall and entrance foyer. Astor of Hever School, Oakwood Park, Maidstone – MA/07/1191

This plan shows the proposed development in accordance with the conditions of the planning permission granted on 11/01/11. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the planning permission and the site plan. The plan shows the proposed development in accordance with the conditions of the planning permission granted on 11/01/11. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the planning permission and the site plan.

Project Name: The Astor of Hever School, Oakwood Park, Maidstone, Kent
 Project Location: New Teaching Block & Assembly Hall
 Location Plan
 Date: 11/01/11
 Drawn by: DCL/JAC
 Checked by: APJ/WJ

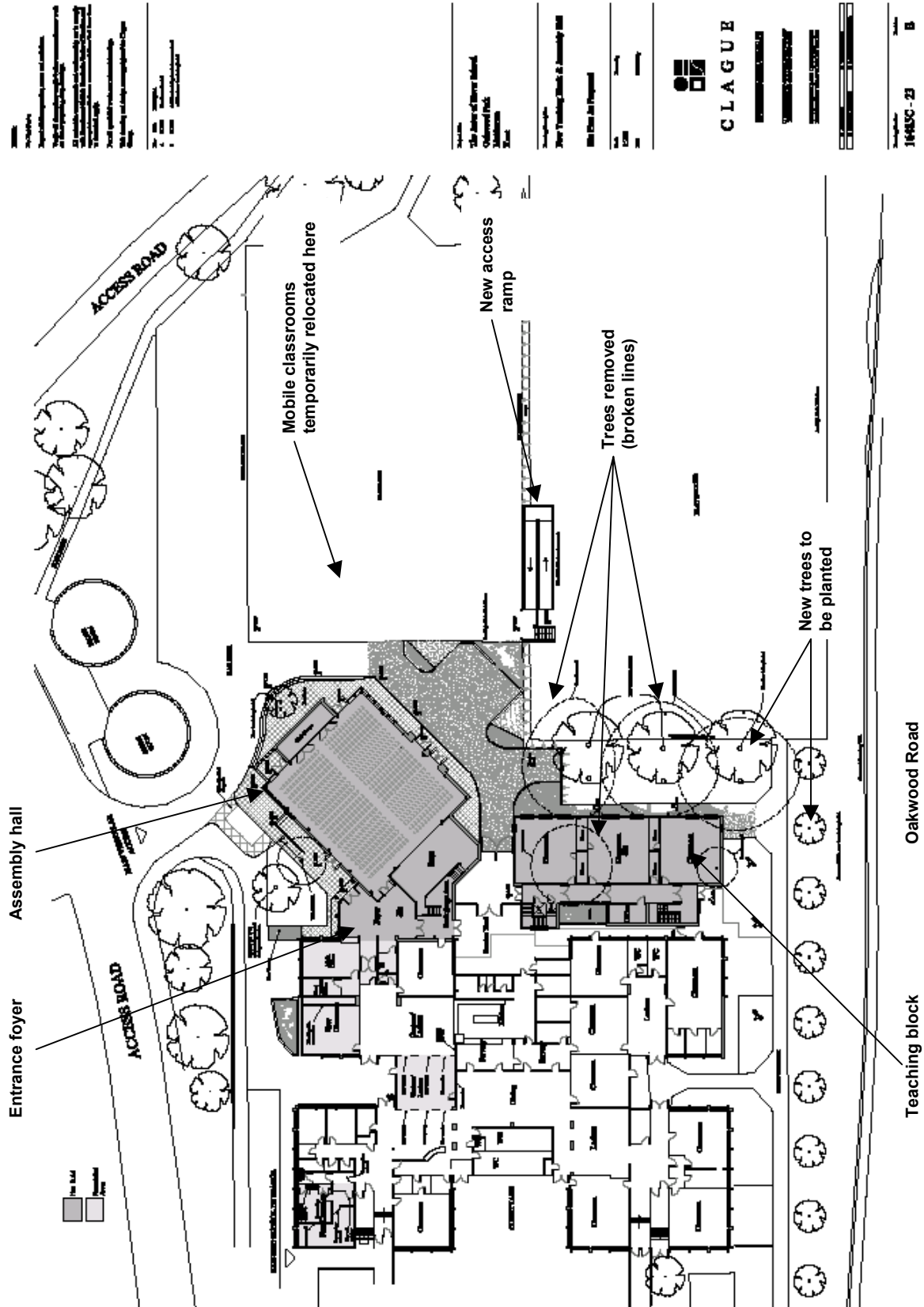

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Drawing No: 164855C-20
 Scale: A
 Date: 11/01/11



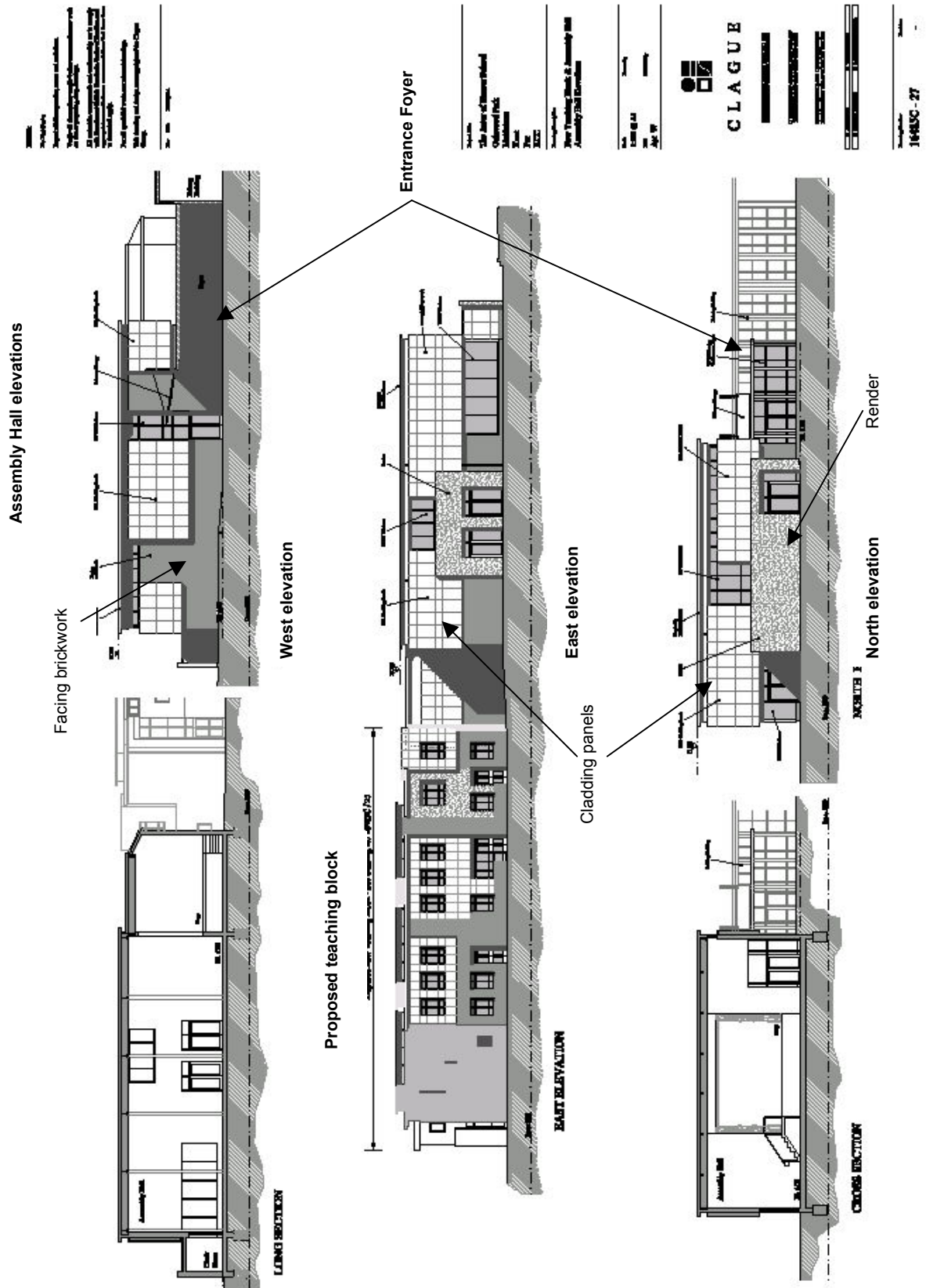
Item D1

Teaching block, assembly hall and entrance foyer. Astor of Hever School, Oakwood Park, Maidstone – MA/07/1191



Item D1

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Notes:
 Do Not Scale.
 Report all discrepancies, errors and omissions.
 Verify all dimensions on site before commencing any work on site or preparing shop drawings.
 All materials, components and workmanship are to comply with the relevant British Standards, Codes of Practice, and appropriate manufacturers' instructions. All dimensions are in millimetres unless stated otherwise.
 For all specialist work, see relevant drawings.
 This drawing and design are copyright of the Clague Group.

Project Site:
 The Astor of Hever School
 Oakwood Park
 Maidstone
 Kent

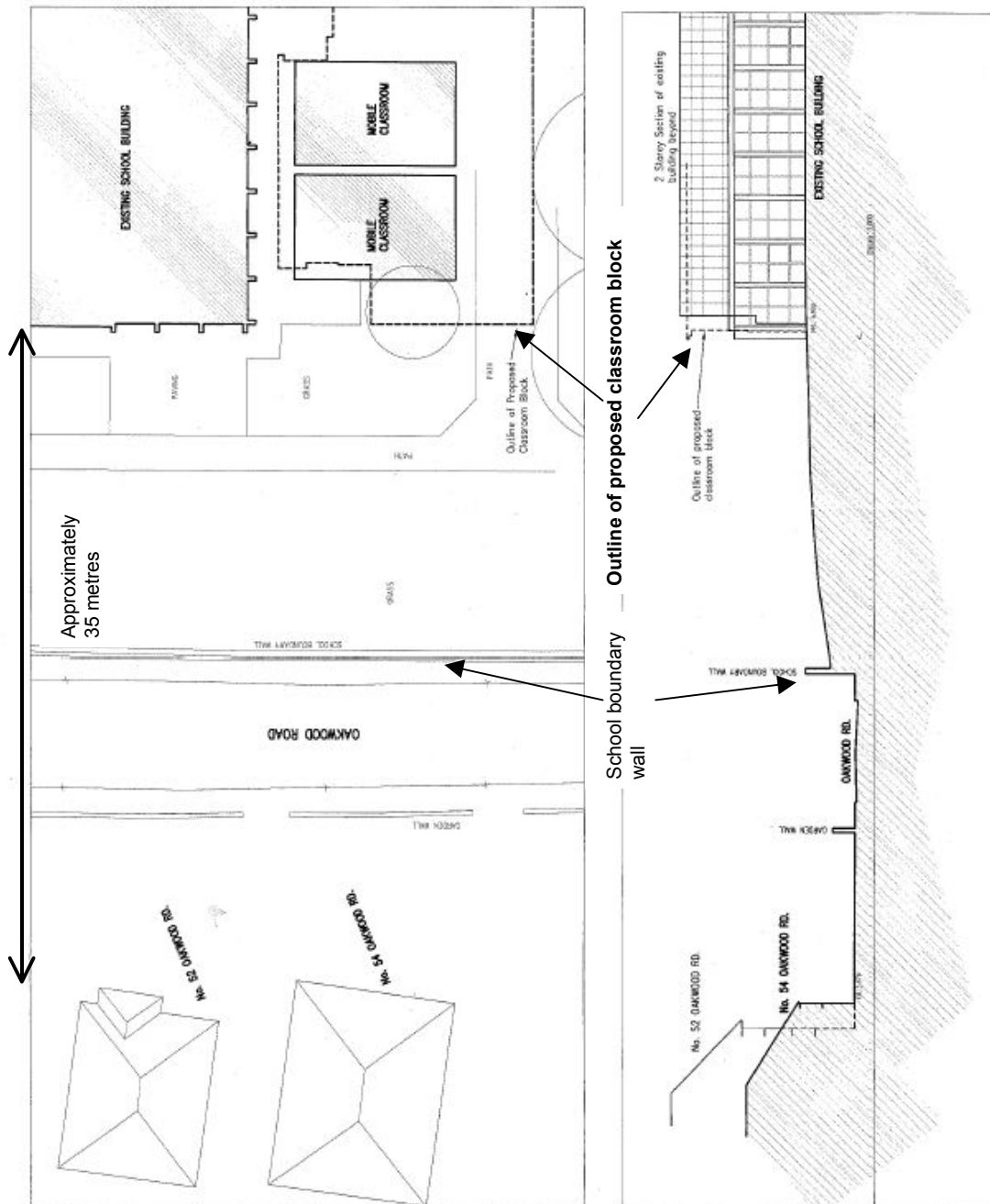
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Teaching block, assembly hall and entrance foyer. Astor of Hever School, Oakwood Park, Maidstone – MA/07/1191

Background

4. The Astor of Hever School is a 5-form entry secondary school that serves the western side of Maidstone. At present the School has 820 students registered on the school roll with 61 full time and 40 part time staff employed at the site. Alongside the main school building there are 5 mobile classrooms on site that allow space to deliver the curriculum. The school has no assembly hall and at present relies on the sports hall within the adjacent Westborough Sports Centre for assemblies, examinations, and as the main gymnasium for physical education. The Sports Centre is a joint use facility between the School and Maidstone Borough Council, and is available to the general public as a community facility after 1745 hours.
5. The recent planning history for the school site includes two applications for the provision of a number of mobile buildings (planning references MA/02/1220 and MA/03/1560). The County Planning Authority also permitted a new physical education teaching block in 2005 (reference MA/05/101). This development included 2 classrooms, office space, and ancillary accommodation.

Proposal

6. The application proposes the construction of an extension to create a new assembly hall, backstage facilities, and main school entrance foyer, along with a new detached two storey classroom block providing 6 new general teaching areas, associated storage and office space. The application also details the provision of replacement car parking spaces and hard standing, the removal of 6 trees, and the relocation and eventual removal of the existing mobile classroom buildings from the site. The proposed assembly hall extension and classroom block would create approximately 1036m² of new floor space, replacing the mobile accommodation on site and improving the facilities available to the school. The proposed development would not alter either the staff or pupil levels at the school as the scheme is proposed as a replacement and modernisation of the current facilities.
7. The proposed assembly hall and entrance foyer would extend the existing school building to the north-east. This arrangement would be built over part of the existing car park, access road, and the footprint of 2 existing mobile classrooms. The development would result in the loss of 28 formal car-parking spaces from site, and the removal of 1 tree. The assembly hall building and associated backstage area would measure approximately 25m by 17m by 6.5m high, and would create a double height single storey building. The hall would be positioned opposite the main access to the school site oriented at an angle to the existing school block, toward the north-east. The drawings attached show the building as a flat roofed brick built extension, finished with glazed sections, render, and cladding panels.
8. As a result of the positioning of the proposed school hall, the application includes adaptation of and revisions to the hard standing and access road on site. The extension compromises 28 car-parking spaces; a further 25 spaces would be retained within the existing car park. The application proposes 18-replacement spaces, 5 adjacent to the proposed development, and a further 13 within a new overflow car park to the north-east end of the lower playground. The overflow car park has been proposed in response to officers initial concerns over car parking provision set out in the original submission. Further to the replacement parking proposed, the application confirms that an additional 12 parking bays associated with the Westborough Sports Centre have recently been made available for dedicated use by the Astor of Hever School up to 1745 hours each

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- day. The supporting information originally received also referenced further car parking in association with a proposed new all-weather sports pitch, however, that application has not yet been received and is not therefore part of the current considerations.
9. The new glazed entrance foyer is shown as a single storey extension on the north-west side of the proposed assembly hall, between the hall and the existing building. The foyer would relocate the existing entrance arrangements to a more prominent location. The changes would include the partial re-modelling of the internal layout of the existing building.
 10. The proposed classroom block would be located directly adjacent to the eastern corner of the main school building behind the proposed assembly hall. The building would be positioned, in part, over hard standing and the footprint of 2 mobile buildings, as well as a landscaped amenity space between the existing buildings and the school playground. The proposed classroom block would measure approximately 26m by 13.5m by 6.5m high. The building is shown over two storeys and would accommodate 6 classrooms, office space and storage facilities. The proposal would include a flat roof and facing brickwork, with panelling, render, and UPVC windows. This element of the development would require the removal of two trees within the footprint of the building.
 11. Following the completion of a tree survey in support of the application, a tree report identified that a further 3 trees directly adjacent to the proposed classroom building, that were initially intended to be retained as part of the development, would be compromised by the building. The report recommended that due to the general health of the trees in question and the close proximity of the development, the building, and hard landscaping, proposed would significantly compromise the Root Protection Area. In view of this recommendation, an amendment to the application detailing the removal of the additional 3 trees was submitted. This amendment included a landscape scheme, setting out replacement tree planting of advanced nursery stock (16 – 18cm girth) together with an avenue of trees planted along the boundary with Oakwood Road, proposed as mitigation.
 12. The proposed development would replace 5 existing mobile buildings on site with permanent accommodation. Four of these buildings would need to be relocated to the western end of the northern playground for the construction of the development. On first occupation of the proposed facilities the mobile buildings would be removed from the site.
 13. Further to the above, the proposal sets out a new pedestrian access ramp between the existing school playgrounds on site.
 14. The applicant, in support of the application, supplied a further statement on the removal of trees as part of the development. The tree survey report and supporting statement note that the 6 trees proposed for removal to facilitate the development are middle aged: 2 red oaks, 3 maples, and 1 whitebeam. Two of the trees are identified as having potential weaknesses and are in poor physiological condition. The report identifies that these trees should be removed for sound arboricultural reasons prior to any development. The further 4 trees proposed for removal are classified individually under the British Standard (BS5837) grades as having a moderate to low quality and amenity value. Two would be lost under the footprint of the proposed buildings; the remaining 2 would be located directly adjacent to the proposed classroom block. The information supplied identifies that the close proximity of the building would require a reduction in the crown of both trees in order to allow the physical structure of the building and the enabling construction works. The foundations of the building, scaffolding work and

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associated hard standing would result in encroachment of over 45% on the Root Protection Areas for both trees which would be well beyond the recommended levels identified in the British Standard.

15. The applicant's agent has confirmed that the location of the proposed assembly hall and entrance foyer has been proposed for operational and access reasons. Confirming that the location is the only area large enough to accommodate the facilities and allow direct connection to the existing building. The options for the classroom block are further limited by the above, the only realistic options being either on part of the playground area or in the position proposed. Not wishing to unduly compromise the playground space available on site, or detach the teaching accommodation from the rest of the school, the School determined the optimum location as that proposed within the application.

Development Plan Policies

16. 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 SS6 | Seeks to improve the built and natural environment, functioning and appearance of the suburbs of the major urban areas, including the provision of services and facilities that serve local needs. |
| Policy EN8 | Seeks to protect, conserve and enhance wildlife habitats and species, particularly where they are protected under wildlife legislation. |
| Policy EN9 | Seeks to maintain tree cover and provision of new habitat as part of development proposals. |
| 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 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. |

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(ii) **The adopted Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000 (saved policies):**

- Policy ENV6 Seeks landscape schemes in appropriate cases incorporating retention of existing trees which contribute to the landscape character and providing appropriate new planting of native species.
- Policy T13 Parking standards will be adopted for new development, generally to ensure minimum provision.

Consultations

17. **Maidstone Borough Council** – raises no objection, subject to conditions covering the submission of external materials, details of the proposed slab levels, tree protection measures, a scheme of landscaping, including ongoing maintenance and protection.

The Borough Council was re-consulted on amendments to the application including proposals to remove a further 3 trees as part of the proposals and a landscape scheme. Any further views received prior to Committee Meeting shall be reported verbally.

18. **The Divisional Transportation Manager** – raises no objection to the proposals in respect of highway matters, subject a condition covering the provision of vehicle parking spaces shown on the submitted drawings before the use of the proposed facilities is commenced.

19. **The County Council's Landscape Advisers** – initially raised concerns and requested further survey work and a landscape scheme be submitted. Following receipt of additional supporting information and a landscape scheme, the final comments received raise no objection to the amended proposal and read as follows: *'the amended proposal which includes replacement planting for the trees to be lost due to development, and an avenue of trees along the footway by Oakwood Road, would have a positive impact on the existing landscape and visual amenity of the site and would satisfactorily mitigate the potential adverse landscape and visual effects of the development.'*

20. **The County Council's Archaeological Officer** – raises no objection, subject to a condition requiring an archaeological watching brief ensuring excavation work be observed and items of interest recorded.

The Officer comments *'the site lies on high ground overlooking the Medway Valley and sites nearby indicate it was favoured in Prehistory and the Roman period. Although there are no remains recorded on the site itself, there is potential for hitherto unknown features to be revealed during development.'*

Local Members

21. The Local County Members for Maidstone Central Mr. D. Daley and Mr J. Curwood were notified of the application on 8 June 2007.

Written comments have been received Mr Daley, which read as follows, *'no objection to this proposal. I have reservations about a possible problem with parking if the "all-weather" sports pitch comes forward in the future.'*

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Publicity

22. The application was publicised through a newspaper advert, the posting of 1 site notice and the notification of 30 neighbouring properties. The neighbouring properties were subsequently re-consulted on 2 further occasions concerning amendments to the scheme including the proposed overflow car park, and the removal of 3 additional trees adjacent to the proposed classroom block.

Representations

23. Initially, 2 letters of representation objecting to the proposal as originally submitted were received from local residents. The main points raised in relation to this application can be summarised as follows:

Siting, Design and Appearance

- Objects to the application as over-development of the Park and erosion of its character.
- Objections to the height of the classroom block, positioned on the elevated school grounds in relation to properties on Oakwood Road, including the bungalow opposite the site. Concerns that the building would tower above adjoining property by two storeys.
- Concerns that the south-east elevation proposes large windows to a corridor that would allow overlooking of adjoining property.
- Concerns that the existing double storey classroom block visible from Oakwood Road is in poor repair requiring maintenance, considers funding would be better spent upgrading the existing building.
- Asks why, if the School and Colleges are so short of space that they cannot provide proper facilities without damaging local amenity, did KCC sell off the Astor School Farm as ‘surplus’.

Highway and Parking

- Objects to the application on the grounds of loss of car parking spaces within Oakwood Park whilst expanding the school’s facilities.
- Advises Members of the severe parking problems caused to residents in Queen Road and Shaftesbury Drive caused by students who have been ousted from the Park seeking the nearest free unrestricted parking spaces, irrespective of the danger to other road users.
- Feels that no further development should take place in Oakwood Park until there is a co-ordinated strategy to deal with car parking issues, on which local residents and users have been properly consulted.
- Expresses alarm over references within the application documents to the future development of an all-weather sports pitch with an associated 100 car parking spaces, in justification for the loss of parking spaces involved in the current application.

Landscaping

- Is relieved that the 3 mature trees adjoining the application would be protected and retained, expresses dismay that 3 trees would be felled.

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- Considers that any replacement trees should be from large planting stock and that further trees and shrub planting should be included within the scheme to screen the existing and proposed buildings from Oakwood Road, similar to that achieved by other schools at Oakwood Park.

Proposed Use

- Has no objection to the use of the assembly hall included in the application for use as a school hall, however, objects to it being used by the general public, with late night noise from cars and revellers.

Following the re-consultation with neighbouring residents concerning the removal of trees on site and the proposed landscape scheme, 1 letter has been received. The main points raised can be summarised as follows:

- Asks why the row of 3 trees directly adjacent to the application site that are proposed to be removed could not be retained and cut back to facilitate the development proposed.
- Asks how mature the proposed replacement trees would be. Questions whether younger trees would survive the rigors of school life.
- Notes that the landscape work required under the planning permission for one of the mobile buildings was never completed. Questions whether the landscaping in this instance would be provided.
- Comments that one of the species of tree proposed in the landscape scheme, the Field Maple, are tolerant but unspectacular. Suggests that Purple Norway Maple would be more interesting.

Discussion

24. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (16) 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.
25. This application seeks permission for the construction of an extension to the existing school building to form a new assembly hall and entrance foyer, along with a detached 2-storey teaching block to replace existing mobile buildings. The application includes amendments to existing hard-standing on site, the provision of replacement car parking spaces, and the removal of 6 trees. The proposal raises a number of issues related to siting, visual impact, local amenity considerations, transport and vehicle parking, landscaping, and ecology. As set out above these points need to be considered in the context of the Development Plan, along with any other material considerations raised.
26. The building work proposed is being brought forward to improve and enhance the existing facilities provided at the school. The development would replace existing classroom accommodation presently provided in mobile buildings, along with improving the main entrance to the school, and providing the school with a dedicated assembly hall. The development as proposed would not result in a change in the number of students or staff attending the site.

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Siting, Design and Appearance

27. The Astor of Hever School buildings are located on a confined plot of land on the south east boundary of the Oakwood Park estate, parallel with Oakwood Road. The application site shows the proposed building work located at north-east end of the main school block. The school site is situated on ground that slopes downwards toward Oakwood Road, as such the application site is in an elevated position in relation to property on Oakwood Road. The application proposes flat roofed buildings that would have an overall height of about 6.5m. The height of the classroom block proposed coupled with the ground level has caused concern for local residents, particularly the potential impact of the building on the amenities of the area in relation to issues of overlooking and the potential overbearing nature of the development. Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policy QL1 requires new development to be well designed, of high quality, to respond positively to the scale, layout and character of their local surroundings, including the amenity of local residents.
28. I note that it is largely the siting of the proposed classroom block, closest to Oakwood Road that is causing the most concern. This building as proposed would be located approximately 18m from the existing school boundary wall that fronts Oakwood Road, 26m from the boundary wall of the closest residential property, and 35m from the façade of the bungalow opposite the site. The ground level of the south-east elevation of the classroom block would sit 2.8m above the height of the land at the boundary, therefore increasing the potential perceived height of any building constructed in this locality. The applicant has provided a cross-section drawing through this area of the site and the property on Oakwood Road to demonstrate the proposed development in the context of the surrounding building; please see a copy of this drawing included on page (D1.6).
29. The applicant's agent has confirmed that the options available for the development within the main school grounds are limited by the space necessary to accommodate the buildings proposed. For operational and access reasons, the assembly hall and new entrance would need to be attached to the main school building and be located close to the main vehicular and pedestrian access points to the site. Similarly, I understand that the classroom block would need to be positioned close to the existing accommodation for operational reasons, and potentially to enable a future permanent link to the main building, should the funding become available. Taking account of the size of the development proposed, and the existing buildings on and around the school grounds, there would appear to be a limited number of options available to locate the development as proposed. The alternatives would involve building on the existing playground space, which would not necessarily overcome the concerns over the height of the building in relation to property on Oakwood Road, and would compromise the recreation space available to the school.
30. The proposed classroom block would be located north of property on Oakwood Road, and therefore would have no impact on the levels of sunlight reaching residential properties, irrespective of the distance involved. The building as proposed would be positioned in close proximity to the existing school building and as such would, in my opinion, limit the impact of the development on the openness of the site. The scale of the buildings proposed are similar to existing development at the school, and would not exceed the height of a 2-storey element of the existing school building that faces Oakwood Road. The classroom block would be oriented on a north-west south-east axis; this would limit the profile of the building visible from Oakwood Road, with the assembly hall building largely screened behind.

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31. The application purposefully incorporates flat roofs to the development to link the buildings in with the design, scale and mass of the existing school block, and to limit the overall height. The issue that should be noted, as set out above, is the difference in the height of the ground between the application site and Oakwood Road. The south end of the classroom block would adopt a line of development on school grounds, parallel to Oakwood Road, established by the existing school building. Therefore, the development, at its closest point, would not move the buildings at the school any closer to residential property than the established line of development.
32. In my opinion, given the distances involved between residential property and the closest element of the development proposed I do not consider the proposals would be incompatible with the existing pattern of development. I note that the house opposite the site is a bungalow and that the distance between this property and the proposed teaching block would be approximately 35m. Oakwood Road passes through the space that would be between the two buildings, and at this point in the road boundary walls flank both sides of the carriageway. Given that the development even accounting for the differences in ground level would be similar in height to neighbouring 2-storey residential properties, I do not consider that the scale and massing of the proposed teaching block would be unacceptable.
33. A neighbouring resident has raised concern over the potential for overlooking to occur from windows shown to the south elevation of the teaching block. I note that the applicant has attempted to minimise the number of windows to this elevation, and that the second floor windows shown are to a landing and hallway space within the building. The standard advice on distances between windows of habitable rooms in order to prevent loss of privacy is 21m. Given that the distance between the development and the front elevation of the closest residential building would be over 35m. I do not consider that the proposed development would result in any significant loss of privacy for the neighbouring properties.
34. The application details the proposed buildings as being finished using facing brickwork to complement the adjacent structures. The proposals would also incorporate the use of high-pressure laminate panelling, rendered sections and UPVC windows within the design. The existing school buildings on site were constructed in the 1970s and are not of any particular architectural merit. I note that the application draws from the existing building in terms of general form, scale and massing with materials proposed to complement rather than match the main building. In my opinion the adopted approach would have a positive impact on the existing arrangements, and would replace existing temporary buildings on site that are not considered appropriate for permanent retention. The configuration and variety of materials proposed, coupled with the varied roof lines and the use of glazing would help break up the mass of the buildings and enhance the appearance of the site.
35. Four of the mobile classrooms to be removed from the site would be relocated to the western end of the northern playground for the duration of the build. This location would keep the buildings to the centre of the site away from residential property, and their eventual removal would potentially improve the built environment in visual terms. A nearby resident has raised a question over the general maintenance of the main school building on site, I would note that this issue stretches beyond the context of the current application and is largely a site management issue.
36. Concern has been raised by a nearby resident about the cumulative impact of development within Oakwood Park on the character of the area and openness of the landscape. I accept that with a number of different organisations occupying space within

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the Park care needs to be taken not to unnecessarily encroach on the open space. However, in the context of the current application, in my opinion, the siting proposed would minimise the impact of the development on the openness of the Park. That would keep the footprint of the proposed building directly adjacent to the existing built compound at the school and result in the removal of existing temporary buildings from the site.

37. Therefore, subject to consideration of highway matters, landscaping and use below and the imposition of conditions covering final details of the external materials, and the proposed slab levels, I would consider that the design of the building accords with the appropriate Structure Plan Policies, including Policy QL1.

Highway and Parking

38. Oakwood Park accommodates a number of large educational establishments along with KCC office and conference facilities, and as such the Park generates a significant level of movement, and traffic, to and from the site on a daily basis. That has resulted in long standing car-parking problems within the Park that has migrated into the residential roads surrounding the area. Whilst the application as proposed would not result in an increase in people attending the Astor of Hever School, the proposed development would involve the loss of a number of existing car parking spaces under the footprint of the proposed assembly hall. Given the established car parking problems experienced in association with Oakwood Park, which is contributed to by students and staff attending the Astor of Hever School and other establishments, the potential loss of car parking from the site has understandably caused concern for local residents.
39. I note that the proposals as originally submitted potential did not mitigate fully for the number of spaces that would be compromised by the proposals - approximately 28 spaces. The School currently employs 61 full time staff and 40 part time staff and has an existing maximum car parking provision of 53 off-street spaces. Following further negotiation concerning the replacement car parking proposed, the applicant amended the proposals to include an additional overflow car park at the eastern end of the lower playground. The application now proposes to retain 25 existing spaces on-site unchanged, provide 5 replacement spaces adjacent to the assembly hall, and 13 spaces within the overflow car park. The applicant has also confirmed that the School has recently taken possession of the adjacent Westborough Sports Centre, allowing exclusive use of the facilities during the school day. This use includes the 12 dedicated car-parking spaces to the front of the building until 1745h, at which point the facilities within the Sport Centre are available to the general public. These 12 spaces plus the proposed arrangements set out above would allow the School access to a total of 55 spaces (a net increase of 2 spaces), should the proposed development be approved. The Divisional Transportation Manager has confirmed that he is satisfied with the revised arrangements, and subject to the replacement spaces being made available prior to first occupation of the development, would not raise an objection to the application on highway grounds.
40. The application, as original submitted, included reference to a forthcoming proposal for a new all-weather sports pitch and car park being promoted by the School. The current application documents confirmed that the associated car parking, should it be granted planning approval, would be available to the School during the day. However, that application has yet to be received and any measures proposed cannot be considered in the context of this current application. As set out above, other measures have been

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proposed and considered in mitigation for the car parking lost as part of the proposed development.

41. I note the concerns expressed by local residents about the overall car parking issues experienced around Oakwood Park in general, and the impact caused by recent changes to the car parking restrictions within the Park. These changes have potentially increased the use of surrounding streets for parking by visitors and students attending the facilities within the Park. However, it would be unreasonable to expect the Astor of Hever School to solve these problems individually, or specifically, given the scale of the proposals, as part of this application. I note the suggestion that no further development should be considered until a joined up approach to traffic and car parking issues is considered across the Oakwood Park campus. Nevertheless, in the context of this application, I would advise that the facilities are being brought forward to replace existing temporary accommodation and to meet the educational needs of the existing school roll, and not as a lead up to an expansion of the school. The application proposes adequate replacement car parking spaces for those that would be lost as part of the scheme. I would also note the central location and good accessibility to the school site, along with the access to a wide range of public transport options. Given the above and the Divisional Transportation Manager's comments, I consider that the application would accord with Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policies TP3 and TP19 and Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan Policy T13, and would not raise an objection to this application on highway grounds.

Landscaping

42. The application, as amended, proposes the removal of 6 semi-mature trees from the school grounds as detailed above. The original application proposed to remove only 3 of these trees, proposing to retain and protect the other 3 trees, that form a group to the east of the existing buildings on site. However, following concerns expressed by the County Council's Landscape Adviser, a tree survey was carried out in support of the application. This report concluded that given the footprint and proximity of the proposed classroom building to the 3 trees to be retained, these trees would be significantly compromised by the building, associated hard landscaping, and construction operations necessary to complete the proposals. The development as proposed would occupy a considerable proportion of the individual Root Protection Areas for the trees in question. The report further identifies that 1 of the 3 trees would need to be removed for sound arboricultural reasons, recommending that individually none of the trees identified are of significant arboricultural or aesthetic merit, and would not pose a significant constraint to the development, subject to mitigation through comprehensive replacement planting. On that basis, the application was amended to include the removal of the additional 3 trees, and a landscape scheme proposed in mitigation.
43. I note that both Officers and the County Council's Landscape Adviser had initial concerns over the impact of the amended proposals on the landscape of the area. Whilst individually the trees are not considered to be of significant value, as a group they are relatively prominent in the landscape, linking the Astor of Hever School grounds into the wider Oakwood Park campus, screening and softening the existing built development on site. However, the applicant has demonstrated that there are limited options and space available within the school grounds to achieve the development proposed. The survey work carried out in relation to the trees identifies that one of the trees has a defect and would need to be removed irrespective of the development, which in turn would influence the health and appearance of the group as a whole. The removal of the trees in question would be unfortunate but I consider that it would be better to

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accept their loss now and consider appropriate mitigation, rather than try to protect the trees and potentially lose them at a later date.

44. In mitigation for the loss of trees from the site, the applicant has provided details of a landscape scheme. This scheme would include the provision of a line of 3 replacement trees of large nursery stock adjacent to the proposed classroom block, along with a row of new trees planted parallel with Oakwood Road, between the existing, and proposed, school buildings and residential property opposite. Over time this replacement planting would further reduce any adverse visual impact the existing school building and the proposed development may have on nearby property, and within the wider landscape. I note the comments received following the re-consultation with neighbouring residents concerning the revised landscape arrangements proposed. I would recommend that should the application be granted planning permission the completion of the proposed landscape scheme within the first planting season following occupation of the development should be a condition of any decision. I note the comments made by a local resident about the value of one of the species of trees proposed, however, I understand that Field Maple has been selected because of their hardy nature. Given the Landscape Adviser's positive comments about the proposed landscape scheme, I would not raise an objection to the application on landscape grounds, subject to conditions covering, amongst other matters, the completion of the landscape scheme as proposed, replacement planting should there be any failures in the scheme, and tree protection measures during construction for the remaining trees on site.

Proposed Use

45. Local concern has also been raised over potential late night noise from cars and revellers. The application advises that for the most part the redevelopment would not change the existing pattern of use of the school site, but acknowledges that through the development of the proposed facilities the assembly hall may attract additional out-of-hours use for school purposes, or the local community. I would comment that this practice is in line with Government policies on Extended Schools, making the best use of the facilities available for the benefit of the wider community.
46. Furthermore, the assembly hall would be over 50m from the nearest residential property, with the main entrance located on the north side of the building. The hall would be largely screened from Oakwood Road by the existing building and proposed classroom block. Given the distance involved to residential property, I do not consider that potential intermittent use of this facility for the benefit of the wider community would have any significant detrimental impact on residential amenity through noise generated by associated activity.

Ecology

47. The original application included an ecological scoping survey carried out in January 2006 that identified a bat roost within the main school building, adjacent to the proposed classroom block. At that time of year bats are in hibernation and an emergence survey could not be carried out to identify whether the roost was in use. Further survey work was recommended between May and August inclusive.
48. A further bat survey report has recently been received, which confirms that no evidence of bats was found on site during an emergence survey carried out in June 2007. The report recommends that whilst the area of the building where the previously identified roost is located would be unaffected by the proposed works, building work would take

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place in close proximity that could constitute a disturbance. The report identifies that ground work could commence early next year, however, before erection of the steel frame a repeat survey should be undertaken to determine if any bats are present immediately prior to works commencing. In order to achieve this survey when bats emerge from hibernation, the report recommends deferring commencement of works to the steel frame until March 2008. If bats were confirmed to be present, further discussions would need to take place with Natural England. I am in the process of seeking further advice on these recommendations and expect to be able to deal with the recommendations by way of appropriate conditions.

Conclusion

49. The proposed development would provide permanent replacement accommodation for 5 mobile classrooms currently used by the school, and would provide for enhanced facilities that would improve educational function of the school. It would not result in an increase of existing staff or pupil numbers. I consider that the development respects the character and appearance of the surrounding area and is appropriate in terms of its siting, scale and design. Whilst any development would inevitably have some effect on surrounding land uses, I am satisfied that the development would be acceptable in the context of existing development and would not lead to an unacceptable loss of amenity in terms of noise, overlooking, overshadowing, or sense of enclosure. The loss of trees from the site would be unfortunate, however, I note that some of the trees would need to be removed regardless of the decision made on this application. I am satisfied that the replacement landscaping proposed would compensate over time for this loss. I therefore consider that the application accords with the relevant policies of the Structure Plan and Local Plan referred to in paragraph (16), and that any impacts from the proposal could be reasonably mitigated by the provisions set out in the application and the imposition of conditions set out below, and would recommend accordingly.

Recommendation

50. 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,
- details of external materials,
- tree protection measures,
- completion of the landscape scheme proposed within the first planting season following first occupation of the development,
- ongoing maintenance and protection of the landscape scheme,
- car parking area be provided prior commencement of use,
- details of final slab levels,
- details of external lighting,
- condition(s), as appropriate, to ensure any bats on site are safeguarded,
- hours of working during construction to be restricted to 0800 and 1800 Monday to Fridays, and 0900 and 1300 on Saturdays, and
- removal of temporary mobile classrooms on first occupation of the buildings hereby permitted.

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Background documents - See section heading