

New teaching and residential accommodation, Valence School, Westerham – SE/07/1914

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 6 November 2007.

Application by Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for demolition of Garage Cottages and erection of new two storey teaching block. Extension to existing Knoll Block. Erection of four new single storey residential blocks, plus associated hard landscaping works, Valence School, Westerham Road, Westerham – SE/07/1914

Recommendation: Subject to any further views received by the Committee Meeting, the application be referred to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and subject to her decision, and satisfactory resolution of outstanding issues on contamination & ecology, permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Members: Mr R Parry

Classification: Unrestricted

Members' Site Visit

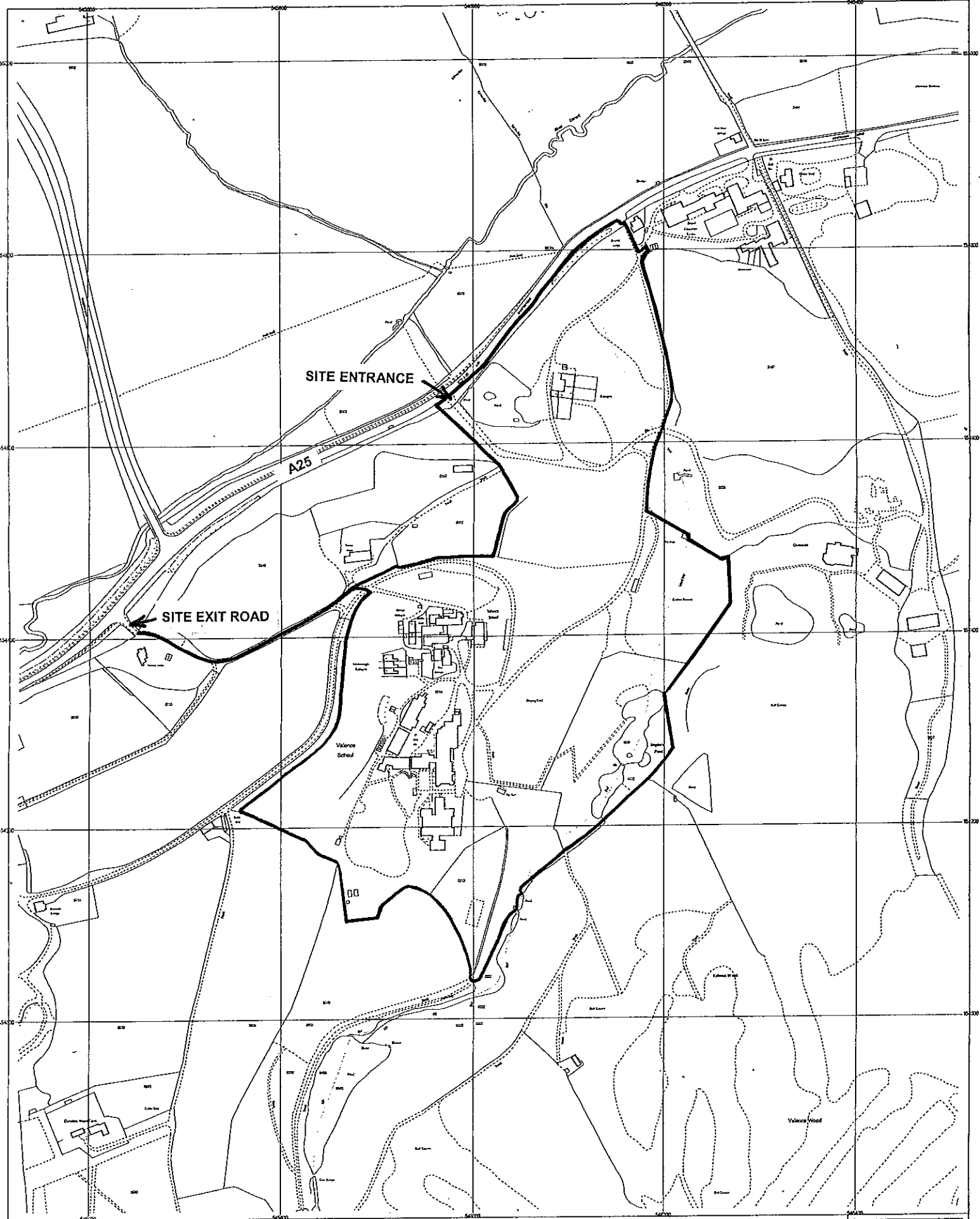
1. A group of Planning Application Committee Members visited the application site on the 4 September 2007 to acquaint themselves with the proposals and the issues they raise. The Committee Secretary's notes of the visit are attached as an appendix.

Site

2. Valence School site lies to the south of the A25, between Westerham and the village of Brasted. The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Greensand Ridge Special Landscape Area and an Historic Park and Garden. The site parkland setting includes gardens and areas of woodland. The school is located towards the top of a ridge, running from south west to north east. The ridge ends immediately to the north east of the school, so that the school buildings and garden terraces are surrounded on three sides by steep slopes. A former KCC social education centre (Mountfield/Horizons site) adjoins the site to the east, the Westerham Golf Course to the east and south east, woodland to the south and west, open fields to the south west and west with some scattered residential properties, and the A25 to the north. A site plan is attached.

Background and proposal

3. The Valence School is a day and residential all-age maintained special school for young people who have a wide range of physical disabilities, complex medical needs and associated communication and learning difficulties. There are currently 90 students on roll, 40 day and 50 boarders. The provision operates during term time, 38 weeks per year, including 16 weekends when the school is open. Young people attending Valence are mainly from the South East of England predominantly from Kent but including Medway, Sussex, Surrey, London Boroughs of Bexley, Croydon and Sutton.



VALENCE SCHOOL
WESTERHAM D4.2

RECEIVED
21 JUL
2007
SITE PLAN

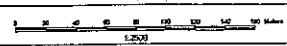
Kent
County
Council

PROPERTY GROUP
County Hall, Maidstone
Kent ME14 1XQ
Tel: 08458 247247



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Drawn By SP Date JULY 2007



Drawing No. TQ4654/9

Item D4

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4. The current accommodation comprises a Victorian mansion house with added hall, dining area and kitchen and 3 ground floor primary classrooms and a two storey residential block which is linked to the Sports Hall, swimming and hydrotherapy pool. The sports facilities have undergone total refurbishment in recent years to provide specialist facilities and the students access this using the first floor residential area as a corridor. Access to the first and second floors is provided by 2 lifts, one of which has been refurbished and the other was installed in 2005. There is an additional single wheelchair lift to enable students to access the 2nd floor residential accommodation from the main lifts that are on a different level.
5. There is a single storey building (Lawn House) originally purpose built in the 1960's as a residential and teaching unit for primary aged children. It currently provides residential accommodation for 30 students and group teaching rooms. *(Over the course of the last three annual inspections ongoing refurbishment and maintenance works have continued; however, the physical environment for boarders remains inadequate with Lawn House being totally inappropriate and unable to meet even the basic care needs of boarders. Commission for Social Care Inspection June 2006.)*
6. There are various separate outbuildings grouped together that provide teaching accommodation and are arranged as specialist areas for maths, English, history, geography, French, Science, Art/DT, ICT, PSHE, Food Technology and Music. These include a mobile classroom, converted stables and tack rooms and a workshop as well as a single storey 1970's built (Knoll) block.
7. There is also an unoccupied pair of cottages (Garage Cottages) built in 1921, which have been allowed to deteriorate to a state of disrepair, that were formally used as staff accommodation.
8. Approximately 190 staff are employed at Valence including health care professionals (nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech & language therapists). The staff live, mainly, within a 10 to 15 mile radius of the school.
9. The needs of the students have become more severe and complex progressively over the years and the impact of legislation – health and safety, moving and handling, National Care Standards, Ofsted – has influenced working practices. The School has endeavoured to make appropriate adaptations to inadequate accommodation in order to attempt to meet such demands put upon it within the confines of a limited budget.
10. The Education Authority has reaffirmed the need for the school under the recent countywide Special Education Needs strategy review. Following that review, this application proposes new buildings to meet the Schools requirements for upgraded accommodation, as follows:
 - A small extension to the existing Knoll Teaching Block, in the northern part of the site, in matching design and materials.
 - The demolition of Garage Cottages in the northern part of the site, removal of a hedgerow and a Yew tree, and the erection of a new two-storey teaching block, constructed using traditional materials.
 - Removal of trees and other vegetation and the erection of four single storey residential blocks, plus associated hard landscaping works in the south west corner of the site adjoining the top lawn. Two would be on an area that currently contains derelict greenhouses and garages and the other two on the woodland

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edge. It is proposed that they would be simple unpretentious buildings with timber cladding and walkways and low pitch roofs.

11. The application is accompanied by various reports in support of the application. These include a Design and Access Statement, reports addressing Green Belt Policy issues, landscape and visual effects, ecological surveys with related mitigation strategy and archaeology, and a tree survey.

Amendments to the proposal

12. Following discussions with the applicant, and in seeking to address objections that have been raised to the proposal, some amendments have been made to the application. These include: adjustment to the siting of the double residential block on the western edge of the top lawn together with realignment of the perimeter path; the use of cedar shingles for the roofs of the residential blocks (instead of artificial slates); and design changes to the two-storey teaching block. Outline landscape proposals have also been submitted. In addition a more detailed report that deals with Green Belt Policy and the applicant's case for Very Special Circumstances has recently been submitted.

Copies of drawings showing the layout of existing buildings, the location of the proposed buildings and elevations, as amended, are attached.

Planning Policy

13. In ODPM Circular (11/2005), the Government's commitment to the principles of the Green Belt and to maintaining tight planning controls over development on Green Belt land has been reaffirmed. It is expected that all planning applications for development in the Green Belt be subject to the most rigorous scrutiny, having regard to the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy as set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 2 [PPS2]. That is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The openness of Green Belts is considered to be their most important attribute and therefore there is a general presumption against inappropriate development, which is by definition harmful and should not be permitted, unless it can be justified by very special circumstances.
14. The Government's Planning Policy Statement 7 [PPS7]: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas sets out the policies applicable to rural areas. These include the need for strict control over development in the open countryside with the overall aim of protecting the countryside for its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife and the wealth of its natural resources, so it may be enjoyed by all. All development in the open countryside should be well designed and inclusive, in keeping and scale with its location, and sensitive to the character of the countryside and local distinctiveness. Nationally designated areas that include Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are confirmed as having the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.

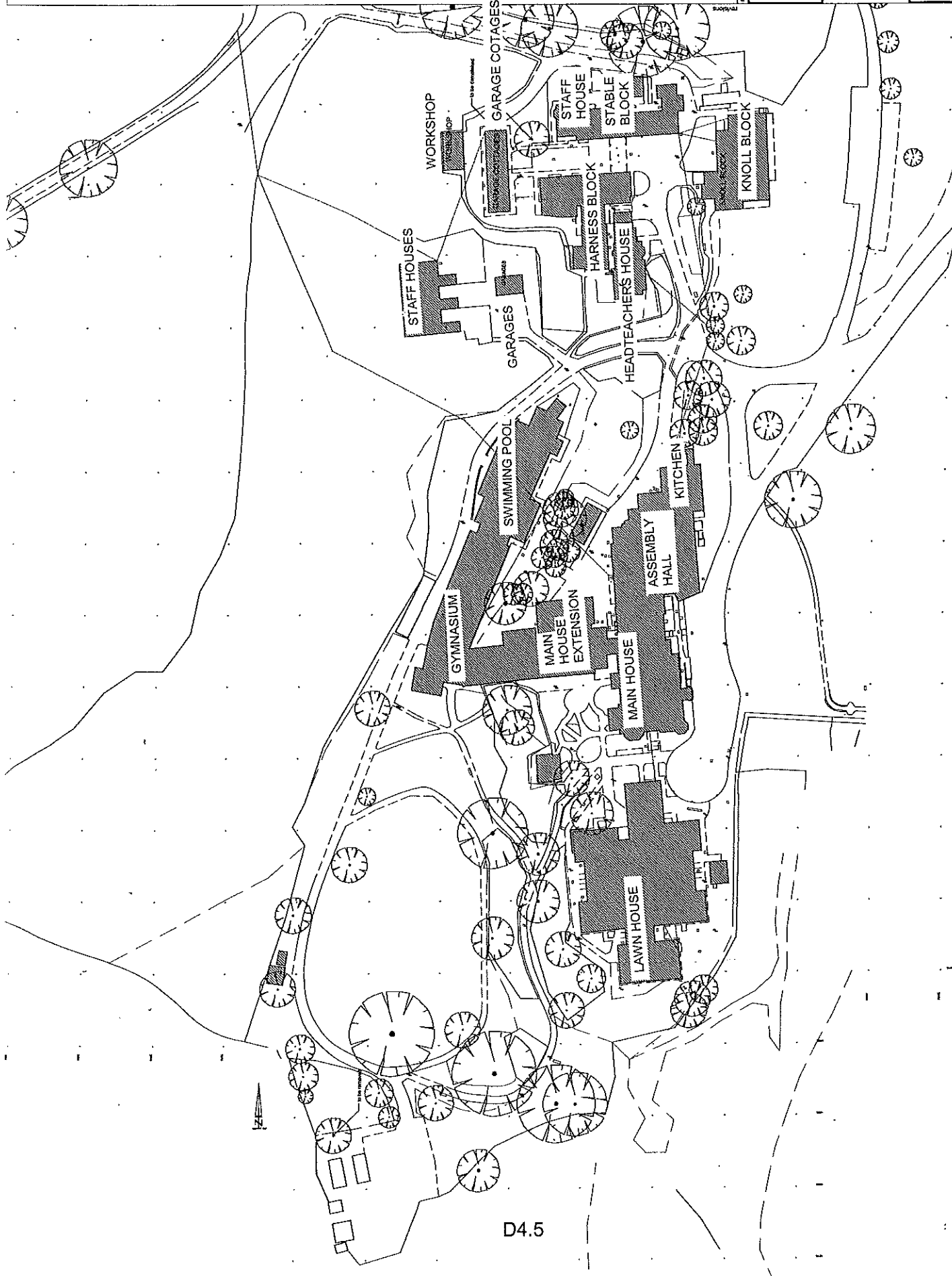
- Do not scale from this drawing
 - Report any discrepancies to the Architect
 - Check dimensions on site prior to starting work

VALENCE SCHOOL
 WESTERHAM
 TEACHING & TOP LAWN

11 CASSEBY PARK
 TUNBRIDGE WELLS
 KENT
 TN11 2SJ
 TEL: 01893 5377
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 Architects
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SITE SURVEY
 SHOWING EXISTING
 BUILDINGS

Scale: 1/500
 Date: February 2007
 Drawing No: 2504 / 48



EXISTING SITE LAYOUT

D4.5

NOTES

- Do not scale from this drawing
- Report any discrepancies to the Architect
- Check dimensions on site prior to starting work

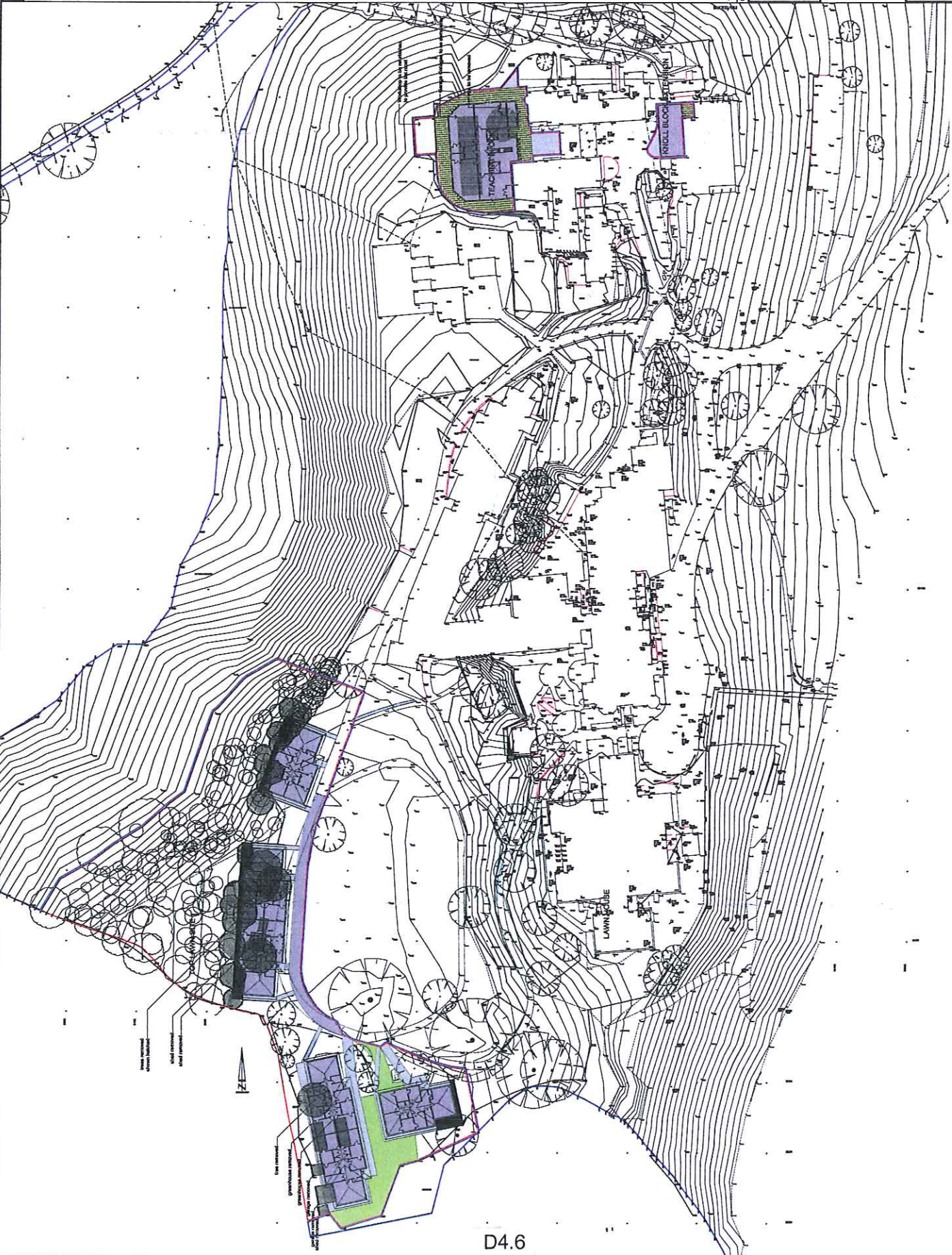
No.	Date	Description
D	28.08.07	Revisions 2 / 3 completed and Top Lines put in - signed PG
C	7.06.07	Revisions requested PG
B	20.04.07	Revised to suit new site layout PG
A	18.02.07	Amendments suggested for clarity PG

**VALENCE SCHOOL
WESTERHAM
NEW ACCOMMODATION**

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Drawing Title:
**PROPOSED SITE PLAN
TREE REMOVAL, DEMOLITION
AND SITE IDENTIFICATION**

Scale: 1 / 500
Drawing No: PG
Date: January 2007



PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT

D4.6

NOTES

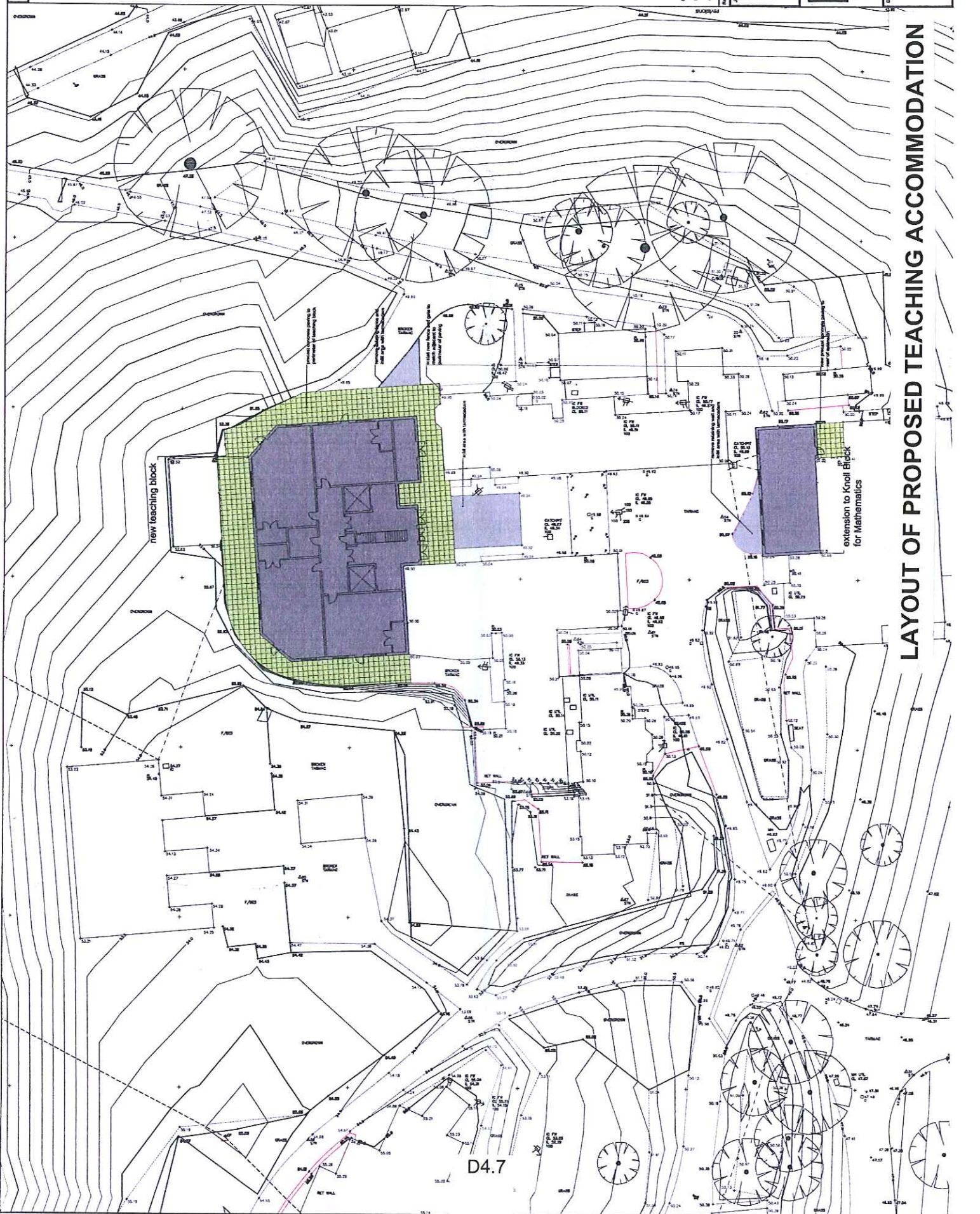
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C	16/01/07	External works shown	PG	2 0115 3007
B	20/02/06	Minor amendments	PD	
A	7/12/05	Major amendments	PD	

**VALENCE SCHOOL
WESTERHAM
TEACHING ACCOMMODATION**

**PETER'S
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Chartered Architects

**NEW TEACHING BLOCK
KNOLL BLOCK EXTENSION
PROPOSED SITE PLAN**



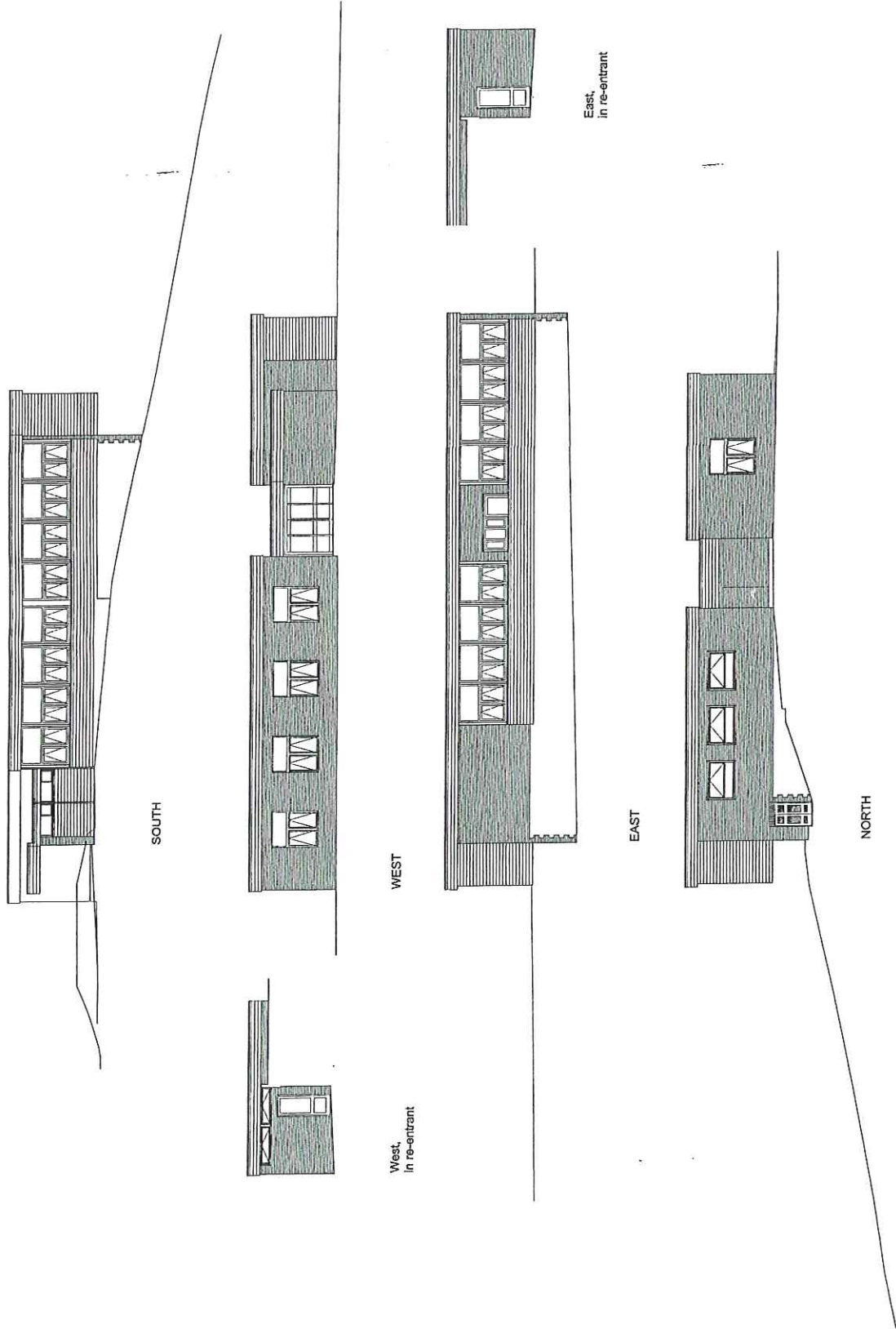
LAYOUT OF PROPOSED TEACHING ACCOMMODATION

D4.7

NOTES

- Do not scale from this drawing
- Report any discrepancies to the Architect
- Check dimensions on site prior to starting work

Materials:
 Facing brick walls to match adjacent
 Flat roof in tree layer felt with upvc parapet details to match adjacent
 Colour coated aluminium windows and external doors



D4.8

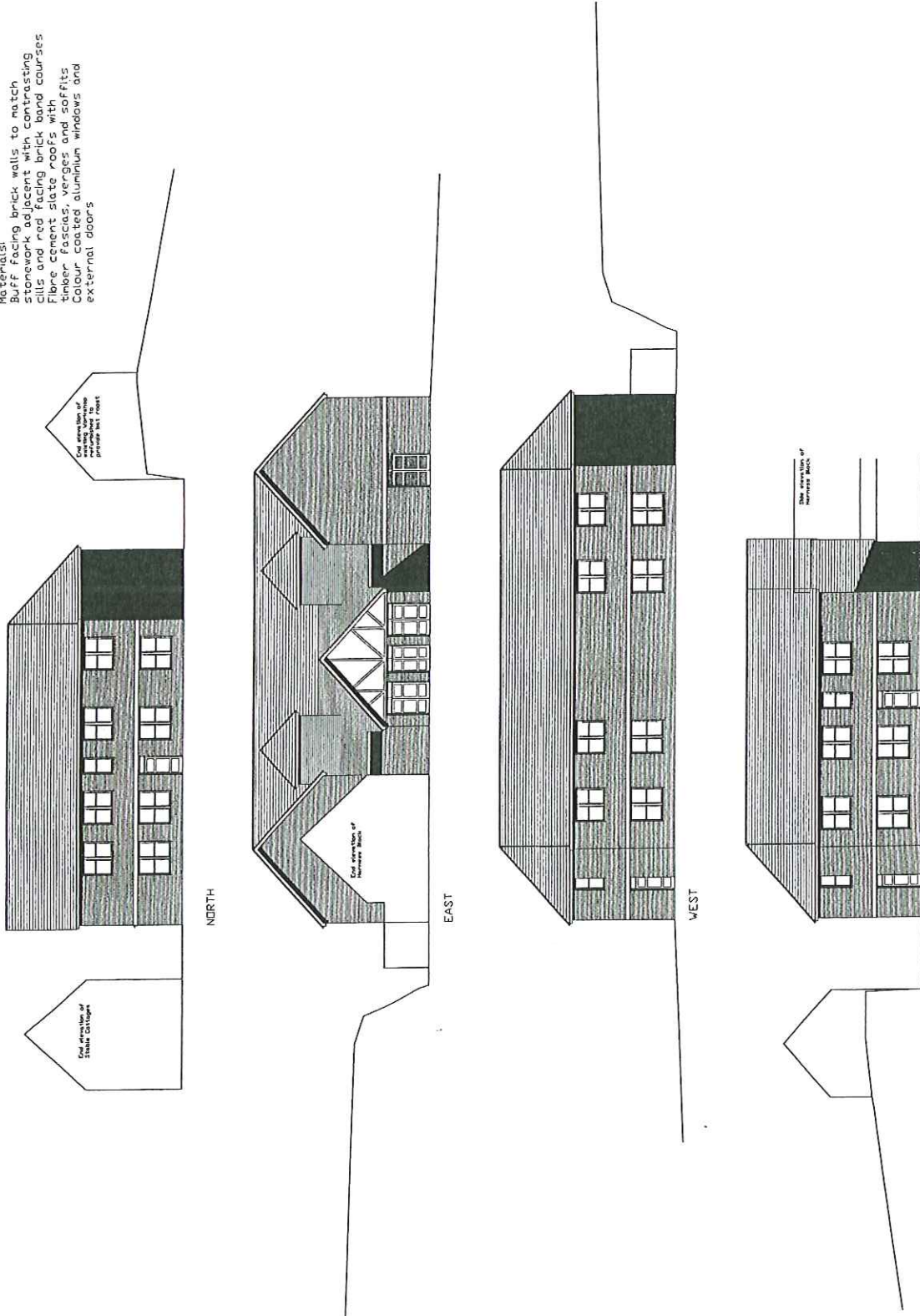
A 15.02.07		Minimum room width: 300
File Name	Client	Drawn by
VALENCE SCHOOL WESTERHAM <small>2. 6. FEB. 2007</small>		
JOURN GUTHRIE PARTNERS <small>Chartered Architects</small> TEL: 01892 520377 FAX: 01892 511979 email: enquiries@journ-guthrie.co.uk		
Drawing Title: KNOLL BLOCK ELEVATIONS AS PROPOSED		
Scale:	1/100	Date: January 2007

ELEVATIONS OF EXTENSION TO KNOLL BLOCK

NOTES

- Do not scale from this drawing
- Report any discrepancies to the Architect
- Check dimensions on site prior to starting work

Materials:
 Buff facing brick walls to match
 stonework and facing brick contrasting
 with the existing brick bond courses
 Flies and roof slates with
 timber fascias, verges and soffits
 Colour coated aluminium windows and
 external doors



D4.9

E 14/08/07 Information related to these plans and updates PD

Rev	Date	Description

VALENCE SCHOOL
 WESTERHAM
 TEACHING ACCOMMODATION

BURNS
 CULTURAL
 ARCHITECTS
 PARTNERS
 11 CALVERLEY PARK
 LUDGROVE WELLS
 KENT
 TN1 2SL
 TEL: 01892 250377
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Drawing Title

NEW TEACHING BLOCK
 ELEVATIONS

RECEIVED
 14 SEP 2007

Scale 1 / 100

Drawn By

PD

Date

December 2006

ELEVATIONS OF NEW TEACHING BLOCK

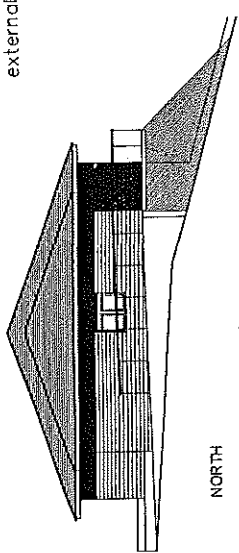


LAYOUT OF PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION

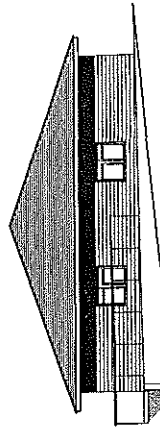
NOTES

- Do not scale from this drawing
- Report any discrepancies to the Architect
- Check dimensions on site prior to starting work

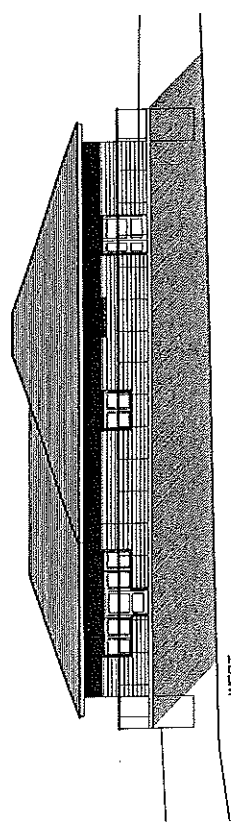
Materials:
 Horizontal feather edge timber boarding to walls
 Western Red Cedar shingle roofs with timber fascias and soffits
 Timber windows and external doors
 Timber decking and colour coated mild steel railings to external walkways



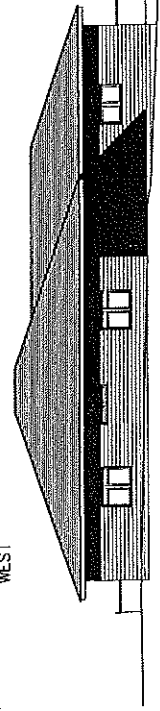
NORTH



SOUTH

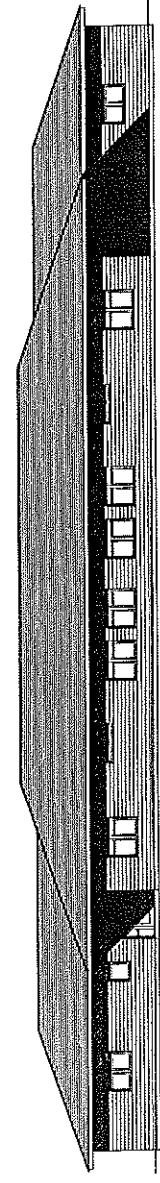


WEST

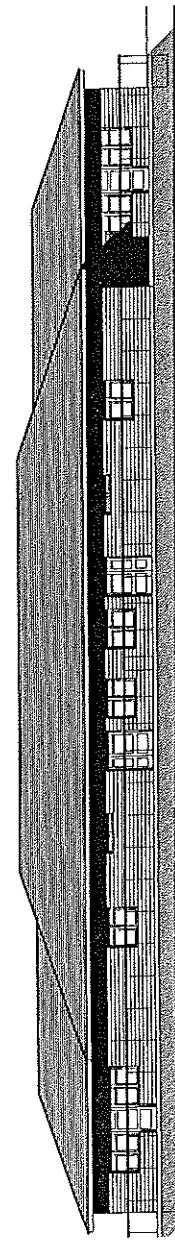


BLOCK 1, EAST

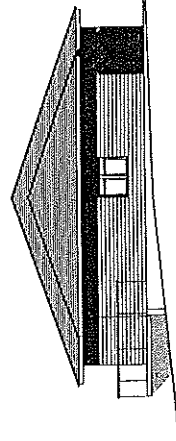
D4.11



EAST



NORTH



SOUTH

Rev.	Date	Description
C	20.06.07	Material selected PD
D	18.09.07	Revisions relation to full revised site layout PD
C	20.06.07	Revisions to section to full revised site
B	16.05.07	Material name added PD
A	20.05.07	Coloured notes added and external doors added PD

**VALENCE SCHOOL
 WESTERHAM
 RESIDENTIAL BLOCKS**

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 CUTTING
 PARTNERS**
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 TN11 2SJ
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 FAX: 01892 81000
 email: empire@rufens.co.uk
 Architects
 Architects

Drawing Title	TOP LAWN SITE BLOCKS 1/2 & 3 PROPOSED ELEVATIONS
Scale	1 / 100
Drawn By	PD
Date	January 2007

TYPICAL ELEVATIONS OF RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION

BLOCK 2 / 3, WEST

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

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

- Policy SP1 States that the primary purpose of Kent's development and environmental strategy will be to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern and form of development.
- Policy SS2 Within the Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development. New building should accord with the provisions of PPG2 and Annex B of PPG3.
- Policy QL1 Requires that all development should be well designed and be of high quality. Developments, individually or taken together, should respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surroundings. Development which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, functioning and character of settlements or the countryside will not be permitted.
- Policy QL9 Development will not be permitted which would have an adverse impact upon the historic and archaeological importance, landscape character and physical appearance of historic landscapes, parks and gardens. Historic landscape features and the settings and views into and out of, historic landscapes, parks and gardens will be protected and where possible enhanced.
- 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 EN1 Kent's countryside will be protected, conserved and enhanced for its own sake. This is important for the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of Kent. Development in the countryside should seek to maintain or enhance it. Development which will adversely affect the countryside will not be permitted unless there is an overriding need for it which outweighs the requirement to protect the countryside. Development so permitted should include appropriate mitigation and/or compensation.
- Policy EN3 Seeks to protect, conserve and enhance Kent's landscape and wildlife habitats.
- Policy EN4 Protection will be given to the nationally-important landscapes of:
- the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and
 - Kent's Heritage Coast between Kingsdown and Dover and between Dover and Folkestone.
- The primary objective in these areas will be to protect, conserve and enhance landscape character and natural beauty. Major commercial, mineral or transport infrastructure developments will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that:
- (a) there is a proven national interest
 - (b) there are no alternative sites available or the need cannot be met in any other way; and
 - (c) appropriate provision can be made to minimise harm to the environment.
- Other development which would be detrimental to the natural beauty, quality and character of the landscape and quiet enjoyment of the

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- area will not be permitted. Development that is essential to meet local social or economic needs should be permitted provided that it is consistent with the purpose of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heritage Coast.
- Policy EN5 The primary objective of designating Special Landscape Areas is the protection, conservation and enhancement of the quality of their landscapes, whilst having regard to the need to facilitate the social and economic well-being of the communities situated within them.
- Policy EN8 Wildlife habitats and species will be protected, conserved and enhanced. Development likely to have an adverse effect, directly, indirectly or cumulatively, on important habitats or species, will not be permitted unless the adverse impact on an important nature conservation resource can be adequately mitigated and/or compensated.
- Policy EN9 Seeks to maintain tree cover and the hedgerow network. Additionally, states they should be enhanced where this would improve the landscape, biodiversity, or link existing woodland habitats. Ancient and semi-natural woodland will be protected and, where possible, enhanced.
- Policy NR5 The quality of Kent's environment will be conserved and enhanced, including the visual, ecological, geological, historic and water environments, air quality, noise and levels of tranquillity and light intrusion.
- Policy TP19 Development proposals must comply with the respective vehicle parking policies and standards adopted by Kent County Council and Medway Council.

(ii) The adopted 2000 Sevenoaks District Local Plan:

- Policy EN1 Proposals for all forms of development and land use must comply with the policies set out in the Plan, unless there are overriding material considerations, and the following criteria:-
- The form of the building to be compatible with other buildings and the design to be in harmony with adjoining buildings and incorporate materials and landscaping of a high standard.
 - The layout should respect the topography of the site and retain important features including trees and hedgerows, new landscaping features will be required in appropriate cases.
 - Development should not have an adverse impact on the privacy or amenities of a locality.
 - The development does not result in the loss of important buildings or related spaces.
 - A satisfactory environment for future occupants.
 - A satisfactory means of access and provision of parking to the required standards.
 - Appropriate facilities for those with disabilities.
 - Measures to deter crime to be incorporated.
 - Requirements of statutory undertakers and service providers to be met.
 - The proposed development does not create unacceptable traffic conditions on the surrounding road

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- network and is located to reduce where possible the need to travel.
- The proposed development is planned and designed so as to have regard to water and energy conservation and to avoid or minimise pollution.
 - The application to be accompanied where appropriate by a planning statement describing the environmental and physical impact of a proposal on a locality and measures that will be undertaken to mitigate the impact.
- Policy EN6 Development which would harm or detract from the landscape character of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty will not be permitted.
- Policy EN7 Development within the North Downs and Greensand Ridge Special Landscape Areas will be permitted only where it would cause no significant harm to the landscape character of the area.

Consultations**16. Sevenoaks District Council: comment as follows:**

"The land lies within the Green Belt where strict policies of restraint apply. The proposal would be inappropriate development harmful to the maintenance of the character of the Green Belt, and to its openness. This conflicts with policy SS2 of the Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006 and policy GB2 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

The proposal would be an intrusive form of development in the countryside and therefore harmful to its character. This conflicts with policies EN1 and EN3 of the Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006 and policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

The land lies within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposal would detract from the character and appearance of that area. This conflicts with policy EN4 of the Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006, and Policy EN6 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

The land lies within a Special Landscape Area. The proposal fails to give long term protection to the landscape and would harm its character. This conflicts with policy EN5 of the Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006 and policy EN7 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

The proposed development would result in the loss of mature trees. The trees form a prominent feature of the locality and contribute to the character and appearance of the area. The loss of trees would detract from the character and appearance of the locality. This conflicts with policies EN1 and EN12B of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan and policies EN9 and QL1 of the Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006.

The adjacent KCC site has been identified as surplus to requirements and comprises previously developed land. Redevelopment of that site should be considered in advance of development of open land, which has not been previously developed in the Metropolitan Green Belt, in accordance with the principles set out in PPG2 and PPS3."

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(NB. Policies EN12A and GB2 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan referred to above were not included in the saved policies applicable beyond the 27 September 2007.)

Further views are awaited from the District Council on the amended details of the proposal and the report on Green Belt Policy setting out the applicant's case for Very Special Circumstances. These will be reported at the Committee Meeting.

Westerham Parish Council: acknowledges that the proposal is in breach of Sevenoaks District Local Plan Policy GB2 and considers the proposal to be inappropriate development. On that basis it considers that the application should be called in by the Secretary of State. The Parish Council is sympathetic to the needs of the current residents and pupils of this facility, and the requirements of the County Council to improve and extend its services to meet those needs.

It states that, nevertheless the school is situated within the Green Belt, and an AONB, and must comply with statutory obligations and policy as laid down in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan and the Local Plan.

In more specific terms, the Parish Council would be minded to accept the proposals to rebuild (demolish) the Garage Cottages, and to build the new teaching block, which would meet the County Councils educational obligations. The Parish Council has more concern with the proposed residential accommodation and does not think that sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate exceptional need and this element should be declined under Sevenoaks District Local Plan Policies GB2, GB4, GB5 and EN8.

(NB. Policies GB2 and GB4 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan referred to above were not included in the saved policies applicable beyond the 27 September 2007. Neither policy GB5 that relates to sites identified as Major Developed Sites within the Green Belt nor EN8 that relates to Areas of Local Landscape Importance is relevant to this particular site.)

Further views are awaited from the Parish Council on the amended details of the proposal and the report on Green Belt Policy setting out the applicant's case for Very Special Circumstances. These will be reported at the Committee Meeting.

The Environment Agency: raises no objection but has provided advice with regards to foul and surface water drainage (including use of soakaways) and groundwater protection.

It also recommended that prior to determination, a desktop study be carried out with regards to potential contaminated land. The applicant subsequently provided details of site investigations to the Environment Agency, which has agreed in principle the recommendations and analysis of risks and liabilities detailed. However it has sought further clarification on some of the contaminants found (possible from road pavement materials) in 2 of the trial pits for further comment. It states that any relevant condition should not be discharged until all the works are complete and a closure report submitted. In addition, it states that further clarification should be sought from the Local Authority Environmental Health Officer with respect to issues related to harm to human health. Advice on carrying out works in dealing with contaminants is also set out in its response.

The Civil Aviation Authority: raises no objection.

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The Divisional Transportation Manager: raises no objection. He notes that the number of pupils on the roll and the number of staff are unlikely to increase, and that the purpose of the application is to improve the accommodation. The number of students within the residential accommodation would increase from 50 to nearer 75, which would decrease the amount of traffic generated by day pupils. It is considered that parking is adequate for the site.

The County Archaeologist requests that conditions be placed on any grant of planning permission to secure the implementation of programmes of archaeological work and building recording, in accordance with written specifications and timetables.

County Landscape Adviser initially commented (in summary) that “whilst views of the site are generally constrained by its wooded nature and topography, the primary landscape issues in this case are the impacts that the proposals would have on the AONB and the character of the historic parkland. These impacts should have been quantified as part of the applicant’s landscape and visual assessment. It is considered that the general locations of the buildings are acceptable around the perimeter of the lawn; however the design as proposed would be unacceptable in the AONB landscape as outlined in the Countryside Agency’s guidance. A more imaginative approach reflecting the character the area would be more appropriate.”

In response to the amended details of the proposal and updated report on Landscape and Visual Effects the County Landscape Adviser has commented as set out below:

In the context of the AONB has highlighted those parts of Structure Plan Policy EN4 relevant to this application and the context in which her comments are made, being:

- The primary objective in these areas will be to protect, conserve and enhance landscape character and natural beauty.
- Development that is essential to meet local social or economic needs should be permitted provided that it is consistent with the purpose of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

“Applicant’s Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects

The Landscape and Visual Effects Second Addendum is still primarily focused on views rather than impact of the proposals on the landscape itself. By nature there are few visual receptors in the AONB as it predominantly a rural area. Whilst the visual impact assessment addresses concerns from those who may potentially have views of the development, the applicant fails to focus on the significance of effects on the landscape and hence justify the proposals against the AONB policy. This was identified as a primary landscape issue in my previous comments.

My own brief assessment would be that as a nationally designated landscape the Kent Downs AONB is considered of **high** value. The site itself is typical of the character of this part of the AONB (Greensand Ridge). Both the Landscape Assessment of Kent and the Sevenoaks District Countryside Appraisal identify the area as being in good condition and recommend a policy of conserve. Using the applicants Appendix 1 as a guide, the **high** sensitivity of the landscape provided by its designation balanced against the magnitude of change (**medium**: ‘e.g. moderate changes in a localised area’) gives an overall assessment of the proposals having a **Moderate to Substantial Effect** on the landscape. Given the significance of this effect the applicant needs to demonstrate that the proposals meet the provisions of the AONB policy as underlined (quoted) above.

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Comments on Proposals

The applicant has probably gone as far as they can within the constraints they have set themselves with regard to the building types and layout. I have no objection to the principle of realigning the path around the top lawn, and the layout and change of materials offer an improvement over the previous submission.

However whilst they have endeavoured to integrate the buildings into the site in such a way as to reduce their visual impact, they are neither characteristic in scale, design or layout with the vernacular architecture of the AONB, nor offer much interest with regard to innovation or creative design. Thus the development unfortunately falls short of the AONB policy's aspiration to 'enhance' the landscape and, whilst it mitigates its impacts, it will not leave a lasting legacy in this nationally important and historic landscape.

Should the proposals be accepted and, if it were possible within the constraints of the planning system, it would be in the landscape interest to impose a condition that the buildings should be removed and the landscape reinstated if at some time in the future they were no longer fulfilled their planned purpose. This would help ensure that they would not contribute to the incremental erosion of the landscape character or set a precedent for future development, and this would provide the AONB with long term protection.

Again if the planning authority is minded to approve the application I would reiterate my previous comments:

The proposals as submitted do not show construction impacts or service runs for utilities, therefore it has not been possible to assess any temporary or permanent effects these may have on the landscape or individual trees. These should be submitted prior to making a decision to ensure the full impact is known.

If the application were to be approved it would be necessary to receive the following prior to construction:

- detailed landscape proposals including layout, species, size, density
- details and colours of external materials for buildings, hard landscape elements.

A condition should also be imposed that all tree works are undertaken in accordance with BS5837:2005 'Trees in Relation to Construction'."

Local Member

17. The local County Member, Mr Richard Parry, was notified of the application on the 18 June 2007.

Publicity

18. The application was publicised by an advertisement in a local newspaper and the posting of a site notice, which noted that the application was a departure from the Development Plan in view of the site's location within the Metropolitan Green Belt. 49 residential and business properties in the vicinity of the school were also notified of the application. The 4 residents who raised objections to the proposal were also notified of the amendments.

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Representations

19. 6 letters of representation were received from 4 neighbouring properties objecting to the proposals. The main comments/points of concern and objection can be summarised as follows:
- Object in the strongest terms to the proposed siting of residential accommodation on the extreme edge of the Valence Estate, on the top of a ridge;
 - The residential accommodation would look down on neighbouring residential properties;
 - Objection is raised to the removal of numerous trees, and concern is expressed that the siting of the development, in close proximity to trees, would lead to further tree removal in the future;
 - The site is within the Green Belt, and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Special Landscape Area. The development is not sited or designed in a way which respects the site and its setting;
 - The development would be widely visible, and would severely damage the historic landscape;
 - The development is contrary to Government and Local Authority guidance and policy;
 - An alternative location for the residential element of the development should be found, such as the grassy slopes adjacent to the main access drive;
 - Substantial screening of the development is required, which may necessitate minor changes to the siting of the buildings;
 - Concerns are raised over the accuracy of the school boundary/ownership as shown on the plans;
 - Concern is expressed over the dangers caused by traffic exiting Valence School, down a lane and onto the A25. It is requested that traffic calming measures are put in place along the lane to reduce the risk of accidents; and
 - Support for the work of the school is also expressed.
20. In addition, a letter of support has been received. It is stated that the proposed development would:
- Enhance the work of Valence School;
 - Create new buildings, fit for purpose for disabled children who attend the school; and
 - Provide new residential accommodation which carefully blends in with the surrounding landscape.
21. I have received one letter in response to notification of the amended details of the proposal which includes the following comments:
- The cost of rotating blocks 2/3 by about 8 metres to the east would be significantly increased by the realignment of the site road over a length of 80 metres. The change would give no relief to the damage caused to the AONB to the west and in his opinion makes matters worse.
 - Appreciates that these new blocks are necessary but reiterates his objection that block 2/3 is located only 2 metres from his boundary. Does not consider it is possible to provide effective screening in this narrow space and the building would be clearly visible from the otherwise unspoilt area of Green Belt. Also considers that it would be contrary to the policy that states development which would harm or detract from the landscape character of the AONB will not be permitted.

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- Suggests moving the block about 16 metres northwards with Block 1 moving a little less. As a Civil Engineer he considers that the cost of foundations on steeply sloping ground would be less than the cost of diverting the road. Considers that this amendment would have no adverse effects for the School and would allow proper tree screening and make the development more acceptable. Asks the Committee to demand this change.

Discussion

Introduction

22. Although the existing use of the land to accommodate school buildings and activities is well established there are a number of issues arising from the proposed development. These include its impact on the Metropolitan Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Special Landscape Area and the Historic Park and Garden. These impacts needs have to be considered in the context of the Planning Policies, referred to in paragraph 13-15 above, and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity.

Green Belt considerations

23. It will be noted that the whole of the school site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Therefore in the context of the relevant National Planning Policy and Development Policies that apply, set out in paragraphs 13-15 above, consideration needs to be given to whether or not the proposal involves inappropriate development and whether or not there are very special circumstances that would warrant setting aside the general presumption against the development.
24. As indicated in paragraph (12) above the applicant has now submitted a more detailed report specifically to address the application of Green Belt policy to the proposed development. It considers the proposed development as being compliant with paragraph C17 of PPG2, being a school occupying a major developed site not yet identified in a development plan, where subject to criteria, infilling or redevelopment is proposed. The criteria relate to whether or not it would, have any increase in impact on openness, exceed the height of existing buildings or occupy a larger area of the site. In terms of openness, whilst it considers that the extension to the Knoll Block and the new teaching block would not have an increased impact on openness it acknowledges that the new residential buildings would and therefore the development becomes inappropriate on this ground. With regard to height it notes that the proposals do not exceed the height of existing buildings. In respect of footprint, it is stated that there would be a net increase, in footprint of all the proposed works, of 26% (1704m²), and the proposal is therefore inappropriate on this ground. The report goes onto consider whether very special circumstances exist that outweigh the policy presumption against inappropriate development and includes an evaluation of alternative solutions. The report includes the following summary and conclusions:

“Very Special Circumstances

There is no policy guidance on very special circumstances and the range of potential circumstances is wide, comprising a need or combination of needs that cannot be met except in Green Belt.

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The Need for the Development

Evidence has been presented showing that the needs of the Valence School pupils have changed dramatically over 10 years. The proportion of pupils with complex social and educational needs has risen from 12% to 66%. Powered wheelchair use has similarly increased. Pupils with high and total care needs now predominate at 37% and 55% respectively (2007). All of these changes require better buildings but these are not yet available.

The current buildings and what they deliver in terms of national criteria have been audited by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The 2006 inspection report raises significant health and safety concerns. It states that boarders' needs in terms of safety, independent access, privacy and dignity are either unmet or compromised. These shortfalls and their adverse impacts, together with the clearly expressed urgency for action amount to very special circumstances capable of outweighing the presumption against inappropriate development in Green Belt.

Under the inspection regime there is a real possibility that Valence School will have to close unless these deficiencies are addressed in 2007. The consequences of closure are highly adverse. They include dislocation of the education of pupils who are most in need of continuity, disruption and uncertainty to the lives of pupils and their families, removal of access to multidisciplinary and specialist services currently clustered at the school, loss of 180 jobs and problems for the education authority in meeting its legal duties.

Collectively these amount to a very special set of circumstances capable of outweighing the presumption against inappropriate development.

Alternative Solutions

The range of alternatives examined is:

- Split site (off site residential campus)
- Whole school relocation

Consideration has been given to re-use of developed sites as well as new development.

The Split Site Alternative involves heavy use of transport for boarders. This will take so long that the working day, after hour clubs and general independence of boarders will be severely affected. The proposal would undermine equality of access to education services and would impact on a vulnerable group of people, some with life-limiting medical conditions. Staffing would need to increase and the greater dependence of pupils is contrary to Government policy. In terms of good town planning practice this is so unacceptable that it should not be allowed to happen. For this reason alternative sites [for split site use] are not contemplated. Transport sustainability is particularly poor in this alternative although other energy usage would be similar to that in the current proposal. The sequence of events leading to occupation of an off-site residential campus would take 3 to 4 years at the end of which, Lawn House could be refurbished, taking 18 further months. The school will have closed during this time. This alternative is both undesirable and undeliverable within a reasonable time.

The Whole School Relocation alternative prefers an area of territory that will retain the current day pupil catchment, so minimising loss of pupils and specialist staff. A wider area has however been examined. The methodology excludes Green Belt and countryside sites. The supply of available sites amounts to one part of one site, out of five sites examined. Two sites are so far away that day pupils will not be able to attend and most if not all skilled staff will not be able to travel there, thus losing their jobs and removing their skills from the school. For cost reasons however this option is not feasible. Planning permission will be difficult to achieve on sites allocated for business or housing use. The school will have closed during the 4 to 5 years acquisition and development process. This alternative is not deliverable within any relevant timescale.

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Conclusions

The planning application development is inappropriate in the Green Belt.

There are very special circumstances capable of outweighing the policy presumption against inappropriate development set out in PPG2 - Green Belts. These will not set a precedent as they are not repeatable on other sites.

On this basis the case for granting planning permission is sound in Green Belt policy terms."

25. The applicant has also provided a statement on the Mountwood/Horizon site which adjoins the school site to the north east, in view that the District Council had specifically referred to the possibility of it being used. The applicants concluded that site is not suitable for several reasons. As a residential campus it would be completely unacceptable for the School to have a split site for the reasons set out in the summary above. With regard to Whole School relocation it is much too small, and as a Green Belt site it would raise the same inappropriateness issues as the current site.
26. Overall I accept the applicant's assessment and application of Green Belt Policy set out in the submitted report, as summarised above. The development would clearly be inappropriate development and in the case of the residential accommodation would, in my view, significantly impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Nevertheless, I consider that very special circumstances have been demonstrated in this particular case for overriding Green Belt policy constraints. Accordingly I do not consider that an objection on the basis of the effects of the proposed development on the openness of the Green Belt would be warranted. However, if Members were minded to grant permission, the application would have to be referred to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for consideration. This is required under The Town and Country (Green Belt) Direction 2005 because the proposal involves inappropriate development that would significantly impact on the openness of the Green Belt. The impact of the development on/potential harm to the landscape is dealt with below

Landscape

27. The school site is set within an historic park and garden and although not one that is registered with English Heritage its parkland character makes an important contribution to the landscape setting as a whole with its varied topography, large open grassed areas, landscaped areas with specimen trees and wooded boundaries. It is also located within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and a Special Landscape Area (SLA) as acknowledged elsewhere in the report and therefore its landscape is subject to strong planning policy protection, i.e. the landscape policies set out in paragraph 14 – 15 above. Arguably the key Development Plan Policy is Structure Plan Policy EN4 (*quoted in full in paragraph 15 above*), which accords with the objectives of PPS7, is more comprehensive than Local Plan Policy EN6, and affords a higher degree of protection than those policies relating to Special Landscaping Areas, historic landscapes, parks and gardens or the countryside more generally. In my view, bearing in mind the nature, extent and purpose of what is proposed, the relevant parts of policy EN4 against which the application must be assessed are where it states: "*the primary objective in these areas will be to protect, conserve and enhance landscape character and natural beauty;*" and the last sentence, "*Development that is essential to meet local social or economic needs should be permitted provided that it is consistent with the purpose of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.*" [The purpose of AONB's being, in essence, to protect, conserve and enhance their landscape character and natural beauty.]

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28. Since the proposal involves new buildings and removal of trees there would inevitably be changes to the landscape itself and to a greater or lesser extent to views to, from and within the site. The location of the proposed buildings has been broadly influenced by the way in which the school accommodation is organised between teaching, communal, administrative and residential. However the options have been further limited by the physical characteristics of the site and the need to respect its setting, landscape and historical context.
29. In terms of the landscape/visual impact, the teaching accommodation is more straightforward. First, the single storey extension to the Knoll Block involves, in effect, infilling and squaring off an existing building with no additional impact on the landscape. Secondly, the new two storey teaching block would be built over the footprint of the demolished cottages forming a quadrangle with existing buildings. Although it would be higher, have a larger footprint and bulk, and would result in removal of a tree and a hedgerow, I do not consider it would have a significant impact on the landscape, particularly as the landform, surrounding trees and buildings would provide a degree of enclosure.
30. Given the various constraints of the site the residential accommodation has been more difficult to locate and for operational reasons required a location in close proximity to other residential accommodation and the main house. This has resulted in the proposal on the edge of the top lawn on the upper south western part of the site for four single storey blocks, two double and two single, to provide accommodation for 36 pupils. The two buildings to the western side of the lawn are on the ridge of land which slopes away and would result in the need to remove a number of trees as indicated on the proposed site layout drawing. In addition, the path around the lawn would need to be realigned. The other two buildings would result in only one or two trees being removed. Several garages, sheds and greenhouses would also need to be removed. *(Although it was mentioned at the Members' Site Meeting that some of the trees affected were covered by a Tree Preservation Order I now understand from the District Council that this is not the case. The Tree Preservation Order related to a different unaffected area of the site.)*
31. Clearly the removal of trees and the provision of buildings on this higher part of the site would have an impact on the landscape and setting of the site. The applicant has sought to mitigate the impact with low level buildings and careful siting to minimise tree loss whilst at the same time retaining the top lawn which is an important component of the original house and gardens. Proposals for new landscaping and woodland management have also been put forward. Suggestions from a local resident to move the buildings to the west side of the lawn, northwards to allow more space for new planting adjoining his boundary, would result in the loss of a significant beech tree which the applicant has sought to retain. The landscape proposals include a native hedge on this boundary with hedgerow trees although the space is limited.
32. Bearing in mind the sensitive nature of the landscape context and potential impact of the proposed development, particularly the residential blocks, the applicant has submitted reports dealing with the landscape and visual effects, as referred to above. The County Landscape Adviser has considered the proposal, in the light of those reports, including the details of it as now amended. The comments and assessment made set out in paragraph (16) above will be noted. In particular, she considers that the development would fall *"short of the AONB policy's aspiration to 'enhance' the landscape and, whilst it mitigates its impacts, it will not leave a lasting legacy in this nationally important and historic landscape."* Therefore if this view is accepted, whilst

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it could be argued that the development is essential to meet local social needs, it would not be consistent with the purpose of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. As such it would be contrary to the relevant Planning Policies.

33. There is no disputing the high landscape quality and character of this particular part of the AONB and its sensitivity to change. The issue about the design of the buildings is less clear cut. The proposal is for low level, unassuming design with dark stained timber cladding and cedar shingle roofs. The internal planning, practical requirements, size and amount of accommodation have somewhat limited the opportunities for an innovative solution, such as a curved building that takes advantage of the site contours and features. There is also, to a certain extent, a fine line between what might or might not enhance the landscape since arguably the landscape would be better without any additional buildings in this particular case.
34. On the other hand, I consider there is a demonstrable need that I have already accepted in respect of the Green Belt Policy considerations, which also outweighs the potential conflict with the proposal falling short of enhancing the AONB, as discussed above. I am also mindful that the applicant has endeavoured to integrate the buildings into the site in such a way as to reduce and mitigate their visual impact. On balance therefore, subject to implementation of the proposed landscaping and woodland management, and measures to protect the retained trees during construction, I would not raise a landscape policy objection to the proposal. Members will note the suggestion of our Landscape Adviser to impose a condition requiring the buildings to be removed when they are no longer needed. Whilst I understand the intention of it, in my view, such a condition would not be appropriate if in granting planning permission, the proposed buildings are considered to be acceptable.

Design

35. Development Plan Policies, require development to be well designed and to respect its setting. In broad terms, the siting and design have been discussed above in the context of the landscape considerations. In terms of appearance, the teaching accommodation seeks to respond to the context of existing buildings and proposes use of materials in keeping with them. The design of the new teaching block has been amended in response to comments made by our Conservation Architect to respond better to the form and style of the existing buildings. Subject to the final selection of materials being reserved for approval by condition, I consider that the design of the teaching accommodation would be acceptable and in accordance with the Development Plan policies.
36. With regard to the residential accommodation, on the basis of my conclusion on the Landscape Policy issues, I would not raise an objection to the design of those buildings. I consider that the proposed use of timber roofing, fascias, soffits, cladding, windows and doors, and decking is appropriate and these could be controlled by condition, with the final selection of any colour treatment and finishes being reserved for approval.

Impact on residential amenity

37. The nearest residential properties are those within the school site which are occupied by staff or pupils and there are no issues of loss of amenity. The proposed residential blocks are within a few metres of the site boundary with adjoining land but neighbouring residential properties are at some distance. As such they would not, in

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my view, be directly affected and there would not, for example, be an issue of any of these properties suffering loss of privacy from being overlooked. Although some concern has been raised about being able to see the proposed residential accommodation, where these are private views it is not a material planning consideration.

External lighting

38. No details have been provided on external lighting for the development at this stage. It is likely that it would be required for the convenience and safety of site users, and site security. In view of the potential impact of such lighting on the wider landscape setting, if permission is granted, it would be appropriate to reserve details by condition so that the type and position of the external lighting can be controlled to ensure light pollution can be minimised and to accord with Structure Plan Policy NR5.

Transport and access issues

39. There is not intended to be any change to the numbers of staff or pupils as a direct result of this proposal. The Divisional Transportation Manager has not therefore raised an objection to the proposal. However a neighbouring resident has raised concern about the traffic using the school exit road and requested traffic calming is put in place. Whilst I do not consider that there is any basis for it to be required as part of this proposal, I understand that the School are prepared to consider this separately.

Archaeology

40. The County Archaeologist has asked that if planning permission is granted that conditions are imposed securing the implementation of programmes of archaeological work and building recording (of the cottages to be demolished) before development takes place. Otherwise there are no archaeology issues at this stage.

Drainage and protection of water resources

41. No details of drainage for the new development have been provided at this stage. If planning permission is granted foul and surface water drainage could be reserved by condition and the Environment Agency consulted to ensure that it meets its requirements. The Environment Agency has asked for clarification on some contaminants found from ground investigations and suggested that further clarification should be sought from the Local Authority Environmental Health Officer with respect to issues related to harm to human health. I am following these matters up. If Members were minded to grant planning permission, this issue should be addressed/resolved in consultation with the Environment Agency prior to any decision being issued. Its advice relating to drainage, groundwater protection and how to deal with contaminants could be covered by an informative.

Ecology

42. Following on from initial surveys of the areas affected by the development for protected species more detailed surveys have been carried out which have determined that reptiles, badgers, bats, dormice and birds would be affected by the proposed development. Outline mitigation proposals have been included in the reports on ecology but final proposals have not been received. Some mitigation is reflected in the proposed landscaping and woodland management. It is already clear

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that the applicants would have to apply for a European Protected Species Licence in respect of the Bats and would possibly have to in respect of the dormice. I am continuing to consult with our ecologist and am also consulting Natural England on the survey details and proposed mitigation now more information is available. Subject to the advice received, I would expect that the proposals for mitigation monitoring and management could be covered by appropriate conditions. Similarly any reasonable requirements for biodiversity enhancement could also be covered by condition. If Members were minded to grant planning permission, this issue should be satisfactorily resolved prior to any decision being issued.

Conclusion

43. This proposal seeks to provide improved accommodation to meet curricular and care needs at this day and residential all age special school. The School caters for young people who have a wide range of physical disabilities, complex medical needs and associated communication and learning difficulties. It is a long established school site but its sensitive countryside location means that the proposed development has raised some key Planning Policy issues particularly in respect of its impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, as discussed above. However, I consider that very special circumstances have been established in this particular case for overriding Green Belt policy constraints in terms of the demonstrable need put forward by the applicant and the lack of alternative solutions. Similarly, I consider that the need in this particular case outweighs the reservations, discussed above, about the proposal failing to enhance the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, although it is considered that its impact would be substantially mitigated. Therefore, on balance, subject to satisfactory resolution of the outstanding issues on contamination and ecology, and the imposition of conditions, I am of the opinion that the proposed development would otherwise be in accordance with the general aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies. Subject to any further views received by the Committee Meeting I recommend that the application be referred to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and that subject to her decision and to satisfactory resolution of the outstanding issues, planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

Recommendation

44. SUBJECT TO any further views received by the Committee Meeting, I RECOMMEND that the application BE REFERRED to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and SUBJECT TO her decision and satisfactory resolution of the outstanding issues on contamination & ecology, PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions, including conditions covering:
- the standard time limit,
 - the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details,
 - external materials,
 - submission for approval of details, implementation and subsequent maintenance of landscaping proposals,
 - submission for approval of details and implementation of proposed woodland management,
 - implementation of appropriate tree protection measures,
 - external lighting specifications to be agreed,
 - submission for approval of specifications and implementation of programmes of archaeological work and building recording before development takes place,
 - submission for approval of details of foul and surface water drainage,

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- measures to deal with ground contamination,
- ecological/protected species mitigation, monitoring and management,
- biodiversity enhancement, monitoring and management, as appropriate, and
- measures to prevent mud and debris being taken onto the public highway.

I FURTHER RECOMMEND THAT the applicant BE ADVISED of the following informative:

- Account should be taken of Environment Agency's advice relating to drainage, groundwater protection and in how to deal with contaminants.

Case officer - Paul Hopkins	01622 221051
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Background documents - See section heading
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Appendix to Item D4

APPLICATION SE/07/1914 – DEMOLITION OF GARAGE COTTAGES AND ERECTION OF TWO-STOREY BLOCK; EXTENSION TO KNOLL BLOCK; FOUR NEW SINGLE STOREY RESIDENTIAL BLOCKS AND ASSOCIATED HARD LANDSCAPING WORKS AT VALENCE SCHOOL, WESTERHAM ROAD, WESTERHAM

NOTES of a Planning Applications Committee Members' site visit at Valence School, Westerham on Tuesday, 4 September 2007.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr R E King (Chairman), Mr J B O Fullarton, Mr C Hibberd, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr G A Horne, Mr J F London, Mr T A Maddison, Mr A R Poole and Mr F Wood-Brignall.

OFFICERS: Mr J Crossley, and Mr P Hopkins (Planning) and Mr A Tait (Legal and Democratic Services).

THE APPLICANTS: Valence School (Mr R Gooding – Head Teacher, Mr J Paul, Chairman of Governors, 6 other representatives of the Governing Body); Mr A Barwick – KCC Lead Manager Special Schools Review Implementation; Mr P Damon – Burns Guthrie (Agent); Bernice Catt – Bernard Hoskins Landscape.

OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES: Sevenoaks DC (Cllr K J Maskell and Mr L Simmonds – Planning); Westerham PC (Cllr Mrs L Rodgers).

- (1) The Chairman opened the meeting. He explained that its purpose was for the Committee Members to familiarise themselves with the site and to listen to the views of interested parties. He informed the meeting that Mr Parry (the local Member) had sent his apologies but would be attending the Committee meeting which determined the application.
- (2) Mr Hopkins introduced the application by saying that the site was located within the Metropolitan Green Belt, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Greensand Ridge Special Landscape Area and a Historic Park and Garden. Planning Policies applied which presumed against inappropriate development and provided for environmental protection and enhancement.
- (3) Mr Hopkins then said that Valence School was a day and residential all age school for young people with a range of physical disabilities and associated communication and learning difficulties. There were currently 90 students on roll (40 day and 50 boarders) and there was no alternative provision for these students in Kent. The School employed 190 staff.
- (4) Mr Hopkins continued by saying that the recent countywide Special Education Needs Strategy Review had made proposals for new buildings in order that the School could meet the National Care Standards.
- (5) Mr Hopkins went on to describe the components of the application itself. The Garage Cottages in the northern part of the site would be demolished and replaced with a new two-storey, 8 classroom teaching block. The flat-roofed Knoll Block (east of Garage Cottages) would have an extension and internal adaptations.

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- (6) The south west corner (where the meeting was taking place) would see the construction of four single storey blocks, providing residential accommodation for 36 pupils. Preparation for this would involve clearance of the derelict greenhouses and garages, the removal of some trees (set back on the slope of the site). These buildings would be unpretentious in design with timber cladding and walkways. The low-pitched roofs would have cedar shingles.
- (7) Following consultation, the applicants had decided to mitigate the visual impact of the residential blocks by bringing one of them forward to the edge of the pathway, which would in turn be realigned. They had also agreed to provide additional information on the very special circumstances in support of the proposed development in the Green Belt.
- (8) Mr Hopkins concluded by outlining the key issues in determining the application. These were the impact of the development on the openness of the Green Belt and whether this was outweighed by the very special circumstances; the impact on the Landscape; and the design of the proposed buildings.
- (9) Mr Damon (Burns Guthrie) said that the drawings had been revised to address the concerns raised during consultation. The view of the buildings from the valley would be screened and fewer trees would need to be cut down. The amendments had been made following lengthy and fruitful discussions and the applicants now believed that the best possible design was now being put forward. He added that the objective of the redesign had been to protect the openness of the Green Belt and that locating the proposed buildings on the woodland edge would assist its management.
- (10) Bernice Catt (Bernard Hoskins Landscape) said that the double block building had been brought forward in order to maintain the trees behind it. New trees would be planted on the lawn in order to improve the view with the additional benefit of being able to take over from the older ones. The area around the proposed single blocks would be more difficult to accommodate as the woodland there had not been managed for some time. It was now intended to coppice the Sweet Chestnut, allowing the standard trees to grow up. Coppicing would take place on an annual basis. The buildings would be located behind the hedge with trees behind it. The wooden materials of the buildings would be stained with ochre to make them appropriate to the character of the surrounding land.
- (11) Mr Gooding (Head Teacher) said that the School had been established at the site since 1951. At that time none of the pupils were wheelchair users. In 2007, 85% of the pupils had wheelchairs, often outdoor-powered. The needs of the pupils had outstripped the adaptations that had been made. Lawn House had been added to the complex in 1975 and there had been a number of internal adaptations. Nevertheless, the rooms were now too small and the corridors too narrow. The accommodation did not meet new National Care Standards and consequently denied pupils their life-quality needs.
- (12) Mr Gooding went on to say that the School had attempted to get the County Council to address accommodation issues for the past 12 years. A plan had been developed in 1995, but this had now been overtaken by more complex needs which in turn required more equipment. This application represented an attempt to make the Valence School fit for purpose. Without these facilities, the School would be forced to close.

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- (13) Mr Simmonds (Sevenoaks DC Planning) said that his authority had objected to the proposal on the grounds of the planning constraints associated with the site. These were the Green Belt, Local Plan and Structure Plan policies. They were concerned about the impacts on the AONB, SLA, and the character of the countryside as well as the loss of TPO trees. It had been noted that amendments had been made and Sevenoaks would be keen to look at the application afresh if they were reconsulted.
- (14) Mr Marshall (a local Member from Sevenoaks DC) said that he recognised the value of Valence School. He believed that the School had made a good effort to address the issues of concern. He asked whether it was intended to take the trees down in stages.
- (15) Mrs Catt explained that the coppice cycle was between 7 and 25 years. The coppicing would be cut down to ground level and then allowed to grow again. This process was beneficial to wildlife and would allow new trees to grow. For this reason, some of the trees affected by the application would have needed to be removed anyway in order to provide space and light. The proposed buildings would not be visible from a distance as a result of the work that would need to be done. Only the canopy would change.
- (16) Mr Gooding said that it would not be possible to accommodate pupils at the social care centre on the A25 whilst schooling them on site. The two complexes were about 1 mile apart.
- (17) Mr Hopkins confirmed that there would be consultation on revisions to the proposal.
- (18) Mr Wood-Brignall asked for comments on the objections by local residents that the residential accommodation would overlook their properties. Mr Damon showed Members the plans to demonstrate how the applicants had attempted to address their concerns. The nearby properties were pointed out across the adjoining field.
- (19) Mr Wood-Brignall also asked the applicants to comment on the objection that the development was not sited in a way which respected the site and its setting. Mr Gooding said that following the storm in 1987, it had been possible to stand on top of the ridge and see all the way to Westerham. The coppice had grown since then. The landscape was ever-changing and of value for that reason rather than because of the particular that it took at any one time.
- (20) Mr Hibberd asked how many of the trees were the subject of TPOs. Mrs Catt replied that none of them were. She explained that the trees to be removed were the Walnut Tree and the Norwegian Spruce, but that the Beech would remain.
- (21) Mr Simmonds said that he was under the impression that the trees were the subject of TPOs. He would need to check the records in the light of Mrs Catt's comments. The Chairman asked for a paragraph in the report to Committee clarifying this question.
- (22) Mr Gooding replied to further questions from Mr Hibberd by saying that there were no listed buildings on site and that there would be no need for additional

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parking as the 190 staff would be on site at different times. No new staff would be employed as a result of the proposal and there would be no traffic implications arising from it.

- (23) Mr Maddison asked for a list of plusses and minuses to be provided in respect of impacts on the Green Belt.
- (24) Mr Horne asked whether the pupils had been involved in the design. Mr Gooding replied that they had been very much involved prior to the application going forward. They had not been involved in the detail but rather in discussions on the type of accommodation that was most suitable.
- (25) Mrs Hohler asked whether there would be an increase in the number of residential pupils as a result of the development. Mr Gooding replied that there would initially be no change. Any change after that would be gradual and insignificant.
- (26) In response to a question from Mrs Rogers of Westerham PC, Mr Gooding said that the site had been designated as appropriate for 120 boarders in 1951. That designation had never changed. The figure of 75 represented the maximum number that would need to be accommodated under any designation. At present there were only half that number of boarders.
- (27) Mr Wood-Brignall asked whether there was any need to provide traffic calming measures along the lane leading to the A25 and whether the Golf Club would be contributing to these. Mr Gooding explained that the traffic calming measures requested related to the School's exit road which was not used by the Golf Club.
- (28) The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions. The notes of the visit would be appended to the Head of Planning Applications Group's report on the proposal.
- (29) Members then inspected various parts of the application site. They were shown the exact locations of the proposed residential blocks; the Knoll Block and the unoccupied Garage Cottages, which were to be demolished and replaced by a two-storey teaching block. They were informed by Mr Damon that the Conservation Architect had requested changes including raising the pitch of the roof and incorporating details of the adjoining buildings into the new one.
- (30) Members also saw the building (being renovated) behind the Garage Cottages. The ground floor would be used for storage and the upper floor as a mitigation area for bats.