

Modular building for Children's Centre, Knockhall Community Primary School, Greenhithe, Dartford.

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

Application by KCC Children, Families And Education for single storey modular building for Children's Centre at Knowckhall Community Primary School, Eynsford Road, Greenhithe (Ref:DA/07/672)

Recommendation: permission be granted subject to conditions

Local Member(s): Ivor Jones

Classification: Unrestricted

Background

1. The Planning Applications Committee considered this application at its meeting on 11 September 2007, at which the application was deferred to enable the applicant to further address the questions of car parking provision and building design. The original report is attached as Appendix 1. This report updates the position of the application since then and includes revised documentation received after the September Planning Committee.
2. As outlined in the previous report under paragraphs 2-4 in Appendix 1, the Children's Centre Programme is being developed as part of the Central Government's National Sure Start Programme and is funded by the Department for Education and Skills. Kent County Council has been tasked with creating 52 Children's Centre across Kent by March 2008. The main aims of the Sure Start programme are to increase the availability of childcare for young children and support parents in their aspirations towards employment. The Centres are proposed in deprived areas to offer a range of health, adult education and family support services alongside full day care facilities for children under 5. Knockhall Community Primary School site has been chosen as it is in an area identified as deprived with a continued fall in school roll. It is noted that there is already a new nursery within the school grounds and the new Children's Centre would rely on these facilities to make the nursery provisions outlined under the Sure Start Scheme.

Amended proposal

3. Following concerns raised by the Planning Applications Committee in September 2007, the proposal has been amended. The amended proposal continues to be for a single storey, flat roof modular building together with two canopies, new vehicular access and 4 car parking spaces, one of which is a disabled parking bay. The entry to the Children's Centre would be through a new vehicular and pedestrian access to the site from Abbey Road. The pedestrian access would be through a gate from the new 35m footpath along the frontage of the site. Externally, there would be two canopies and an impact absorbent play area. Inside, the building would contain crèche/meeting rooms, an Information Computing Technology (ICT) suite, an interview medical room, a snack kitchen, a reception/office area and toilets.
4. Following the deferral at the September Committee Meeting, further discussions between the applicant and the planning officer took place. Subsequently, amendments to the external finishes of the building have been formally submitted. It is now proposed to use render finish on the walls instead of Plastisol. Additionally, it is proposed to use vertical close-boarded oiled, cedar cladding panels, extending approximately 450mm above the main roof to break the flat roof line, as well as to introduce more variety of texture on the elevations. The windows would be bronze powder coated aluminium. The revised proposal is shown on page D5.3. With regards to the provision of car parking

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spaces, the applicant is not proposing any additional on-site car parking bays above what was proposed in the earlier submission. The planning application continues to include 3 car parking spaces for the staff plus 1 disabled parking bay with no visitor car parking.

Planning Policy

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

(i) The Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006:

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| Policy SP1 | Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's environment and to ensure a sustainable pattern of development. |
| Policy SS6 | Seeks to improve the built and natural environment, functioning and appearance of the suburbs, including the provision of services and facilities that serve local needs. |
| Policy QL1 | Seeks to ensure that all development is well designed and of high quality that responds positively to the local character. Development, which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, function or character of the area, will not be permitted. |
| Policy QL12 | Provision will be made to accommodate additional requirements for local community services in response to growth in demand from the community as a whole. The services will be located where they are accessible by walking, cycling and by public transport. |
| Policy TP3 | States that the local planning authority should ensure that development sites are well served by public transport, walking and cycling. |
| Policy TP19 | States that development proposals should comply with vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by the County Council. |
| Policy NR1 | Proposal for development should incorporate sustainable construction techniques |

(ii) The Dartford Local Plan 1995:

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|-----------|--|
| Policy S2 | Encouragement will be given to the provision of community, leisure and tourist facilities. |
| Policy B3 | The development proposal should incorporate hard and soft landscaping measures and create a good environment |

(iii) The Dartford Local Plan 2nd Draft Deposit:

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|-------------|---|
| Policy CF1 | Community facilities should be grouped together to reduce the need for travel, be easily accessible, serve a range of needs take account of the existing patterns of facilities and comply with other development control criteria. |
| Policy DD11 | A high standard of design will be sought in all proposals. |

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Example of Cedar Cladding



Example of render to a pitched roof building

N.B. Colour of render not true representation due to limited colour palette. Colour to be Sand Yellow RAL 1002

Rev	Description	Date
1	Issue for Tender	15/01/2009
2	Issue for Approval	15/01/2009
3	Issue for Approval	15/01/2009
4	Issue for Approval	15/01/2009
5	Issue for Approval	15/01/2009
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Amended elevation drawing to include revised external finishes of the building

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Consultations

6. Dartford Borough Council, Sports England and the Divisional Transportation Manager raised no objection to the proposal. The Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council requested a site visit to the school and were present to express their views at the September Planning Committee. In addition, the local residents raised objections mainly on the grounds of the impact of the development upon highways. For details of the consultees comments please refer to paragraphs 7-10 of Appendix 1.
7. The Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council were re-consulted on the latest amendments. The Town Mayor and Members are still concerned about the actual siting of the building and request a site visit. They also feel that parking and the entrance/exit to the site are inadequate. Finally, the Town Council Members are prepared to meet with the applicant to propose ideas.

Discussion*Introduction*

8. Following this application being deferred, further negotiations relating to the car parking provision and the design of the building have taken place between the applicant and the planning officer. The main aim of these discussions was to explore the potential for further provision of car parking and to improve the design and external appearance of the proposed building.
9. The application is required to be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan policies, unless other material considerations are of overriding importance. The focus of this report is on two items, the impact on highways and the design of the proposed building. Policy TP3 and TP19 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan (KMSP) require the new development to be well served by the public transport, walking and cycling and to comply with vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted in The Kent Vehicle Parking Standards. Further, Policy QL1 of the KMSP and Policy DD11 of the Dartford Local Plan 2nd Draft Review require new developments to be of high quality and well designed, not to lead to the loss of amenity and to consider their impact on the generated travel demand. Finally, consideration should be given to the KMSP Policy QL12 and the Dartford Local Plan 1995 Policy S2, which encourage decision-makers to make provision for community facilities. In conjunction with these and other relevant policies, these issues are considered and discussed below.

Impact upon highways

10. The application was deferred at the September Planning Committee Meeting to allow further discussions about the adequacy of car parking provision to ensure that this matter is considered appropriately. Members' attention is drawn to the paragraph 10 in the Appendix 1, which lists the objections on the grounds that the new Children's Centre might increase the congestion problem around the site. Residents are concerned, as they are already experiencing some level of congestion around the site during the school times, especially during pick-up and drop-off time.
11. Following my further discussions with the applicant, it was confirmed that the Children's Centre would employ 3 members of staff on a regular basis with the number rising for special events. The applicant believes that the provided 3 car parking spaces would be entirely sufficient for the members of staff. Moreover, it is intended that staff employed

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within the surrounding area will be expected to walk and any staff required to drive would be offered a space in the new car park.

12. Further, it is estimated that the Centre could have up to 30 visitors in a day. However, the applicant explains that these visitors would be spread out over the 10 hours of operation i.e. through an appointment system, and so would not all be present at the same time. Only when a particular event, such as a staff seminar, is being provided would there be a number of people arriving at one time. The applicant also believes that it is unlikely that these events would occur at the same time as the start and end of school. There would therefore be no on-site visitor car parking provided, apart from one disabled parking bay, and visitors would be expected to walk to the Centre since it has been purposefully sited to serve the local neighbourhood and in walking distance of the homes to be served.
13. The Kent's strategy within the KMSP, specifically Policies TP3 and TP19, aims to reduce the need for people to travel by car. This should in turn, reduce the need for on-site parking. Also, the Plan puts an emphasis on locating development where it would reduce dependency on the car and increase the potential use of public transport. It is believed that by not providing any on-site car parking for visitors would have a significant influence on their choice of transport made by visitors of the Centre. The applicant re-stated that the Centre has been strategically located in the community to minimise travel distance for the community it is intended to serve. The Sure Start scheme places a great deal of emphasis on "buggy pushing distance" for the users of the Centre and the lack of on-site car parking aims to encourage visitors to walk to the Centre. It is therefore considered that the proposal conforms to the requirements of TR3 and TR19 of the KMSP 2006.
14. Another issue against any further extension to the proposed car parking, is that it would most likely result in further encroachment on the school's playing fields, which would then be contrary to the Playing Field Policy defined in the 1996 Statutory Instrument No. 1817. Therefore, that solution would not be desirable, in that the County Council would not normally countenance the sacrifice of valuable school playing field for parking spaces, unless there was an overriding need.
15. From the policy point of view, the proposal is supported by Policy S2 of the Dartford Local Plan, which advocates provision of community facilities. Further, the Policies QL12 of the KMSP and CF1 of the Dartford Local Plan 2nd Draft Deposit encourage community facilities to be grouped together to reduce the need for travel, be easily accessible by walking and public transport.
16. Overall, it is noted that the facility would be located in an urban area and close to the community that it is aiming to serve. The lack of car parking spaces for visitors is intended to encourage people to walk to the site. I consider that if the proposal is approved, there is a potential risk that the congestion level might increase on some occasions due to people's resistance to change their travel habits. However, it is unlikely for this to be a long-term effect, after people recognise that there is no car parking provision for visitors on site overall. I do not think that the proposed development would sufficiently add to the congestion problems around the site so as to warrant refusal of the current proposal on these grounds. Moreover, as the Divisional Transportation Manager is satisfied that the surrounding highways have the capacity to accommodate movements associated with the proposed Children's Centre.

Design

17. Members may also recall that in the September report I did express disappointment with the design of the proposed modular building, specifically with the proposed external materials and finishes, alongside to the low level of details showing the standard of the

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modular building. Since then, the applicant has proposed changes to the external appearance of the building. Moreover, cross section drawings have been submitted to show the quality of the proposed building. Those changes must be considered in the light of Policy QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006 and Policy DD11 of the Dartford Local Plan 2nd Draft Deposit, which require all development to be of high quality, respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surrounding.

18. The proposed modular building units would come with a factory finish in through coloured render to the external walls. The applicant proposes to use predominantly Sand Yellow RAL 1002, aiming to match the yellow stock brickwork used on the recently built nursery building. Additionally, the elevations would be covered with vertical close-boarded oiled cedar panels extending approximately 450mm above the main roofline. The roof would be profiled insulated composite steel roof decking in the contrast to the previously proposed felt finish. The applicant believes that the combination would give a contemporary and stylish solution whilst balancing the financial restraints imposed on them.
19. It is considered that the proposed development respects the policy requirements. I am of the opinion that the applicant has significantly improved the appearance of the building since the last report presented to the Committee. The chosen external materials and finishes are now more attractive and of better quality. It is now considered acceptable to classify the proposed building as “an enhanced modular building”, and therefore more appropriate for a long-term retention. The building is guaranteed for 25 years and due to this fact it would not be practical to limit the planning permission to a limited period, should the permission is granted. Further to Members' comments about need to achieve high rating in BREEAM standards, the applicant confirms that the building would achieve BREEAM “Good” with the desired target of “Very Good”.
20. Under the above circumstances, I consider that the amended scheme shows a much improved and more attractive modular building. It incorporates higher quality external materials and finishes to the ones originally proposed to be used on the building. The provision of the proposed building would facilitate well the range of health, adult education and family support services that it aims to do.

Conclusion

21. This proposal has given rise to issues of traffic and design. Whilst I acknowledge that there might be some potential for an increase in vehicle movements arising from the additional facility in the area, it is unlikely to be so significant to recommend refusal on these grounds. Specifically, it is considered to be located in the community to be served and in accordance to the sustainable transport policy. The external materials of the modular block have been greatly improved and consequently my design concerns have been addressed.
22. I believe that the benefits of introducing the facility to the area would outweigh any potential and occasional inconvenience to the nearby neighbours. Overall, I consider that the proposed development would be in accordance with the aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies.
23. Subject to any further views received by the Committee Meeting, I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions, including conditions covering:
 - Standard time condition for it to be implemented
 - Sample of the render
 - Fencing to be finished in green to match the existing
 - The availability of the staff parking spaces
 - Protection of trees during construction

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- Replacement trees if any are removed
- The development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details

Case Officer –Anna Michalska-Dober

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Background documents –See section heading
