

SECTION D
DEVELOPMENT TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Background Documents - the deposited documents, views and representations received as referred to in the reports and included in the development proposal dossier for each case and also as might be additionally indicated.

Item D1

Retention of mobile classroom. Goodnestone Primary School – DO/07/651

A report by Head of Planning Applications Unit to Planning Applications Committee on 9 October 2007.

DO/07/651 – Application by Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for the retention and renewal of a mobile classroom, Goodnestone C.E Primary School, The Street, Goodnestone.

Recommendation: Permission be granted.

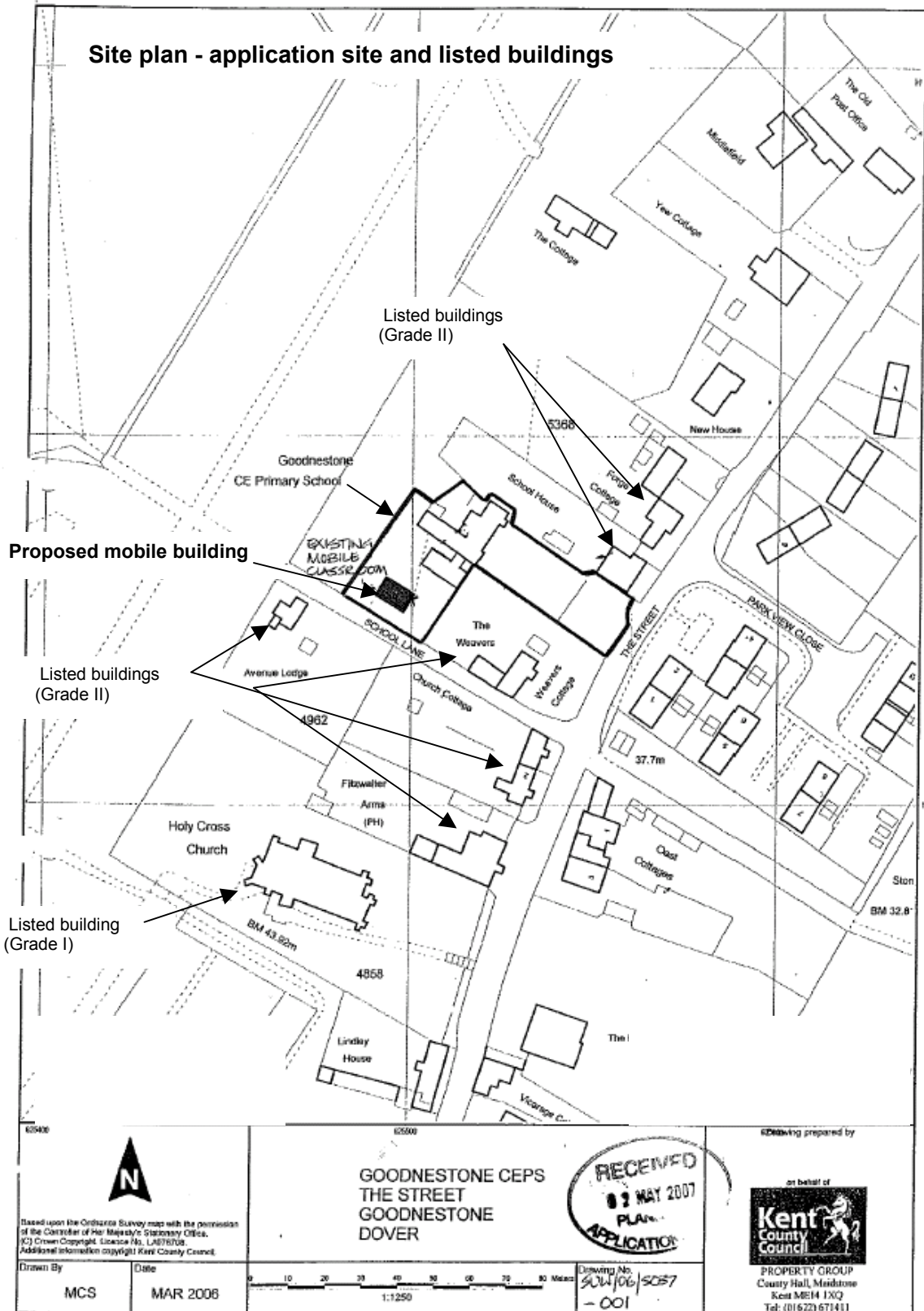
Local Members: Mr L. Ridings

Classification: Unrestricted

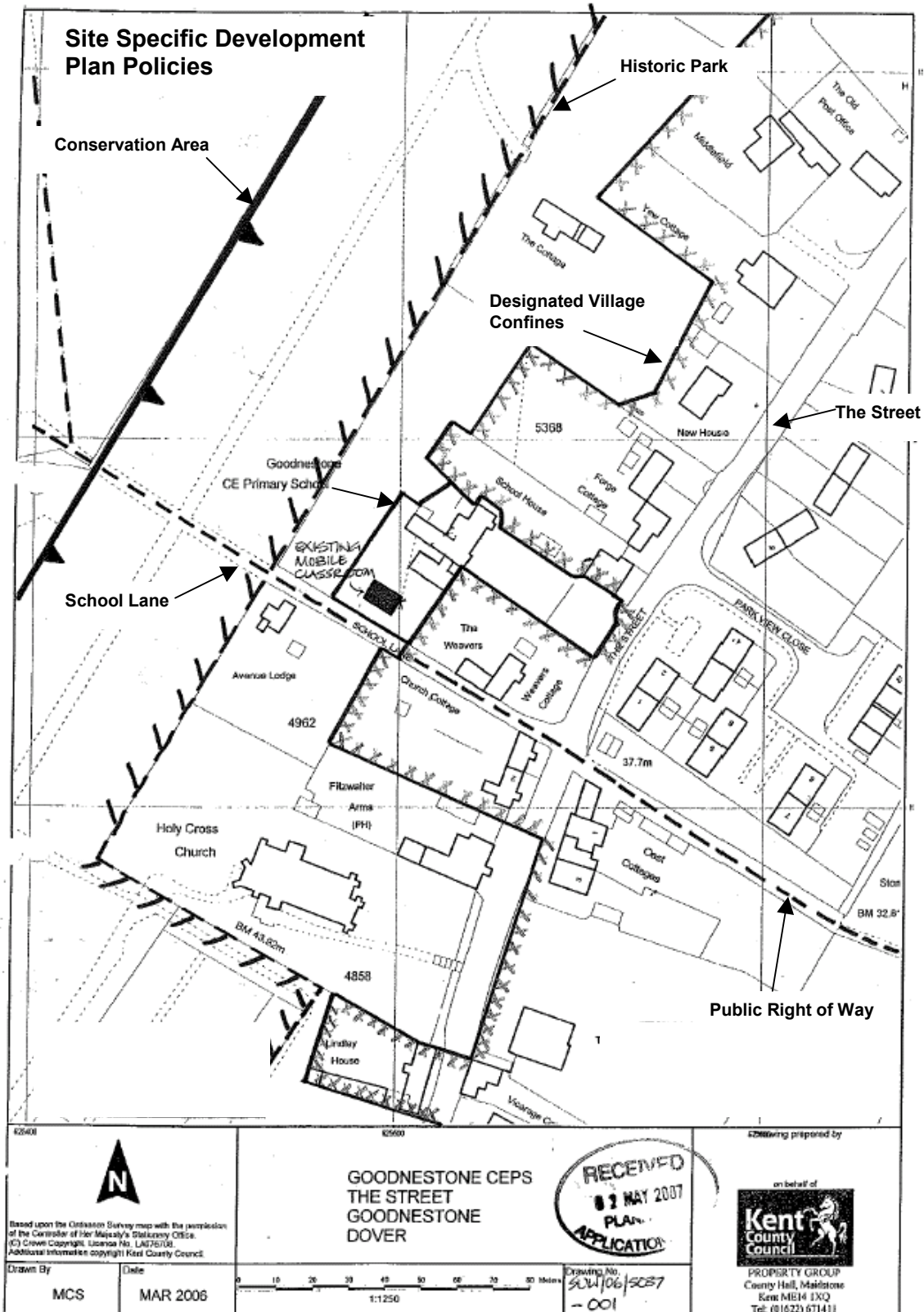
Site

1. The application site, an area of 0.05 hectares, is located within the Goodnestone Primary School grounds, in the village of Goodnestone, approximately 2-km north-east of Aylesham. The Primary School is positioned on a small L-shaped plot of land with the main access off The Street. The application site is located to the rear of the school, adjacent to the south-west boundary with School Lane, a narrow access road that is designated as a Public Right of Way. Residential property is located around the site to the south, east and west (please see attached site plan). A mature hedgerow is maintained within the school grounds between the application site and School Lane. The location is well screened to the north-west and south-east by trees and boundary planting and to the north-east by the main school building. The application site is not visible from the main street scene off The Street.
2. The site of the proposed development is located within the Goodnestone Conservation Area. There are a number of listed buildings within the surrounding area, including Avenue Lodge approximately 18m to the west, Weavers Cottage 23m south-east, Church Cottages 50m south-east, The Fitzwalter Arms 60m south, and the School House 50m east (please see attached site plan). The original school building is not listed, although it was built in the 19th Century. The school was recently extended toward the application site with an office extension completed in a style sympathetic to the original building.
3. As well as being located within a Conservation Area, Goodnestone School is identified within the Dover District Local Plan Proposals Map as being outside the Village Confines, within a Special Landscape Area and a Groundwater Source Protection Zone. Goodnestone Park, which surrounds the village, is designated as a Historic Park and Garden. Please see attached plan for further information on site-specific Development Plan policies.

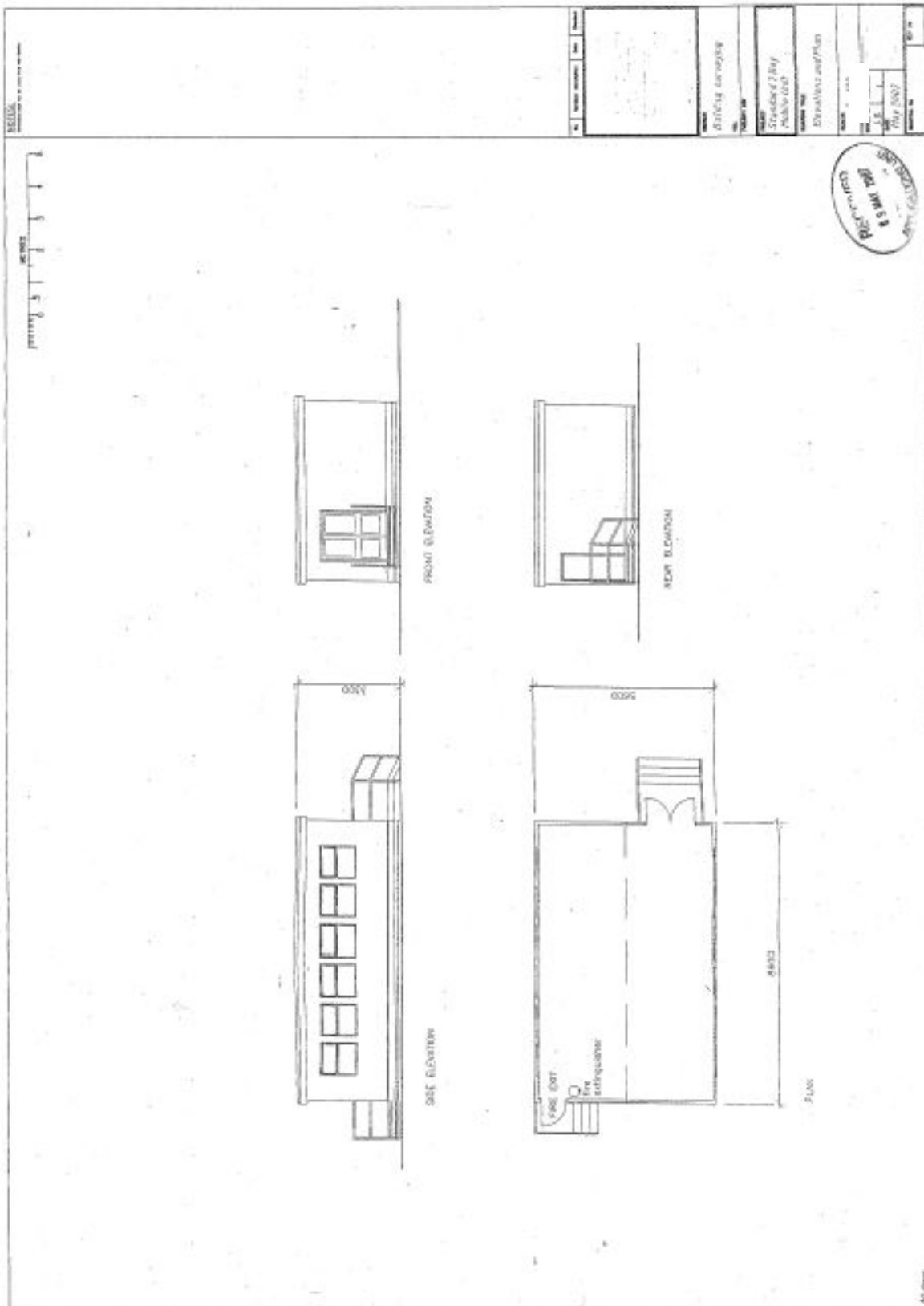
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Background

4. The mobile building proposed for retention within this application was originally granted planning permission by the County Planning Authority in September 1992, and has been maintained on site under various temporary planning permissions since this date. The building was brought on site to provide a third classroom for this School, which at the time of the original application had approximately 60/70 pupils attending. The County Planning Authority granted the most recent permission in November 2005 for a period of 12 months to allow the applicant time to prepare a scheme to provide more suitable permanent accommodation to replace the mobile building.
5. In October 2005 the County Planning Authority granted planning permission for the construction of a new reception/ administration block linked to the existing school building, including the provision of a reception, school office, Headteacher's office, and disabled WC. As part of this development the mobile building was replaced with a refurbished unit. At the time the development of the reception block was proposed as the first phase of work to improve and modernise the teaching accommodation at the school. The replacement of the mobile accommodation was to follow, subject to funding, as a permanent extension attached to the reception building.
6. In February 2006 the County Council's Children, Families and Education Directorate applied for the erection of a larger 3 bay mobile building (including toilets) at the school to replace the existing unit. However, this application was subsequently withdrawn on the recommendation of the Planning Applications Group, due to objections received from Dover District Council, and from a number of local residents. The District Council objected on grounds that the proposal would detract from the special character of the Conservation Area and concerns that the temporary building would become a semi-permanent fixture in an inappropriate location.
7. Members may be aware that due to a falling school roll, Goodnestone Primary School was one of the schools considered for closure under the County Council's Primary Strategy. The applicant advises that this led to a fall in the reception class intake for the last year. However, with confirmation of the school's viability, the intake increased in September.

Proposal

8. The application proposes the retention of the existing mobile classroom sited within the school grounds. The previous temporary planning permission granted by the County Planning Authority expired on 30 November 2006.
9. The unit is of standard design and is similar in structure and appearance to many other such units located around the County. The mobile building provides approximately 48m² of floorspace (1 classroom), measuring 8.6m by 5.6m, rising to a height of 3.3m. The building is completed in a green textured finish with a flat felt roof, and timber steps. The classroom block was replaced on site in 2006 as part of the project to construct the reception/ administration block referred to in the Background section above.
10. The mobile classroom provides teaching accommodation for the Key Stage 1 pupils attending this small local school, with the Key Stage 2 pupils in years 3, 4, and 5 taught in the two classrooms within permanent accommodation located in the main school

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building. The school roll for the year 2006/7 was 51 pupils with 11 members of staff. The confirmed roll for September 2007 will rise to 63 pupils.

Additional Information provided by the Applicant

11. In response to the objections raised by Dover District Council (set out below) the applicant has provided further background on the school and confirmation of the educational need for the classroom as follows:

The roll of the school has increased from 51 in Term 3 to a confirmed roll of 63 for September 2007, with a reception year intake of 15 against a planned admission of 10.

Historic low numbers have necessitated mixed year classes, which require 3 teaching classrooms. Two are in permanent accommodation, with Key Stage 1 pupils accommodated by the use of a temporary mobile classroom. The numbers have always been sufficient to require the school to operate with three classrooms. There is no suitable space for a classroom within the main building, the first floor space in the main building being accessed by narrow domestic type stairs and is only suitable for storage.

The mobile unit was taken out of school use whilst the project to extend the administration block was underway. The School was able to temporarily manage the situation due to a fall in pupil numbers. These numbers are now rising and retention of a mobile classroom is essential to allow this village school to deliver the curriculum.

In 2006 the falling school rolls in Dover and Deal resulted in Goodnestone Primary School being considered for closure under KCC's Primary Strategy. This led to a fall in the reception class intake, but, with the confirmation of the school's viability, the numbers have now increased in Key Stage 1 (29 pupils in Years R/1/2, with 17 in Years 3/4 and a further 17 in Years 4/5).

As part of the KCC Primary Strategy, it is recommended that Schools which are forced by pupil numbers to operate mixed age classes should only do so if they can have no more than two year groups within any class and do not bridge key stages.

If the Year R intake stabilises at 10 pupils year on year, the Local Authority will consider a permanent replacement of the mobile classroom, via the Modernisation Programme. However, having been recently considered for closure, the Local Authority must ensure that the school is viable in the long term before allocating a substantial amount of capital funding.

The mobile classroom remains the immediate solution to the lack of space within the main building, pending confirmation of a stabilised school roll.

Development Plan Policies

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

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

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- Policy SP1 Seeks to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern and form of development.
- Policy SS8 Requires development in rural Kent other than at rural settlements should provide a public facility for which a rural location is justified.
- Policy EN1 States Kent's countryside will be protected, conserved and enhanced for its own sake. Development which adversely affects the countryside will not be permitted unless there is overriding need for it.
- Policy EN5 Seeks to protect, conserve and enhance Special Landscape Areas, whilst having regard to the social and economic well-being of the communities within them.
- Policy QL1 Requires that all development be well designed and of high quality that respond positively to the local character. Development, which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, function and character of settlements or the countryside, will not be permitted.
- Policy QL6 Seeks development within Conservation Areas should preserve or enhance their character or appearance. Development which would harm the character or appearance of a Conservation Area will not be permitted.
- Policy QL8 Seeks to preserve the architectural and historic integrity, and protect and enhance the setting of list buildings.
- 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.
- (ii) The adopted **Dover District Local Plan 2002:**
- Policy DD1 Requires proposals that are acceptable in terms of layout, siting, scale, architectural style, materials, spatial and visual character of the area, landscaping, privacy and amenity.
- Policy CO3 Seeks to conserve and enhance Special Landscape Areas. Development which would adversely affect the landscape character will not be permitted unless there is a demonstrable economic or social need for the development.
- Policy HE1 Requires development to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of a conservation area.
- Policy HE2 Planning permission will only be granted if a development preserves or enhances the area's character or appearance, respects existing patterns of development, along with the scale, form, architectural character of existing buildings.
- Policy HE4 Planning permission will not be granted for proposals which would adversely affect the setting of a listed building.

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- Policy HE9 Development which would adversely affect the character, views to and from a park, setting or amenities of a park or garden of Special Historic Interest will not be permitted.
- Policy CF1 Proposals for the expansion of community facilities will be permitted provided that they are well related to the community which they serve.
- Policy CF2 Planning permission for mobile classrooms will only be granted where there is a proven short-term need; they are located so as to minimise visual harm; and their siting would not result in the loss of or damage to important trees.

Consultations

13. **Dover District Council** raises an objection on the grounds that the development is considered by reason of its design, location and materials used in construction to detract from the special character of the Conservation Area, and to the setting of the school, and surrounding listed buildings, contrary to Dover District Plan policies DD1, HE1, HE2, HE4 and CF2 and Kent and Medway Structure Plan policies QL1, QL6 and QL8.

The District Council comments that *there is a long history of temporary classrooms at the school, and it is considered that the classroom can therefore no longer be considered to be a short term solution to the over crowding problems described in the covering letter submitted with the application. The classroom is therefore contrary to Dover District Local Plan policy CF2.*

Goodnestone Parish Council: no comments have been received at the time of writing this report, any received prior to the Committee Meeting will be reported verbally.

Divisional Transportation Manager has no highway objection to the proposal.

Publicity

14. The application was publicised by an advertisement in a local newspaper, the posting of one site notice. These referred to the proposed development being within the Goodnestone Conservation Area, affecting the setting of a Grade II Listed Building and adjoining a Public Right of Way. In addition 10 neighbouring properties were notified of the application.

Representations

15. No letters of representation were received as a result of the above publicity.

Local Member

16. The Local County Member for Sandwich Mr L. Ridings was notified of the application on 24 May 2007.

Discussion

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17. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (12) above. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, this proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity.
18. The application seeks planning permission for the temporary retention of a mobile building currently located within the Goodnestone School grounds. The building has been positioned on site for approximately 15 years and accommodates a third classroom space at the school. The additional classroom is required to meet the educational need of the current school roll, which stands at 63 pupils from September 2007. The applicant has confirmed the building is used to accommodate the Key Stage 1 pupils, 29 children from September. Two classrooms within the main school building accommodate the Key Stage 2 pupils in years 3, 4 and 5, with 17 pupils in each class respectively. There is no alternate space within the main school building to accommodate a third classroom.
19. The application site is within a sensitive location as designated in the Development Plan, including a Special Landscape Area and the Goodnestone Conservation Area, as well as being located in close proximity to a number of listed buildings. Therefore, the application raises a number of issues surrounding the siting and design of the building when considered in the context of the character of the surrounding built environment and landscape.

Siting, design and appearance

20. The site proposed in this application is located outside the confines of Goodnestone village as defined on the Dover District Local Plan Proposals Map. Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policies SS8, EN1 and QL1 seek to protect and enhance the Kent countryside for its own sake, unless there is an overriding need for the development. In the context of the current application, I would consider that a development for use by a local school on site within an established educational facility is sufficient justification for considering an application in a location outside the village confines.
21. Goodnestone village and the surrounding countryside is located within a Special Landscape Area. Structure Plan Policy EN5 and Dover District Local Plan Policy CO3 seek to conserve and enhance this landscape unless there is a proven social or economic need. A Historic Park also surrounds Goodnestone, Dover District Local Plan Policy HE9 requires that development that would adversely affect the character of a Historic Park or Garden, including views into and out of a park, will not be permitted. In considering the proposed development in the context of the Special Landscape Area and the Historic Park, I would advise that the site proposed is well screened by soft landscaping on three sides and by the main school building to the fourth. Due to the scale of the building, the development is only visible at a local level from School Lane. Therefore, I consider that the development does not have an adverse impact on the surrounding landscape, including views into and out of Goodnestone Park.
22. The application site is within the Goodnestone Conservation Area and within the setting of a number of listed buildings, the closest of which is Avenue Lodge 18 metres to the west across School Lane, and Weavers Cottage approximately 23 metres to the south-east. Dover District Council has raised an objection to the continued retention of the

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proposed building, on the grounds that the development detracts from the special character of the Conservation Area, and from the setting of the school and surrounding listed buildings, due to its location, design and materials used in construction.

23. In considering the design of the building proposed, I would advise that the development consists of a mobile building similar in construction to a number of units used across the County. Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policies QL1, QL6, QL8, and Dover District Local Plan Policies DD1, HE1, HE2, and HE4, all seek proposals that are well designed, and appropriate in the context of the existing pattern of development in the local area, with emphasis on protecting or enhancing the character of a Conservation Area and the setting of any listed buildings.
24. I would note that the building is highly unlikely to be considered as an acceptable permanent solution in this sensitive locality, and note the District Council's concerns over the design of the development in the context of the Conservation Area, main school building and surrounding listed buildings. The single storey flat roof construction cannot be said to enhance the character of the existing built environment. However, the issue to be considered in this instance is whether the retention of the mobile building would detract from or fail to preserve the character of the surrounding area for a continued temporary period.
25. As previously mentioned, the building is sited in a location that is screened from views from outside of the school grounds. The space available to accommodate the unit on site is limited and the position proposed is the only practicable option available for the development. Its position set back from The Street to the rear and side of the school building screens the development from wider views within the Conservation Area. The mobile building is visible at a local level from the adjoining School Lane. The existing mature hedgerow that runs along the boundary of the school in this location helps to break up views of the structure and soften its overall impact on the immediate vicinity. Whilst the building is visible in the immediate setting of at least two listed buildings and at a local level with the Conservation Area, I do not consider that its continued retention on site for a short temporary period would result in an unacceptable impact on the surrounding built environment. Under the circumstances, I consider that removal of the building would be preferable, but the limited visual impact is not in itself sufficient justification to presume against consent on design or Conservation Area grounds.

Need

26. Dover District Local Plan Policy CF2 states that mobile classrooms will only be considered where there is a proven short-term need, the building is located to minimise visual harm, and the siting does not result in damage to important trees. The development already occupies the site, so any concern over trees is not appropriate in this instance. The development is as far as possible located to minimise visual harm and is well screened. I would note that the development was originally considered acceptable by the County Planning Authority in 1992, and has been considered acceptable for continued retention on a number of occasions since. I would acknowledge the District Council's concerns that this development should not become a permanent feature in this location. However, in my opinion, the acceptability of the development in the context of the Development Plan is finely balanced. The question of whether a short-term need for the development has been established therefore becomes a material consideration to the application.

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27. As already mentioned, the School only has space for two classes in permanent accommodation. Given the number of pupils attending the site across 7 school year groups, I would consider that the need for a third classroom is well established and vital to the effective operation of the school and the service provided to the local community.
28. The length of time the mobile building has occupied this sensitive site is cause for concern. The last temporary planning permission was granted for a period of 12 months in order that the applicant could take the opportunity to explore options for the permanent replacement of the building. During this period the applicant has advised that special circumstances took place that prevented a permanent solution being brought forward. Indeed, it should be noted that there have been proposals drawn up for permanent extra accommodation at this school, but uncertainties over the future of the School have prevented those being implemented in recent years. As set out in paragraph (11) above, the uncertainty over the future of the school during the last 12 months resulted in a fall in pupil numbers, and prevented any permanent proposals being developed and brought forward. The applicant has advised that with the confirmation of the viability of the school the roll is due to rise, and should the number of pupils attending stabilise, then the school would be considered within the County Council's Modernisation Programme for Schools.
29. In my opinion, the above circumstances demonstrate that there is a justified short-term need for the continued retention of the mobile building to allow the effective operation of the school, whilst a permanent solution is formulated. I would consider that the removal of the mobile building would potentially compromise the service provided by the school to the local community and thereby jeopardise its continued operation. Balancing the potential loss in service against the localised impacts of the mobile building on School Lane for a continued temporary period, I would not raise an objection to the application. This recommendation is subject to the applicant being advised to strongly consider options for permanent replacement of the mobile unit during the period of any planning permission, and should this not be possible, to be advised to look at ways of adapting the existing arrangements to accommodate the necessary classroom space. Realistically, given the time necessary to bring a scheme forward, I would suggest that a temporary planning permission for a period of 3 years would allow time for this process to take place.

Conclusion

30. In weighing the considerations set out above, I would consider that the design of proposed development is not acceptable as a permanent fixture in this sensitive location, the building does not enhance the character of the Conservation Area, or the setting of the surrounding listed buildings. Nevertheless, the development is well screened within the Conservation Area and any impact is localised to the immediate vicinity. In my opinion, the applicant has established that the building is necessary to the continued short-term operation of the school whilst numbers attending the site stabilise and a permanent solution is brought forward. When balancing the visual impact of the mobile classroom in the context of the character of the surrounding area against the effective operation of the school, I would consider that, in this instance, the continued provision of a community service outweighs the potential impact of a further period of temporary permission. Taking account of the previous temporary planning consents and the educational need for the facility, I would not raise an objection to the proposal. Therefore, subject to the applicant being advised to consider the provision of a

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permanent replacement facility during any temporary period of planning permission, I would recommend the planning permission be granted for a further temporary period.

Recommendation

31. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO the imposition of a condition requiring the building be removed and the site restored within 3 years of the grant of planning permission.

32. I FURTHER RECOMMEND THAT the applicant BE ADVISED of the following informative

- Planning permission is granted for a continued period to enable the preparation of a scheme to provide more suitable permanent accommodation at the school. It is considered that the continued siting of the mobile building fails to enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

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