

Creation of Children's Centre. Grove Park Primary School, Hilton Drive, Sittingbourne – SW/07/902

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

SW/07/902 – Application by Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for the creation of a Children's Centre within existing redundant space and minor internal works, plus the erection of a canopy in front of Cedar Block. Grove Park Primary School, Hilton Drive, Sittingbourne.

Recommendation: Permission be granted.

Local Members: Mr K. Ferrin

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

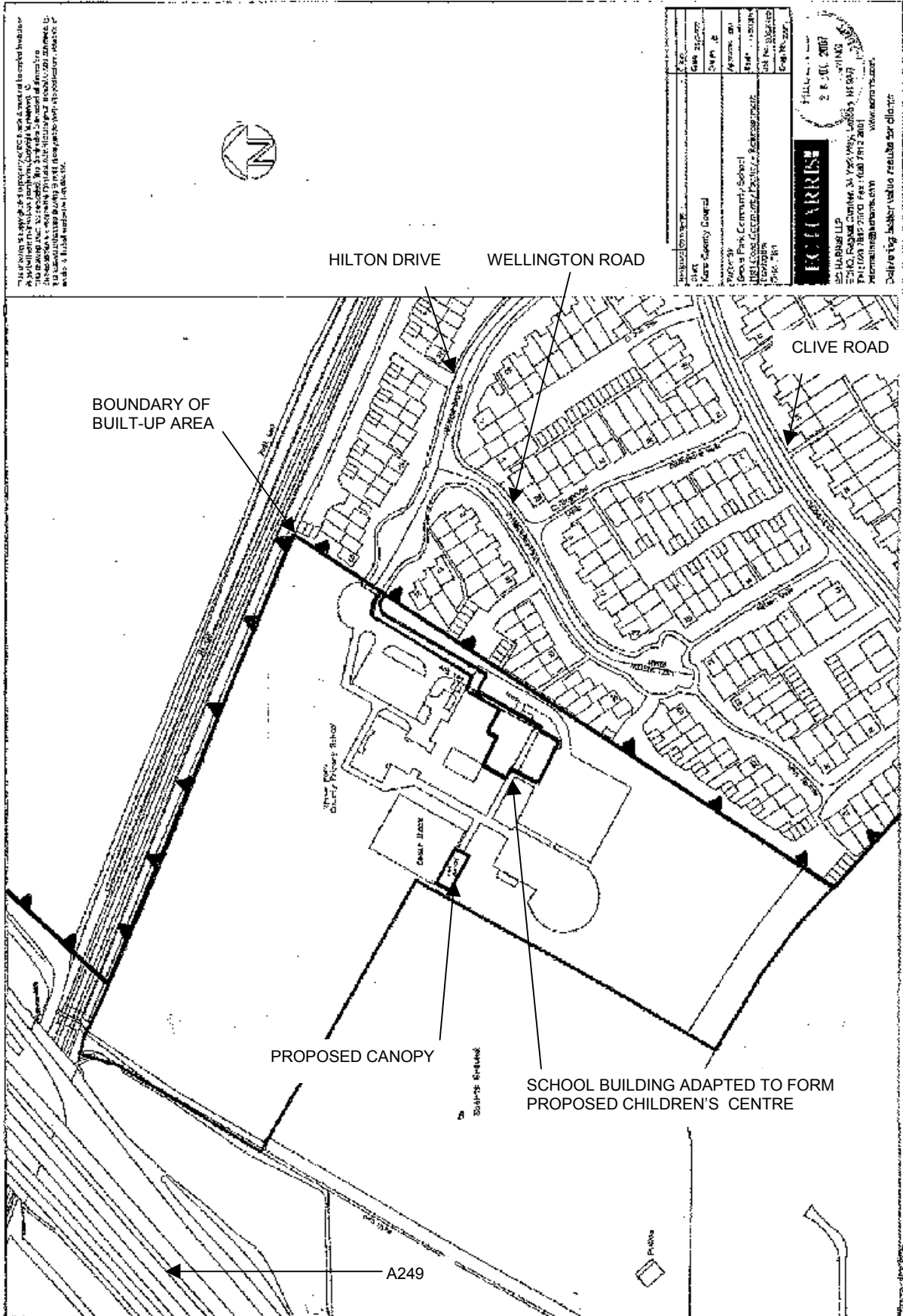
1. Grove Park Primary School is located off Hilton Drive on the outskirts of Sittingbourne, approximately 1.5 km to the west of the town centre. Access to the site is via a dedicated vehicle cross over and pedestrian access at the western end of Hilton Drive. A car park with 40 formal spaces is located adjacent to the main access. The main school buildings, which consist of a flat roofed building constructed in the 1970's, and a more recent 2-storey classroom block granted planning permission in 2003, are laid out to the south and west of the car park. Beyond the school buildings playing fields and public open space border the site to the south and west. The A249 passes to the east of the playing fields, with a railway line to the north.
2. The application site is located within, and adjacent to, the south-east corner of the main school building, and land adjacent to the southern elevation of the 2-storey classroom block.
3. The nearest residential properties are located east of the site on Wellington Road and to the north-east on Hilton Drive – see attached site plan. The boundary between the school grounds and adjoining residential property to the east consists of a hedge that screens the application site from the nearest properties.
4. The school grounds fall outside of the defined built-up area boundaries as set out within the Swale Borough Local Plan (2000) Proposals Map.

Background

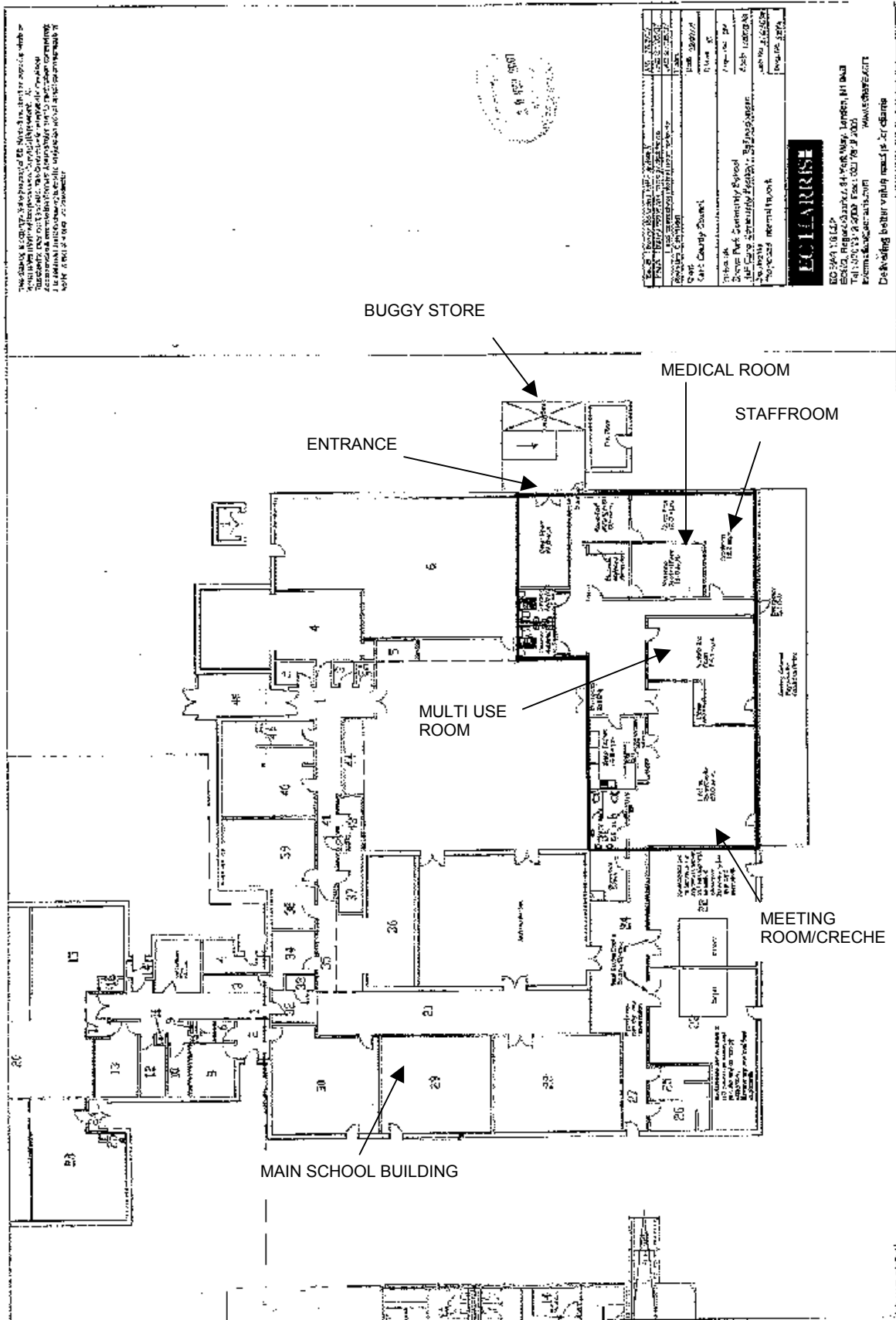
5. The County Planning Authority granted planning permission for a 2-storey classroom block and extensions to the existing school building in February 2003 (planning reference SW/03/1302). In 2004 planning approval was granted for an extension to a playground on site (under reference SW/04/867), an extension to the school hall (SW/04/930), and the creation of an earth bund along two sides of a playground adjacent to the railway line (SW/04/1038).

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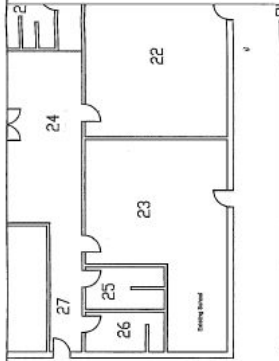
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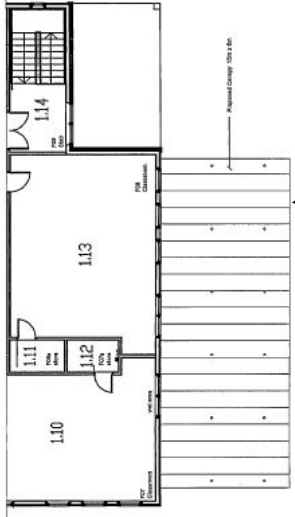
Residential Committee	Date
Client	Date 27/07/07
Kent County Council	Drawn JC
Project No	Approved SA
Grove Park Community School	Scale 1:2000 AS
Half Core Community Facility - Refurbishment	Job No 210315P
Drawing No	Drawn No 2252
Proposed Plans and Elevations	Draw No 2252
Central Block	

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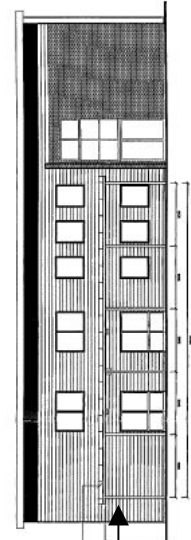
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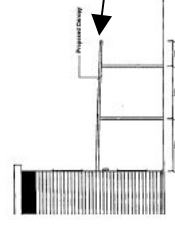
Proposed Ground Floor Plan



Proposed First Floor Plan



Proposed South West Elevation



Proposed North West Elevation

PROPOSED CANOPY
15M X 6M

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Proposal

6. The application proposes the creation of a community Children's Centre through the adaptation of part of the existing main school building, which was previously used as classroom space. In addition to changes to the internal layout, the proposed external alterations to the building would include replacement UPVC windows and aluminium doors to match existing fenestration. External works proposed also include the provision of a buggy store, and steel framed canopy to the adjoining 2-storey classroom block. The canopy is proposed to replace the schools existing canopy to be utilised as part of the Children's Centre.
7. The application has been made on behalf of the County Council's Children, Families and Education Directorate. The scheme is one of a number of similar applications being proposed across the County as part of Central Government's National Sure Start Programme, funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The main aim of the Sure Start Programme is to increase the availability of childcare for all children, improve health and emotional development for young children and support parents in their aspirations toward employment. The aim of the Children's Centres is to offer a range of health, adult education and family support services for the local community.
8. The application proposes a Children's Centre, which would contain a creche / meeting room for use by parents who are using the Centre, as well as a second smaller multi use room. Both rooms would provide flexible space for informal meetings thorough to formal seminar style learning. The arrangements also include an interview / medical room, an office area, staff room, kitchen and toilets. All of the above facilities would be provided within the existing school building through internal adaptation of under-used classroom space. No new floorspace would be created as part of this application.
9. The Children's Centre would operate as a separate community facility independent from the school. The application proposes that the Centre would be open from 0800 to 1800 hours, Monday to Friday, 48 weeks of the year. The Centre would employ 3 members of staff on a full time basis with the number rising for special events. The application sets out the Centre is expected to generate up to 30 visitors across a normal day. The Centre would also provide a venue for education events, such as seminars. The application advises that it is unlikely that these events would occur at the same time as the start and finish of the school day.
10. No additional car parking facilities are proposed within the application, the Children's Centre staff and disabled visitors would be expected to use the existing 40-space car park provided at the school; no parking facilities are proposed for visitors to the Centre. The application sets out that the Centre has been located to minimise travel distances to the community it is intended to serve, and visitors would be encouraged to walk.

Development Plan Policies

11. 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 SS6 Seeks to improve the built and natural environment, functioning and appearance of the suburbs of the urban areas, including the provision of services and facilities that serve local needs.
- 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 QL1 Seeks all development be well designed and of high quality that respond positively to the local character. Development, which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, function and character of settlements or the countryside, will not be permitted.
- Policy QL11 Provision will be made for the development and improvement of local services in existing residential areas and in town and district centres, particularly where services are deficient. Flexibility in the use of buildings for mixed community uses, and the concentration of sports facilities at schools, will be encouraged.
- Policy TP3 Local Planning Authorities should ensure that development sites are well served by public transport, walking and cycling.
- Policy TP19 Seeks development proposals to comply with the respective vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by Kent County Council and Medway Council.
- (ii) The adopted Swale Borough Local Plan (2000)
- Strategic Policy I Seeks to provide for the development needs of the Borough, whilst ensuring the protection and enhancement of the environment, achieving a sensitive balance between competing needs.
- Strategic Policy IV Seeks to minimise adverse impact upon the environment from development and also to achieve a new improved environmental standard.
- Policy G1 Requires all development to accord with Local Plan Policies, have regard to characteristics of locality, avoid unacceptable impacts on natural and built environments, adopt high standards of design, cause no demonstrable harm to residential amenity, provide safe pedestrian and vehicular access and avoid unacceptable consequences in highway terms, and provide parking sufficient for the traffic likely to be generated.
- Policy E9 Land falling outside the defined built-up area boundaries will be protected for its own sake. Development in this area will not be granted unless it relates to development which is essential to meet the needs of local communities, or it consists of the acceptable re-use of existing built area.

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Policy E48 Seeks to ensure all development is of high standard of design appropriate to its surroundings.

Policy C1 Subject to compliance with other Plan policies, planning permission will be granted for appropriately located social and community facilities.

(iv) Swale Borough Local Plan First Review: Re-deposit Draft (2005):

Strategic Policy II Seeks to protect and enhance the environment and promote good design.

Strategic Policy VII Seeks to provide new community facilities, increase use of local facilities.

Policy E1 Requires all development to accord with Local Plan Policies, have regard to characteristics of locality and setting, avoid unacceptable impacts on natural and built environments, adopt high standards of design, cause no demonstrable harm to residential amenity, and integrate security and safety measures.

Policy E20 Seeks development to integrate security and safety measures.

Policy C1 Supports proposals to improve community services and facilities. Where proposals would meet an identified local need in an accessible location, supports proposals to help maximise the use of existing community services.

Consultations

12. **Swale Borough Council** – raises no objection to the application, subject to a condition limiting the hours of operation to 8.00am – 6.00pm on weekdays only.

Bobbing Parish Council – raises no objection to the application. However, the Parish Council raise concerns that traffic could increase in this area. Commenting that *'traffic problems have always plagued this school and we would not like any further problems for the residents nearby.'*

The Divisional Transportation Manager – raises no objection to the proposal in respect of highway matters.

Local Member

13. The Local County Member for Swale West, Mr. K. Ferrin, was notified of the application on 1 August 2007.

Publicity

14. The application was publicised by the posting of one site notice and the notification of 8 neighbouring properties.

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Representations

15. 1 letter of representation objecting to the proposal was received from a local resident. The main points raised can be summarised as follows:
- Concerns about the potential highway impact of the proposed development. Advises that the existing traffic generated by the school already results in conflict between road users and parking problems on residential streets. Expresses concern that the operation of the proposed Centre until 1800 hours would make the situation even more difficult for residents.

Discussion

16. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraphs (11) 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.
17. This application proposes the creation of a new Children's Centre facility at Grove Park Community School, Sittingbourne. The proposed Centre is one of 52 similar facilities being applied for by KCC Children's, Families and Education Directorate across the County. The aim of the Children's Centres is to offer a range of health, adult education and family support services to provide for the needs of the local community and support existing nurseries in the surrounding area.
18. The application proposes the adaptation of part of the existing Grove Park School buildings, including existing classroom space, made available by a fall in the number of pupils attending the school. The application sets out that the school has a design capacity for 630 pupils, with a current school roll of 484 pupils. The application proposes internal adaptation to part of the main school building to create the proposed Centre, plus some minor alterations to the exterior of the building, including replacement UPVC windows and aluminium doors, all of which would be covered by Permitted Development Rights. The application also includes the provision of an external buggy store, and new steel framed canopy adjacent to southern elevation of an adjoining teaching block.

Location

19. The application site falls outside the built limits of Sittingbourne urban area as defined in Swale Borough Local Plan Proposals map. Therefore, the application site is subject to Development Plan Policies relating to the protection of the countryside, including Kent and Medway Structure Plan policy EN1, and Swale Local Plan 2000 policy E9, which seek to protect the countryside for its own sake, unless there is an overriding need for the development to provide a function for the local community.
20. Bearing in mind that the application proposes the reuse of part of an existing education establishment for a community use, I cannot see a conflict with the appropriate development plan policies and would not raise an objection to the location outside the built limits. Moreover, the school site is an integral, albeit peripheral, addition to the built

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up area of the town, and its exclusion from the urban confines is essentially to safeguard the relative openness of the site.

21. As stated above, the Children's Centre would involve the adaptation of existing school buildings, and would not move the built development within the site toward residential property, nor significantly toward the open countryside. The canopy proposed within the application would be located to the west of the school grounds away from residential property adjacent to the newer of the school buildings. In my opinion the minor exterior changes proposed in the application would not be inappropriate in the context on the local environment.

Traffic and Access

22. The main element of the application that requires consideration is the potential for the proposed use to generate additional activity, including movements to and from the site, and whether any change in the use would result in an unacceptable impact on the adjoining property. The Children's Centre proposed would operate drop in style facilities to support young families in the local community, as well as providing a venue for training events in support of this service. This use of the site would fall within the same Use Class as the existing school (D1).
23. The application proposes opening hours of 0800 to 1800 hours, five days a week, and confirms that 3 members of staff would be employed on a permanent full time basis, with an estimated use by up to 30 visitors across a normal day. The application sets out that the school currently employs 30 full time members of staff with a further 12 on a part-time basis. The school car park has a capacity of 40 spaces. Children's Centre staff and disabled visitors would therefore be accommodated within the existing parking facilities. Beyond the disabled spaces, no car parking is proposed for visitors to the Centre. The application setting out that the Centre would be located within walking distance of the community it would serve, with visitors encouraged to walk.
24. Concerns have been raised by a nearby resident about traffic problems experienced by residents as a result of the existing activities at the School, and concerns that these problems could be increased by the proposed development. The letter received highlights that on street parking can be an issue in the surrounding roads at peak times of the day. Bobbing Parish Council, whilst raising no objection to the application, also express concerns about traffic issues surrounding the school site.
25. Kent and Medway Structure Plan policy TP3 sets out that new development should be well served by public transport, walking and cycling. I would advise that being directly adjacent to the built up area of Sittingbourne, the application site is well situated to allow access to public transport, as well as being served by the footpath network within the adjoining residential area. The existing car parking provision (40 spaces) is considered acceptable given the numbers of staff that would attend the site in association with both the School and Children Centre use.
26. I note the proposed facility would replace under-used classroom space within the existing school building. The development of the Children's Centre would effectively reduce the number of pupils that could be accommodated within the school by approximately 50 places, and replace this use with up to 30 visitors per day in connection with the Centre.

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27. Whilst I acknowledge that there is traffic congestion associated with the school site at peak times of the day, this is not unlike that experienced by many schools around the County. The traffic levels that potentially could be generated by the proposed use should be balanced against the reduction in the design capacity of the school. The applicant advises that the Centre would be well located to serve the local community with visitors encouraged to walk to the site. Whilst inevitably some visitors may choose to drive, the intermittent nature of these movements spread throughout the day is unlikely to result in an increase in highway concerns, or result in any significant loss of amenity to local residents through any traffic generated. In particular, it needs to be borne in mind that these Children's Centres are specifically being designed and located to serve only those who live in walking distance of them. I would note that the Divisional Transportation Manager is not raising an objection to the development as proposed. Therefore, I would not raise an objection to the application on highway grounds, and would suggest that a condition on any decision notice requiring the implementation of a Green Travel Plan would assist in monitoring and mitigating the movements generated by the proposed Centre.

Hours of Use

28. The one objection received from a nearby resident raised concern over the hours of operation set out in the application: proposed from 0800 to 1800 hours, 5 days a week, 48 weeks a year. This would potentially extend the use of the site during the school holidays, and to some extent beyond the regular school hours. However, the hours of operation proposed are not extensive and mirror an extended school day. The proposed use of the site would be in harmony with Government initiatives for Extended Schools, making the best use of the buildings and facilities for the benefit of the wider community. Given the size of the Centre and the numbers of potential visitors suggested in the application, in my opinion, the Centre would not cause an unacceptable impact to the adjoining residential properties as a result of the hours set out above.

Design

29. The external changes proposed in the application are minor in nature. The main element being the canopy proposed to the 2-storey teaching block, with most of the other works proposed being covered by Permitted Development Rights. Taking account of the location and design of the existing buildings, subject to a condition requiring the submission of materials to be used in construction of the canopy, I would not raise objection to the design of the canopy or the other minor external changes proposed in the application.

Conclusion

30. I consider the proposed development to be acceptable in terms of its location and visual appearance. The Children's Centre would be located within an existing educational facility adapting under-used accommodation. The Divisional Transportation Manager has considered the highway problems associated with the School and is not raising an objection to the development. Whilst the community use would change the timing of some visits to the site, I consider the spreading of movements intermittently across the day would not result in an increase in the problems experienced at peak travel time. Therefore, I would not raise a planning objection and recommend accordingly.

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Recommendation

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

- the standard time limit;
- the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
- details of the materials to be used to construct the canopy and buggy store
- hours of use to be restricted to 0800 to 1800 Monday to Friday; and
- implementation and ongoing review of a Green Travel Plan for the Centre.

Case officer – James Bickle

01622 221068

Background documents - See section heading
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