

**Single storey modular building for Children's Centre, Knockhall Community Primary School.**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 11 September 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: Subject to any further views received by the Committee Meeting, permission be granted subject to conditions

**Local Member(s):** Ivor Jones

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Site**

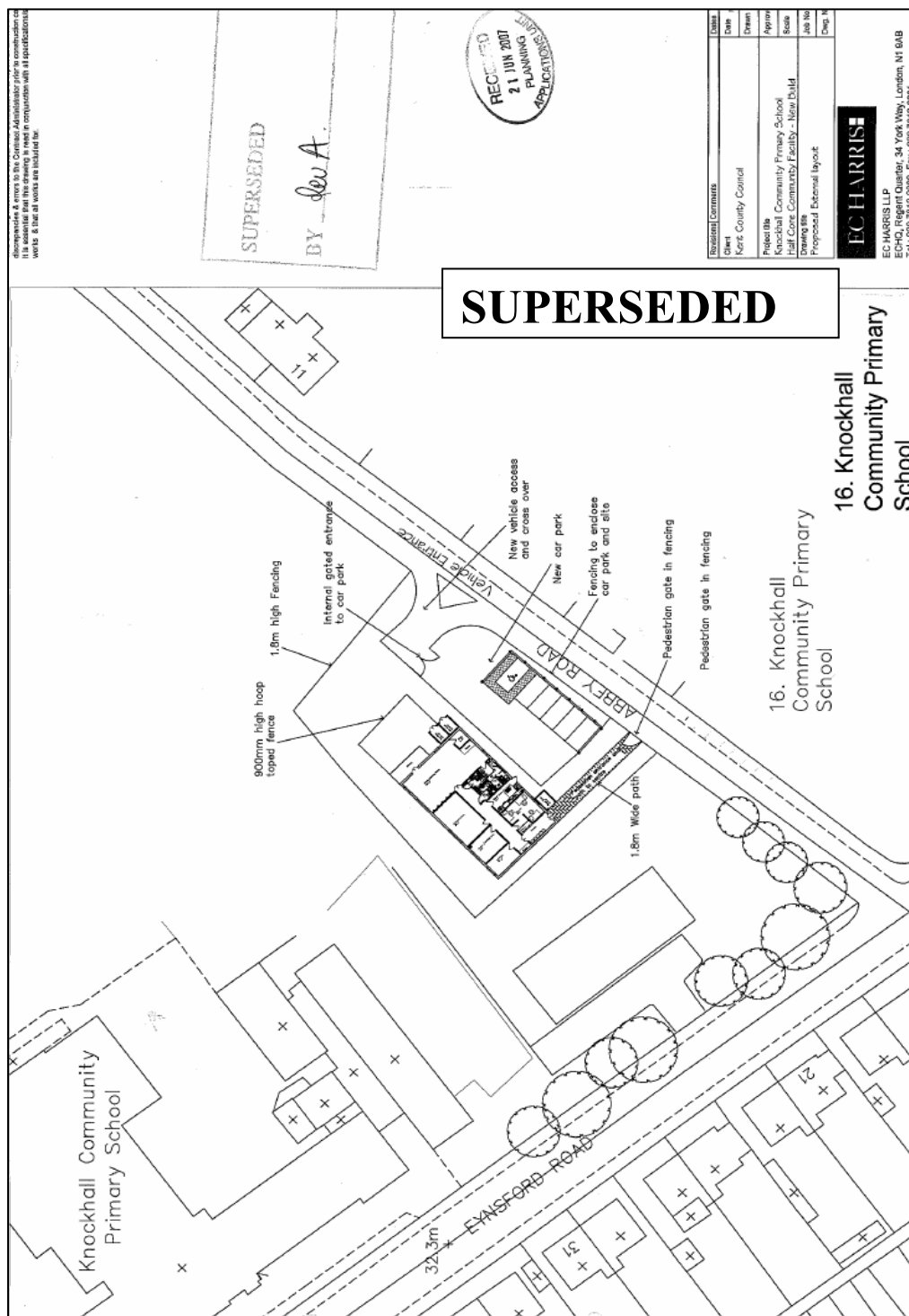
1. Knockhall Community Primary School is located along Eynsford Road and Abbey Road in Greenhithe near Dartford. Terraced residential houses surround the school site, except for the northern boundary where the site bounds railway track/embankment. A site plan is attached (see page D4.3).

**Proposal**

2. The proposal is to create a new Children's Centre. The planning application has been submitted by Kent County Council's Children Families and Education Directorate. The creation of Children's Centres is part of the Central Government's National Sure Start Programme and is funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). 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. Kent County Council has been tasked with creating 52 Children's Centres in the most deprived areas of Kent by March 2008. Knockhall Community Primary School site has been chosen as it is in an area identified as deprived with a continued fall in 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 provide the nursery provisions outlined under the Sure Start Scheme.
3. The proposal (as revised) is for a new 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 (see page D4.4). The entry to the Children's Centre would be through a new vehicular and pedestrian access to the site from Abbey Road. There are 3 new car parking bays for use by the staff of the Children's Centre. Additionally, one disabled parking bay is proposed but otherwise no visitor car parking would be provided. The pedestrian access would be through a gate from the new 35m footpath along the frontage of the site. The footpath would be 2.6m from the kerb edge and outside the perimeter of the centre's fencing but within the boundary of the school grounds. Externally, there would be two canopies and an impact absorbent play area. Inside, the building contains crèche/meeting rooms, an Information Computing Technology (ICT) suite, an interview medical room, a snack kitchen, a reception/office area and toilets.
4. The expected opening hours are to be 8.00am to 6.00pm, five days a week for 48 weeks of the year. The Centre would employ 3 members of staff on a regular basis with the number rising for special events. It is expected that there would be up to 30 visitors spread throughout the day.

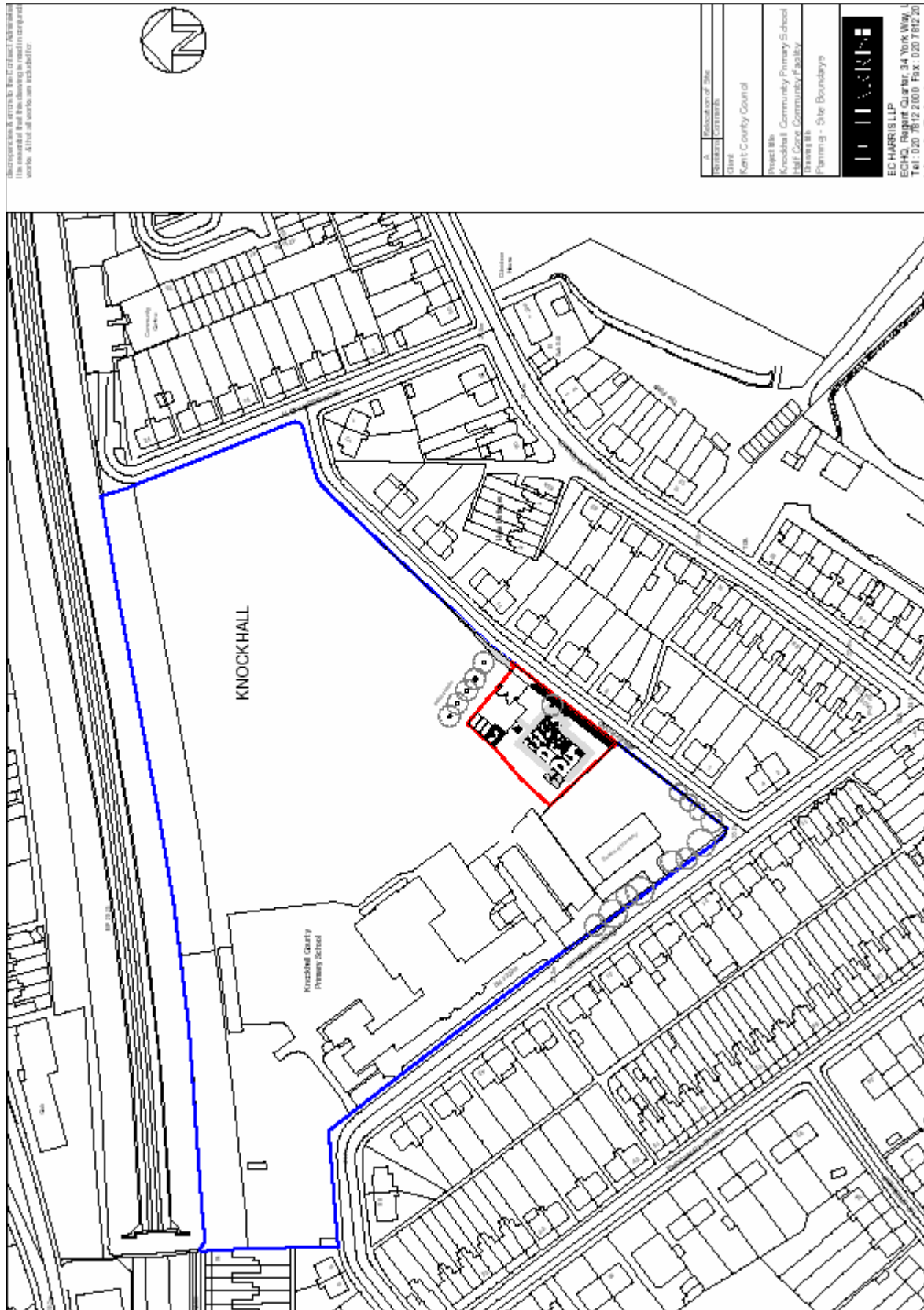
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5. Members’ attention is drawn to the fact that the above details describe the latest version of the scheme. Since the original application was submitted, a number of changes have been introduced to the scheme. The changes have covered repositioning of the building approximately 12m further away from the nursery playing field, improvements to the visibility splays and making the pedestrian access to the site safer. Also, the perimeter fence-line has been brought back approximately 2.6m from the kerb edge, thereby creating a new footpath along the frontage of the site. Finally, the parking has been reduced from six spaces to four and the vehicular gates have been set back from the crossover to enable cars to park and then to open / close the gates as necessary without creating congestion in Abbey Road. The original proposal is shown on the drawing below.



# Item D4

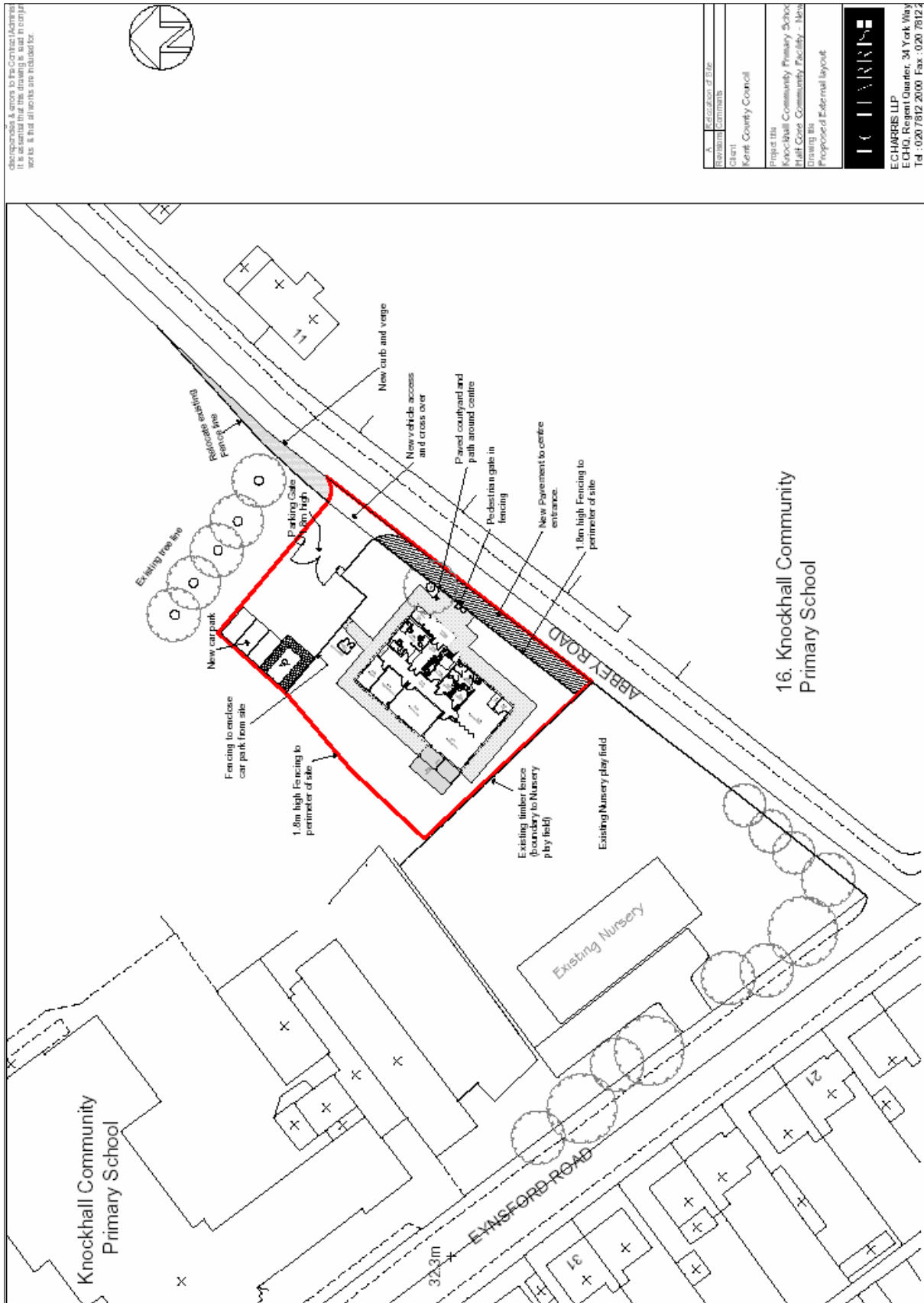
## Single storey modular block for Children's Centre at Knockhall Community Primary School, Greenhithe – DA/07/672



Revised scheme

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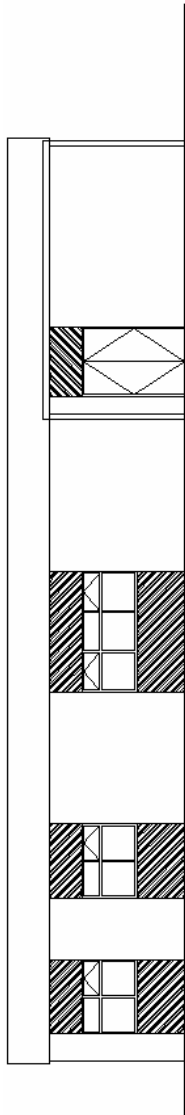
## Single storey modular block for Children's Centre at Knockhall Community Primary School, Greenhithe – DA/07/672



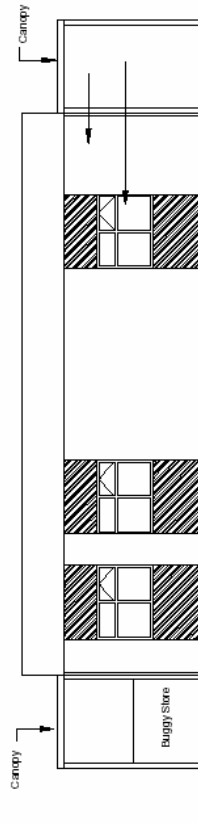
Revised scheme

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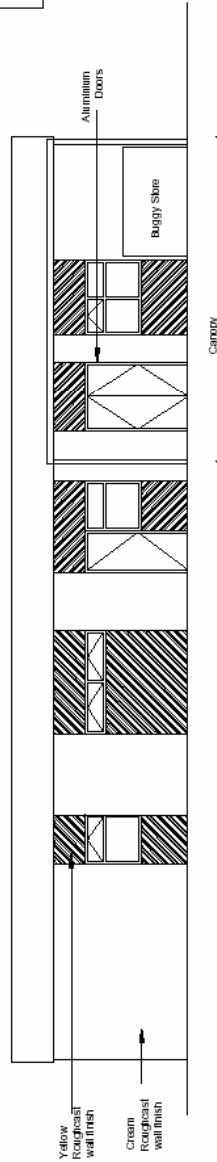
It is essential that this drawing is read in conjunction with all works & that all works are included for.



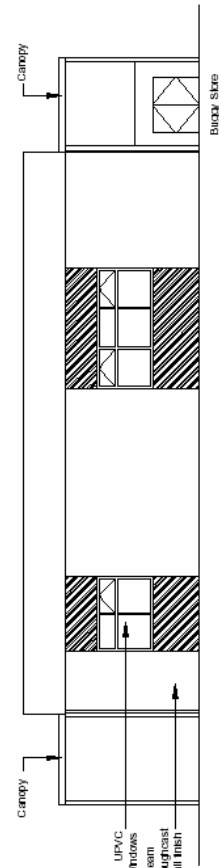
North West Elevation



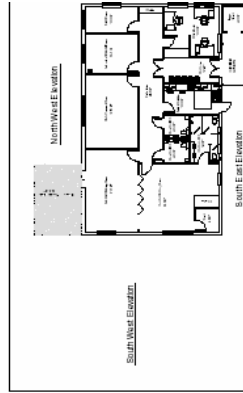
North East Elevation



South East Elevation



South West Elevation



**Block : 1**  
**Scale**

B	Revised Building of building - Elevations Plans
1	Architect
1	Block size
1	Drawings
Client	
Kent County Council	
Project title	
Knockhall Community Primary School	
Half Core Community Facility	
Drawings	
Elevations	



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**Planning Policy**

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

(i) The Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006:

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:

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:

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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**Consultations**

7. **Dartford Borough Council:** raises no objection to the original proposal; Any further comments to the amended scheme received prior to Committee meeting will be reported verbally.

**Divisional Transportation Manager:** raised objection to the original proposal. His comments are attached below:

*"There is limited (if any) visibility at the vehicular access point. This would be a hazard and as such I cannot agree to the proposal.*

*Whilst the road is subject to a 30mph speed limit I doubt that this speed is reached by the majority (if any) of the vehicles using the road.*

*My suggestion would be we should base visibility requirements to a speed of 25 mph, unless the applicant is prepared to carry out a speed survey, which may reveal a lower speed. This would then require a visibility splay of 33m x 2.4m x 33m to be provided. (If the speed were 20mph this would further reduce to 25m x 2.4m x 25m)*

*Similarly, the pedestrian gate would result in potentially people walking blind into a carriageway and suitable provision needs to be made to prevent this. In this instance it would therefore seem appropriate that the pedestrian and vehicular access are co-located.*

*The car parking needs to be moved back until it is approximately 2.6 metres from the kerb face, this will allow the visibility splays to be formed. The building can be opposite handed, thus placing the pedestrian entrance near the centre of the visibility splay"*

Following the amendments, the Divisional Transportation Manager raises no highway objections to the new proposal.

**The Environment Agency:** raises no objection. However, it is advised that the site lies adjacent to the Knockhall Chase landfill. Therefore, appropriate measures should be taken to mitigate against any off site problems that may be associated with this landfill. It is requested that:

- the foul drainage should be discharged into mains foul sewer,
- no soakways should be located within 50 metres of the landfill site and that the soakways discharge should be no deeper than 3 metres into the underlying chalk, and into clean uncontaminated natural ground
- roof water should discharge directly to the soakway via sealed downpipes
- run-off from access roads and car parking areas should discharge via appropriate pollution prevention measures.

**Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council:** requested confirmation that the amount of parking spaces being proposed is sufficient. Also, the Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council's Mayor would like to request a site meeting regarding the above application.

Any further comments to the amended scheme received prior to Committee meeting will be reported verbally.

**Sport England:** raises no objection to the proposal.

**Local Members**

8. The local Member, Ivor Jones was notified of the application on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2007 and then re-notified on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2007. No comments received.

**Publicity**

9. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 38 nearby properties. Following the submission of amendments, all



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properties were re-notified about the revised plans and comments are expected until 4<sup>th</sup> September. Any further comments to the amended scheme received prior to Committee meeting will be reported verbally.

**Representations**

10.6 letters of representation and a petition objecting to the proposal were received in response to the original proposal. Following the amendments, two letters of representations have been received. The main comments and objections can be summarised as follows:

**Access and traffic**

- The access arrangement and positioning is not safe
- The position of this entrance would make it very difficult to manoeuvre vehicles into and out of the site because of resident parking
- The road is too narrow for two way traffic and the additional traffic the development would generate
- There is no room for a footpath
- The recent nursery building development contributed to worsen the traffic and parking problems around the school site and further concerns are raised that the new development would make the traffic even worse
- A number of houses in Abbey Road do not have off road parking and therefore this development is likely to cause further congestion
- With the proposed changes, parking spaces have been reduced making the situation even worse
- The school already has a car park off Eynsford Road, could this not be utilised and possibly expanded to accommodate further needs

**Play ground**

- It is not true that the playground area is an unused area, both the main playing field and nursery playground, have been used for sports activities
- The proposed development would take away a large part of the new Nursery's grassed play area. It shows scant regard for tax payers' money that finances these projects and lack of compassion for the loss to these children
- We ought to promote more exercise for the young

**Other**

- There are other areas available such as the land at the back of the car park by the railway embankment, solving parking issues and leaving a green space for the children to enjoy. The footpath is on both sides there (along Eynsford Road)
- The location is ill thought out
- There is an existing Community Centre on Alexander Road, which is currently under-used
- There are concerns over the noise the Centre would generate
- Cannot see how the proposal would benefit us
- There is no information on website, perhaps you are trying to hide something
- The plans show the entrance where a tree currently stands, this would need to be removed
- There is no reference to the alternative locations that were mentioned in the original petition, there are other locations on the same site which would be more practical and safer
- Someone from KCC should come to visit the site and see for themselves

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**Discussion***Introduction*

11. The Children's Centre Programme is being developed as part of the Central Government's National Sure Start Programme and is funded by the DfES. Kent County Council has been tasked with creating 52 Children's Centres across Kent by March 2008. In some cases, where schools were identified to have surplus space, it is proposed just to refurbish the existing building(s). In other cases, the scheme involves putting new buildings within the grounds of an existing school. Having regard to the Kent Primary Strategy, Kent County Council's Children's Centre Team in conjunction with Multi Agency partners has identified suitable sites within areas of deprivation. This proposal represents one of the planned Children's Centres in Kent.
12. The application is required to be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan policies, unless other material considerations are of overriding importance. Consideration should be given to the impact of the siting, layout and scale of the development on playing fields and highway safety. Also, the design of the proposal and the need for the new community facility need to be considered. Policy QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan and Policy of the DD11 of the Dartford Local Plan 2<sup>nd</sup> 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. Further, consideration should be given to the Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policy QL12 and the Dartford Local Plan 1995 Policy S2 that encourage decision makers to make provision for community facilities. In conjunction with these and other relevant policies, these issues are considered and discussed below. In principle, I see no overriding objection on planning policy grounds.

*Car Parking*

13. The current roll of Knockhall Community Primary School is 360, where the capacity of the school is 441. The applicant states that the school has adequate parking facilities for their 23 full time teaching staff and 32 other members of staff. However, it is confirmed that there are some problems at drop off and collection time. Representations have raised objection to the proposal on two grounds. First, that the new development would increase the congestion problem around the site. Secondly, that the access arrangement and positioning of the new development is not safe.
14. With reference to the first point, some residents suggest that the recently completed nursery project made the traffic and parking problems around the school site more difficult. There are further concerns about the potential for an escalation of the problem. It was brought to my attention that many houses in Abbey Road do not have off road parking and therefore this development is likely to cause further congestion.
15. The applicant states that the Children's Centre would operate as a separate unit from the School with the School having no control over the day-to-day operation. For this reason, the car parking provision also should be assessed based on the car park provided by the scheme only. The applicant states that the Children's Centre would employ 3 members of staff on a regular basis with the number rising for special events. Therefore, there are 3 car parking spaces for members of staff. It is intended that staff employed within the surrounding area will be expected to walk and any staff required to drive in would be offered a space in the new car park.
16. There is no visitor car parking proposed apart from one disabled parking bay. The applicant states that all the Centres in Kent have been strategically located to minimise travel distance for the majority of the community it is intended to serve. The Sure Start

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scheme puts a great deal of emphasis on “buggy pushing distance” with the users of the centre encouraged to walk. It is estimated that the Centre would have up to 30 visitors in a day. However, the applicant believes that these visitors would be spread out over the 10 hours of operation. Only when a particular event, such as a 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. I consider that if the proposal is approved, there is a potential risk that the congestion level might increase on some occasions but it is unlikely for this to be on regular basis or to be significant enough to recommend refusal of the application on these grounds. Particularly, as the Divisional Transportation Manager is satisfied that the surrounding highways have the capacity to accommodate those movements.

17. The second issue raised was concerning the new access to the site. Both, residents and the Divisional Transportation Manager raised objection to the original access design. It was feared that the positioning of the new entrance would make it very difficult to manoeuvre vehicles into and out of the site. The Divisional Transportation Manager noted that there would be nearly no visibility at the vehicular access point. It was recommended that the applicant revised the access to incorporate visibility splays as advised in his comments above. Moreover, it was noted that the positioning of the pedestrian gate would potentially result in people walking blind into a carriageway. Consequently, an amended vehicular access with all the requests of the Divisional Transportation Manager has been submitted for consideration. Also, the revised pedestrian gate has been moved back from the kerb and a new footpath created along the frontage of the site (see page D4.4). As a result, the Divisional Transportation Manager now raises no objection to the proposed development. I believe, the revised scheme is significantly improved and is acceptable in planning terms.
18. Finally, some residents have suggested that a better location for the Centre should be explored. Suggestions included sharing access with the school, to use the previously used land along Eynsford Road to the left of the main entrance or use of the existing community centre on Alexander Road. The applicant did not consider those options to be suitable.
19. From the policy point of view, it is considered that the proposal meets the requirements of Policies TP3 and QL12 of the KMSp 2006 and Policy CF1 of the Dartford Local Plan 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft Deposit, which require that community facilities be grouped together to reduce the need for travel, be easily accessible by walking and public transport. In the opinion of the Divisional Transportation Manager, the development complies with vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by the County Council as stated in the Policy TP19.
20. I consider that the applicant has sufficiently addressed the safety issues in relation to creating new access to the site. Through the proposal for a new footpath and wide visibility splays any risks would be significantly reduced. It is acknowledged that residents may already be experiencing some level of congestion around the site during the school times, especially during pick up and drop off time. However, I do not consider the proposed development would be so significant as to recommend refusal of the proposal on these grounds.

*Playing field and alternatives*

21. Originally, the Children's Centre was sited very close to the existing nursery building, taking away a significant part of the Nursery's grass play area. Consequently, a number of residents raised objections, due to the impact on the Nursery play area. In response to this, the applicant amended the drawings and repositioned the building approximately 12m further away from the nursery play area. I believe the amended location for the

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proposed Children's Centre effectively eases any impact of the proposed development on the Nursery's play area. Finally, it is noted that Sport England was consulted on both versions of the proposal and raised no objection. It was considered that the plans show a line of trees to north-east of the building, which separate the proposal from the remainder of the playing field. Therefore, the proposal would not impact on land capable of forming a playing pitch.

*Design*

22. Policy QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006 and Policy DD11 of the Dartford Local Plan 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft Deposit require all development to be of high quality, respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surrounding.
23. The proposed building is a single storey flat roof building, constructed in sections in a quality controlled factory environment (see page D4.5). The parts are transported to the site and fixed on pre-constructed foundations. The units come with a factory finish through coloured rough cast coating to the external walls. The applicant proposes to use predominantly cream with yellow, aiming to match the yellow stock brickwork used on the recently built nursery building. The roof would be felt finish. The applicant states that the proposed building would achieve a minimum BREEAM rating of 'good' with desired target of 'very good'. A minimum life-span of 25 years is warranted by the manufacturer, which is also the requirement of the DfES, which would provide funding for this project. No objection has been received to the proposed design of the building from consultees.
24. In principle, it is considered that the proposed development respects the policy requirements. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that no higher standard of design, materials and finishes were proposed. I am of the opinion that the applicant has provided very limited evidence that the building differs much more than the traditional modular building, which normally would only be granted a temporary consent. The applicant is not prepared to accept a temporary consent in this case.
25. On the other hand, the design incorporates a modern method of construction encompassing off-site manufacturing. This technique helps to reduce waste during construction, as well as to cut the construction time to the necessary minimum. Both, Kent Design Guide 2006 and KMSP 2006 Policies QL1 and NR1, promote use of these sustainable construction methods. Also, considering that the Centre is proposed within school grounds, it is very important to limit the construction and therefore disruption time to the School's operation to a minimum.
26. Finally, the above policies require for the proposed development to consider the needs of all sections of community and to provide for a safe environment. The applicant aims to achieve this by means of providing level access to the building and a wide corridor within the building. The boundary of the site would be secured by palisade fencing to match the existing. However, it should be mentioned that to match the new boundary fencing to the existing fencing, this should be finished in powder coated green colour, and not galvanised steel finish as suggested by a photograph in the Supporting Statement. I believe that the details of proposed fencing and its colour finish could be secured by a condition on the planning permission, together with the other outstanding details of external finishes and colour scheme of the building, should the proposal be permitted. Lastly, the applicant states that the proposed works would have no effect on any trees on the site.
27. Under the above circumstances, I consider that the community benefit of having the facility would provide better access to a range of health, adult education and family support services which would outweigh the potentially uninspiring design of the building.

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#### Conclusion

28. On balance, I consider that the benefits of introducing the facility to the area would outweigh any potential impact arising from the additional traffic generated by the proposal and the design concerns, as discussed above. Overall, I consider that the proposed development would otherwise be in accordance with the aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies.

29. Subject to any further views received by the Committee Meeting, I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions, including conditions covering:

- Standard time restriction for it to be carried out
- Details of external finishes and materials
- Details of fencing to be confirmed
- Protection of trees during construction
- 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
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