

New block with IT suite & staff office in roof space, Stone Bay School, 70 Stone Road, Broadstairs.

A report by Acting Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 20 March 2007.

Application by Headteacher and Kent Children, Family and Education for the new classroom block with IT suite & staff office in roof space at Stone Bay School, 70 Stone Road, Broadstairs (Ref:TH/07/75)

Recommendation: Permission be granted.

Local Member(s): Mr John Fullarton, Mr Bill Hayton

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Stone Bay School is a special needs school providing both, educational and residential facilities. There are entrances from Stone Road and Park Road. The rear of Stone Bay School backs directly on to Eastern Esplanade and the seafront north of Broadstairs. The school is situated in a residential area, where the nearest house to the proposed block is approximately 20 metres to the south. The site is naturally sloping down towards the sea. The development site is within 50m of internationally designated sites (Site of Special Scientific Interest-Thamet Coast, Ramsar-Thamet Coast and Sandwich Bay). A site plans are attached (Figure 1 and 2).
2. The application has been submitted on behalf of the Headteacher of the school and Kent County Council Children Families and Education. The application as originally submitted proposed two new buildings. The first building was a two storey block with café, IT and office facilities. The second building was proposed as a permanent replacement for an existing modular building to the north of the school site. The proposal for the replacement building was withdrawn during the consultation period and no longer constitutes part of this application. Details of the proposal are shown on Figure 2.

Proposal

3. The proposed development comprises a new detached classroom block over two floors. The design of the building aims to maximise views from the development and to create an awareness of the external environment (Drawing 1). The site is currently used as a hard surface play area. The applicant states that students have other play area facilities for their use including a grassed area with recently installed play equipment and swing (Photo 4). As part of the development, it is proposed to remove the sycamore trees along the Eastern Esplanade and to reduce the height of the hedgerow to allow views from the new building towards the sea (Photo 1). New planting is proposed to the south boundary. The provision of the independent block would give staff an area to work with specific student groups without the distraction of other students in the Stone Bay School. It would also allow more one to one teaching. The development would enable the School to maintain its high standard of special needs education to local and other students across Kent. The applicant states that the Education Curriculum has identified educational services that need to be provided at the school. These include the provision of Information Communication Technology (ICT). This development is intended to meet that need.

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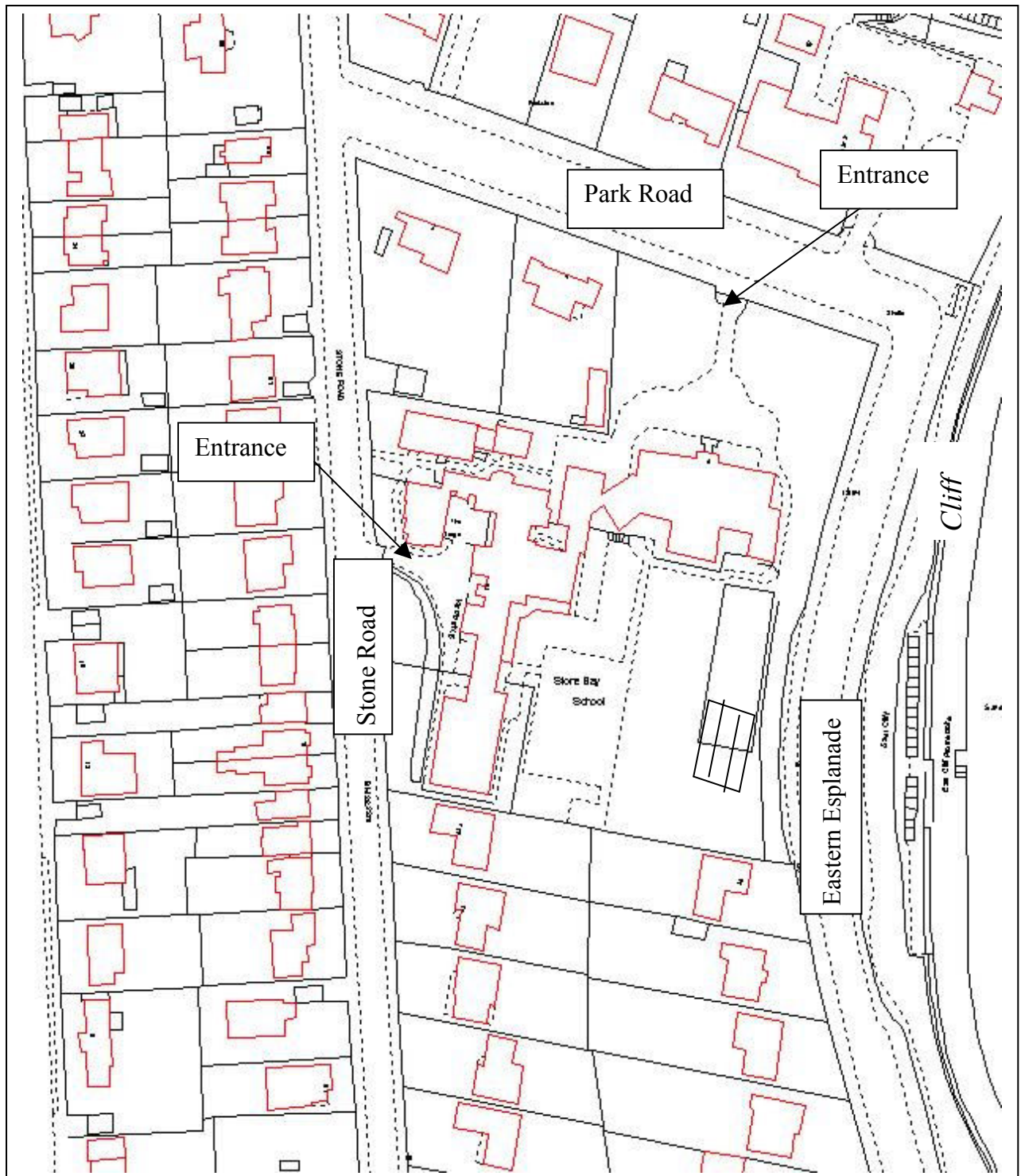


Figure 1 Site Plan, Stone Bay School

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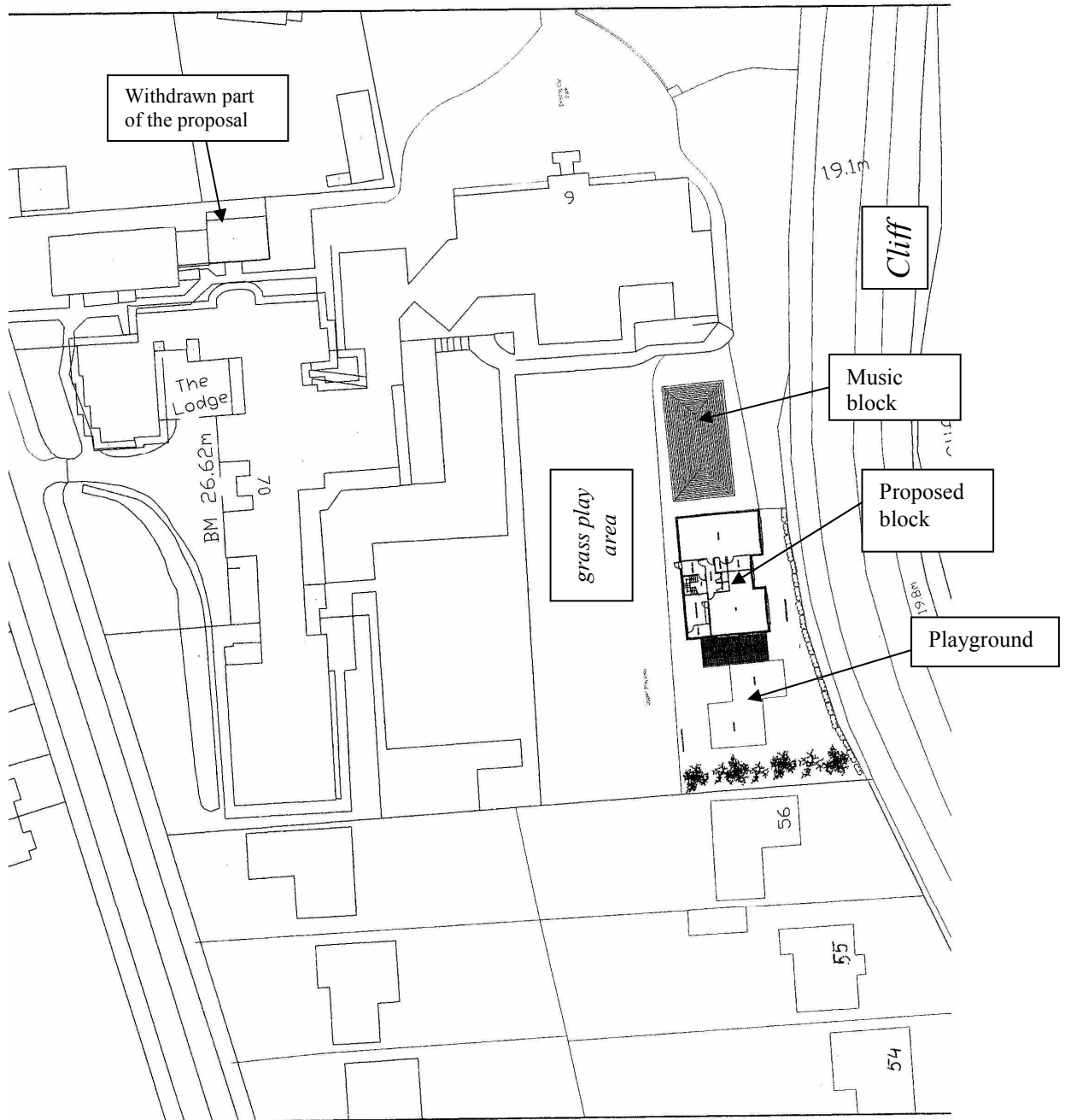
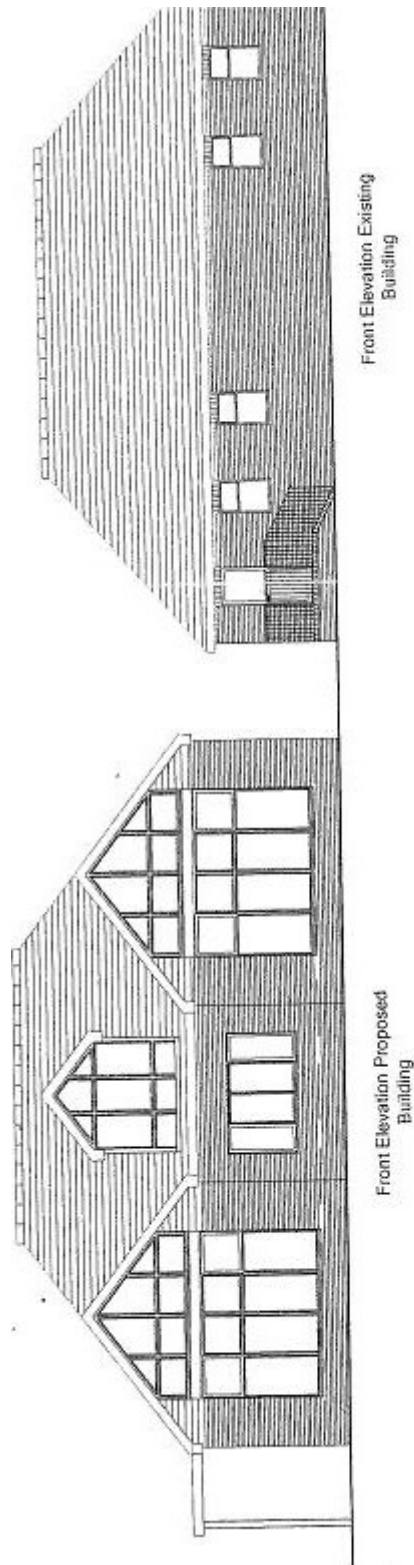


Figure 2 Proposed site plan

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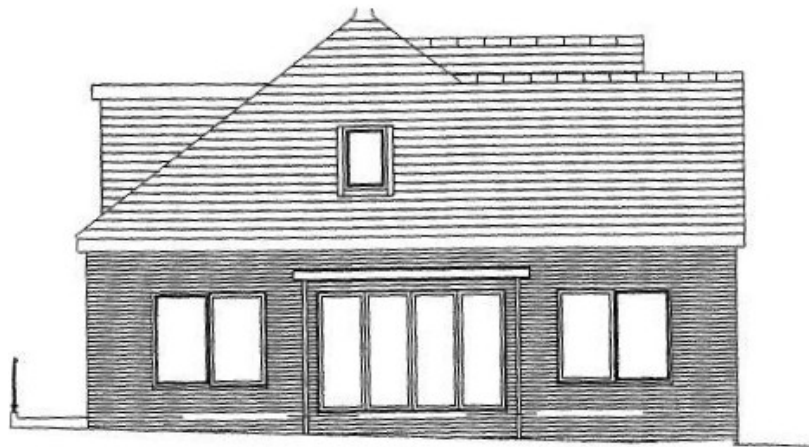
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Drawing 1 East elevation

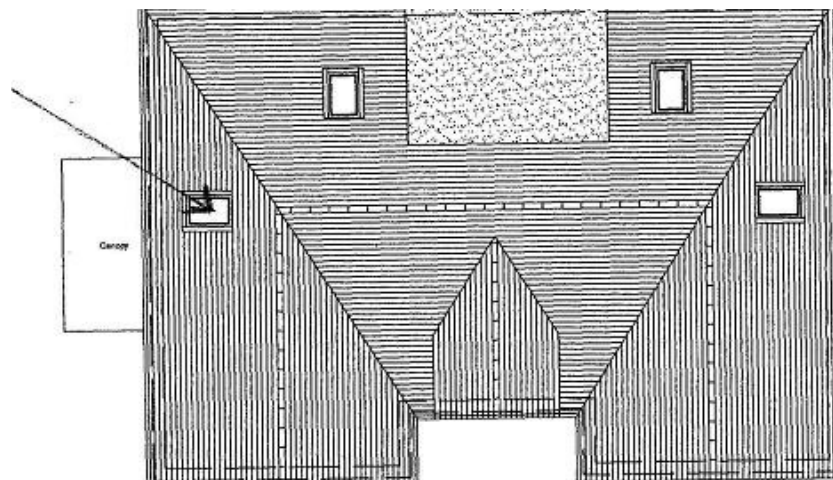
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South elevation seen from property number 56

Drawing 2 South elevation seen from property number 56



Drawing 3 Roof plan



Drawing 4 Cross section through gable ends - East elevation

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Photo 1 Eastern Esplanade



Photo 2 View from the south boundary and property number 56

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Photo 3 Playground and property number 56

Planning Policy

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

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 of the major urban areas, including the provision of services and facilities that serve local needs.
- Policy EN6** Development will not be permitted where it would directly, indirectly or cumulatively materially harm sites of international and national wildlife designation.
- Policy QL1** Seeks all development to be well designed and high quality that respond 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 QL7** Development within archaeological sites will be protected and where possible, enhanced. Where potentially important archaeological remains may exist, developers will be required to arrange for archaeological assessment and/or field evaluation to be carried out in advance of the determination of planning applications.
- Policy QL12** Community Services will be provided as long as there is a demonstrable need for them. 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.

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Thanet Local Plan 2006:

- Policy D1** All new development is required to provide high quality and inclusive design, sustainability, layout and materials. Requires new development that respects or enhances the character of the surrounding area; is compatible neighbouring buildings and spaces and does not lead to unacceptable loss of amenity; incorporates disabled access; retains features that contribute to biodiversity and the quality of the local environment.
- Policy D2** Requires landscaping proposal for all new development that enhance the development in its setting and incorporates the retention of as much of the existing vegetation on site as possible.
- Policy CF1** Supports applications for new community facilities provided that the proposals are not contrary to other Local Plan policies, and the community use and location are demonstrated as appropriate.
- Policy HE11** Seeks appropriate assessment of any archaeological importance of the site and the likely impact of development.
- Policy TR16** Requires proposal to make satisfactory provision for the parking of vehicles.

Consultations

Thanet District Council: raises no objection to the proposal subject to conditions, covering the standard time limit and details of external materials.

The Area Transportation Manager: raises no objection to the proposal as the applicant confirms that the proposal would not increase staff or student numbers at the school, and that the position of the new building would not result in a loss of existing on-site parking.

The Environment Agency: raises no objection to the proposal. Provides advice on the design of the soakway and comments on the surface water drainage and on fuel, oil and chemical storage.

County Archaeologist: The application site lies in an area rich in archaeological remains. The archaeological officer advises that the applicant should secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written specification and timetable, which should be submitted to and approved by the County Planning Authority before the development would take place.

Biodiversity Projects Officer: Advises on the potential impact on the Site of Special Scientific Interest Thanet Coast and Ramsar –Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay designated sites and protected species. The development site is within 50m of these sites. Also, the development is within the existing development footprint and given the scale of the development, impacts on the designated sites seem unlikely. She advises that:

- (l) No disturbance to birds should be carried out during the nesting season, mid March to August inclusive. Mitigation measures should be included in the development

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plans and implemented during construction in order to protect breeding birds that may use the vegetation.

- (II) A strategy for landscaping and biodiversity enhancement at the development site should be produced and submitted to the County Planning Authority for approval as part of the planning application.
- (III) Measures to promote biodiversity should be incorporated into the development including bird and bat boxes on the built structures or in the surrounding areas, native local provenance planting and pond creation.

Jacobs-Landscaping: made the following comments:

(...)”It is an attractive quiet residential street with the majority of properties fronting on to Eastern Esplanade with direct views of the sea, typical of the Thanet coastal towns. There is little vegetation in the area so the school site with its evergreen hedge and mature sycamores provides one of the few areas of mature planting.

From the inside of the site, the boundary fencing prevents access to the sycamore trees and hedge and hinders maintenance of this area. I understand from a representative at the school that the decision has already been made to remove the sycamores to help improve the visual appearance and maintenance of this area from within the site. This is unfortunate for the visual amenity of Eastern Esplanade, however understandable from a practical point of view.

The existing hedge is to be retained, although reduced in height, as part of the proposed building works. Measures to protect this hedge and final proposed height need to be provided, along with a requirement to replant any lost or damaged sections through the construction of the works with the same species. This would ensure the visual amenity of the site boundary along Eastern Esplanade and the setting of the coastal strip.

The proposals also allow for new tree planting along the southern boundary. Details of these trees need to be provided. Whilst the intention of this planting is understood the applicant should carefully consider the species and appropriateness of this planting given the proximity to the neighbouring house”.

Broadstairs & St. Peters Parish Council: consulted on 18th January 2007 and no comments received to date.

Local Members

- 5. The local Members, Mr J Fullarton & Mr B Hayton, were notified of the application on the 18th January 2007.

Publicity

- 6. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and by the individual notification of 8 nearby properties.

Representations

- 7. 3 letters of representation have been received regarding the proposal. The planning considerations can be summarised as:
 - The development is considered to be an over-development of site to the detriment of neighbouring residential properties

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- Having the café with outside seating area just a few yards from the house and garden of Number 56 is unacceptable intruding on residents privacy and right to enjoy their garden. There is already considerable noise from the play area, this development would only increase it
- The smells of cooking from the kitchen would hardly make the use of our gardens enjoyable
- The upper floors of the Café/classroom would overlook Number 56 and local gardens
- Children lack the supervision required to prevent them disturbing their neighbours, and the proposed expansion would increase this risk
- The proposal title indicates that only classrooms would be built, with no mention of a café, which is clearly an attempt to deceive local residents as to the nature of this building. The plan is labelled 'Café Classroom Block'
- If the development is permitted no part of this building should be used as a café, it must be classroom only, music and discos should be prohibited
- If the development is permitted, any trees planted along the boundary of property 56 must be of a type which roots would not cause subsidence to adjoining property
- One resident raises no objection to the proposal but is concerned about the parking problem on Park Road, especially on the junctions with Stone Road and Eastern Esplanade. The concern is that many vehicles are parked right up to the junction, which obscures moving traffic at these two junctions.

Discussion

Introduction

8. 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 whether the layout and scale of development as proposed is acceptable in relation to the existing neighbouring uses and open spaces. Policy QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan and policy D1 of the Thanet Local Plan require new developments to be of high quality and well designed, to respect or enhance the character/appearance of the surrounding area and, not to lead to the loss of amenity through overlooking, noise, overshadowing or unacceptable sense of enclosure. In conjunction with these and other relevant landscape and design policies, these issues need to be considered in the determination of this application and are discussed below.

Design

9. The proposed building respects the Victorian character of the existing buildings on the site. It incorporates contemporary features such as clear storey glazing, to maximize views from the new building and create an awareness of the external environment from within the building. The applicant states that the use of sea views has proven beneficial in the stability of the students as demonstrated elsewhere in the school. It is intended to provide a calming distraction to the sometimes unpredictable student behaviour. The proposed orientation of the building is east and south, which would maximise the morning sunlight, daylight and solar gain. I consider therefore that the building is of a satisfactory design, given its location and proposed use.

Overdevelopment

10. The existing buildings on the site are predominantly two and three storey in height. The proposed building would comprise a detached block over two floors - ground floor and attic floor. The height of the building would not exceed 8 metres, which would be of similar height to the music building on the site and lower than nearby residential

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properties to the south of the school. In my opinion, the scale and massing relate to the site's existing context and would not be an overdevelopment of the site (Drawing 1).

Overlooking

11. Given the proximity of the building to the property Number 56, careful consideration needs to be given as to whether the development would result in an unacceptable impact on residential amenity through overlooking. In particular, the neighbours raise objection to the side elevation Velux window within the roof space (Drawing 2, 3, 4). The architect has undertaken to design this window at 1.6m above floor level, thus minimising the risk of the overlooking. In addition, the standard distance of 21 metres between windows of habitable rooms, which is to prevent loss of privacy, would also be maintained. The applicant advises that the purpose of this Velux window is to allow sufficient daylight to enter the room, which would be used as an IT suite. In my view, the angle of the roof-line and the fact that the proposed building would be 21 metres away from the boundary with the nearest residential property, it is therefore unlikely that the neighbours' privacy would be materially affected.

Use of the proposed building

12. One of the representations raised an objection to the use of the proposed building as a café and the unacceptability of smells coming from the kitchen. The applicant states that pupils would use this part of the building for learning and lunches only. The word "café" is perhaps misleading, as the students would be taught there to prepare healthy meals rather than deep-fried fast food. The new facility would provide a domestic environment (11.5m² kitchen area) in which 6-8 students would prepare snacks and healthy food using standard white goods equipment while learning good practice in food hygiene. The facility would not be used for the preparation of commercial meals or provide a dining facility for large numbers of students as the school has a very good commercial kitchen within the main building. It is also possible that some meals would be transported to the proposed café classroom from the main school's kitchen. This practice of transporting meals from the main kitchen already exists in other areas of the school. Finally, an objector raised concerns about potential use of the building as a disco facility. In response to that the applicant has confirmed that there is no intention to play loud music or have discos in the building. If members are concerned with this aspect, it could be restricted by the imposition of a suitable planning condition on any consent. In view of the character and size of the proposed kitchen/café room, I believe that the proposal is acceptable in planning terms and would not have a detrimental impact on residential amenity.

Outside seating area

13. An objection has been raised to the covered patio area with large folding doors to the south elevation of the proposed building (Drawing 4). The concern is that having an external sitting area would increase the noise from the play area. However, the applicant states that the playground is currently used by a dozen or so children and this would not change. It is intended to provide versatility of use of the café and adjacent recreational area. It is considered that controlled and focussed activity by the pupils reduces spontaneous outbursts and maintains a generally calm environment. The Headteacher believes that supervision would be more concentrated as the external play area would be smaller and children would have easier access to the building. The provision of additional activities in the new building would help to focus attention and stabilize behavioural problems.

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Highways

14. One resident raised concern with the current car parking arrangements on the school site and on nearby streets, despite the fact that the roads are wide. In his/her opinion many vehicles are parked too close to the junctions of Park Road with Stone Road and with Eastern Esplanade, which obscures moving traffic. The applicant confirmed that there would be no increase in staff or student numbers and no additional vehicular or pedestrian access points would be created as a consequence of this development. He, also, acknowledged that the school has never been able to accommodate on-site parking for staff. The Park Road entrance and hard standing has been improved over the past year to reduce traffic congestion on the public highway, particularly at weekends and at end of Term when parents and hire vehicles collect students to take them home. The Area Transportation Manager raises no objection to the proposal.

Landscaping

15. The planning application includes a proposal to remove the sycamore trees along the Eastern Esplanade and part of the hedgerow. This is necessary to accommodate the layout and would reduce maintenance of this area from within the site. The removal of the high planting along the eastern boundary would also allow a view from the building onto the sea and to allow more daylight to enter the building. Some replacement of trees would be proposed as part of the landscape scheme. Although it is regrettable that the development removes the only large vegetation in this part of the Eastern Esplanade, the landscape architect accepts that the justification for doing so is reasonable. Lastly, a concern has been raised about possible damage caused by the roots from proposed new trees to be planted along the southern boundary. If the permission is granted, further details of the landscape scheme would have to be submitted to make sure that the planting would be adequate for the site and could ensure that species would be chosen that are not harmful to the foundations of the neighbouring properties.

Conclusion

16. Overall, I consider that the design of the proposed building would not have a detrimental effect on the amenity of local residents. Further, the mass and the design of the proposed development is appropriate for the context of the site. I am of the opinion that the proposed development would not give rise to any material harm and is otherwise in accordance with the relevant Development Plan Policies. Therefore, I recommend that permission be granted subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.
17. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions, including conditions covering:
- The standard time limit
 - The development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details
 - External materials to be submitted for approval
 - A scheme of landscaping, its implementation and maintenance
 - Protection of nesting birds
 - Archaeological watching brief
 - Hours of working during construction

Case Officer –Anna Michalska-Dober

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Background documents –See section heading
