

**10 bay performing art and drama mobile classroom at The Bradbourne School, Sevenoaks - SE/06/2478**

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

Application by The Governors of The Bradbourne School and KCC Children, Families and Education for a 10 bay performing art and drama mobile classroom at The Bradbourne School, Bradbourne Vale Road, Sevenoaks, SE/06/2478.

Recommendation: Planning permission be refused.

Local Member(s): Mr N. Chard

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Members' Site Visit**

1. This application was reported to the Planning Applications Committee on 13 February 2007 and, as a result of the discussion and issues raised, the application was deferred pending a Committee Members' site meeting. The site meeting is to be held on 13 March 2007. The Committee Secretary's Notes of the site meeting will be circulated at the Planning Applications Committee Meeting on 20 March 2007.

**Site**

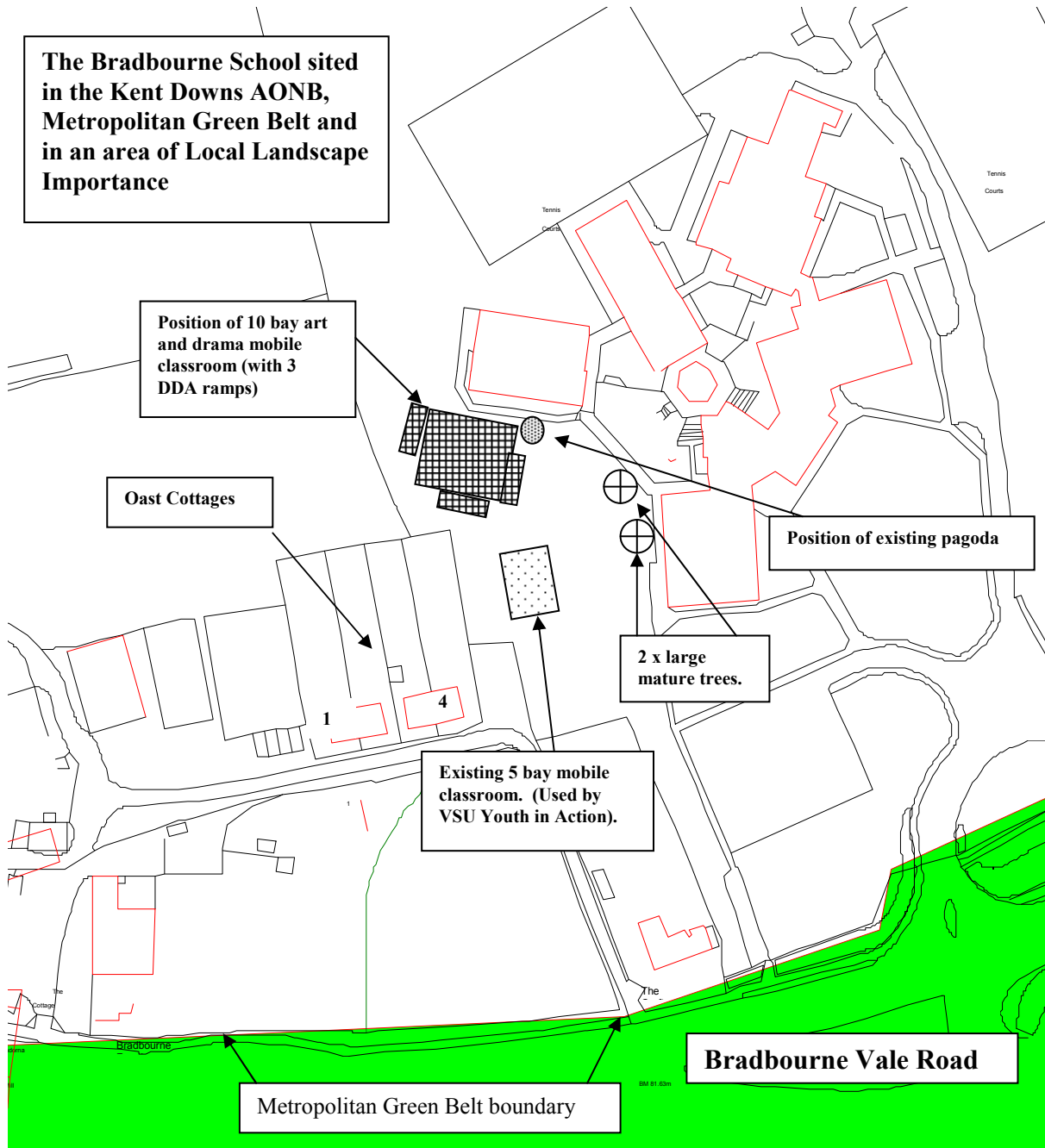
2. The Bradbourne School is located on the northern side of Bradbourne Vale Road, which acts as the boundary between the Sevenoaks Urban Area to the south and the Metropolitan Green Belt. The site is situated inside the Metropolitan Green Belt, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is in an area of Local Landscape Importance. A site location plan is attached.

**Proposal**

3. The proposal is for a 10 bay mobile classroom to be used for the delivery of performing arts and drama. The Bradbourne School has over 800 pupils and specialises in the performing arts and drama but has a severe shortage of accommodation for this purpose. There is currently only one art and drama performance studio and one dance studio in the school. The existing multipurpose hall is used for exam and sports activity, so for much of the time is unavailable for use for arts and drama activities. It is the applicant's long-term intention for permanent accommodation to be built to cater for this need but this is not likely to reach fruition for some years. Therefore, temporary accommodation is proposed as the only short-term solution with the School seeking a temporary planning consent of 5 years.
4. The proposed site for the mobile classroom is in the south-west area of the school close to the boundary, adjacent to an existing single storey classroom and the main school buildings. The area of land where the mobile classroom is to be sited is currently a grassed area including two large mature trees, one pagoda and a number of picnic style tables and is currently used as a break time recreation area. It is also 10 metres from the boundary with residential properties.

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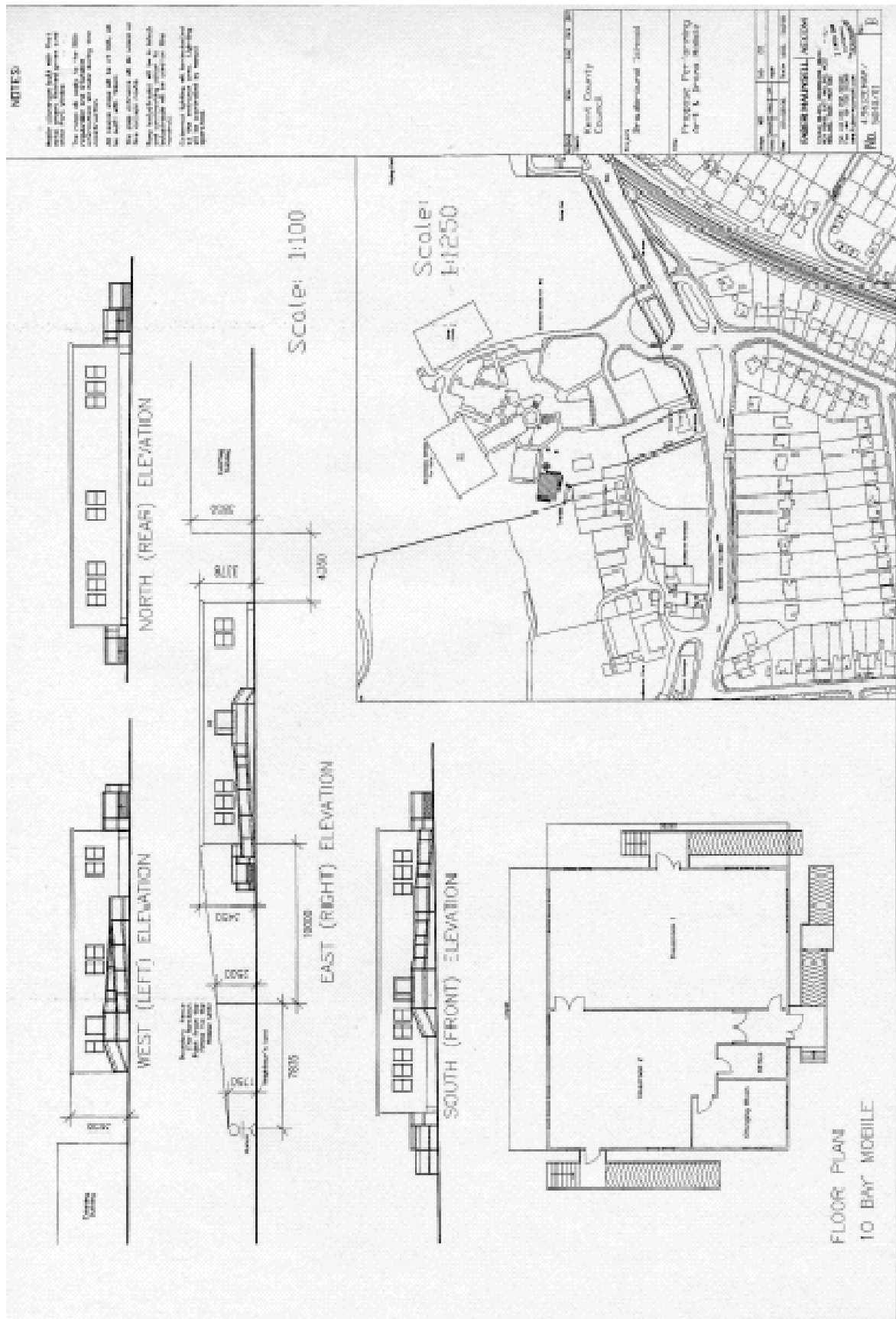
## Site Location Plan



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Scale 1:1250

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5. The proposed mobile classroom is to be a single storey structure measuring 17.5m in length, 15m in width and 3.6m in height with a floorspace of 268 square metres. The exterior walls are to be finished in green (BS-14-C-39) with white PVC windows and timber doors. The proposed hours of use are 08:00 to 17:00 term time only. There is currently a 5 bay mobile unit close by which is used solely by VSU – Youth in Action.
6. The school roll would not increase as a result of this proposal and as such there would be no traffic implications as a consequence of the development.

**Planning Policy**

7. Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2) sets out the Government's policy guidance on Green Belt development, which local planning authorities must take into account when taking decisions on individual planning applications.
8. The key Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant of consideration for the application

**(i) Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006**

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Policy SP1  | Conserving and enhancing Kent's environment and ensuring a sustainable pattern of development. Encouraging high quality development and innovative design.  |
| Policy EN4  | Protection will be given to the nationally important landscape of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the primary objective in this area will be to protect, conserve and enhance landscape character and natural beauty. Development, which would be detrimental to the natural beauty, quality and character of the landscape and quiet enjoyment of the area, will not be permitted. Development that is essential to meet local social or economic needs should be permitted provided that it is consistent with the purpose of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. |
| Policy SS2  | Metropolitan Green Belt - Within the Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development, unless exceptionally justified by very special circumstances.   |
| Policy QL1  | Development should be well designed and respect its setting. Development that would be detrimental to the amenity of settlements will not be permitted.   |
| Policy QL11 | Existing community services and recreation facilities will be protected as long as there is a demonstrable need for them.   |
| Policy NR5  | The quality of Kent's environment will be conserved and enhanced. This will include the visual, ecological, geological, historic, <u>noise</u> and levels of tranquillity.  |

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(ii) The adopted 2000 **Sevenoaks District Local Plan:**

- Policy EN1 Proposed development does not have any adverse impact on the privacy and amenities of locality by reason of form, scale, height, outlook, noise or light intrusion.
- Policy EN6 Development, which would harm or detract from the landscape character of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty will not be permitted.
- Policy EN8 Proposals in Areas of Local Landscape Importance must not harm the local character of the area. Particular attention should be paid to the design, layout and landscaping of any development and to its boundaries with the open countryside.
- Policy GB2 Within the Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development.
- Policy GB4 Any development approved within or conspicuous from the Green Belt must be sited, designed and use materials that maintain the open character of the area, avoid detriment to visual amenity and minimise any potential harm.

**Consultations**

9. **Sevenoaks District Council** – Raises no objections but would like to see additional screening built up around the boundary of the school, most notably the boundary with Oast Cottages.

**Sevenoaks Town Council** – No objections.

**Natural England** – No objections.

**Environment Agency** – No comments received to date. Consulted on 22 September 2006.

**Divisional Transport Manager** – No comments received to date. Consulted on 22 September 2006.

**Jacobs (Noise)** – Raises objection on the grounds that the structure, as described, is constructed of a steel frame, flat roof, flat metal sheet cladding with white PVC windows and timber doors and is insubstantial in acoustic terms and would need to be significantly enhanced in terms of mass specification to provide a reasonable level of sound proofing. Permanently sealing the fenestration on this façade and removing the door would not provide a sufficient degree of noise attenuation. The use of additional landscaping along the property boundary although desirable would not be significant in acoustic terms.

**Local Members**

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10. The local County Member, Mr N. Chard, was notified on 22 September 2006 and has given his full support to the application.

**Publicity**

11. The application was advertised in the Tonbridge News in Focus, by the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 5 neighbouring residents.

**Representations**

12. One letter of representation has been received from a neighbouring resident. The main points include the following:

- High levels of noise disturbance caused by the congregation of students along property boundary.
- There are alternative areas within the school site, including a disused tennis court, which could be used for the development.
- Multiple applications received within the last year, all of which were proposed for the area of the school that borders residential properties.

**Discussion**

13. The main issues to consider arise as a result of the site's location within the Metropolitan Green Belt, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the noise impact of the development on neighbouring residential properties. Whilst the provision for educational needs are acknowledged by Structure Plan Policy QL11, the proposal must also be considered against the relevant Development Plan Policies and policy guidance outlined in paragraphs 7 & 8 above. These policies, as well as presuming against inappropriate development within the Green Belt, afford long-term protection to the landscape over other considerations, with concern for the preservation and enhancement of the built environment and protection of local amenity.

Impact on the Green Belt

14. The whole school site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and in the context of the relevant National Planning Policy guidance and Development Policies that apply, what is proposed is inappropriate development. It is therefore necessary to consider the impact of the development on the openness of the Green Belt and whether or not there are very special circumstances that warrant setting aside the general presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

15. Whilst the mobile classroom is proposed to be located on a grassed area, it is close to existing school buildings and contained within the developed part of the site and does not encroach onto the more open part of the school site to the north. The area is to some extent enclosed either by existing buildings or by fencing and boundary planting.

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Although it is double the size of a standard mobile classroom, the proposed unit would be relatively low in height and subservient to the main buildings. It also needs to be borne in mind that it is intended that it would only be temporary pending the provision of permanent accommodation. Taking account of the above factors, I do not consider that it would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

16. The proposed mobile classroom has been put forward largely on the basis of curriculum needs arising from the school's specialist performing arts and drama status. The fact that facilities for teaching these subjects is currently inadequate, is cited in justification of the proposal by the applicants. In essence, I consider that taking account of the detailed siting considerations discussed above, that it is sufficient to demonstrate the very special circumstances for overriding Green Belt policy constraints in this particular case. I would not therefore raise an objection on the basis of the effects of the proposed development on the openness of the Green Belt subject to only being for a temporary period.

Impact on the Landscape and Local Amenity

17. Kent Structure Plan Policy EN4 seeks to protect and enhance the Kent Downs AONB. Priority is given to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty over other planning considerations. This is also reflected in Policy EN6 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan, which states that proposals can only be permitted if they conserve or enhance the natural beauty and special character of the landscape. Whilst all new development needs to accord with Development Plan Policies, I consider that the visual impact on the wider landscape is very limited due to its siting close to existing school buildings and by the screening already in place. Any impact would be further reduced by increased planting along the boundaries, which would be conditioned as part of any consent. An objection on landscape policy grounds would not therefore be warranted. The colour of the mobile classroom would be dark green, the same colour as the existing mobile classroom, which would help to further reduce any impact on the local amenity.

18. Members will note the objections received from an adjoining neighbour. These were drawn to the applicants' attention and the applicants' agent has responded as follows:
- The School does not allow pupils to congregate along the boundary with Oast Cottages. Pupils would have to remain on the school side of the proposed mobile classroom away from the site boundaries.
  - There is a large grassed area to the east of the school that was considered for the mobile classroom. However, the area is separated from the main school by the vehicle access to the car park and for health and safety reasons the school does not wish pupils to cross a main vehicle access.
  - The area directly north of the gardens of Oast Cottages and to the west of the existing school buildings was also considered but this area slopes away to the rear of the school and would result in poor security and visibility for the area, and although further away it would be directly in line with the rear of 4 Oast Cottages.
  - All windows overlooking the south-west boundary would have an opaque coating.
  - Further response from Bradbourne School is found in Appendix 1.

Noise Impact on the Local Amenity

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19. The mobile classroom at its closest point to the boundary of 4 Oast Cottages would be between 10 and 14 metres. It is worth noting that at the closest point the boundary is already well screened by semi-mature trees and a 2.5m fence. The nearest façade of 4 Oast Cottages would be some 40 metres from the site of the mobile classroom. Physical constraints prevent the mobile classroom being moved immediately further to the north.
20. In light of the proposed use of the mobile classroom for dance and drama activities it was necessary to seek advice from Jacobs Noise consultants. The nature of the activities involved require music to be played on a near continuous basis and even at low volume would be audible from outside of the mobile classroom due to its lack of soundproofing qualities. It is not only the music volume that would cause noise disturbance but a vibration and echo effect would be created by movement on the mobile classroom floor and added to by virtue of the floor being 1 metre above ground level.
21. It can be seen by the comments from Jacobs Noise in paragraph 9 that there are serious noise implications involved with the siting of the mobile classroom in this location. Given the structure of the mobile classroom is a steel frame, with flat roof and flat metal sheet cladding it is highly insubstantial in acoustic terms. In order to make the mobile classroom acoustically acceptable it would require substantial soundproofing to all walls and the roof, the removal of the access ramp to the boundary side and the permanent sealing of all windows along that edge of the classroom. It would then have to be proved that it is effective soundproofing by way of noise surveys. Estimates for such works show that the work would be prohibitively expensive for the School.
22. As a result of the noise implications, a new location for the mobile classroom was again explored with the aim of locating it to the rear or to the east of the school in an area that would not have noise implications on residential amenity. The School is fully aware of the reservations that I have on noise grounds, but decided not to pursue the possibility of another location any further, instead favouring the proposed location primarily as there are already electrical services in place in that position.

**Conclusion**

23. Although I do not consider that there would be a significant impact on the visual character of the Local Landscape Area and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or on the openness of the Green Belt, I consider that there would be a significant impact in terms of noise on the residential amenity of Oast Cottages, which could not be satisfactorily mitigated. Under the circumstances, I recommend that permission be refused on the grounds of the noise impact that the proposal would have on the residential amenity of Oast Cottages and it is in contravention of Structure Plan Policy NR5 and Sevenoaks District Local Plan Policy EN1. The School has suggested some noise limitation measures that can be seen in Appendix 1, but I do not consider these to substantially reduce the noise impact on Oast Cottages, nor are they able to be effectively monitored or controlled by the School or the Planning Authority.

**Recommendation**



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24.1 RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE REFUSED on the following grounds:-

- The development is contrary to Structure Plan Policies NR5 and Sevenoaks District Local Plan Policy EN1 given that the proposal would have a significant adverse impact on the privacy and amenity of Oast Cottages by reason of noise intrusion.

Case officer – Adam Tomaszewski	01622 696926
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Background documents - See section heading
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Comments received from Bradbourne School in support of application.

**NOISE LIMITATION**

- The mobile will be used mainly as a drama/dance area. Action research into these subjects has shown that pupils who take part in performing arts have significantly improved their self esteem and their academic standards.
- The music will be used at a low volume in dance to allow the teacher to direct the pupils and discuss techniques over the music whilst dancing. As is currently the case, she would not be able to put the music up to a high volume and still be heard by the pupils
- The school has Arts Mark Gold and our renewed bid commented on the expansion of performing arts
- The head's office is currently located next to the auditorium where dance lessons and extended schools activities take place and she is not disturbed by the levels of noise emitting from the room
- Noise limiters can be used to control the sound to not exceed the lawful maximum
- If windows have to be opened, these could be the ones facing the Science block – this will then ensure that any music escaping from the room will be directed away from the cottages. Science teachers would also complain if the music were too loud! Curtains could be used to cover the windows to help reduce noise levels
- We would welcome visits from the council to monitor noise levels
- There was a mobile previously, nearer to the boundary of the cottages, which was used for music teaching and extra curricular activities for a number of years. No complaints about noise were received, even although much of the music was amplified and drums were used
- Planning permission has previously been granted (circa 1994) for a community Music Block in the same area. Unfortunately this project did not go ahead due to lack of financial support. As far as we are aware, no objection was made to this plan at the time

**BENEFITS TO THE SCHOOL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY / PARTICIPATION IN DfES AND LSC INITIATIVES**

- The mobile could be used for community classes such as ballet; "Scamps"; Local primary school collaboration which is part of the extended schools and sports initiative programmes. As a pilot extended school, the school is already used widely for community use but more use can be made of it if the accommodation were to be further improved
- We have an auditorium which is used for dance but these classes have to be cancelled when exams take place and we cannot fulfil the national curriculum in dance or drama, due to the current situation of drama lessons being taught on the stage and behind the stage in the auditorium
- As part of the LSC initiatives and the DfES plans for 14-19 diplomas, we will be unable to fulfil our dance/drama/performing arts requirements and collaboration within the West Kent Federation without this vital accommodation
- The auditorium is an excellent space to accommodate Sevenoaks South Cluster based activities such as Cluster Inset, Healthy Schools Conferences, Emotional Intelligence and Personalising Learning Conferences. However, offers of this community space are limited at the moment due to its impact on teaching and

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learning in drama and dance. The mobile accommodation would enable more community use of the auditorium

- Local rural theatre groups use our auditorium in the evenings “Applause” is one of these companies
- We are asking only for a five year permission to be granted as we do hope to have a multi purpose hall built in the future