

Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421

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

Application by Kent County Council Adult Services for Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath at Meadows School, London Road, Tunbridge Wells.

Recommendation: Planning permission be permitted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mr R. Bullock

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

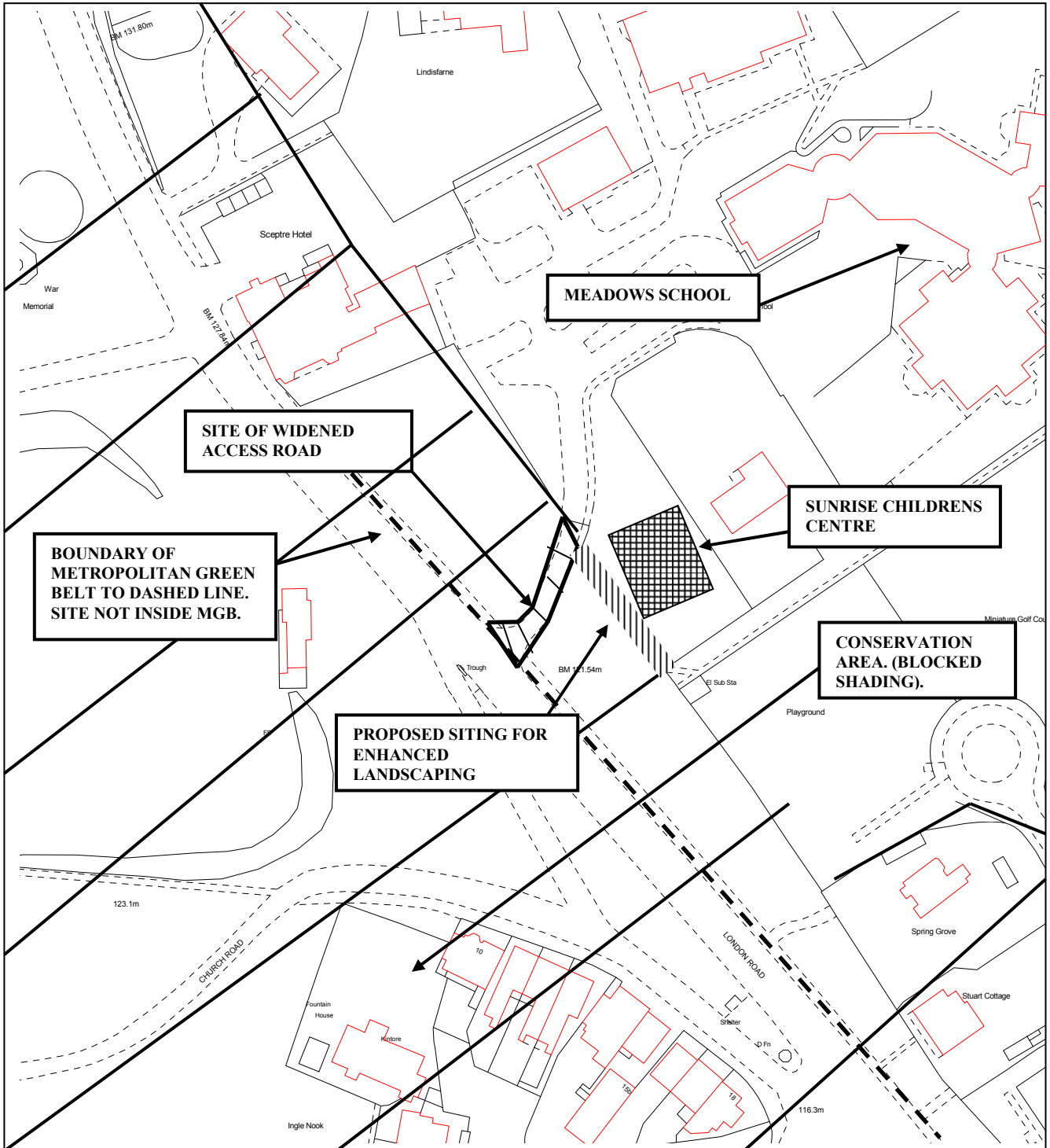
1. The access road is sited on land adjacent to London Road Southborough, leading to the Meadow School and the new Sunrise children’s respite centre. The site is situated in the Southborough Conservation Area and adjoins the Metropolitan Green Belt and a Special Landscape Area, it is also part of an important landscape approach into Southborough. The south-east edge of the development lies within the Southborough Common and an Area of Important Open Space. A site location plan is attached.

Fig.1 Entrance of access road from A26 London Road.



**Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath,
Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421**

Site Location Plan

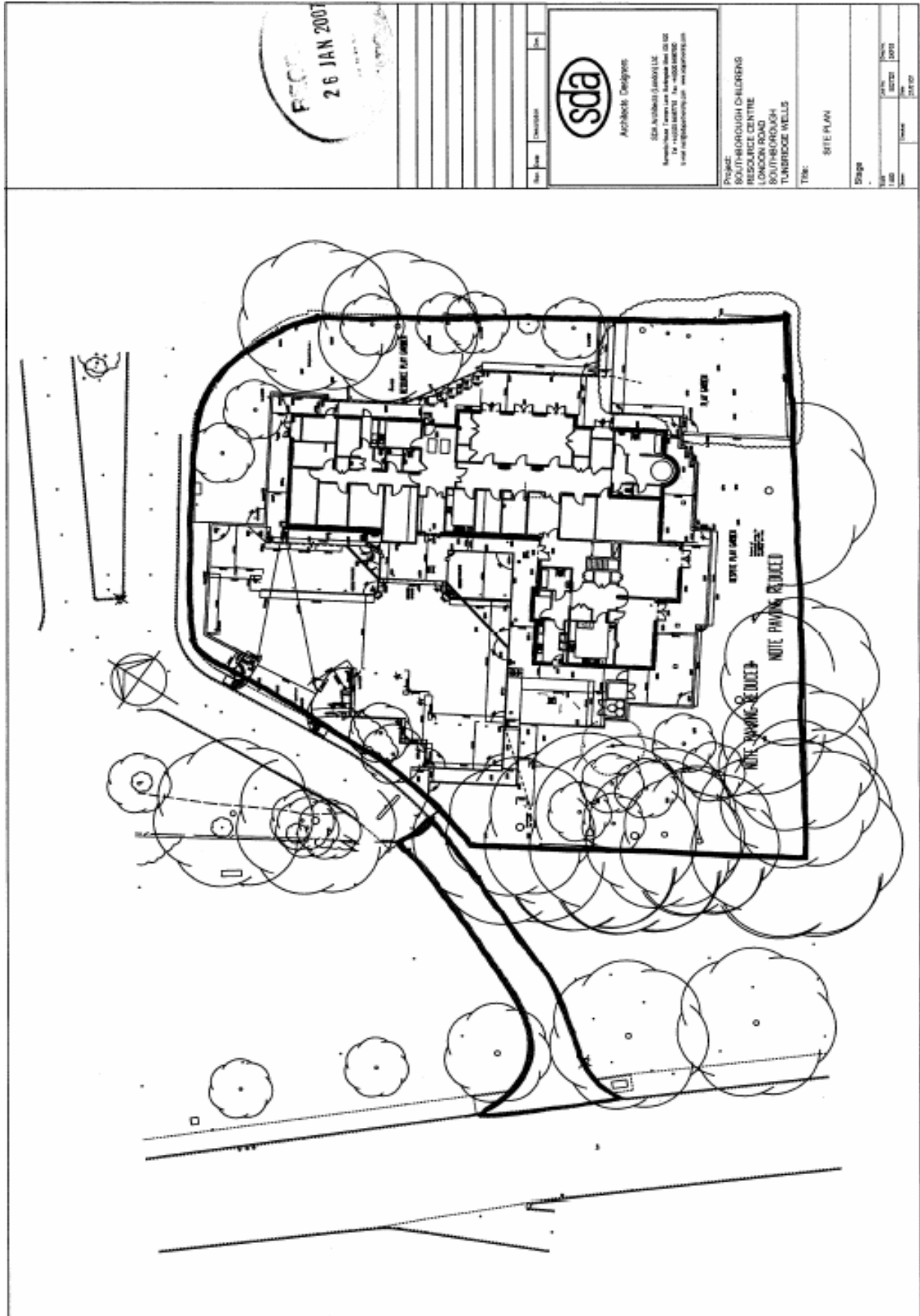


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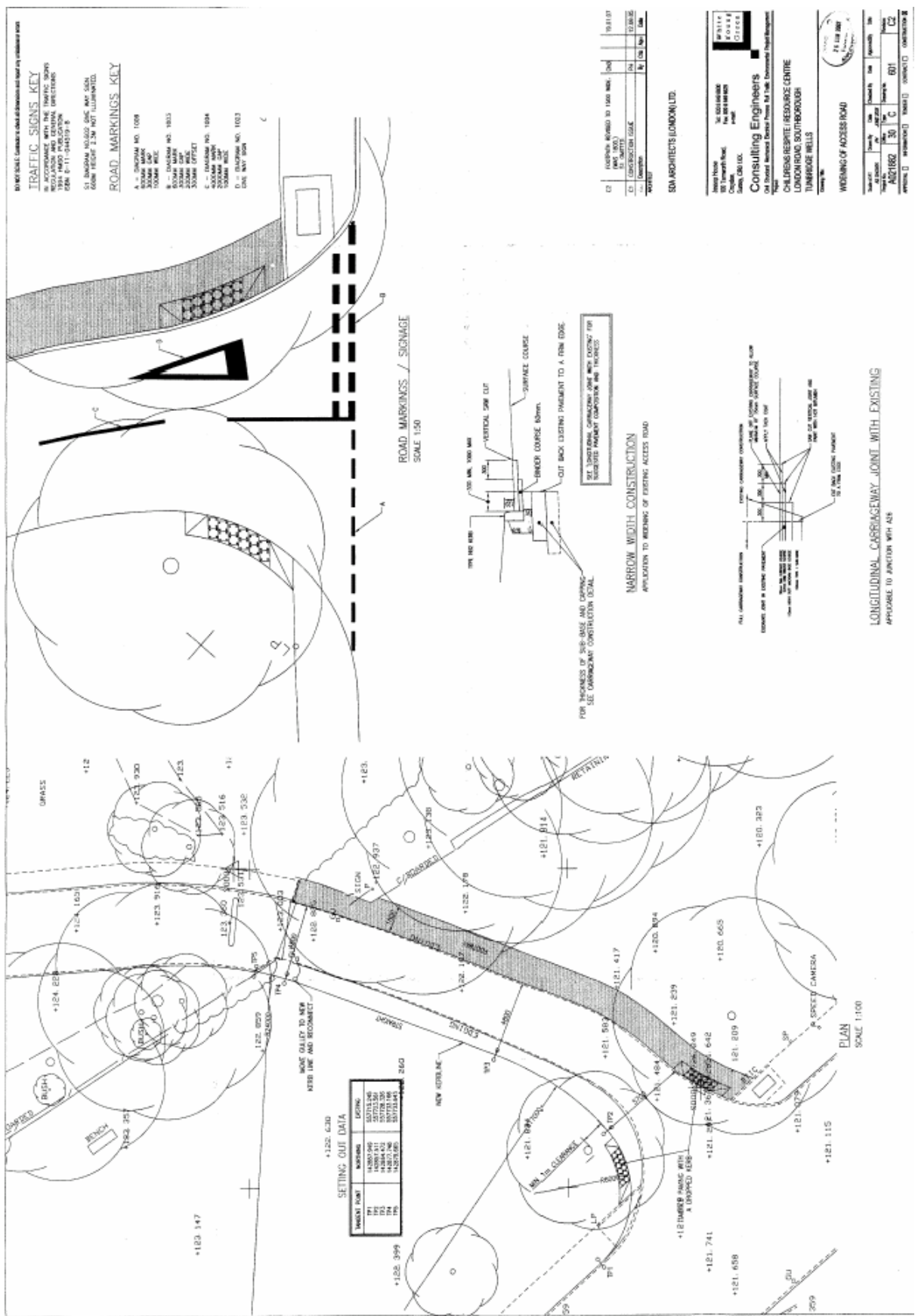
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Item D5

Retrospective - Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421



Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421



**Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath,
Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421**

Fig. 2 View of access road from entrance to Sunrise Centre looking towards A26.



Background and Proposal

2. In March 2005 under reference TW/05/35 the Sunrise Children’s Centre on this site was permitted. The existing access road serves both the Sunrise Children’s Centre and the Meadows School to the rear. As a consequence of the increased use of the access road from London Road the decision was taken to widen it and add a pedestrian footpath. There followed a mis-communication within the project team, which meant that it was not included in the original application, resulting in a retrospective application under reference TW/06/3473 that was subsequently refused by the Planning Applications Committee on 16 January 2007. The project team did however communicate all designs and drawings at the time, to both Southborough Town Council and Kent Highway Services who gave their necessary approvals.

Planning Policy

3. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of 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

Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421

development and innovative design that reflects Kent's identity and local distinctiveness and promoting healthy, safe and secure living and working environments

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 QL6 Development within conservation areas should preserve or enhance their character or appearance. Development, which would harm the character or appearance of a conservation area, will not be permitted.

Policy QL11 Protection and enhancement of existing community services.

(ii) Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan Adopted 2006

Policy EN1 The nature and intensity of the proposed use would be compatible with neighbouring uses and would not cause significant harm to the character or amenities of the area. There would be no significant adverse impact on highway safety.

Policy EN5 The proposal would preserve or enhance the buildings, the scale, massing, use of materials, detailing, boundary treatment, and landscaping would preserve or enhance the character of that part of the conservation area, it would not result in the loss of trees, shrubs, hedges that are important to the character and appearance.

Policy EN21 Proposals for development affecting Areas of Important Open Space will only be permitted where no significant harm would be caused to the appearance or open character of the designated area and the development would not materially detract from the contribution which that area makes to the locality.

Policy EN23 Proposals for development affecting the important landscape approaches to settlements, will only be permitted where no significant harm would be caused to the appearance and character of the approaches and the development would not materially detract from the contribution which that approach makes to the locality.

Consultations

4. **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council** – Raises objections by reason of size, alignment and materials used and that the development is harmful to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and street scene. Insufficient special circumstances or mitigation measures have been shown to justify overriding policy objections. The key issues are whether the development is acceptable in terms of

**Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath,
Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421**

character and appearance in the conservation area, and whether it is acceptable in highway safety terms.

Southborough Town Council – No objection.

Divisional Transport Manager – Raises no objection to the proposal but comments that an entrance wide enough for two way traffic is of benefit as it removes any possible problems that might arise when one vehicle has to wait on the highway to allow another to emerge or, worse still, one has to reverse back onto the highway to allow another to leave the site. The A26, London Road is an exceptionally busy main thoroughfare and such manoeuvres are particularly hazardous, from a Highways point of view no justification would need to be made in terms of additional traffic to support the application.

Area Public Rights of Way Officer – No objection.

Natural England – Consulted on 7 February 2007. No comments received to date.

Conservation Officer – Raises no objection but suggests an alternative to standard concrete kerbs is used, either exposed granite aggregate or Marshall's conservation kerb.

Local Members

5. The local County Member Mr R. Bullock was notified on 7 February 2007.

Publicity

6. The application was advertised in the Tunbridge Wells Extra on 16 February 2007, the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of twenty-five neighbouring residential properties.

Representations

7. Two letters of representation have been received and are appended to this report. The main points included the following:

- Visual appearance and scale of the proposed-shared access is totally inconsistent with its purpose. I am pleased that the proposed footpath is to be 1.5 m wide.
- The weld mesh fencing referred to in the application is already erected so is therefore also retrospective.
- The current traffic signage and the lining are inappropriate to the Common and the Conservation Area and should be removed.
- With respect to the landscaping which is to be reinforced we would like to understand the precise extent of the landscaping and the detailed scheme proposed.
- Why is a two-lane roadway required? We understand that the conservators of the [separate] Tunbridge Wells Common have a policy of not allowing access roads across the common that are wider than one and a half vehicles width. The applicant should be asked to demonstrate the apparent need for a full highway standard access.

Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421

- There is an annual arts and craft fair that takes place on the Southborough Common who find the introduction of raised kerbstones create a barrier between either side of the access road.

Discussion

8. The main issues arise as a result of the access road's location within the Southborough Conservation Area and as part of an important landscape approach. The proposal must be considered against the relevant Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 3 above. These policies, as well as presuming against inappropriate development within a Conservation Area require development to preserve and enhance the Conservation Area affording long-term protection to the landscape over other considerations. Authorisation was obtained by the applicant for the works to be carried out on land owned by Southborough Town Council, owners of the land the access road is built on and the stretch of Common Land used.
9. The development would see the replacement of the existing asphalt pavement with brick paviors to match the pavement alongside London Road. In addition to the brick paviors, and upon the recommendation of the KCC Conservation Officer, the existing concrete kerbstones would be replaced with Marshall's conservation kerbs or similar and the footpath width would also be narrowed from around 2m in width to 1.5m. In addition to these improvements the Give Way road sign would be removed.
10. Members will note the objections received and in respect of these, the applicant has considered the views and responded as follow:
 - The green weldmesh fence is not part of this application it was permitted with the application for the Sunrise Respite centre.
 - The Give Way sign would be removed as part of the application but it is important to retain the road markings for safety reasons as the road exits onto the A26, which is an exceptionally busy thoroughfare.
 - A detailed landscaping scheme would be required by condition if consent was given.
 - There are dropped kerbs in position on the pavements that run alongside London Road that facilitate easy access between either side of the access road. It is not justifiable for there to be no permanent kerbstones, just to facilitate unimpeded access for an annual event.

Impact on the Southborough Conservation Area

11. The whole of the development site is within the Southborough Conservation Area and in the context of the relevant Development Plan Policies that apply, the proposed development can be considered appropriate for the location as a result of the high quality materials to be used. As shown by Fig. 1 on page D5.1 the new access road does not look overly large in scale, however, it is important to assess the impact of the development on the street scene with the situation prior to the development. The widening of the access road is minimal ranging from 1m at the narrowest point to 1.5m at the junction with London Road and was only widened along the north-western edge. However, it is when coupled with the newly created pedestrian footpath that the full affect on the Conservation Area is apparent. It is the pavement section only that forms part of Southborough Common. The pedestrian footpath ranges in width from 2m at the

Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421

junction with London Road to around 1.5m at the entrance to the Sunrise Centre as part of the proposal the width of the footpath would be reduced to 1.5m along the entire length of the footpath. The overall width at the entrance to the access road from London Road has increased by 3m from 7.5m to 10.5m. The increase in width of the access road is at its maximum at the slight curve in the road shortly after leaving London Road where the overall increase has been 3.4m. It is unfortunate that the sections of the road that have been widened the most have been at the point that is most visible to the wider community, thus having the greatest impact on the Conservation Area. However, should Members be minded to permit the application, the overall width would be reduced by up to 0.5m upon the completion of the redeveloped pedestrian footpath. In my view the visual appearance of the Southborough Conservation Area would be substantially improved by the introduction of brick paviors and conservation kerbs, it would be difficult to build a case opposing the introduction of pedestrian footpath given the fact that there is a school and a respite centre on site and by virtue of the fact that the majority of footpaths in Southborough are constructed using these materials.

12. When considering the application against the relevant Development Plan Policies it is evident that the development would comply with Structure Plan Policy QL6 and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Local Plan Policy EN5 as in my view, the implementation of the improvements would significantly improve, enhance and preserve the character of the Conservation Area. Throughout the design process consideration has been given to the choice of materials to be used, the scale and landscaping that would help to preserve or enhance the Conservation Area as stated by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Local Plan Policy EN5. The introduction of brick paviors and conservation kerbstones coupled with the narrowing of the pedestrian footpath significantly reduces the impact of the development on the Conservation Area and wider locality. The reduction in width of the pedestrian footpath also reduces the amount of common land that has been used for the development.
13. The development also proposes to introduce a scheme of enhanced landscaping that would extend the length of the previously permitted weldmesh fencing that forms the boundary line of the Sunrise respite centre, as shown by Fig 1 on page D5.1 and by the site location plan on page D5.2. The purpose of this enhanced landscaping scheme would be to further reduce the impact of the Sunrise Respite Centre and access road as whole development. Upon the introduction of landscaping screening the visibility of the Sunrise Respite Centre from the A26 would be significantly reduced and the vegetation would significantly soften the overall impact of the widened access road on the Conservation Area.

Impact on the Important Landscape Approach to Southborough

14. Policy EN23 in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Local Plan aims to protect important landscape approaches and does not permit development, which would materially detract from the contribution that the approach makes to the locality. A key feature of the important landscape approach to Southborough are the pedestrian footpaths in that they are constructed using traditional brick paviors, helping to maintain the character and appearance of the locality. The pedestrian footpath forms the part of the development that has the greatest impact on the locality as it has been cut out of the Common. I previously advised the Committee that the development as originally implemented was inappropriate and contrary to Development Plan Policies and this view was accepted by the Committee in refusing TW/06/3473. However, given the overall width of the pavement would be reduced by up to 0.5m and replaced by high quality

Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421

materials that are prevalent in the area, and would exceed that of other pavements in Southborough, I consider the proposal to be in accordance with Structure Plan Policies QL6 and TWBC Policies EN5, EN23 and that it would not be to the detriment of the Important Landscape Approach.

15. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has raised objection to the development on the grounds of the width of the access road and that it is out of keeping with other access roads leading off London Road. I am of the opinion that the new road is visibly larger than it was prior to widening. However it is difficult to compare it to other access roads further to the south, as these tend to be for use by one or two residential properties, whereas this development serves the needs of the Meadows School and the Sunrise Respite Centre, for which use is at much a higher level. In response to the comments of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council case officer regarding the size and materials used for the development, I do not hold the same view. The quality of materials set to be used for the footpath would exceed that of similar footpaths in the vicinity and whilst I do agree that the widening of the access road appears at its widest at the junction with the A26, I am of the opinion that it does not significantly harm the character and appearance of the location, given also that the overall width of the access road alone has only actually increased by around 1.5m at its maximum, most of the overall width increase is actually closer to between 0.5 and 1m. In considering this issue Members should also note the comments of the Divisional Transport Manager, in paragraph 4, who stated that explicit justification for such widening works are not necessary due to the fact that the access road emerges onto the exceptionally busy A26 and that the prospect of cars backing onto the Highway would be extremely hazardous and not acceptable.
16. Prior to the widening of the access road, there was a narrow pedestrian footpath that was in a serious state of disrepair, there was also insufficient space for vehicles to pass side by side without driving on the grass verge and Southborough Common. I consider that there is justification for widening of the access road, as continued damage to Southborough Common is not acceptable, coupled with the fact that there was no permanent pedestrian footpath leading from London Road. Objections received stated that there is no justifiable need for a footpath to the Sunrise Centre on grounds of necessity and detriment to the landscape, I do not share these views. There is already a pedestrian footpath along the length of London Road and prior to this development it ceased at the bottom of the access road resulting in pedestrians and wheelchair users having to be pushed along a narrow access road sharing it at busy times with two way traffic.
17. I do not consider the principle of a pedestrian footpath adjoining the access road as being in conflict with Development Plan Policy. The construction of the widened access road has resulted in some uneven verges and any level imbalance between the kerbs and grassed areas should be infilled with topsoil and re-seeded to reproduce the same gradients that were evident prior to the development. I therefore consider that there is a justifiable requirement for an improved access road and given the alterations that this development proposes, I consider that the new pavement would be in keeping with surrounding pavements and finished to a potentially higher standard with the introduction of superior quality conservation kerbstones.

**Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath,
Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421**

Conclusion

18. In conclusion, I consider that the proposed development is in accordance with Structure Plan Policies SP1, QL1, QL6 and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Local Plan Policies EN1, EN5, EN21 and EN23 and that there is a justifiable need for an improved access road and pedestrian footpath. I am of the opinion that the development does not materially detract from the character and appearance of the locality to any significant degree and that the materials to be used would enhance and preserve the Southborough Conservation Area. In particular I do not consider the actual widening of the access road to be excessive and coupled with the proposed materials to be used for the pathway and its narrowing in width, it would not be out of place in a Conservation Area. It is disappointing that this situation has arisen retrospectively, but I consider this proposal is acceptable and satisfactorily addresses my earlier grounds for refusal. Should Members be minded to permit the application, I recommend that a condition be attached requiring a timescale for the urgent implementation of the development to address the breach of planning control.

Recommendation

19. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE PERMITTED subject to conditions, Including conditions covering:

- The standard time limit,
- The development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted plans,
- Timescale for the implementation of the development to address breach of planning control,
- Works to address the uneven verges and to correct the level imbalance between the kerbs and grassed areas,
- A scheme of landscaping, its implementation and maintenance.

Case officer – Adam Tomaszewski	01622 696923
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Background documents - See section heading
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**Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath,
Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421**

Appendix 1 to Item D5

Kent County Council
Planning Applications Group
1st Floor Invicta House
County Hall
Maidstone
ME14 1XQ

14 Valley View
Tunbridge Wells
TN4 0SY

7 March 2006

Dear Sir

Planning Application TW/07/00421

I write to object to the alterations to the existing shared access to Meadow School and Kent County Council Respite Centre detailed in this application for the following reasons:

- 1 The visual appearance and scale of the proposed access road is totally inconsistent with its purpose of providing an access across Common Land in a Conservation Area. It is totally out of character and appearance in relation to the existing access it replaces. I am pleased that the proposed footway is 1.5 metres wide despite what the drawing scales and it will be surfaced with brick pavers to the approval of Tunbridge Wells BC. Tactile pavers should be used at the pedestrian crossing in lieu of tactile blocks.
- 2 The plans as submitted do not include any typical cross sections indicating how the grass verges beside the widening to the sides of the existing access will be treated. Luckily, by virtue of having had a practice run, the public can see what an unsympathetic and totally unacceptable layout is proposed. It is currently impossible for a wheelchair, pram or buggy to be pushed up or down the grassed Common land, parallel with the A26 London Road, because of the steepness of the “embankment slopes behind the kerbs and two 125mm high kerbs. These obstructions are totally out of keeping with the concept of Common Land accessible to all
- 3 This part of the Common is used for an annual event requiring participants to cross the access road. Experience of the proposed access last summer (2006) demonstrated that this proposal splits the event into two halves because the cross section of the access is not people friendly for either able bodied persons or those requiring wheeled transport for their mobility needs. If the inappropriate high kerbs remain then an additional pair of dropped kerbs are required adjacent to the school entrance. The kerb face height should not exceed 20mm in order to define the limit of the access road and, minimise the extent of shaping behind the kerbs and footway onto the existing grassland.
- 4 The whole of this area of verge forms part of Common Land – Southborough – CL35 and all paved areas on Common land should be as unobtrusive as possible in order to maintain that character. (Not withstanding that they do not have Secretary of State’s release of Common Land status to construct this widened access.) The gradient of the footway should not slope towards the access road, thereby increasing the level difference with the grassed area behind the footway. It should slope away from the road, parallel with the existing Common Land, thereby reducing the level difference with the grassed area behind the footway. Any shaping of the Common Land grassed areas adjacent to the access road and footway should be carried out over a very flat gradient relative to the natural shape of the ground
- 5 The benefit of a retrospective planning application is that it should include details of vehicle and pedestrian movements and conflicts to justify their proposals. The fact that they are not included in this second application shows that the need is not proven for an access of these dimensions. I spent three hours on Monday 5 March outside the school taking a traffic survey and these are at the end of the letter. Note in 3 hours – no wheelchairs, 3 pedestrians, 73 cars and 12 luton size personnel carriers/ambulances.

Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421

6 If a new access is needed then it should only handle the vehicles and pedestrians using the current school and respite centre site. It should not be constructed to pre-empt usage of the site when either or both facilities close down.

7 There are a number of inconsistencies between drawings, the brick pavers cannot be laid using the standard detail provided, and the pedestrian crossing shown on the drawings adjacent to A26 is actually in a different position. On drawing SD07, every detail says refer to that drawing about standard footway paving – the detail is shown on drawing SD02. There is no detail indicating how level differences between new construction and existing grass will be dealt with.

Comments on “Reasons for this application”

The reasons for the proposed access by the applicant’s consultant whilst probably correct in an abstract concept, are not in practice, and do not justify constructing a “road” across the Common rather than an upgraded access.

“Increased traffic” – yes undoubtedly, but as no traffic figures (including pedestrian figures) before and after opening of the respite centre have been provided one cannot judge the scale of the new situation

“avoid damage to common as at present and prevent back up onto bus lane” – there were some signs of overrunning onto the Common prior to construction of the respite centre but being on sidelong ground, any wheel ruts in the common drained quickly and were of trivial depth. In the twelve years I have passed this access on a regular basis I have never seen traffic waiting in the bus lane to get onto the access road. These issues may have been increased during construction of the respite centre but that is an extraordinary situation and not relevant to the day to day use of the joint site.

“hard edge to prevent ingress onto the common” – I take this to mean provision of a 125mm high kerb face. No kerb face will prevent vehicles getting onto the Common if they try. There are other accesses to the south of the application site without kerbs and it would be undesirable to set a precedent here. Conservation kerbs are appropriate in an urban conservation situation but not adjacent to grass as they have a white colour that does not fade with time and merely highlights the intrusive nature of this proposal.

“dedicated pedestrian route to keep wheelchair users off the road” – no vehicle or pedestrian usage figures have been provided to demonstrate pedestrian/vehicle conflicts so no one is aware of the scale of the problem. We are talking about a short private access road, not an adopted highway that is designed to higher safety standards. One of the pedestrians walked up the road for half its length. Not a wheel chair in sight at the start of the school day on Monday.

“road markings to improve the flow of traffic on the main road and access road” – the minimum of road markings should be provided in order to prevent urbanisation and visual clutter on the green Common sward.

“landscaping” – I find it strange that when there is condition 3 of consent to TW/05/35, which seems to have been ignored to date. The planting season is almost finished when this issue is raised. What games are going on?

Discussion

There are three issues at stake here:

visual appearance of the Common

getting people in vehicles and on foot to the school and respite centre,

use of the Common

**Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath,
Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421**

This application seeks to build a road across the Common with 125mm kerb faces and little “embankment” slopes to lose the level difference between the new road and the existing grass sward. There has been no attempt to try to replicate the way the existing access sat in the Common Land

The footway slopes towards the road above a 125mm high kerb face, that is against the natural slope of the ground, but could have sloped towards the common to lessen its impact.

The total width of this access is wholly out of scale with the needs of its users. There is no record either before 2006 or since opening of vehicle/pedestrian conflict at this location. There were only three occasions in 12 minutes out of 180 minutes when vehicles were travelling in opposite directions at the same time. No pedestrians were around at that time.

The access needs only to be 4.2 metres wide plus a 1.5 metre pedestrian footway, finished in brick pavers. The access edges can be finished in concrete edging boards so as to define the access maintenance limits. Any level difference between edge of a new access and existing grass should be made flush with the grassed area by infilling in topsoil and seed or turves at a slack gradient that permits gang mowing up to the edge of the access road as before.

A local Art Show uses the area of Common land, on each side of the access, over the August bank holiday weekend. Meadow School kindly provides parking for exhibitors and visitors. At that time it is important for people with prams, pushchairs and wheelchairs to be able to cross the access road at any point without having to traverse kerbs and the hideous and insensitive earthworks. During the Art Show in 2006, following construction of the new access for which consent is sought retrospectively, there was a distinct separation of the two parts of the show because visitors found it difficult to negotiate the assault course generated by the new road.

In Conclusion

Please REFUSE this planning application for the reasons stated above.

Yours faithfully

Nicholas Bullett

Item D5

Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421

Traffic count between 07.00 to 07.59 hours

Time	Into site	Out of Site
07.10	Car	
07.12	Car	
07.23	Small van	
07.24	Car	
07.25		Small van
07.33	Car	
07.43	Car	
07.53	Car	
07.54	Car	
07.58	Car	
07.59	Pedestrian - half on road, half on footway	
07.59	Car	

Total movements in – 10 small vehicles and one pedestrian – no wheelchairs

Total movements out - 1 small vehicle

Traffic count between 08.00 to 08.59 hours (1 of 2)

** indicates vehicles on access road at same moment

Time	Into site	Out of Site
08.00	Car	
08.03		Car
08.03	Pedestrian on footway	
08.06	Personnel carrier/ambulance	
08.12	Car	
08.13	Car	
08.13	Car	
08.13	Car	
08.14		Personnel carrier/ambulance
08.15		Car
08.18	Car	
08.20	Car	
08.21		Car
08.21		Medium van
08.27	Car	
08.28	Car	
08.33	Car	
08.33	Personnel carrier/ambulance	
08.34		Car
08.37		Car **

Item D5

Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421

08.37	Car **	
08.39	Car	
08.40	Personnel carrier/ambulance	
08.43		Car **
08.43		Personnel carrier/ambulance **
08.43		Personnel carrier/ambulance **
08.43	Car **	
08.44	Car	
08.45	Car	
08.45	Car	
08.47		Car
08.48	Pedestrian on footway	
08.48	Car	
08.49		Car **
08.49	Car **	
08.49	Car	
08.49		Car
08.51	Car **	
08.51	Car **	

Traffic count between 08.00 to 08.59 hours (2 of 2)

** indicates vehicles on access road at same moment

08.52	Car	
08.52		Car
08.56	Car	
08.56	Car	
08.57	Car	
08.57	Small van	
08.58	Car	
08.58	Car	
08.59	Car	
08.59		Car

Total movements in – 29 small vehicles 3 luton type vehicles and 2 pedestrian – no wheelchairs

Total movements out - 11 small vehicles 4 luton type vehicles

Traffic count between 09.00 to 09.59 hours

Time	Into site	Out of Site
09.00		Car
09.02	Car	
09.03	Car	

Item D5

Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath, Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421

09.03	Small van	
09.03		Car
09.03		Personnel carrier/ambulance
09.03		Car
09.08	Car	
09.08	Car	
09.10		Car
09.11		Car
09.14	Car	
09.14		Car
09.18	Personnel carrier/ambulance	
09.20		Car
09.25		Car
09.27		Personnel carrier/ambulance
09.29		Car
09.31		Car
09.34		Car
09.35	Transit - post	
09.38		Transit - post
09.40	Small van	
09.43	Car	
09.54		Car
09.54	Car	
09.57	Car	

Total movements in – 10 small vehicles 2 luton type vehicles - no pedestrians – no wheelchairs

Total movements out 12 small vehicles 3 luton type vehicles – no pedestrians – no wheelchairs

**Retrospective – Widening of access road and addition of footpath,
Meadows School, Southborough TW/07/421**

Dear Sirs

Planning Application TW/07/10/0002 - Kent County Council Adult Services Widening of existing access road and addition of pedestrian footpath

Thank you for your letter of 7 February with plans, and your further letter of 28th February. We appreciate that some of our concerns have been taken into account. Nevertheless the comments in this letter are without prejudice, in particular, to our letter of 26th February to DEFRA regarding the need for consent to the works to the common, a copy of which you have received.

We have a number of comments in respect of the second retrospective application and in particular note the following:-

1. The weld mesh fencing referred to in the application is the green mesh fencing already erected, and we understand the application in this respect is also retrospective – we do not believe that this type of fencing respects or integrates with the adjoining conservation area. We have copied the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Conservation Officer in order that he may input on the relevant requirements, and suggest what may be appropriate for fencing in the circumstances. We would ask that you make sure that this is done prior to any determination of the application.
2. We do not consider it acceptable for the access to be widened as currently proposed. You have seen our representations of 26th February to DEFRA regarding works carried out to common land for highway access without DEFRA consent. If the planning application is granted KCC will be giving planning permission for common land to be turned into a highway access. This is incorrect and should not be permitted.
3. Various assertions have been made by the applicant in respect of volumes of traffic. We are not aware that any of these assertions have been backed up by traffic count surveys or other proper empirical evidence. Why does the application say that a two lane roadway is required? In this connection we understand that the conservators of Tunbridge Wells Common have a policy of not allowing access roads across Tunbridge Wells Common wider than one and a half vehicle widths, which obviously seems prudent in terms of preservation of the Common, and we do not think Southborough Common should be treated any differently. The applicant should be asked to demonstrate the apparent need for a full highway standard access with appropriate evidence to your satisfaction, before any widened access provision should be considered.
4. The current traffic signage and the lining are inappropriate to the Common and the Conservation Area and should be removed.
5. We note that the “conservation kerb” will be used in place of the current highway standard kerbs. Subject to our prior comments on the extent of the access that should be permitted, we welcome this, and also the use of brick paviors in the footpath to conservation area standard.
6. With respect to the landscaping which is to “reinforced” we would like to understand the precise extent of the landscaping and the detailed scheme proposed. The letter of 28th February from Helen Bond, the project officer, indicates that “additional landscaping [will] be sited in front of the green mesh fencing”. Whilst we welcome the principle, we would like further details of the nature of the screening proposed. In our view a proper high screen of the new buildings is essential and presumably you will take detailed advice from Tunbridge Wells Conservation Officer on this aspect also.

We look forward to hearing from you further, and also with confirmation as to when the revised application is proposed to be determined.

Nigel Heilpern

on behalf of the Southborough Society.