

Item D5

Reinstatement of brick piers, railings and new gates to surround a new cycle enclosure at St. Eanswythe CE (Aided) Primary School, Folkestone SH/06/1386.

A report by the Acting Head of Planning Applications Group to the Planning Applications Committee on 13 February 2007.

Application by The Governors of St Eanswythe CE (Aided) Primary School and KCC Children, Families and Education for the reinstatement of brick piers, railings and new gates to surround cycle enclosure. SH/06/1386.

Recommendation: Planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mr. R. Tolputt

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

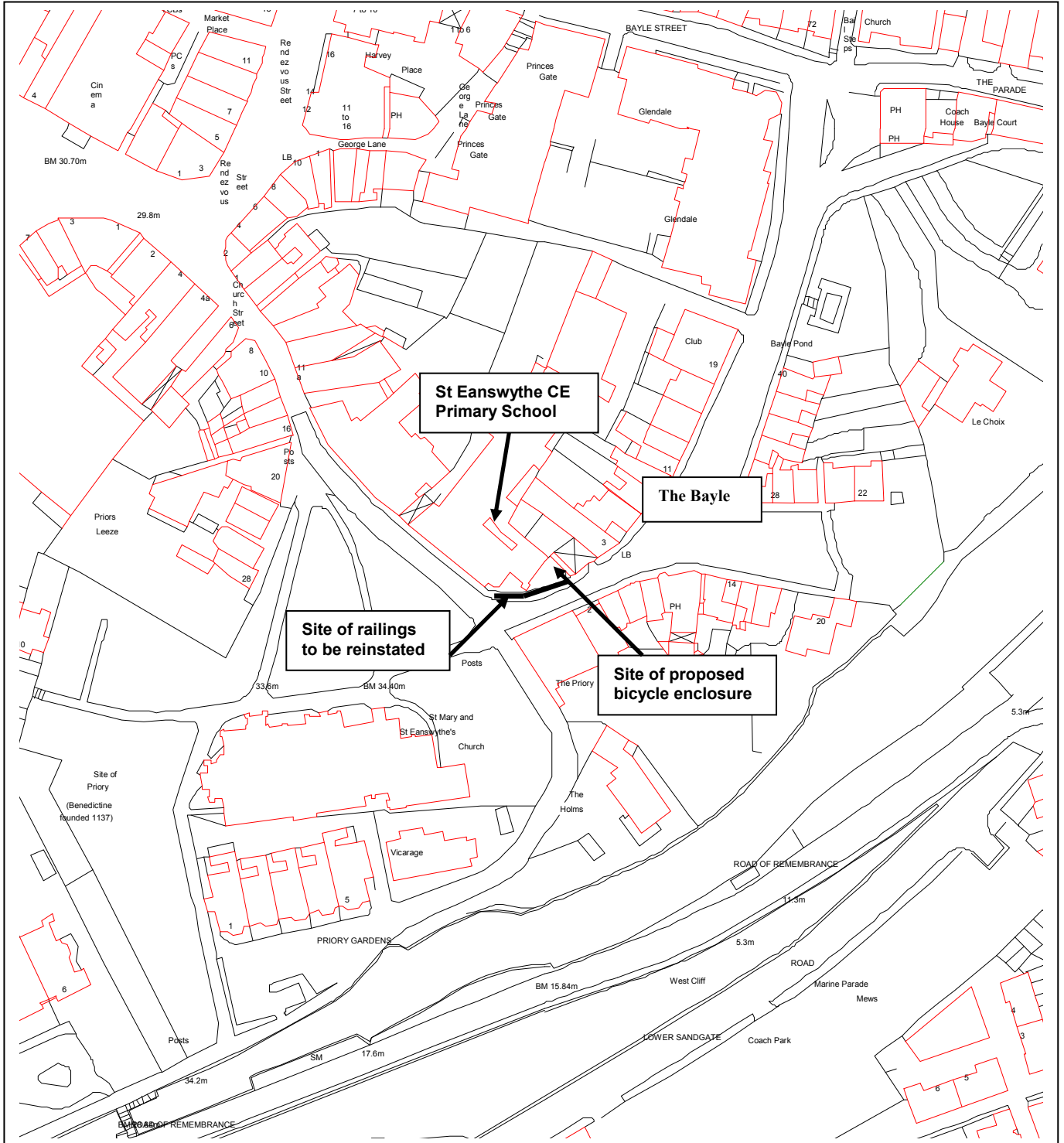
1. St. Eanswythe CE (Aided) Primary School, built in 1901, is situated on Church Street in the Bayle Conservation Area of Folkestone. Residential properties surround the site. A site location plan is attached.

Proposal

2. St Eanswythe CE (Aided) Primary School consists of seven classes with 205 pupils and 25 members of staff. The proposed site for development is at the corner of St Eanswythe Primary School as it turns onto The Bayle. This part of the school building has not been restored and evidence is visible of demolished piers and cut off wrought iron railings. The space behind is unused and open to the street gathering litter and leaves, see Figs. 1 & 2 on page D5.3.
3. When the application was originally submitted in October 2006 it proposed the retention of the existing magnolia tree and the provision of bicycle racks around the tree and along the line of the railings. That met with objection from Shepway District Council, the Bayle Residents Association and a local resident. Following this, the design of the scheme was amended and it is the amended design that will be discussed throughout this report.
4. The proposal seeks to restore the three existing pillars and rebuild two pillars to create five fully restored pillars in total. There are two proposed sets of gates to be erected, one double set at 2.5 metres wide to the school entrance and a 1.2 metre single gate to provide access to the bicycle enclosure, which will have sufficient storage for 12 bicycles.
5. The new railings would provide security to the area behind allowing it to be used to store bicycles during the day. The use of bicycles has been greatly encouraged in this congested part of Folkestone and is a key feature of the School's Travel Plan along with other schemes such as the walking bus. There is a young magnolia tree situated in this area as shown in Fig. 1 on page D5.3, the proposal seeks to remove the tree and replant it in the churchyard of St Mary and St Eanswythe Church for which its Reverend has consented. The proposal also seeks to plant a privet hedge along the railings preventing any stored bicycles from being visible from The Bayle.

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Site Location Plan



Scale 1:1250

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Fig. 1 - Proposed site of phase one of development.



Fig. 2 - Proposed site of phase two of development (both phases to be constructed concurrently subject to funding).



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6. The design for the railings was decided by of a study of the recently reinstated railings at The Bayle pond. The proposal was amended upon the request of the KCC Conservation Officer as the railings in the initial proposal would result in a railing section that would be too slender and the finials would look out of scale with the railings. The railing size was therefore increased by 25mm and the main stanchions 30mm.

Planning Policy

7. 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 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.

Policy SH1 Proposals which assist in regenerating Folkestone, including improvement of its shopping, service and tourism functions will be supported.

(ii) Shepway District Local Plan: 2006.

Policy SD1 All development proposals should take account of the broad aim of sustainable development. Preserve and enhance built and cultural heritage including Listed Buildings and their settings, conservation areas, sites and settings of nationally and locally important ancient monuments and archaeological sites, historic parks and gardens and, historic landscapes.

Policy BE1 A high standard of layout, design and choice of materials will be expected for all new development. Materials should be sympathetic to those predominating locally in type, colour and texture.

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Policy BE4 The District Planning Authority will require the height, scale, form and materials of new development, including alterations or extensions to existing buildings, to respect the character of conservation areas; and seek to retain materials, features and details of unlisted buildings or structures which preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Consultations

8. **Shepway District Council** – Raises no objection given the proposed relocation of the magnolia tree and the planting of the privet hedge along the railings.

Folkestone Town Council – Raises no objection but requests the safeguarding of the magnolia tree.

Divisional Transport Manager - Raises no objections to the application from a highway point of view.

Conservation Officer – Raises no objections providing suggestions are implemented into the scheme relating to size of the railings and stanchions.

English Heritage – Raise no objections.

Local Member

9. The Local County Member Mr R. Tolputt was notified on 13 October 2006.

Publicity

10. The application was advertised in the Folkestone Extra newspaper on 8 December 2006 and by the posting of a site notice. A neighbour notification exercise was also carried out involving the individual notification of twenty-eight neighbouring residential properties.

Representations

11. To date one letter of representation has been received from a local resident and two letters from the Bayle Residents' Association regarding the initial proposal and a further two letters received regarding the amended proposal. One letter was received in support of the application from the Kent Police Crime Reduction and Architectural Liaison Officer. The main comments / points of concern include the following:

In opposition to the application

- Is there not room for bicycle stands behind the school out of public view, away from the risk of vandalism?

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- The Bayle is one of very few picturesque and historic areas in Folkestone and to have the approach to it marred by a stack of cycles occupying such a significant corner indicates a complete disregard of civic pride.
- The School shows little regard for the local environment judging by the amount of litter that is allowed to remain around the school entrance.
- Child cyclists emerging from the proposed area will worsen the chaotic congestion of vehicles in the morning and afternoon and result in safety concerns for the elderly and children.
- Inappropriate for cycle stands in such a key position.
- Revised plans do not carry the application any further forward.

In support of the application

- Bicycle storage facilities are welcomed in historic cities like Oxford & Cambridge.
- Current arrangements for storing bicycles are not satisfactory – being pushed through the building with doors having to be left open and stored in a part of the playground. This creates security and health and safety issues.
- The new area can be locked and secured affording good security with any stored bicycles proving to be barely visible through the privet hedge.
- Encouraging children to cycle to school is one of the Government's objectives for a healthier and fitter generation.

Discussion

12. This application proposes the reinstatement of railings and brick pillars that were in position pre-World War II and the creation of a bicycle storage area in the newly created defended space. The approved School Travel Plan sets out a series of objectives and targets that aim to promote and encourage a healthy lifestyle for pupils and staff. The main targets aim to decrease the number of cars in the immediate vicinity of the school, increase cycling/scooter use by 10% by September 2007, reduce the number of single occupancy journeys to school by 4% and to improve pupils awareness of travel options thus improving road safety.
13. As a result of a pupil School Travel Survey carried out in January 2006 a need was highlighted for bicycle storage facilities. The nature of the school's design severely restricts the number of suitable sites at the school for such a storage area. There are not suitable access arrangements at the rear of the school, so the storing of bicycles at the rear of the school result in bicycles having to be taken through the school which is highly impractical especially when considering Health and Safety. The decision was therefore taken to apply for planning consent for the reinstatement of the brick pillars and for the creation of a bicycle storage area as proposed. Whilst the need for education provision is acknowledged in Structure Plan Policy QL11, the proposal must also be considered against the relevant Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 7 above.

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14. Members will note the objections received to which the applicant has made the following points in response:
- “The KCC approved School Travel Plan highlights the requirements for Schools to encourage cycling to increase children’s overall health and decrease traffic congestion - a problem of which is very significant at this particular site.
 - The encouragement of staff and parents/pupils to walk and cycle to school can only help to ease the traffic congestion situation.
 - Other sites at the school have been considered but all result in bicycles being dragged through the school, which is not a practical solution.
 - It seems strange that some of our most architecturally significant cities such as Oxford and Cambridge so readily accept the bicycle yet one or two people in the Bayle area see them as unsightly. Is the same felt about the parking of their vehicles in the area?
 - Railings on the wall will prevent people sitting on the wall and congregating in this area, depositing litter and beer cans as happens currently. Therefore improving residential amenity.
 - The revised plans do further the application, as the introduction of a privet hedge will all but remove any visibility of bicycles stored behind”.
15. The locality of the site in a Conservation Area dictates the high quality of design and materials to be used as part of any development. Shepway District Local Plan Policy BE1 enforces this requirement by stating that materials should be sympathetic to those predominant locally in type, colour and texture. The design of the development submitted is to a very high standard, which has taken into account the wider Bayle area and has been conscious throughout the design process of respecting the locality and of producing a sympathetic design. The railings proposed are to be constructed of galvanised welded steel and powder coated black with silver finials, which are similar in design to the railings surrounding the Bayle pond area. The proposal would seek to restore and reinstate the brick pillars and railings that were in situ prior to 1939, which is amplified in Shepway District Local Plan Policy BE4 which seeks to retain materials and features which preserve or enhance the character or appearance of Conservation Areas.
16. Members will note from the objections received, that they do not relate to the development in its entirety but rather the principle of the space behind the railings being used for bicycle storage and ensuring the safeguarding of the magnolia tree. It is therefore necessary to consider the suitability of a bicycle storage facility in this location and assess this against relevant Development Plan Policies. Members will recognise the importance of encouraging pupils and parents to travel to and from school by way of more sustainable methods of transport and for design that reflects Kent’s identity and local distinctiveness. These factors are amplified in Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policy SP1.
17. The magnolia tree is not protected by a TPO and is relatively young and undeveloped; it does not stem from one main trunk but rather three smaller shoots. The Royal Horticultural Society states that Magnolia trees can grow up to 15 metres tall and up to 10 metres wide. In my opinion given the space available and the fact that it is currently entirely surrounded by concrete paving, relocation to the churchyard would be the best long-term solution for the tree.

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18. It is important to ascertain whether the creation of a bicycle storage area constitutes an unacceptable and unsightly development in this Conservation Area and if it is to be deemed a contravention of the relevant Development Plan Policies. It is also important to assess whether bicycles are to be deemed unsightly or indeed, conversely, whether they can be deemed beneficial to residential amenity and the overall locality. It has become extremely important in recent years to decrease the number of vehicle journeys to and from school each day, in favour of more environmentally friendly alternatives. Consequently documents such as School Travel Plans have been produced promoting schemes like the walking bus, car sharing, cycling, walking and public transport. In the case of St Eanswythe School, I am of the opinion that the School should be commended for its effective promotion and obvious encouragement of such schemes. As a result a significant number of pupils/staff wish to travel to school each day by bicycle a fact that should be commended, given the comment made by the Bayle Residents Association concerning the level of congestion around the school being added to by child cyclists. I suggest that the situation would actually be alleviated, if 10 pupils cycle to school on a particular day, there is the potential for a daily reduction of up to 20 vehicle movements. The Bayle Residents Association raised concerns that the safety of children and elderly residents could be put at risk by cyclists entering or leaving the site. It is School policy for older pupils only, who have passed their Cycling Proficiency Test to be allowed to cycle to school. Therefore the risk of dangerous and reckless cycling is unlikely, coupled with the presence of staff members on duty, I do not consider that there is sufficient cause to consider refusal of the application on this point. The Kent Police Crime Reduction and Architectural Liaison Officer has also stated that children who do cycle to school, do so at walking pace or at slow speeds, as their parents are often walking with them to make sure their children get to school safely.
19. In regard to the alleged lack of civic pride with the introduction of 'a stack of cycles' into the front area of the school I consider that the School is demonstrating a high regard for their locality by promoting sustainable transport methods; I do not consider the impact of a relatively small number of bicycles to severely damage the quality of the streetscape. If considered in the context that bicycles would only be sited here for around 6 hours a day, 38 weeks of the year, when cars are parked in the area all day every day. The agent states that some of our most architecturally significant cities embrace the use of bicycles and I consider this to be a valid point for Members to consider. Members will also be mindful of the fact that with the provision of a privet hedge behind the railings, any bicycles that may be stored there would not be visible from The Bayle.
20. I consider it unlikely that bicycles stored in this location are increasingly susceptible to vandalism, as has been suggested, the railings and gate will make it difficult to gain access. The gates would be locked throughout the day and with the provision of hedging any bicycles stored are unlikely to be at risk of vandalism or theft. The specific design of the bicycle racks has also been considered, in order to decide if there is a more suitable design of rack for this location. The particular 'Boyco' design of rack proposed in this application is a very simple one as shown on drawing no. 05 on page D5.5. I consider that racks of this design are most suitable for this location as they maximise the space available for bicycle storage and are not large in size or visually unattractive.

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Conclusion

21. In conclusion, whilst I acknowledge the views of the Bayle Residents Association, I am of the opinion that the proposal does not constitute a contravention of Development Plan Policy warranting refusal. I do agree that a location for storage of bicycles at the rear of the school would be preferable, but unfortunately in this case it is not possible. However, I consider that in circumstances such as these it is important for Schools to be promoting sustainable methods of transport. The quality of the design is to a very high standard involving the restoration of brick pillars and railings to their former standard, whilst producing a useful defended space beyond substantially improving the public realm; the decision to replant the magnolia tree in the churchyard affords it a better chance of survival as it reaches maturity. The application is generally in accordance with Structure Plan Policies SP1, QL1, and Shepway District Local Plan Policies SD1, BE1 and BE4.

Recommendation

22. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO conditions requiring the replanting of the magnolia tree in the St Mary & St Eanswythe Churchyard and for the development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans.

Case officer – Adam Tomaszewski	01622 696923
Background documents - See section heading	