

Integrated Highways Depot, at land adjacent to the Henwood Industrial Estate, Ashford- AS/06/1422

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 16 January 2007.

Application submitted by Kent Highway Services for an integrated highways depot comprising offices, garaging, salt barn and storage areas with associated car parking and landscaping at land adjacent to The Henwood Industrial Estate, Ashford. (Ref:AS/06/1422)

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mrs E Tweed

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. The application site is located about 1.5 km east of Ashford Town Centre, south of the M20 and north of Hythe Road, with the Ashford to Canterbury railway line to the east, and Henwood Road to the west. The site is approximately 2.04 hectares in area, and comprises former playing field, raised above boundary drainage ditches to the east, south and west. To the north the site is bounded by the M20 motorway. Norton Knatchbull School playing fields, incorporating a fenced sports pitch, are located to the immediate east of the site. Land to the south is slightly lower in level, and is subject to an outline planning approval for a housing development. Buildings forming part of the Henwood Industrial Estate are located to the west. *A site location plan is attached.*

Background

2. The application site forms part of a larger area of land allocated for both employment uses and housing in the Ashford Borough Local Plan, adopted in 2000. The site was also included within a previous planning application (Ashford Borough Council Application Reference: AS/05/00786) for class B1, B2 and B8 employment uses, which has been granted outline planning permission. Planning condition 13 of the consent prevents operation of any process or machinery, and deliveries or despatches to and from the site outside the hours of 0700-1900 Mondays to Fridays and 0700-1700 on Saturdays. The applicant understands that this condition was applied to control 'nuisance development' in respect of future residential properties to the south. However, the applicant believes that the condition would be unreasonable for a highways depot, which would need to carry out gritting activities at all times during bad weather, usually at night. Therefore, the applicant proposes that the condition should not apply, providing that adequate acoustic attenuation and the maintenance of appropriate air quality can be demonstrated.

Proposal

3. The application seeks planning permission for an integrated highways depot comprising a 2 storey office block, garaging, salt barn and storage areas, along with associated car parking and landscaping. *Reduced copies of the drawings showing the illustrative site layout, floor plans and site elevations and sections are attached.*

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The application is also accompanied by a Planning Supporting Statement, Design Statement, Access Statement, Transport Assessment, Travel Plan, Air Quality Assessment and Noise Assessment.

4. The depot would be one of two principal depots in East and West Kent, the West Kent Depot being proposed at Wrotham. It is intended that the proposed Ashford Divisional Headquarters serve Ashford, Swale, Canterbury, Thanet, Dover and Shepway Districts, supported by a satellite depot at Preston, Faversham. The proposal for this, and the other highway depots, follows a decision taken by Cabinet in September 2004 to reshape the Kent Highways Service including, among other matters, the County Council taking back the functions previously delegated to the twelve District Councils under an agency agreement. The initial intention was to provide three super depots across Kent, but Cabinet resolved on the 16 October 2006 not to proceed with the acquisition and development of the site at Dover. The County Council decided upon a new strategy – to concentrate service delivery at two principal sites and to rely more heavily upon new technology, making more effective use of the satellite locations/remote working, and to promote more home working.
5. Therefore, it is now proposed to develop two Divisional Headquarters, one at Ashford and the other at Wrotham. In addition to the application site, it is proposed that another operational depot be developed in the Dover/Thanet area in the future. The purpose of the proposed development is to enable the County Council to discharge its functions as Highway Authority more efficiently and effectively, involving the co-location of maintenance, design and administrative functions. More specifically the purpose is:
 - To enable the effective maintenance of the highways network to be carried out all year round;
 - In winter, and at other times of the year as necessary, to respond swiftly to the arrival of severe weather, to keep roads open to facilitate safe and convenient travel for all road users;
 - To take full advantage of the organisational benefits to be derived from the location on a single site of a range of professional and administrative staff, along with manual workers.
6. The primary strategy of the development at the site has been to locate most of the buildings and structures along the southern boundary in an effort to minimise the visual impact of the development's operation, and reduce noise, fumes and odours for the future residential properties which have the benefit of planning permission to the south. The proposed development provides a single point of access through the adjacent Henwood Industrial Estate, and planning permission has already been obtained for the access road (from Ashford Borough Council). The road would cross over the open drainage ditch running along the western boundary, via a small bridge, and would be provided by the developer of the Heinke Building site. The application site is divided between the depot yard, located in the western half of the site, and the depot offices and associated car park located in the eastern half. This arrangement has been adopted to ensure early separation of yard and office traffic.
7. The proposed 2 storey office building would be located at the south east corner of the site, predominately aligned with the southern boundary, and in alignment with, but separate from, the covered storage buildings within the depot yard. The 'L' shaped office building would provide general open plan office space for 169 Kent Highways Services staff, PROW (Public Right of Way) staff, external contractors and suppliers, including yard and headquarters staff working for Kent's appointed road maintenance and traffic signal maintenance contractors. In addition, the building would provide surveying, road safety equipment and traffic signal equipment stores, traffic signal testing facilities, and

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welfare accommodation for 45 road maintenance contractor operatives. It is proposed that the offices would be occupied between 7.30am and 7pm.

8. The proposed office building is 17 metres wide and 68 metres in length, with a 15 metre by 15 metre section at the south eastern end. It would have a total gross floor area of 2,368 Sq.m, the gross floor area at ground level being 1,197 Sq.m. Steep roof pitches and low eaves lines combine to lower the overall height of the building to 9.175 metres, ensuring that the height and scale is more comparable with the adjacent yard buildings. Accommodation at ground floor level would be generally cellular in nature, apart from the open plan offices, reception and break out spaces at the southeastern end of the building. At first floor level the accommodation would be fully open plan on the south east and south west frontages, and at each end of the building, with cellular accommodation such as managers offices, meeting rooms, toilets and other support accommodation arranged along the northerly facades of the building. This arrangement allows for good daylight penetration and assisted natural ventilation in the majority of spaces. Fresh air and day light would be able to filter into all parts of the building via openable vents, windows, roof lights, and via wind catcher ridge ventilators. Large (1 metre deep) roof overhangs at eaves level and external slatted timber solar shading devices would reduce unwanted solar gain.
9. The external envelope of the building proposes two differing wall cladding aesthetics, each reflecting the nature of the accommodation contained within the building, its aspect and location. The south east and south west elevations, fronting onto open plan office spaces are proposed to be clad to full height in a light grey powder coated curtain walling system, in-filled with green tinted glazing and mid brown coloured horizontal cedar boarding. The remaining elevations, fronting onto cellular accommodation, would be clad in flint filled gabion walling to a height of 3 metres above ground floor level, with either curtain walling or mid brown vertical cedar boarding located above it. The roof would be clad in mid grey PVF coated standing seam aluminium, with like coloured roof light framing. The applicant advises that the appearance of the external cladding is durable and tough, appropriate to the office building's location in a highways depot environment, whilst also providing a visual interest. Similar materials and arrangement of fenestration is proposed on corresponding end and side elevations.
10. In addition to the two storey office building, the eastern half of the site would also accommodate 142 car parking spaces for office and yard staff (including 10 spaces for visitor parking and 7 disabled parking bays), together with 5 motorcycle spaces and parking for 15 cycles. The site access road, pedestrian access and the primary car parking aisles and parking spaces would be surfaced in macadam. Secondary car parking aisles and parking spaces would be surfaced with reinforced turf. Block paving is proposed at the office entrances and for outdoor working areas, with access to the office block proposed via a full height recessed glazed entrance screen with automatic doors, located to the south east of the building.
11. The depot yard, located to the west of the site would be separated from the office building and associated access and car parking by a 2.4 metre high fine mesh galvanised steel security fence, to be finished in dark green. The remaining perimeter of the site would be fenced using a more open mesh equivalent, or by means of existing fencing. Gates of a similar construction, finish and colour would be provided at the point of entry to the depot yard and car park. The gates would be of the hinged type, being held open during the working day and locked shut when the depot yard and/or car park are not in use. A personnel gate of similar construction but with swipe card controlled access would be provided between the yard and the office building. The entrance gates

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to the depot yard would be 'framed' by free standing gabion walling and structure planting to soften and enhance the visual appearance of the site entrance.

12. The depot yard would include a salt barn to store up to 4000 tonnes of salt, open and covered parking for gritting and other lorries, enclosed storage buildings, open storage areas, a weighbridge and other related areas for recycling, refuelling and vehicle washing. In addition, there would be a small office, a mess room and a toilet for yard staff.
13. The salt barn, because of the salt loading requirements and method of delivery is required to be high. Therefore, in an effort to reduce its visual impact, the structure is proposed to be sited in the northern part of the site, adjacent to the car park and access road, away from sensitive site boundaries. The rectangular shaped salt barn would be 30 metres long and 21.6 metres wide, with an overall height of 11.2 metres.
14. A covered parking areas for gritting lorries and smaller vehicles is also proposed. This structure would measure 21 metres by 14.2 metres, with a height of 6.4 metres.
15. Further covered storage buildings are proposed along the southern boundary of the yard, to house various plant and equipment. The 'L' shaped form of the buildings is intended to reflect the form of the office building, and would have a maximum roof height of 6.4 metres and a total gross floor area of 1332.8 square metres.
16. Concreted open storage areas designed to drain to interceptor tanks and filters are proposed to the east, north and west boundaries of the depot yard, and also centrally within the yard.
17. Various other structures, plant, equipment and facilities, as shown on the site layout, would also be provided.
18. Indicative details of landscaping and boundary treatment have been submitted. Existing trees within planted margins along the east, south and west boundaries would be retained, where possible, and reinforced with further planting of trees, shrubs and hedging. New native tree planting along the southern boundary, in conjunction with mounding and trellis topped fencing, is proposed to screen the office building from the residential properties that are to be constructed to the south of the site, and to provide summer shade for office staff. Native species of climbing plants are also proposed to cover the south west and south east facades of the covered storage buildings.

Reduced copies of the submitted drawings showing the site layout, elevations, and access are attached.

Planning Policy

19. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to the consideration of the application:
 - (i) The Adopted 2006 **Kent & Medway Structure Plan**:
Policy SP1 - States that the primary purpose of Kent's development and environmental strategy will be to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern of development.

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- Policy NR5** - The quality of Kent's environment will be conserved and enhanced. This will include the visual, ecological, geological, historic and water environments, air quality, noise and levels of tranquillity and light intrusion.
Development should be planned and designed to avoid, or adequately mitigate, pollution impacts. Proposals likely to have adverse implications for pollution should be the subject of a pollution impact assessment.
In assessing proposals local authorities will take into account:
(a) impact on prevailing background pollution levels; and
(b) the cumulative impacts of proposals on pollution levels; and
(c) the ability to mitigate adverse pollution impacts; and
(d) the extent and potential extremes of any impacts on air quality, water resources, biodiversity and human health.
Development which would result in, or significantly contribute to, unacceptable levels of pollution, will not be permitted.
- Policy QL1** – Seeks to conserve and enhance the environment through the quality of development and design. Developments, individually or taken together, should respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surroundings.
- Policy EN3** - Kent's landscape and wildlife (flora and fauna) habitats will be conserved and enhanced.
- Policy EN8** - Wildlife habitats and species will be protected, conserved and enhanced, especially through long term management and habitat creation schemes, particularly where they have been identified as national and county priorities in the UK and Kent Biodiversity Action Plan(s), or where they are protected under wildlife legislation. This will be secured by:
(a) ensuring that site evaluation is undertaken to establish the nature conservation value of proposed development sites
(b) identifying, safeguarding and managing existing and potential land for nature conservation as part of development proposals, particularly where a connected series of sites can be achieved
(c) local planning authorities identifying locations and proposals for habitat and species management, restoration and creation.
Development likely to have an adverse effect, directly, indirectly or cumulatively, on important habitats or species will not be permitted unless:
• there is an overriding need for the development that outweighs adverse impact on nature conservation; and
• adverse impact on an important nature conservation resource can be adequately mitigated and/or compensated.
- Policy EN9** - Seeks to maintain tree cover and the hedgerow network. Additionally, states they should be enhanced where this would improve the landscape, biodiversity, or link existing woodland habitats. Ancient and semi-natural woodland will be protected and, where possible, enhanced.

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Policy EP3 - Proposals for employment and business development other than (a) those already identified in adopted Local Plans or (b) at the specific locations identified in Policy EP5(b) or identified pursuant to Policy EP7, should be located in, or adjacent to, major or principal urban areas and be easily accessible by a choice of transport. Such proposals should be attractive to the market place.

Policy TP3 - States that local planning authorities should ensure that development sites are well served by public transport, walking and cycling, or will be made so as a result of the development. Travel Plans should be established for larger developments that generate significant demand for travel to promote the use of these means of transport. Developments likely to generate a large number of trips should be located where there is either a good choice of transport already available or where a good choice can be provided in a manner acceptable to the local transport authority.

Policy TP15 - States that development which generates significant increases in traffic, especially heavy goods vehicles, will not be permitted if it is not well related to the primary and secondary road network, or if it would result in a significant increased risk of crashes or traffic delays unless appropriate measures to mitigate the effect of the development have been secured.

Policy TP19 - States that development proposals should comply with vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by the County Council.

(ii) The adopted 2000 **Ashford Borough Local Plan**:

Policy DP1 - Requires development to be thought out in design terms in relation to scale, density, height, massing, landscape, access and detailing.

Policy DP2 - New development proposals must satisfy the following general requirements:

(a) the development must be designed in a way which respects the character and appearance of the area around it;

(b) the ability of neighbours to enjoy reasonable levels of privacy, peace and quiet, natural light, and atmosphere relatively free from dust and other pollutants must not be adversely affected;

(c) the local transport system must be capable of properly serving the development proposed taking account of its scale, nature and location and there must be safe access to the site, sufficient car and cycle parking and adequate space for safe manoeuvring.

Policy DP6 – Development proposals that generate significant levels of noise should be accompanied by a scheme to mitigate such effects, bearing in mind the character of surrounding uses, to ensure there would be no serious impact upon noise sensitive uses.

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- Policy DP7-** Wherever practical, all new development proposals should provide for the enhancement of nature conservation by maintaining and/or creating suitable habitats with locally native species and corridor planting to help sustain and promote wildlife.
- Policy GP4** -To propose development on specific sites in a way which minimises damage to the environment by respecting the character of surrounding areas, protecting important features in the landscape, heritage features and wildlife habitats and providing compensating environmental benefits where damage by development cannot be avoided.
- Policy EN30** -Development which would harm or cause adverse effects to any species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, will not be permitted unless there are material considerations which outweigh the harm to the conservation interest, or the harm could be overcome by conditions or planning obligations. In exceptional circumstances it may be possible for mitigating measures to be included in any particular scheme, provided that they would at least offset any harm.
- Policy EN31** -Development which is likely to significantly affect semi-natural habitats or any other important habitat will not be permitted unless measures have been taken to limit significantly this impact and long term habitat protection is provided where appropriate.
- Policy TP1** - Proposals for development must take account of the following issues and, wherever appropriate, show how these issues have been reflected in the scheme put forward:
- (a) the need to minimise the need to travel, for example, by the location together of complementary uses;
 - (b) the importance of providing access to development via a wide choice of transport modes, including public transport, cycling and walking;
 - (c) the need to design site layouts and the facilities provided in a way which encourages a variety of feasible forms of transport, promotes safety and is attractive.
- Policy TP11-** Proposals for development should provide for the parking of vehicles, in accordance with the Kent County Council Vehicle Parking Standards.
- Policy S37** - Land to the east of Henwood Industrial Estate is proposed for housing and employment development, although at least half of the site should remain as public open space. The Council will seek to secure proposals for the site that:
- (a) deal carefully with the relationship between the layout of the new development to existing residential, employment and educational uses bordering the site;
 - (b) include a variation of housing density and building type;

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- (c) protect existing important habitats wherever practical, and design the site layout to provide new habitat links providing routed for wildlife and provide for the long term management of these areas;
- (d) provide replacement playing fields;
- (e) provide pedestrian and cycle routes through the site which link to the wider network and give easy access to surrounding areas;
- (f) provide separate vehicle accesses to residential and employment development on the site;
- (g) retain the Listed Buildings in an appropriate setting.

Consultations

20. **Ashford Borough Council:** raises no objection to the proposal but makes the following comments and suggestions:

- The Travel Plan is noted and the intention for this to be monitored and periodically reviewed is appreciated. The Council would be grateful to receive updates to the Travel Plan as and when they occur;
- The energy efficiency measures incorporated into the design are welcomed;
- Suggests that enhanced landscaping around the perimeter fence to the compound should be provided to give visual softening, and defensive planting incorporated to assist in security of the compound;
- There is no specific detail in the application concerning external lighting, which has the capacity to give rise to unnecessary light spillage and adverse amenity impact to existing and planned nearby residences. The Council urges that this be dealt with in consideration of the application rather than be left to be dealt with by means of planning condition;
- The southern boundary would benefit from additional tree planting, especially to the rear of the PROW store building, in order to improve the relationship of the development with the planned new dwellings to the south. It is noted that the landscaped 'buffer zone' on this boundary is generally of a reduced depth to that envisaged with Scarborough and Benchmark Estates through the grant of outline planning permission. In that application, the Borough Council considered that a 15 metre wide heavily landscaped buffer zone should be provided. The Borough Council will leave this matter to the County Council to properly consider in the application determination process;
- Any decision made will need to adequately address the potential noise and disturbance impacts arising from uses taking place within the enclosed compound on the amenities of nearby residential occupiers;
- Policies ET3 and ET4 of the Ashford Borough Local Plan (2000) should be taken into account in the determination process. Both Policies were specifically mentioned in the reason for condition 10 of outline planning permission that seeks to restrict the quantum of floorspace related to the matters of use, transport generation and location, relative to the town centre 'employment core' identified in the Ashford Borough Local Plan.

In addition, Ashford Borough Council's Environmental Health Officer comments as follows:

- Pleased to note that the contractor will be expected to apply for a prior consent in accordance with Section 61 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. Any application

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should assume working hours of 0800-1800 hrs (Mondays to Fridays) and 0800 to 1300 hrs (Saturdays), with no works on Sundays or Bank Holidays;

- The noise assessment should indicate what noise levels may be anticipated at the nearest residential property.
- Dust emissions during the initial construction phase will need to be controlled and works should not begin until there is an adequate mains water supply on site. The mitigation measures outlined in the air quality assessment should be embodied into a dust control condition.

The Divisional Transport Manager: requested that additional information was submitted, and that the Transport Assessment and Travel Plan be amended accordingly. Following receipt of the revised documents, he comments as follows:

“Following confirmation from the applicant, in which we are assured that ‘KHS Management endorses the Travel Plan, and are committed to implementing the measures included in it’, I have no objection to this application.

The trip rates detailed in the Transport Assessment correspond with the proposed modal splits in the Travel Plan. Therefore the success of the Travel Plan is essential for this development in order to keep trip rates at the agreed levels.

The Travel Plan should be conditioned to ensure that the proposals within it are undertaken. By conditioning this, it should be understood that all modal shift targets, initiatives, schemes, facilities, timescales and monitoring targets detailed in the Travel Plan are expected to be implemented. In addition, it should be conditioned that a Travel Plan Co-ordinator is appointed at least 6 months before the site is occupied.

The maximum parking level has been agreed, and this should be reflected in a ‘final’ plan as previously requested. Owing to this change, a condition should be imposed that the final external layout is agreed with the Highways Authority prior to commencement on site.”

Jacobs (Noise): comment as follows:

Construction Noise

“I am satisfied that noise from the proposed development can be adequately controlled by condition to restrict noisy construction work to those typically agreed, in order to reduce the impact on amenity of the closest noise sensitive receivers, (eg. Monday to Friday 7am to 7pm, and on Saturday 8am to 1pm, with no working on Sundays/Bank Holidays).

The applicant has predicted a ‘severe noise impact’ [from construction activity] at the proposed residential area to the south of the site, which is claimed to be 25 metres away. There is also mention of a ‘potential’ for an acoustic barrier to this boundary of the site. I would wish to see this provided to ensure some acoustic mitigation is provided to the proposed housing, albeit for a temporary period of time.”

Operational Noise

“I am satisfied that, subject to a condition, noise from the operational use of the depot should not cause a detriment to amenity at the closest properties. A condition should be attached that only authorises use of vehicles with smart alarms, and the not the traditional reversing alarms that can be most annoying.”

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Air Quality

“There should be no detriment to amenity through air quality emissions from the site.”

Jacobs (Landscaping): raises no objection and concludes that the site is well suited for the proposed development due to the surrounding land use as an industrial estate. The impact on existing trees and vegetation is minimal, with much of it retained as visual screening along the east and south eastern boundaries. The residual visual impact upon proposed housing to the south, the M20 to the north, existing industrial buildings to the west and open land to the east would be minimal. Proposed planting and building materials are suited to the site.

Biodiversity Projects Officer: The submitted reptile survey indicates the definite presence of protected reptiles on the site, and therefore a legal requirement to make all reasonable precautions to avoid harm to these species. The Reptile Mitigation Strategy should identify a receptor site prior to determining the planning application. However, it is considered that in this instance, with the use of appropriate conditions, the written commitment of the applicant, and the integrity of the appointed ecologist, that it is a pragmatic solution which can be supported, given the right controls. Conditions covering the following are suggested:

- that the on-site mitigation work (exclusion, containment) will be carried out as per the method statement;
- that reptile capture cannot commence until a suitable receptor site has been agreed;
- that the identification of a suitable receptor site will be carried out as per the Method Statement with a mechanism to ensure its protection into the "foreseeable future", with enhancement, translocation and monitoring plans submitted for approval;
- that the landscaping proposals are developed in line with the Method Statement proposals, with reptiles in mind to enable recolonisation from surrounding habitat.

In addition, no disturbance to birds should be carried out during the nesting season (March to August). Mitigation measures should be included in the development plans and implemented during construction in order to protect breeding birds that may use vegetation that would be removed.

The landscaping proposed appears to suggest non-native planting in some areas. The choice of native species available is more than adequate for the proposals and indigenous species, with their associated biodiversity gains should be used for all planting.

The Environment Agency: raises no objection to the proposal subject to the imposition of conditions regarding the disposal of foul and surface waters and land contamination.

County Archaeologist: requests that a condition requiring the implementation of an archaeological watching brief be added to any subsequent planning permission.

Representations were also received from:

Mid Kent Water: raises concerns related to the proposed salt barn and the potential risk of contamination to the Groundwater Source at Henwood. Mid Kent Water has a

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duty to ensure it maintains safe drinking water supplies, and that these remain protected from any potential contamination. The data received so far has not been sufficient for the Company to conclude whether there would be risks to water supplies and how this would be mitigated, and therefore maintains an objection to the proposal.

Local Member

21. The local County Member, Mrs E Tweed, was notified of the application on the 2 August 2006.

Publicity

22. The application was publicised by advertisement in a local newspaper, the posting of two site notices, and the individual notification of 8 nearby properties and the housing developer Jones Homes.

Representations

23. At the time of compiling this report, 1 letter of representation had been received. This letter is from Jones Homes, the housing developer which has planning permission to build housing on land immediately to the south of the application site. A copy of the letter is appended to this report.

Discussion

24. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan policies outlined in paragraph (19) above. Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, this proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. Issues of particular relevance include impact upon protected species and their habitats, residential and local amenity, massing and design and impacts upon the local highway network.

Principle of the Development

25. As indicated above, the application site forms part of a larger area of land allocated in the Ashford Borough Local Plan for housing as well as employment uses. Planning permission was granted in November 2005, in outline, for new development to provide Class B1 (business) a, b and c, Class B2 (general industry) and Class B8 (storage and distribution) uses, with associated external works, new access road and junction, and cycleway. The application site covers part of the area allocated for employment. The indicative layout plan for the outline application included a 15 metre buffer zone at the southern boundary of the site, to separate employment and residential development. Condition 13 of the outline permission limits the hours of use for development at the site, as detailed in paragraph 2 above. Although this application proposes development which is considered *sui generis* (ie. a unique use), it is recognised that the purpose of condition 13 is material to the consideration of this application. This application however seeks a 24 hour operation, albeit only in cases of emergency, including the requirement to grit roads in the winter when necessary. Therefore, the impact upon amenity, with regard to the housing to be built to the south of the site, needs to be considered.

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26. The neighbouring housing developer has suggested that the site is not the best location for such an intensive and environmentally disturbing use. It is suggested that the County Council should undertake a more thorough and detailed search for a better located site as it appears that this site has been selected as a compromise solution, and is not wholly acceptable in environmental, access and locational terms. The highway and ecological implications of this proposal are discussed later in this report, as are possible impacts upon adjacent residential development.
27. This application seeks to provide one of two new divisional highway depots/offices in Kent, following a reorganisation in the delivery of highway services. Contrary to the assertions, there has been a thorough and detailed site search with 50 potential sites for the principal depots initially identified. All of those sites were tested for suitability in relation to their proximity to the strategic road network, their adequacy of size, their accessibility for the workforce and others, and their proximity to satellite depots. Out of that initial search, 8 sites made up the initial shortlist for the Mid Kent Division (7 in Ashford and 1 in Aylesford). In strategic terms, Ashford was considered the most appropriate location for the Mid Kent depot, but none of the 7 Ashford sites could ultimately be pursued. Three were found to have overriding constraints which precluded them from further consideration, and the remaining 4 proved unavailable for acquisition. The final choice of the Henwood site followed this initial extensive search, and reflects its subsequent availability as well as the fact that it also meets the locational requirements of the initial site search.
28. Following the decision taken by Cabinet in October 2006 not to proceed with the acquisition and development of the site at Dover, and to concentrate service delivery to 2 principal sites, the site selection process was reviewed and an addendum to the Planning Supporting Statement submitted. The present situation for the newly defined East Kent division is more complex than for the proposed Wrotham Divisional Headquarters which would serve the newly defined West Kent division. The territory covered by Wrotham simply expanded to take in Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Districts in addition to the original 4. In the case of Ashford, the new territory is substantially different, involving the removal of the 2 districts (Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells) which now form part of West Kent, and the addition of all 4 districts which formed East Kent as originally constituted. Thus the review of the site selection process takes into account the 13 sites originally considered in Ashford and Swale districts, and the 22 sites in the 4 easternmost districts in the County originally considered to serve East Kent as then defined.
29. Seven of these sites were eliminated on the grounds that they were too small. They would therefore also be unsuitable in the present context. 18 sites in all 6 Districts were taken forward for further consideration at the next stage. To have been carried forward to the second stage for consideration, sites had to be large enough and to have adequate connections involving easy access to an A road or other road on the strategic network. It does not however necessarily mean that the point at which access is gained to that network is well located in relation to the area the depot needs to cover. The strategic location of these sites was therefore reconsidered.

The following sites (running clockwise from the north) had a near-coastal location:

- Waterbrook Park, Graveney, near Faversham
- Eddington Business Park, Herne Bay
- Blacksole Farm, near Herne Bay
- Richborough, near Sandwich (two sites)
- Sheerway Business Park, near Folkestone

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- Link Park, Lympne

The following sites (again running clockwise from the north) are located further inland:

- Staines Hill, Sturry
- Lakesview Industrial Estate, Hersden
- Manston Business Park, near Ramsgate
- Lydden Field, near Dover
- Hawkinge Airfield, near Folkestone
- Westenhanger

The near-coastal sites are by definition located near the edge of the East Kent division as now defined, and although well placed to provide winter service and maintenance in the vicinity, are remote from much of the rest of the territory to be covered. Even the sites located a little further inland are situated either too far north or too far south, and none is well located to serve the area to the south-west of Ashford, with the possible exception of the sites at Lympne and Westenhanger, or the western parts. In any event, the consideration of a suitable location in this instance must take into account the proposal to develop the existing depot at Preston, Faversham, as a satellite depot with a salt barn, and the intention to compensate for the Dover site by finding another site for an operational depot in the Dover/Thanet area. It is concluded that none of these sites, considered as candidates for the East Kent division as originally defined, is suitably located to serve the East Kent division as now defined.

30. Three sites were shortlisted for East Kent as originally defined: the White Cliffs Business Park (planning application withdrawn), Highland Court Farm, Bridge, near Canterbury (site sold and therefore no longer available) and the McClaren site at Lydden. As a strategic location, the last named would have the same drawbacks as the Lydden Fields site discussed above. All these factors focussed attention again on Ashford as the optimum strategic location, and given the location of all other potential sites, and the lack of availability of alternatives in Ashford itself, it is concluded that the site at Henwood, Ashford, is the most suitable location for a Divisional Headquarters to serve East Kent as now defined.

Siting and Design

31. The primary concern with regards to the proposed site layout and design is the impact that the development could have on adjacent land to the south, which has planning permission for residential development. Policy QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan, and Policies DP1 and DP2 of the Ashford Borough Local Plan require developments to respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surroundings. Development must be designed in a way which does not detrimentally impact upon the ability of neighbours to enjoy reasonable levels of privacy, peace and quiet, natural light, and an atmosphere relatively free from dust and other pollutants.
32. In respect of the permitted housing development located to the south of the site, 7 out of the 25 dwellings are to be sited close to the boundary, and it is the impact upon these properties that needs to be addressed. The primary strategy for the layout of the application site is to locate the majority of buildings and structures along the southern boundary. This would reduce the impact of the development's operation, in terms of noise, fumes and odours. However, although the buildings and structures would screen these site operation impacts from residential properties, the impact of the buildings themselves needs to be considered and addressed in terms of overlooking, levels of privacy and loss of light. The issues of noise and dust, and their impact upon residential amenity, is discussed later in this report.

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33. A buffer zone between the proposed development and the southern boundary of the site has been included within this proposal in an effort to screen the proposal from neighbouring residential properties. The southern site boundary would be delineated by a 2.4 metre high fence, topped with 0.7 metre high trellis, giving a total height of 3.1 metres. Between the boundary fencing and the proposed buildings a bund, up to 1 metre above natural ground level, would be created. Native shrubs and trees would be retained, with gaps infilled with new planting of the same species. Adjacent to the boundary fencing, new shrub planting is proposed, with a high proportion of evergreens, at a planting height of 1.2 metres and a density of 1 plant per metre. Beyond this, towards the top of the bund, it is proposed to plant evergreen oaks at 3.5 metres in height, and at 5 metre spacing. Low level shrub planting would then separate the tree planting and a pedestrian footpath, which is proposed to the rear of the buildings. The width of the buffer zone would be 11 metres at the widest point and 7 metres at the narrowest point, which although narrower than the 15 metres specified in the current outline consent, is considered acceptable given the location of noise generating activities further to the north than otherwise might have been the case with general industrial warehousing development on this site.
34. Jacobs Landscaping advises that the proposed design takes into account the future development of the land to the south, and that visual impacts are reduced through the retention of existing shrubs and trees to the southern elevation. The visual buffer that this would provide would be enhanced and strengthened through proposals for new native shrub planting, and a belt of trees. Jacobs Landscaping states that the residual visual impact to the housing to the south of the site would be minimal. Therefore, I consider that the buffer zone and its associated fencing, bunding and planting are appropriate to the context of the site, and would provide adequate screening between the proposed development and housing to the south. However, concerns regarding overlooking and loss of light remain and are considered below.
35. The main office building, and an area of covered storage, are proposed to run parallel to the southern boundary of the site. As explained above, the intention is that the buildings would screen neighbouring properties from noise and activity within the depot itself. The 2 storey office building is proposed to the eastern end of the southern boundary and would face the rear elevations of 4 properties. The height of the office block has been kept as low as possible (9.175 metres) by designing the building with steep roof pitches and low eaves lines. The low eaves height, compared with internal floor level, and the proposed use of high level windows, has the effect of reducing the angle of view from within the proposed office building towards residential properties. Drawing no. B0147000/A/002 Rev P6 shows sections through the site, and plots the proposed office buildings and a rear elevation of the permitted housing. Sight lines from the office windows have been plotted, and the applicant has accurately demonstrated that once boundary fencing, bunding and planting is *in situ* direct views into neighbouring properties would not be possible. In addition, the distance between the rear elevation of properties and the proposed office block would be over 21 metres, a distance considered acceptable for window to window distances within the Kent Design Guide. The design of the office block has taken into consideration the amenity of the properties to be constructed to the south of the site. All practicable methods have been adopted to reduce and mitigate overlooking from the office block. In addition, the distance between the office block and the housing is deemed to be acceptable in terms of window to window distances, indicating that loss of light is not a cause of concern in this instance.
36. In addition to the 2 storey office building, covered storage is proposed to the western end of the southern boundary, which would face the side elevations of two properties.

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The covered storage area would have a maximum roof height of 6.4 metres, but would be a mono-pitch roof in nature, increasing in height as one moves away from the boundary. The rear elevation would be clad in timber and climbing plants would be utilised to cover the timber, softening the appearance of the building. The closest property would be within 12 metres from the covered storage, although the storage building would not contain any windows and therefore overlooking is not a cause of concern here. The side elevations of the properties would run parallel to the storage building, resulting in front and rear facing aspects being unaffected by the proposed development. The Kent Design Guide advises that 11 metres is an acceptable distance between window and walls, and this proposal therefore is in excess of this guidance. Therefore, I do not consider that the proposed office block, or covered storage area, would have a significantly detrimental impact upon the residential amenity of neighbouring properties in terms of privacy, overlooking and loss of light.

37. I consider that the remainder of the site layout is appropriate in terms of scale, massing and design. The salt barn, the tallest element of the proposed depot, is located as far away from the southern boundary as is practicably possible. Conflicting uses on site are adequately separated and the layout would facilitate effective working on site. The design of the proposed buildings, whilst industrial in nature, has incorporated the use of materials and finishes which would soften and reduce the visual impact of the development. Jacobs Landscaping consider that the size and design of the proposed buildings, and the materials to be used, are suitable in terms of adding to the existing built fabric of the surrounding industrial estate. Therefore, I consider that the design and siting of the development is appropriate to the context of the site, and that the applicant has adequately considered and addressed the impact upon housing to the south.

Residential Amenity

38. In addition to the siting and design of the proposed buildings within the depot, which I consider to be acceptable, the use of the depot, at times over 24 hour periods, would generate noise and disturbance. Air Quality and Noise Assessments have been submitted to enable an accurate assessment of the impacts of the use of the depot to be made.
38. Jacobs advise that, subject to the imposition of conditions and the provision of a 2 metre high noise barrier, to be erected to the southern boundary of the site prior to the commencement of construction works, noise should not have a detrimental effect on the amenity of the closest properties to the depot. Hours of construction works could also be limited under planning condition, and I would concur with those suggested by Ashford Borough Council in this regard (0800 to 1800 hrs (Mondays to Fridays) and 0800 to 1300 hrs (Saturdays), with no works on Sundays or Bank Holidays). In addition, Jacobs are satisfied that there should be no detriment to amenity through air quality emissions at the site. Design and siting within the depot has been carefully considered and thought through, resulting in the main office building and covered storage area screening the depot from neighbouring properties. The impacts of noise and dust have been mitigated against and are considered to be acceptable, whilst at the same time the design of the buildings is such that privacy and light levels are maintained.
39. The applicant has requested that planning condition 13 of the previous outline consent at the site, which limited the hours of use, should not apply to this proposal. The applicant advises that the use of the dept at night would be infrequent, occurring only during severe weather conditions, and that the salt barn would be some 90 metres from the nearest property. Calculations of noise generated by the operation of the salt barn predict noise levels of 38dB $L_{Aeq, 1 \text{ hour}}$ at the nearest properties. The World Health

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Organisation (WHO) recommends, in their publication Guidelines for Community Noise, a noise level outside a bedroom window of no more than 45 dB $L_{Aeq, 8 \text{ hours}}$ or 60 dB L_{Amax} in order to minimise sleep disturbance with a window open. Simplistically, a partially open window provides between 10 and 15 dB(A) attenuation. WHO considers that when referring to an internal noise level 'night time' noise levels should not exceed 30 dB $L_{Aeq, 8 \text{ hour}}$, if negative effects on sleeping are to be avoided. The noise assessment predicts that during the extreme weather episodes that require the deployment of gritters, the residents of the properties in the vicinity of the depot would ordinarily have their thermally, double glazed windows closed. Therefore, with an external noise level predicted to be 38dB L_{Aeq} , the night-time noise from the gritters using the depot would not give rise to sleep disturbance. Jacobs Noise are of the opinion that noise should not have a detrimental effect on the amenity of the closest properties to the depot, and air quality should not be affected. Therefore, I consider that 24-hour operation of the depot, which would be infrequent, would be acceptable. Subject to the imposition of conditions, I am of the opinion that this proposal would not have a significantly detrimental impact on the amenity of residential properties to be constructed to the south of the site.

Drainage/Protection of Water Resources

40. The Environment Agency raises no objection to this proposal, subject to the imposition of conditions. In particular, the Agency would require a scheme for the disposal of foul and surface waters to be submitted for approval, prior to the commencement of development on site, and are satisfied that this can be dealt with under planning condition. However, Mid Kent Water is of the opinion that insufficient detail has been provided with regard to the new drainage systems, and are concerned about potential contamination of groundwater. Although the applicant has stated that 'new drainage systems will be provided to ensure that run off that has salt content is directed to the new foul water sewer', Mid Kent Water would like to see the design, volumes of water being considered, the route and the point of discharge for the proposed drainage system before they can comment fully. Members will note the Company's holding objection in this regard, but Mid Kent Water is only accountable for the supply of water and is not responsible for the protection of groundwater quality, which is the proper responsibility of the Environment Agency. Full drainage details, including appropriate contaminant interceptors, would normally be reserved by planning condition and subject to further approval if consent was to be given. Under the circumstances, I do not consider that the additional information requested by Mid Kent Water should delay consideration of the planning application.

Highways Issues

41. Following amendments to the Transport Assessment and Travel Plan submitted with this application, Kent Highways have confirmed that these documents are now acceptable. The application originally proposed a total of 182 car parking spaces, but following negotiations with Kent Highways, the applicant has reduced the number of parking spaces proposed to 125 staff spaces, 10 visitor spaces, 7 disabled spaces, 6 motorcycle spaces and 15 cycle spaces. This number of spaces is now considered by Kent Highways to be the maximum required for the land uses proposed.
42. However, the Travel Plan states that there would be 285 staff using the site, 164 of which would be based in the office 5 days a week with the remaining 121 based at home with a weekly team meeting on site. It is imperative that this arrangement is enforced, as local residents must not be affected by staff parking on the local highway network. Trip rates which have been 'agreed' in the submitted Transport Assessment and Travel Plan would also be incorrect if more staff than predicted used the site on a

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daily basis. Therefore, the success of the Travel Plan is essential for this development in order to keep trip rates at the agreed levels. The Director of Kent Highways Services has confirmed that they endorse the Travel Plan, and are committed to implementing the measures included within it. Should Members be minded to permit, a condition should be added to the decision to ensure that all modal shift targets, initiatives, schemes, facilities, timescales and monitoring targets detailed in the Travel Plan are implemented.

43. The reduction in the number of car parking spaces proposed has resulted in a reduction in the area of the site allocated for car parking. This has freed up an area of the site that could be used for a number of purposes, including additional planting and landscaping. Alternatively, the newly available space could facilitate a minor alteration to the site layout, which was restricted at the time that the application was submitted. An amended site plan is awaited, and should Members be minded to permit, the granting of planning permission would be subject to the receipt and approval of this amended site plan.

Ecology Issues

44. An ecological scoping survey was submitted with this application and confirmed the presence of good to exceptional populations of the viviparous lizard and slow-worm within the application site. The site at Henwood supports individual reptiles that form part of a larger population that also occupies adjacent land areas. This population is considered to be of County wide importance. Proposed development work is likely to result in direct disturbance to individual reptiles, the loss of approximately 0.4 hectares of good quality reptile habitat would contribute to the fragmentation of an important reptile population. Therefore the ecological scoping survey concluded that the preparation of a Method Statement, to detail proposed reptile mitigation, was required.
45. The Method Statement details the mitigation and compensation proposed including habitat enhancement work, isolation of land within the development site using reptile fencing, and relocation of captured animals. Reptile capture work would only commence after the identification and preparation of a suitable receptor site. The Method Statement reiterates Kent County Council's commitment to identifying land that would not be subject to development activities for the foreseeable future that could be used for relocating reptile captures within the proposed development site. A suitable receptor site is not identified within the Method Statement, but it is stated that the future identification of land for use as a receptor site would be assessed for suitability. A suitable planning condition could require the provision and management of a receptor site prior to the removal of the affected reptile population. Habitat management would also be required under planning condition. The views of Natural England are awaited on this application and will be reported at the Committee Meeting.
46. In addition to the protected species issues discussed above, no disturbance to birds should be carried out during the nesting season (March to August). This could also be subject to a planning condition. In addition, a detailed landscaping scheme would be required under planning condition which, amongst other matters, should identify existing trees to be removed, existing trees and planting to be retained, the provision of new trees, shrubs and planting and a programme of maintenance. The initial landscaping proposed appears to suggest non-native planting in some areas, however it would be preferable to use indigenous species, with their associated benefits for biodiversity. Although this proposal has the potential to have a detrimental impact upon protected species, I consider that, subject to the imposition of conditions (as discussed above), any adverse impacts could be effectively mitigated against.

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Conclusion

47. In summary, I consider that there is no overriding planning policy objection to the proposal. I consider that the siting and design of the proposed buildings has been carefully considered to reduce the impact of the depot, and its associated activities, upon the housing to be built to the south of the site. The applicant has successfully demonstrated that the Highway Depot would not have a significantly detrimental effect on the amenity of local residents, or the local highway network. I consider that there are special circumstances to justify the proposed development on a site which is home to a population of protected species. I therefore conclude that, subject to the satisfactory resolution of the outstanding issues on contamination of ground water, revised site layout and any views from Natural England, and the imposition of conditions, the proposed development would not give rise to any material harm and is otherwise in accordance with the general principles of the relevant Development Plan Policies. Therefore, I recommend that permission be granted subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

Recommendation

48. SUBJECT TO any further views received by the Committee Meeting, a revised site layout to take account of the reduction in car parking provision and any comments from Natural England received by the Committee Meeting date, I RECOMMEND that PLANNING 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;
- external lighting details to be submitted for approval;
- a detailed scheme of landscaping, its implementation and maintenance, to be developed in line with the Method Statement proposals;
- tree protection and a methodology for working in close proximity to trees;
- provision of a 2 metre high noise barrier to the southern boundary;
- details of a scheme for the disposal of foul and surface waters;
- implementation of an archaeological watching brief;
- implementation and ongoing review of the Travel Plan;
- use of smart alarms;
- provision and safeguarding of parking and vehicular access routes within the site;
- location of and construction of contractors site compound and provision of vehicle parking;
- on site mitigation work to be carried out in accordance with the submitted Method Statement;
- reptile capture to not commence until a suitable receptor site is found;
- Identification of a suitable receptor site and its long term protection;
- enhancement, translocation and monitoring plans for the receptor site;
- protection of nesting birds;
- hours of working during construction;
- measures to prevent mud and debris being taken onto the public highway;

Case officer – Mary Green	01622 221066
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Background documents - See section heading
