

SECTION D
DEVELOPMENT TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Background Documents - the deposited documents, views and representations received as referred to in the reports and included in the development proposal dossier for each case and also as might be additionally indicated.

Item D1

Conversion and extension of redundant caretakers house to nursery at The Towers School, Ashford– AS/06/1270

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 12 September 2006.

Application submitted by Kent County Council Children, Families and Education & The Governors of The Towers School for the conversion and extension of redundant caretaker's house to nursery at The Towers School, Faversham Road, Ashford. (Ref:AS/06/1270)

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mr C. Findlay

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. The Towers School is located off Faversham Road, in northwest Ashford, to the north of the M20. Facing residential properties are located to the south of Faversham Road, and open fields bound the remainder of the site. The main school buildings are located towards the centre of the site and are a mix of mainly 1960's buildings, which are now outdated and in need of replacement or repair. Both pedestrians and vehicular traffic primarily access the Towers School off the Faversham Road. The site is virtually level, with car parking fronting the Faversham Road boundary. A Special Landscape Area is located to the east of the site. A site plan is attached.

Proposal

2. This application proposes the conversion and extension of the redundant caretaker's house at The Towers School, Ashford. The house has not been used as a caretaker's house for several years and has stood empty, being used only for storage. The extension to the caretaker's house is just one of many projects proposed to improve the schools facilities and bring them up to the standards required today. The proposed conversion and extension to the caretaker's house is to provide accommodation to house an Early Years nursery for use by both staff and the community as a whole. It is also intended that the facility would be used as a learning facility for sixth form students who are studying relevant courses on site.
3. Due to the fact that the building is not currently used, and that there is a lack of funding available to the school, alternative locations for the nursery were not considered. However, the location of the existing building provides an excellent position for a nursery as it is located away from the main school buildings, but in close proximity to vehicular access and car parking. The proposal includes the construction of four new playrooms for various year groups, two baby development rooms, a baby change facility, disabled WC, male and female WC's and a general office.

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4. The proposed extension wraps itself around three sides of the existing two storey 1960's building. The extension would be single storey, constructed from a timber frame and clad in vertical timber boarding, with a flat roof. The applicant also intends to refurbish the internal decoration of the existing building, including new fire doors and electrics. This would bring the building up to the current required health and safety standards.
5. The Towers School and the 'Old Caretakers House' has, in recent years, had funding for replacement UPVC double glazing, and the applicant proposes to also use these windows in the new extension. The external appearance of the extension is proposed to match the existing house, and other buildings on the school site. The windows would be white, and the timber cladding stained to match. The house also benefits from its own contained garden, which would be modified to provide an area for safe supervised play during fine weather.
6. With regards to sustainable design, the applicant advises that the new extension would utilise timber framing and cladding, along with high levels of insulation, thereby minimising carbon emissions. High quality double-glazing would be incorporated in an effort to reduce solar gain and provide thermal insulation. Wherever possible, natural lighting and ventilation would be made use of. In addition, the proposed design has been produced in line with BS8300 and the applicant has worked closely with Kent County Council's Access Officer to ensure that the existing building and extension would be accessible to all.
7. The applicant advises that there would be a maximum of six members of staff employed by the nursery, which includes a nursery manager. The number of children attending the nursery would determine how many of the six staff would be required for each session. There would be three session times, which the applicant currently anticipates to be 8am to 12pm, 1pm to 6pm and an all day session between 8am and 6pm. The applicant advises that these times have been chosen in order to avoid the drop off and pick up times of the Towers School, which are 8.30-9am and 3.15-3.45pm. The nursery would be registered for 6 babies, 8 toddlers and 16 three to five year olds. The applicant states that the School has ample parking on site and that the School would, with the aid of signage, reserve 5 existing parking bays adjacent to the nursery for the use by parents for pick-up and drop-off.

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

Planning Policy

8. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to the consideration of the application:
 - (i) The Adopted 2006 **Kent & Medway Structure Plan**:
 - Policy SP1** - Conserving and enhancing Kent's environment and ensuring a sustainable pattern of development.
 - Policy QL1** – Seeks to conserve and enhance the environment through the quality of development and design.

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Policy E5 - The primary objective of Special Landscape Areas will be the long term protection and enhancement of the quality of the landscape whilst having regard to their economic and social well being.

Policy QL12 -Community Services, including schools and education provision, will be provided as long as there is a demonstrable need for them.

Policy TP19 - Development proposals must comply with the respective vehicle parking policies and standards adopted by Kent County Council and Medway Council.

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

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

Policy DP2 - New development must be designed in a way which respects the character and appearance of the area around it, particularly where this has a special character, and respect the ability of neighbours to enjoy reasonable levels of privacy, peace and quiet and natural light. The local transport system must be capable of properly serving the development proposed.

Policy CF15 -Proposals to provide for an increased range of community uses will be permitted subject to meeting the criteria in Policy DP2.

Policy CF20 -Proposals for nurseries, in either new or converted buildings, will be permitted if there would be no significant effect on the residential amenity of neighbouring occupiers, there would be no significant traffic flow or highway safety problems arising as a result of vehicle movements to and from the site, and adequate parking is provided for staff, and the property is within a town or village, or at an existing school.

Policy EN2 - Development proposals in or close to residential areas which are likely to damage significantly people's enjoyment of their homes will not be permitted.

Policy EN27 -Long term protection will be given to Special Landscape Areas and other important landscape features.

Policy TP11- Parking for vehicles should be provided in accordance with Kent County Council's Vehicle Parking Standards and with regard to specific factors including the needs of people with disabilities and those with children.

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Consultations

9. **Ashford Borough Council:** raises no objection subject to the imposition of conditions covering the standard time limit for works to commence and to ensure that the proposed materials match those of the existing building.

The Divisional Transport Manager: raises no objection to the proposal.

Local Member

10. The local County Member, Mr C. Findlay, was notified of the application on the 11 July 2006.

Publicity

11. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 5 nearby properties.

Representations

12. 2 letters of representation have been received to date. The main comments/points of concern and objection can be summarised as follows:
- The proposal would result in an increase in traffic movement on an already congested road, especially at peak times.
 - There are insufficient car parking spaces on site already, and the site access is not wide enough for two vehicles to pass.
 - New housing developments in the area will also add to the traffic on Faversham Road.
 - Where are parents of the nursery children going to park whilst they are dropping off their children?
 - A local bus route has been changed and now runs along Faversham Road, causing even more congestion.

Discussion

13. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan policies outlined in paragraph (8) 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. The issue of particular relevance in this instance is whether or not this proposal would have a detrimental impact upon the local highway network.

Siting and Design

14. The design of the building must be considered in conjunction with its scale, massing and siting. The proposed extension wraps itself around three sides of an existing two-storey 1960's caretakers house. The new extension would be single storey, with a flat roof, and its external appearance would match that of the existing building in terms of design and external materials. The original house would also be refurbished internally in order to bring the structure up to the current required health and safety standards. The extension

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has been designed in order to minimise solar gain, maximise thermal insulation and wherever possible use natural lighting and ventilation. The extension would be constructed using timber framing and cladding, along with high levels of insulation, thereby minimising carbon emissions. In addition, by using an existing building, which is currently empty and used only for storage, the impact upon the local environment is minimised.

15. The applicant states that the location of the existing building provides an excellent position for the nursery as it is located away from the main school buildings but within close proximity to vehicular access and parking. The siting of the proposed extension does not impact upon facing properties in Faversham Road, or the frontage of the school, and is considered the most appropriate given the context of the site and the provision of an existing vacant property. In addition, the proposed extension has been designed to visually fit with the existing buildings without being a simple pastiche. Therefore, I consider that the siting, design and massing of the extension are acceptable and conform with the general thrust of Local Development Plan Policies.

Highways

16. Traffic generation and impact upon the local highway network are the primary concerns expressed by local residents. First, concern is raised over the width of the school access road. Local residents state that the access is too narrow which means that cars entering the site have to wait for cars exiting the site to clear the entrance, leading to queues on the main road. Kent Highways raise no objection to this proposal, and state that the proposed use is appropriate as an ancillary usage within the curtilage of the school. The applicant states that the access into the school is 4.8 metres in width, which is more than adequate for 2 vehicles to pass with ease. In addition to this, the session times for the nursery have been deliberately chosen so as not to clash with the peak traffic times associated with the school. This will further mitigate any impact that the nursery may have on local traffic congestion.
17. Concern has been expressed by neighbouring residents that there is insufficient car parking available on site. The applicant states that the nursery would be situated between two car parks, but significantly far away from either to prevent safety concerns or congestion issues. The nursery would be accessed throughout the day by parents dropping off or picking up their children as necessary, who would be able to park in one of the many spaces already available in the car parks either side of the nursery. In addition, 5 existing car parking bays would be reserved for the sole purpose of pick up and drop off associated with the nursery. A maximum of 6 members of staff would be employed by the nursery, all of which could park within the school grounds.
18. Local residents also express concern over an increase in traffic on Faversham Road, as a result of not only this application, but by housing developments which have been granted planning permission by Ashford Borough Council. However, Kent Highways advise that Faversham Road can accommodate the increase in traffic associated with this development. In addition, the granting of planning permission for other developments in the locality is beyond the remit of this planning application and therefore can not be considered in the determination of this application. Concern is also expressed over the Ulley Road/Grosvenor Road crossroads, which a local resident states is extremely dangerous. The applicant states that the crossroads are 90 metres away from the school access point and, although it is recognised that this crossroads is difficult to exit from due to the acute angle that the side roads approach Faversham Road, the design of an existing junction is again beyond the remit of this planning application.

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19. This proposal would generate additional traffic due to an intensification of use of the Towers School site. However, Kent Highways raise no objection to this application, and the applicant has confidently stated that there is sufficient car parking on site to accommodate staff and visitors associated with the nursery. Therefore, I am of the opinion that this application would not have a significantly adverse impact upon the local highway network. In addition, should Members be minded to permit, conditions would be imposed to ensure that construction traffic would not access/egress the site at peak school times, and that mud and debris would not be deposited on the local highway.

Conclusion

20. In summary, I consider that the siting and design of the proposed extension would not have a significant detrimental effect on the amenity of local residents, and that the local highway network can accommodate any increase in traffic generated as a result of this application. Subject to the imposition of conditions, I am of the opinion that the proposed development would not give rise to any material harm and is otherwise in accordance with the relevant Development Plan Policies. Therefore, I recommend that permission be granted subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

Recommendation

21. 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,
- hours of working during construction,
- prevention of mud being deposited on the highway,

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