

Item D4

Single storey nursery building to the rear of the existing school building– Herne Bay Infant School, CA/06/469

A report by Head of Planning Applications Unit to Planning Applications Committee on 18 July 2006

CA/06/469 – Application by Herne Bay Infant School Governors and KCC Children Families and Education for erection of a single storey nursery building to the rear of the existing school building – Herne Bay Infant School, Stanley Road, Herne Bay.

Recommendation: Permission to be refused.

Local Member: Mr D Hirst and Mr J Law

Unrestricted

Site

1. The Herne Bay Infant School is located at the edge of town centre and is bounded by Kings Road, Stanley Road, Arkley Road. The Infant School shares the site together with the Herne Bay Junior School to the east. The campus is surrounded by residential area with a predominance of Victorian terraces. The application site lies to the south of the new Foundation Stage building and to the west of Junior School's playing field. The Infant School's vehicular access is off Stanley Road, with pedestrian access to the south via Arkley Road. The site is within a conservation area. A site plan is attached.

Background

2. This application was the subject of a Members' site meeting on 27 June 2006. A copy of Council Secretariat's Minutes of that meeting appends this report.
3. In July 2003 planning permission was granted for erection of a single storey building on the Arkley Road site to provide a Foundation Stage building (Ref. CA/03/784). The 4 new classrooms and associated facilities, opened in 2004, allowed for the replacement of a number of mobile classrooms. Kent Highways recommended the application for approval on the understanding that there would be no increase in the number of staff or pupils as a result of the development. Also, the applicant noted that vehicular access off Arkley Road was to be restricted to maintenance and emergency vehicles only. The Arkley Road gate is used as pedestrian access only to enter and exit the Foundation Stage building (Photo 1).
4. The School took the initiative to produce a School Travel Plan which stresses the most important issues:

“The biggest issues are associated with pedestrian and traffic congestion along Stanley Road, Arkley Road and Kings Road. There is a general lack of space on the school site (...). A lot of parents wait outside the school gates causing blockages on the pavements around the school. The consequence of this is that parents resort to walking in the road with their children, particularly those with pushchairs or prams. (...) Being situated in a residential area where the predominance of housing is Victorian terraces means that on street parking around the school locally is very limited, as most residents don't have the luxury of a driveway. Parents who bring their children in cars often ignore road markings. This means that they park on double yellow lines and 'keep clear' zigzag lines (...). Lack of on road parking means that parents park on road junctions and corners or stop in the middle of the road, letting their children disembark independently”.

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Proposal

5. The application proposes a single storey pre-school nursery building with all required facilities to provide places for 26 children between the ages of 3 and 5 years old. The nursery would provide one morning session and one afternoon session, each lasting up to 2.5 hours. The building would be located to the south of the School's Foundation Stage building, close to the Arkley Road entrance. The building, together with the proposed external playing area, would extend onto the adjacent playing field of Herne Bay Junior School. Access to the nursery, pedestrian only, would be from Arkley Road. No parking for parents would be allowed within the school grounds and there would be no facility for a vehicle drop off/pick up point.



Photo 1 Pedestrian access from Arkley Road

Planning Policy Context

6. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application.

The adopted 1996 **Kent Structure Plan**:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Policy S1 | Local Planning Authorities will seek to achieve a sustainable pattern of development, which will minimise pollution. |
| Policy S2 | The quality of Kent's environment will be conserved and enhanced. |
| Policy S9 | Has regard for the need for community facilities and services. |

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- Policy ENV15 The character, quality and functioning of Kent's built environment will be conserved or enhanced. Development should be well designed to respect its setting.
- Policy ENV17 Development within conservation areas should preserve and enhance the character of the conservation area.
- Policy ENV18 In the control development, important archaeological sites will be protected. Preservation in situ of archaeological remains will normally be sought.
- T17 Development will normally be required to provide for vehicle parking on site in accordance with KCC's Vehicle Parking Standards.
- T18 Development, which generates significant increase in traffic, will normally be refused if it is not well related to the primary and secondary route network.

The September 2003 deposit draft of the **Kent & Medway Structure Plan:**

- Policy SP1 Seek to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable patterns and form of development.
- Policy QL1 Development should be well designed and respect its setting.
- Policy QL7 Development within conservation areas should preserve and enhance the character of the conservation area. Any development that would harm the character of a conservation area will not be permitted.
- QL8 Seeks to protect and enhance the archaeological and historic integrity of important archaeological site and requires archaeological assessment and/or field evaluation of potentially important sites along with preservation of remains or by record.
- Policy QL12 Seeks to protect existing community services. Seeks to make provision for the development of local services in existing residential areas and in town centres, particularly where services are deficient.
- TP2 Development sites should be well served by public transport, walking and cycling, or will be made so as a result of the development.

The adopted 1998 **Canterbury Local Plan:**

- Policy D1 Development should be well designed and respect its setting.
- Policy D29/30 Development and archaeology.
- Policy D39 Seeks to only permit proposals which result in the loss, in whole or in part, of playing fields if there is an overriding need for the development which outweighs the loss of the playing fields.
- Policy D62 New development will be required to provide parking for vehicles in accordance with Kent Vehicle Parking Standards.

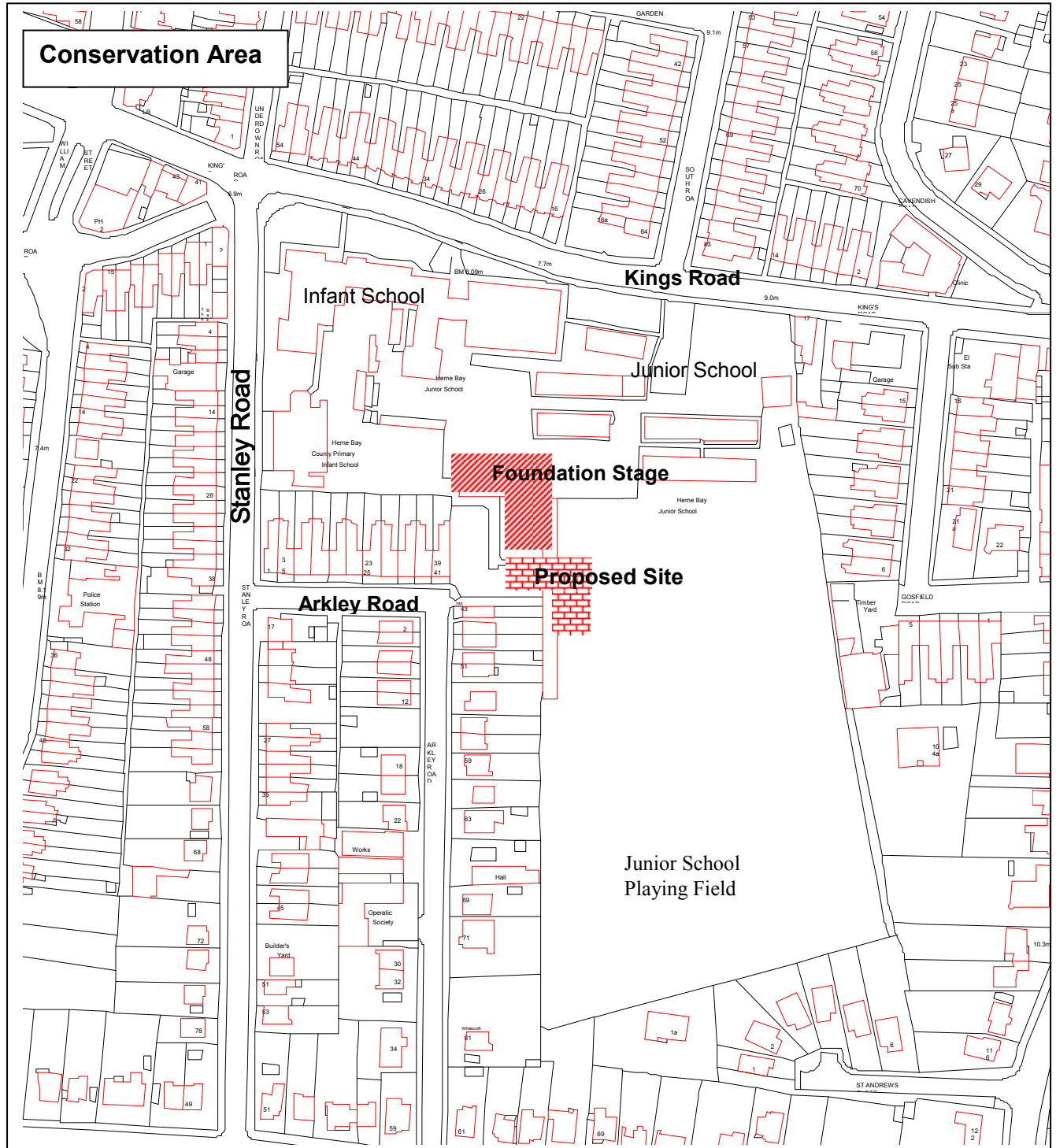
The 2002 deposit **Canterbury Local Plan:**

- BE1 Development should be well designed and respect its setting.
- Policy 15/16 Development and archaeology.
- Policy C8 Seeks to apply Kent Vehicle Parking Standards to development proposals.
- Policy C10 Seeks to grant planning permission for new buildings or uses for local communities providing that any building is appropriately designed and

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SITE PLAN

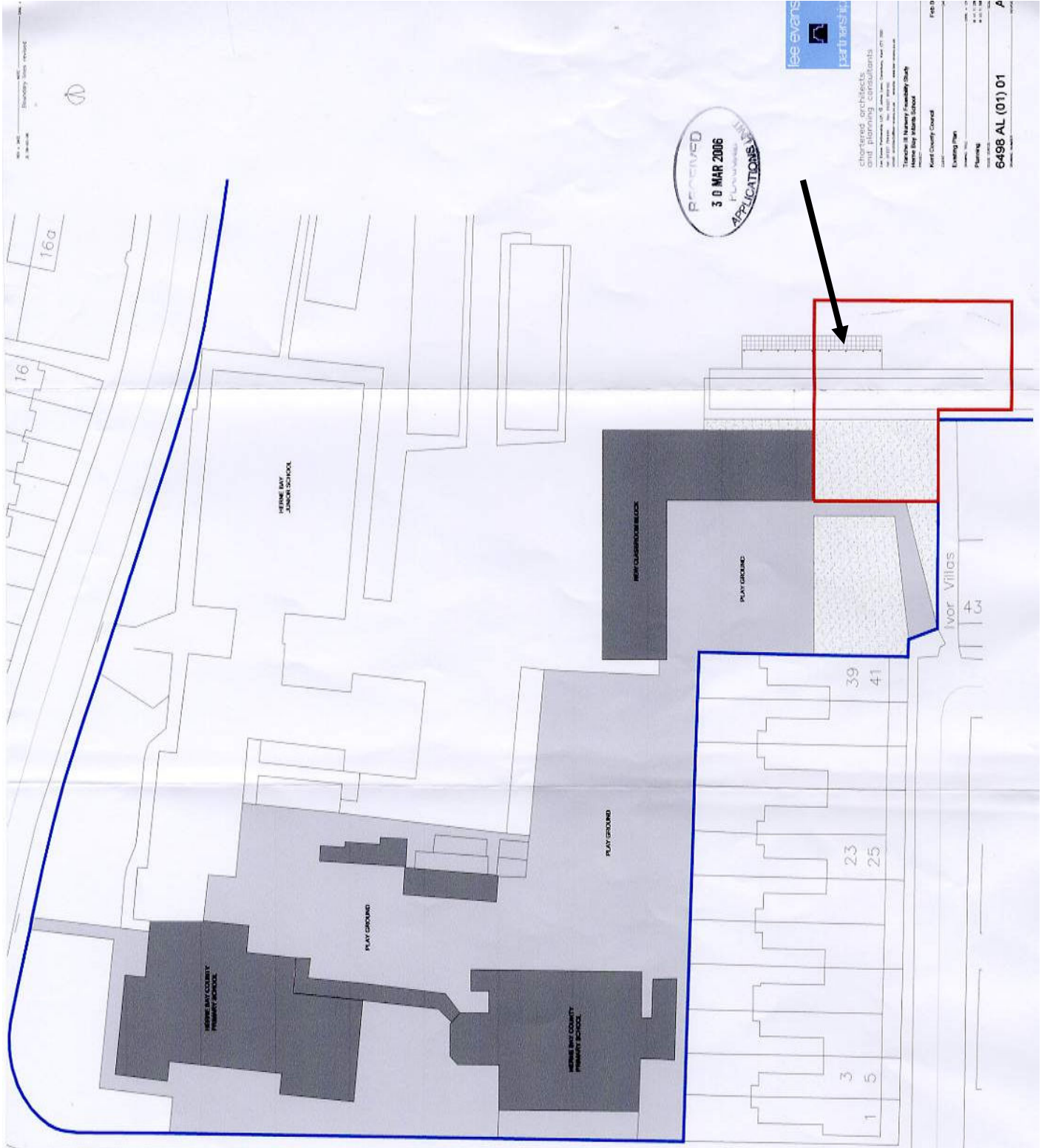


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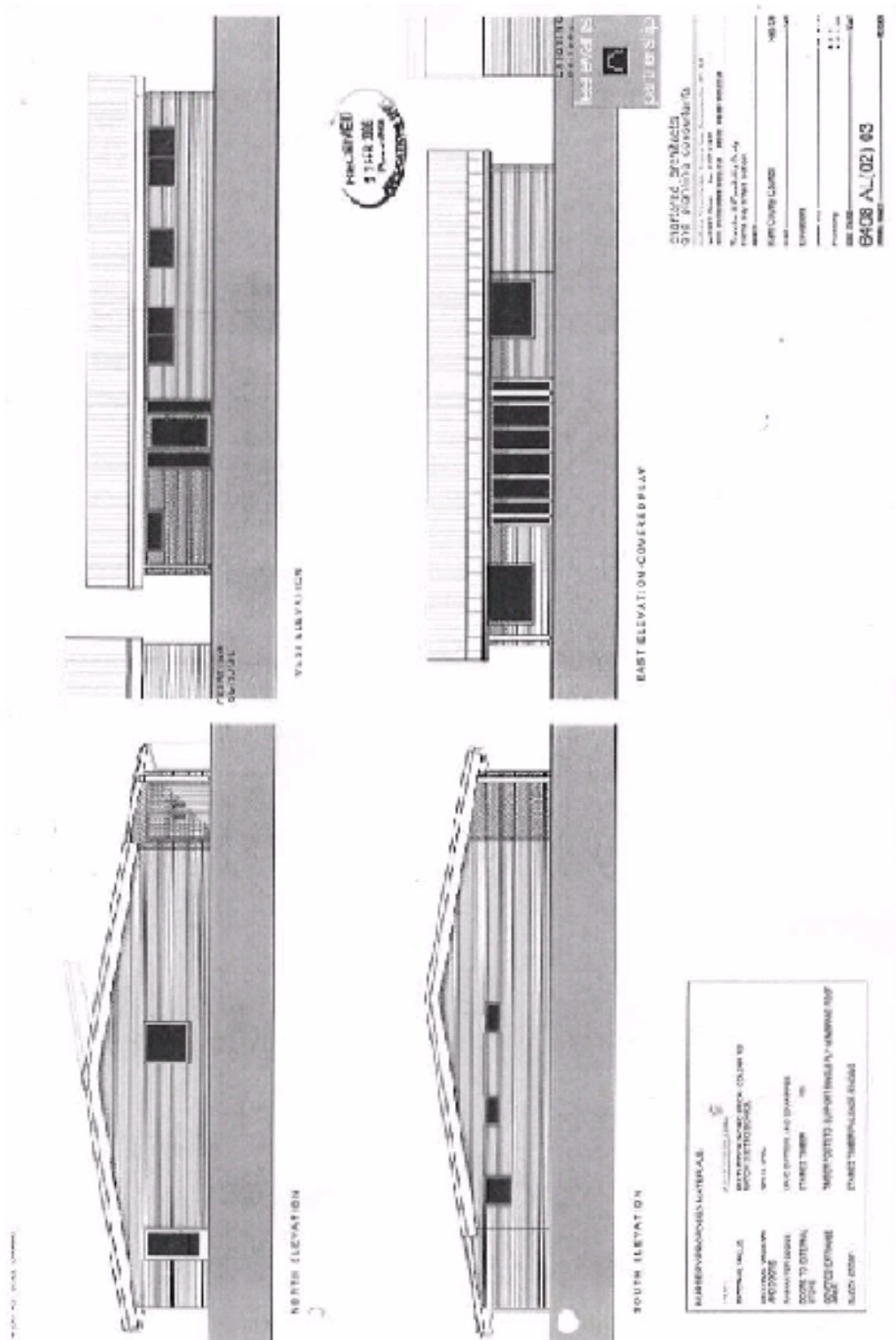
PROPOSED SITE PLAN 1



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ELEVATIONS



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- located, and highway safety would not be prejudiced.
- Policy C20 Seeks to protect existing open spaces.
- Policy C21 Seeks to protect playing fields.

Consultations

Canterbury Council – raises no objection to the proposal.

Divisional Transport Manager – raises an object on the grounds of highway safety. The roads surrounding the site are already experiencing traffic related problems during peak times and further vehicles generated in connection with the nursery are likely to result in double parking and the interruption of the free flow of traffic. It is critical in school areas to keep traffic disruption to the minimum possible in the interest of the safety of children attending the school.

Environment Agency – raises no objection, but would suggests to impose a condition that if contamination is discovered

County Archaeologist – raises no objection subject to condition requiring the implementation of a watching brief to be undertaken by an archaeologist, so that the excavation is observed and the finds recorded.

Conservation Officer – raises no objection.

Sport England – raises no objection

Local Members

7. The Local Members Mr David Hirst and Mr John Law were notified of the application on 31 March 2006.

Publicity

8. The application has been publicised by way of a site notice, an advertisement in the local newspaper and the notification of 37 neighbouring properties. No representations have been received to date.

Discussion

9. The proposal is for additional building at Herne Bay Infant School to accommodate 26 pupils in the morning session and further 26 pupils during an afternoon session. The facility would potentially employ one additional member of staff.
10. The school capacity is 360 pupils, and it reached a peak 4-5 years ago, but has since been declining. Currently, the school has 330 pupils attending the site, and 47 staff. The additional 26 children accommodated within the nursery would bring the school back up to capacity numbers. The fall in the school numbers is not predicted to continue further, but will level out. The applicant states that the impact of the nursery would be no more than returning the school up to its earlier capacity. Further, the Head Teacher believes that the proposal might even reduce traffic around the school: *“Many parents are actually forced into car use because, at present they need to take pre-school children on to Beltinge, Marsh side and other peripheral pre-school provision, after dropping off older siblings. If*

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they were using our nursery they would be more likely to walk". On the other hand, with a change of circumstances, there is nothing to prevent, the Infant School again increasing its numbers to its full capacity of 360 pupils. Nevertheless, Divisional Transport Manager argues that having a separate nursery on the school site would significantly contribute to an increase in traffic-related problems.

11. It is necessary to consider the development in the context of the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (5), especially transport policy T17 and T18 of the Structure Plan. Policies that discuss the effects of the development in terms of its location and the effect on the local environment and amenity are also important.

Need for proposal.

12. The coastal area of Kent suffers one of the highest levels of social deprivation, lacking children's facilities. The selection of Herne Bay Infant School as a site for one of the County's Nurseries is on the basis of greatest educational need and to provide support for local parents. Even though the campus of the Infant School would be limited in extent, the area would greatly benefit from this facility. As recognised by the applicant, the implication of not being able to provide nursery places would have a direct impact on the community in social and educational terms. On the other hand, the needs of the community have to be balanced with other factors, such as parking provision while "*...the development should not be permitted unless the infrastructure, which is directly required to service the development, can be made available...*" (Structure Plan, S9). Further, considering the needs of the community, the safety of the environment and the amenity of residents needs to be protected (Deposit Structure Plan, QL1).
13. The fact that the school is sited within urban area and on the edge of the town centre indicates that much of the population live within easy walking distance of the school. The applicant argues that the proposed nursery would represent a form of sustainable development. Further, the agent questions the interpretation of the transport policies that seek to discourage car usage through limiting car park spaces. In his opinion, the drop off points for parents might be considered against these policies and have the opposite effect.

Traffic movements, car parking and pedestrians

14. Given that no provision is made for a drop off/pick up point at the site and the number of nursery places being provided, the proposal is most likely to result in additional traffic generation. As a result of the proposal, parents would have to park on the street either on Arkley Road or Stanley Road, with a greater impact on the limited space available. As far as pedestrians are concerned, there is already a serious problem with the crowds of parents waiting in front of the school gates. They often encroach on the highway, as there is limited space available at the school grounds to allow parents to enter. The Transport Manager is greatly concerned over the high probability that the Nursery would generate unacceptable additional demand for parking and waiting on the highway. The main point is that the development would have negative consequences to children's safety and the highway situation around the school site.

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15. With regard to parents dropping off/picking up children, the applicant admits that the school physically does not have sufficient parking space on the school site, nor near it, to operate a traffic circulatory system. Even though it is argued that most children would be drawn from families that already have their siblings in the school, it is not possible to control these issues at the proposed nursery. Therefore, it cannot be said that the Nursery would not generate much additional traffic.
16. In terms of existing staff, the applicant has drawn attention to the fact, that as a result of the decline in school numbers there are currently surplus staff. Hence, only one new person would be required. After transferring the surplus staff to the new nursery, the School has no intention to recruit new teachers within the existing infant faculty. Thus, the applicant argues that no additional parking spaces would be required. On the other hand, in the event of returning to its full capacity of 360 children in the Infant School, the re-deployed teachers would have to be replaced by new teachers to meet the changing circumstances. In the view of transport adviser, this number of additional staff cannot be accommodated within the limited school car park. I would also note, that the previous application (2003) for a Foundation Block contained a statement, that no new staff were needed as a result of this development. However, since 2003, 4 new staff have been employed (as stated in Supporting Statement “a total of 47 staff work at the school”). In principle, the proposal is not in keeping with the objectives of the Structure Plan Policy T17 and T18 that recommends refusing applications for development, which would generate a significant increase in traffic. Further, Deposit Structure Plan Policies TP2 and TP19, Canterbury Local Plan Policies D1 and D62 and Draft Canterbury Local Plan Policy C8 should apply.

Hours of use

17. The Nursery is proposed to be open during normal school hours. As the development is likely to generate additional traffic, it has been considered, whether staggering the start and finish times for the proposed nursery could reduce some of the impact of the development on the existing traffic problems. However, it has also been agreed that it is difficult to stop parents who have older siblings in the infant school, from parking or waiting (on foot) for extended periods of time in front of the school gates while waiting for later sessions.

School Travel Plan

18. The final factor to consider is the adopted School Travel Plan. It is appreciated that the school takes the initiative to promote walking to school and the scheme is there to alleviate the existing problems. As a result, this school is a leader in Kent in the number of walking buses it has. It is proud of having more than 85% of children walking to school. It is believed all this contributes to a reduced volume of car traffic around the site. Nonetheless, children aged between 3-5, brought to school for 2.5 hours, are the least likely to benefit from the School Travel Plan. They are least likely to be walked or use public transport and are most likely to be driven to school.

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Design, Conservation Area and Archaeological Site

19. The proposed accommodation adopts the general design brief prepared by Kent County Council, and takes the form of a single-storey block to provide main play-room area, kitchen, toilets, an office and other ancillary facilities to cater for the children. Covered play facilities and external storage would also be provided. The proposed materials take on a traditional brick construction and a pitched metal deck roof, all chosen to match the Foundation Block. The height and massing of the proposal reflects the school building and the surrounding properties. I consider that the overall effect of the design is appropriate to the setting. The development would not have an undue impact on the nearby environment in visual terms.
20. Further, the building would extend to the existing playing field of the adjacent Junior School and would involve the demolition of a part of an existing air raid shelter, which borders the Infant School land. Subject to condition asking for a watching brief in order to record any items of archaeological interest there is no objection to that element. Lastly, the proposed nursery building would slightly encroach onto playing field land. However, this encroachment would not adversely affect the use of the playing field therefore there is no objections to the development on this ground. As such the development accords with the Structure Plan Policies ENV15 and ENV17, ENV18, Deposit Structure Plan Policies SP1, QL1, QL7 and QL8, Canterbury Local Plan Policy D1, D29/30 and D39; and Draft Canterbury Plan Policy BE1, C10, C20 and C21.

Conclusion

21. Whilst I see no objection to the proposal in terms of design and its physical impacts, including archaeology and playing fields aspects, the proposal raises serious highway concerns. In particular, the roads surrounding the proposed site are already experiencing serious traffic related problems during peak hours. I am advised that the site is not capable of safely accommodating 26 new pupils in the morning session and further 26 in the afternoon session. Encouraging more traffic movements near the site would further interrupt the free flow of traffic and undermine the purpose of the walking bus and the Travel Plan already in place. Whilst it is acknowledged that there is a need for Nursery facilities in this area, it is critical in school areas to keep traffic disruption to the minimum possible in the interests of highway safety and the safety of children attending the school. To permit development on this site would make the situation unacceptable according to the Divisional Transport Manager.

Recommendation

22. I recommend that PLANNING PERMISSION BE REFUSED on the following grounds:
 - (1). The surrounding highways do not have the capacity to absorb additional on street parking or traffic movement that would be associated with the proposal;
 - (2). The proposed development would have an unacceptable impact on the highway safety and the children attending the school;

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- (3). The proposal would undermine the purpose of the walking bus and travel plans already in place;

Case Officer: The case officer	Anna Michalska-Dober	01622 696979
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Background Documents - see section heading (or specify particular documents)*
