

Item D3

New two storey teaching block, increased parking provision, replacement and additional playground areas and removal of existing mobile classroom at Reculver C.E. Primary School, Hillborough, Herne Bay – CA/06/364

A report by Head of Planning Applications Unit to Planning Applications Committee on 20 June 2006

Application by Kent County Council Education & Libraries for a two storey teaching block comprising of 4 classrooms, 2 smaller teaching areas, withdrawal room, therapy room, associated toilets and cloakroom areas, increased car parking provision, replacement and additional playground areas and removal of existing mobile classroom accommodation at Reculver C of E Primary School, Hillborough, Herne Bay

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): John Law & David Hurst

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Reculver C of E Primary School is located to the east of Herne Bay and is within the Reculver ward. The school occupies a rural site on Reculver Lane adjacent to St Mary's Church and overlooks extensive playing fields. Residential properties are located to the west of the school site and a listed Church is located to the east of the school. A plan is attached.

Proposal

2. The application has been submitted by Kent County Council Education and Libraries and proposes a new two storey teaching block comprising of 4 classrooms, 2 smaller teaching areas, withdrawal room, therapy room, associated toilets and cloakroom areas, increased car parking provision, replacement and additional playground areas and removal of existing mobile classroom accommodation.
3. The purpose of this project is to replace the existing mobile accommodation by way of a new extension. Reculver CEPS is reported to be a very inclusive school with some pupils with complex additional needs. The project would include additional general teaching areas, a therapy room and a withdrawal room to support inclusion within the school.
4. Although the overall site is of a significant area, the buildings have been restricted to the north west section with mobile classroom accommodation situated on the playing field side. A privately run nursery also occupies part of the site on the north east side of the main buildings. It is expected that this would be relocated to another site when the current lease expires.
5. It has been proposed to locate the new building as close as possible to existing structures. This limits the options available to the north west or south west areas closest to the existing buildings. The latter option would require constructing the new building entirely on the playing fields. It would also create access problems regarding the subsequent removal of the mobile classrooms. Another disadvantage to this location is that a physical link with the existing accommodation would be almost unachievable and the new structure would end up dislocated from the remaining buildings once the mobile classrooms and nursery are removed.

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6. The chosen location would allow the construction of the building partially on the existing playground, restricting the loss of playing fields. Connectivity with the existing accommodation would be much easier to achieve, which would greatly improve the facility in use.
7. The new and replacement playground area would be constructed on the space vacated by the mobile classrooms and would be directly connected to the existing playground space on the south west side of the school. The mobile classrooms would remain in place until the new accommodation has been completed. The new and replacement playground areas would form the first phase of the development to ensure that the school is not deprived of the playground facilities at any time.

Design

8. The new facilities would be provided on two floors of the proposed extension. Although the finished floor level would be lower than the existing to accommodate differing site levels, the two would be connected by a glazed link incorporating ramps to negotiate the change in level. That would allow for full disabled access between the old and new facilities.
9. The north east elevation would be kept relatively plain and closely follows the design of the adjacent existing building. On this elevation, the upper windows would be formed using dormers to match those on the adjacent building facing the side of the site. The south west elevation would have more modelling incorporating gables to provide interest and reduce scale. When the existing nursery building is eventually removed, this elevation would face onto what would possibly become a courtyard.
10. Building materials include red brick, and red clay plain tiles to match some of the existing buildings.

Car Parking and Landscaping

11. The current car parking facilities are far from adequate and, although the school roll would not increase as a result of these proposals, the car park is proposed to be significantly increased in size. That would reduce congestion and improve safety at the start and end of each school day. The existing car park is to be extended and 26 additional bays created including two disabled bays.
12. Access to the school is from a single point on Reculver Lane with the car park leading directly from this in the northern corner of the site. This determines the location of the additional car parking facilities which would take up the current playground space.
13. During construction, consideration would be given to the location of an additional temporary site access. It would be essential to keep construction traffic away from the main school entrance on safety grounds.
14. The site boundaries are generally well developed hedgerows and trees. The development would have no direct impact upon these except, possibly, in the formation of a temporary access. Where existing trees would fall within the proposed new playground

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area, these would be enclosed in soft planting areas to protect the roots.

Planning Policy

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

(i) The Adopted 1996 Kent Structure Plan:

Policy S2 – Seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of Kent’s environment.

Policy S9 – Has regard for the need for community facilities and services.

Policy ENV1 – Development in the countryside should seek to maintain or enhance it.

Policy ENV15 – The character, quality and functioning of Kent’s built environment will be conserved and enhanced.

Policy ENV19 – Listed buildings will be preserved and their architectural and historic integrity and the character of their setting will be protected and enhanced.

Policy RS1 – All development permitted at villages and small rural towns should be well designed; appropriate in location, scale, density and appearance to its surroundings.

Policy T17 – Development will normally be required to provide for vehicle parking on-site in accordance with Kent County Council’s Vehicle Parking Standards.

(ii) The Kent & Medway Structure Plan – Deposit Plan September 2003.

Policy SP1 – Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent’s environment and ensuring a sustainable pattern of development.

Policy E1 – Development in the countryside should seek to maintain and enhance it.

Policy QL1 – All development should be well designed and be of high quality.

Policy QL9 – Listed Buildings will be preserved and their architectural and historic integrity and the character of their settings will be protected and enhanced.

Policy QL12 – Existing community services, including schools, and recreation facilities will be protected 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

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and Medway Council.

(iii) Canterbury District Local Plan, November 1998:

Policy D1 – The City Council will permit development of a high standard.

Policy D9 – The City Council will safeguard the character, appearance and setting of buildings which are listed as being of special architectural or historic interest.

Policy D62 – New development will be required to provide parking for vehicles in accordance with KCC's Vehicle Parking Standards.

(iv) Canterbury District Local Plan, Deposit 2002:

Policy BE1 – The City Council will permit proposals of high quality design.

Policy BE5 – The City Council will have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic features it possesses.

Policy C10 – Proposals for new buildings or uses for the local community will be encouraged and granted planning permission on the basis that any new building is appropriately designed and located and that highway safety would not be prejudiced.

Policy C15 – The City Council will work with primary and secondary education providers to ensure their needs are taken into account in the assessment of their development proposals.

Consultations

16. **Canterbury City Council:** No objection raised.

Herne Bay Divisional Office: No Comments received to date.

Whitstable Area Office: No comments received to date.

Sport England: states that as the new teaching block would be constructed along the replacement and additional hard play areas the developments would have no adverse effects on the existing playing fields. Subsequently, Sport England does not wish to raise an objection to the proposed development.

Environment Agency: has no objection to the proposal but requests that conditions requesting the submission of a scheme for the disposal of foul sewerage and surface waters be submitted for approval by the County Planning Authority. Other conditions requested include drainage of surface water on hard surfaces and parking areas and the discovery of contaminated land and subsequent actions for the applicant.

English Heritage: No comments received to date.

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The Divisional Transport Manager: is satisfied that the School is addressing a current shortfall in off street parking provision and is happy that the existing site access can accommodate the additional traffic movements associated with the extension to the car park and as such would not wish to recommend the application for refusal on highway grounds and raises no objection to the proposal.

Conservation Officer: raises no objections to the proposal.

Biodiversity Officer: offers the following advice:

Breeding Birds

Trees and built structures would be removed to carry out this development; therefore some precautions must be taken for nesting birds. No disturbance to birds should be carried out during the nesting season (March to August), as all birds and their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). Mitigation measures should be included in the development plans and implemented during construction in order to protect breeding birds that may use the structures, or any vegetation, that will be removed, if it falls in the breeding season mentioned above. That includes examination by experienced ecologists prior to starting work and if any nesting birds are found during work development must cease until after the juveniles have fledged. This can be avoided by carrying out any work that affects possible nesting sites outside of the breeding season. There should also be restrictions on work carried out within 30m of unaffected trees, which contain birds nests.

Bats

I would agree that there is no need for a DEFRA development licence to carry out the proposed works, as there is low potential for bats to use the buildings. If during the development any bats or signs of bats are detected work must stop immediately and a licensed bat worker consulted. In this situation a Defra Licence may be needed to continue the works. The contractors must be made aware of these precautionary measures and, if they have not already, I suggest they consult *Bats, Development and Planning* by The Bat Conservation Trust or English Nature's *Bat Mitigation Guidelines* which will equip them with basic knowledge about bats and their signs. This information should be included as an informative on the planning decision.

General

Plans for habitat and biodiversity enhancement should also be included in this proposal. The key principles of PPS9 are not only to avoid, mitigate or compensate for harm to biodiversity but also to incorporate ways to enhance and restore it. I suggest the applicants are asked to include measures to enhance biodiversity as a condition of planning permission. For example, the inclusion of bat bricks in the new buildings, bird and bat boxes in the surrounding site and refugia for herpetofauna could all be included in order to help promote biodiversity alongside development.

Local Member

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17. The local County Member(s), John Law and David Hurst were notified of the application on the 15 March 2006.

Publicity

18. The application was publicised by an advertisement in the local paper, the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 21 neighbouring properties.

Representations

19. I have received one letter of representation from a local resident. The main comments/points of concern and objection include the following:

- The junction between Sweechbridge Road, Reculver Place and Beltinge Road cannot sustain the heavy volume of traffic at the moment and to develop and extend the school would create further problems with a detrimental outcome to the area.
- The development would worsen the heavy volumes of traffic already experienced. The road to and from school is not adequate to cope with levels of traffic experienced and has been made worse by the new housing in the area.
- Parents park on double yellow lines outside the school and in front of neighbouring properties, blocking access.
- Those waiting for the buses wait in neighbouring properties driveways.
- The proposed additional parking would not take away the congestion of traffic.
- Level of traffic highlights a severe health and safety issue.
- Suggested road improvements, including diversions to improve congestion issues in the area.

Discussion

20. The application needs to be determined with regard to the relevant Development Plan Policies and in the light of other material planning considerations, including relevant planning objections raised by the consultees, set against the need for the proposed development.

Policies

21. The key policies for consideration regarding the proposed development are S2 (environment), S9 (community), RS1 (Rural areas) and T17 (Transport). The principle of the development accords with Policy S9 and the detailed layout and the design is such that the overall impact on the wider landscape and environment is minimised and is generally acceptable.

22. Overall, I consider that the proposed development is, in general accordance with the relevant Development Plan Policies and I see no overriding objection on planning policy grounds. In particular, the proposed development, in the main, would be erected over an existing hard-standing area adjacent to existing buildings and would not encroach greatly into open space.

Traffic and Parking

23. There has been concern raised with regard to the traffic problems within the area,

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particularly between Sweechbridge Road, Reculver Place and Beltinge Road. There is recognition that concerns regarding congestion around the school site at the start and end of the school day is a legitimate one. The applicant has stated that their proposals intend to increase the size of the current on site car park, which should help relieve the amount of traffic parking on the highway outside the school. The proposals do not affect the overall numbers of staff and pupils attending the site and therefore would not result in any increased traffic once the new classrooms have been completed. These would simply be occupied by pupils currently housed in the mobile classrooms, which would be removed at the end of the construction period. I would therefore consider that the congestion problem, although a recognised problem, would be improved following the implementation of these proposals.

24. The Divisional Transport Manager has confirmed that given that the School is addressing a current shortfall in off street parking and that the existing site access can accommodate the additional traffic movements, he is satisfied that the proposal does not prejudice transport policy and raises no objection to the proposal. I consider that the details relating to the potential 'construction access' should be submitted prior to works being carried out in order that the potential impacts on the highway from construction vehicles can be fully assessed and could be placed on any planning decision should Members be minded to permit.
25. The suggestions made by neighbours of the school for road improvements have been forwarded to Kent Highway Services for consideration but cannot be considered as part of this application as the proposals do not involve an increase in staff or pupil numbers and would not ultimately affect the amount of traffic experienced in the area.
26. The concerns raised by objectors regarding parents parking in front of the access to private properties or passengers waiting for buses are a school management issue and cannot be dealt with as part of this application, instead should be addressed by the School.

Biodiversity

27. Following the suggestions made by the Biodiversity Officer, the applicant has confirmed that it is their intention to commence work on site at the beginning of September 2006. Consequently, this should not affect the nesting season of any breeding birds in the locality. The applicant has stated that there are a few trees that would be affected by the construction works. With regards to bats, the applicant has confirmed that the contractor would be made aware of their responsibility to identify any potential problems during the construction work.
28. I consider that the protection and replacement of trees on site could be conditioned should Members be minded to permit. This would include the condition for the submission of a full landscaping scheme prior to commencement of operations. An informative would also be included on the decision requesting that contractors are briefed on the importance of roosting bats. It should be noted that the applicant has already submitted a full Protected Species Assessment, which identified the low potential for bats to use the buildings.
29. The suggestions for biodiversity enhancement have been considered by the applicant, who has confirmed that the School is extremely interested in undertaking some work of

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their own in respect of creating habitats and refuges for local wildlife. I consider that an informative reminding the applicant of the importance of biodiversity could be attached to any planning decision.

30. As no objections have been raised by the Biodiversity Officer, I consider that the suggestions raised could be dealt with by planning condition.

Other

31. The proposed development is near to a Listed Church, and English Heritage has been consulted, although no comments have yet been received. The County Conservation Officer has raised no objection to the proposal. I would not consider the proposed extension to have a detrimental impact on the setting of this Church and feel that the design of the new build is in keeping with the character of the area and rural setting. A condition requesting the submission of all external materials, including the reconsideration of the use of upvc windows, would be included on the planning consent. I would consider that the replacement of temporary accommodation with permanent structure to be an improvement to the character and appearance of the School site.

Conclusion

32. The application has to be considered in the context of the Development Plan in relation to the location of the proposed development set against the impacts of the proposal and the need for it. A number of concerns have been raised regarding the impacts of the development on traffic congestion in the area. I acknowledge that traffic congestion is a concern for locals residents, however, I consider that the proposals for additional car parking on the school site would help to improve the traffic problems on the local roads, also I am satisfied that the applicant has addressed the current shortfall in off-street parking provision within the proposals. Given that the proposed development would not result in an increase in staff and pupil numbers, I do not consider there to be an overriding objection on highway grounds. I consider the replacement of temporary accommodation with a permanent structure would benefit and improve the visual appearance of the area. I therefore consider the development to be acceptable and I recommend accordingly.

Recommendation

33. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO conditions including the standard time condition, the submission of details of all external materials, the submission of a landscaping scheme, including tree protection measures during construction, details of windows, details of the temporary construction access to be submitted prior to commencement of operations, the submission of a scheme for the disposal of foul and surface waters, the need for any surface waters on hard standings to be passed through appropriate pollution prevention measures and the identification of contaminated land shall also be conditioned.
34. I FURTHER RECOMMEND that the applicant be advised of the benefits of biodiversity and enhancement, and that the contractors be advised on the potential for roosting bats.

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Case officer – Helena Woodcock

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Background documents - See section heading