

Demolition of part E block and construction of a multi purpose hall, alteration to car park and temporary access at Mascalls School, Paddock Wood – TW/06/365

A report by Head of Planning Applications Unit to Planning Applications Committee on 16 May 2006.

Application by the Governors of Mascalls School and Kent County Council Education and Libraries for the demolition of part of the E block and construction of a multi-purpose hall with associated changing accommodation and first floor classroom, alteration to existing car park, creation of a bus turning area and temporary site access at Mascalls School, Maidstone Road, Paddock Wood.

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Alex King

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. The application site is within the grounds of the existing school, located off Maidstone Road on the south side of Paddock Wood. The school sits within large grounds on the fringe of the built up area and extends into a rural area. The site is outside but close to a Special Landscape Area, the boundary of which runs along Chantlers Hill to the south and Maidstone Road to the west. The land falls away in a northerly direction towards Paddock Wood and raises towards Chantlers Hill to the south. Residential properties are located to the north, south and west of the site. Most of the housing is separated from the built part of the school site by open ground, although some adjoins the main vehicle entrance in Maidstone Road. A site location plan is attached.

Background

2. The school site has had a series of planning applications, including an application for a 3-storey block, comprising of music, dance and drama facilities (TW/04/1935) which was considered, and granted planning permission at the Planning Committee on 9 November 2004. The applicant has referred to this development, currently under construction on site, as Phase 1 of the School's programme of improved works. This current application, for the demolition of part of the E Block and the construction of a multi-purpose games hall, forms Phase 2 of the proposed works on the school site.

Proposal

3. The application has been submitted by the Governors of Mascalls School and Kent County Council Education & Libraries and proposes the demolition of part of the E Block and construction of a multi-purpose Hall with associated changing accommodation and first floor classroom. The alteration to the existing car park and creation of a bus turning area and temporary site access is also proposed.

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4. Mascalls is a mixed school enjoying specialist Visual Arts and Training School status. There are currently around 1300 students on the roll; however the school is oversubscribed and based on the number of recent successful appeals and the increased intake of the main 9 feeder primary schools, it is likely that the roll will increase to nearly 1600 students by September 2008. This increase in roll numbers has highlighted the need for additional space in many areas of the school's curriculum. The School has already started to enlarge their facilities and currently have a building project on site (Phase 1) which increases student capacity in the specialist areas of Dance, Drama, Music, Technology and Arts. This application would address the School's shortfall in capacity for indoor sports, gymnastics, food technology, science and general teaching spaces.
5. Due to financial constraints, Phase 2 has been split in to sub-phases. The first to create a multi-purpose hall, adjacent changing facilities and alterations to the existing car park and the second is to refurbish the remainder of the existing building for food technology, science and general teaching. Phase 2 is dependent on Phase 1 being completed first. This would allow the existing faculties to be relocated prior to work commencing on the new multi purpose hall and changing rooms.
6. Block E is situated slightly off centre, to the east of the main school buildings between blocks D and G. It consists of a 1960s, partly two storey SEAC building with a later single storey brick built extension to the west. The building has a flat roof that has been replaced within the last 2 years. It is proposed to remove the later single storey brick built extension and replace it with a Multi purpose hall and changing facilities. The remainder of the building, with the exception of some additional plant on the existing flat roof would remain unaltered externally.
7. It is also proposed within this application to introduce additional car parking adjacent to the Maidstone Road entrance and provide improved hard standing to facilitate coach/bus parking and turning. The new bus turning area would result in the loss of some trees but would be compensated by the planting of additional trees to the north of this area and the new car park in general.
8. Due to health and safety reasons and in order to minimise disruption to the school, it is proposed to create a temporary site access off Mascalls Court Road. That would be constructed and suitably signed to meet the requirements of the Local Highway Authority. It is envisaged that this access point would be returned to its original state within 3 months of the completion of the building works.

Planning Policy

9. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to the consideration of the application:
 - (i) **The Adopted 1996 Kent County Structure Plan:**
 - Policy S1** – Seeks sustainable patterns and forms of development.
 - Policy S2** – Seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of Kent's environment.

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Policy S9 – In considering development proposals, local authorities will have regard to the need for community facilities, including education.

Policy ENV1 – Seeks to provide protection for the countryside.

Policy ENV2 – Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's landscape and wildlife.

Policy ENV4 – Seeks to provide long term protection for Special Landscape Areas and gives priority to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape.

Policy ENV13 – Seeks to protect and enhance rural lanes, which are of landscape, amenity, nature conservation, historic or archaeological importance from changes which would damage their character.

Policy ENV15 – New development should be well design and respect its setting.

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

Policy RS1 – Requires developments at villages, small rural towns and in the open countryside to be well designed and respect its setting.

Policy RS5 – Development will not normally be permitted in rural Kent other than at the villages and small rural towns unless it is, amongst other factors, the provision of public or institutional uses for which the rural location is justified.

(ii) **The Kent & Medway Structure Plan: Deposit 2003:**

Policy SP1 - Conserving and enhancing Kent's environment and ensuring a sustainable pattern of development.

Policy E5 – Seeks long term protection of Special Landscape Areas.

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

Policy QL12 – Existing community services, including schools, 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.

(iii) **The adopted 1996 Tunbridge Wells Local Plan:**

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Policy CS5 – Extensions to established school developments should not be visually intrusive when viewed from the surrounding countryside, should respect the character and landscape of the countryside, should have adequate access, car parking and setting down and picking up areas for pupils and in meeting the car parking and access requirements should not affect the character and amenity of the area.

Policy EN1 – New development should be well designed and respect its setting.

Policy EN23 – Development within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the High and Low Weald Special Landscape Area should be well designed and respect its setting.

Policy TP1 – Outlines criteria that proposals should meet including vehicle access criteria.

Policy VP1 – The latest edition of Kent County Council's Vehicle Parking Standards will apply to this development.

(iv) The deposit 2002 **Tunbridge Wells Local Plan:**

Policy EN1 – As above.

Policy EN24 – As EN23 above.

Policy TP4 – As TP1 above.

Policy TP5 – As VP1 above.

Consultations

10. **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:** raises no objection to the proposal, although no comments have been received regarding the temporary access, which was added to the proposal after comments by the Borough Council were received.

Paddock Wood Town Council: Objects to this application on the grounds of road safety.

Sport England: states that it is clear from the plans that the multi-purpose hall would have no effect on the adjacent playing field land. The proposed alteration to the existing car park would slightly encroach onto the playing field; however, this will not affect the use of pitches.

The hall will only accommodate 3 badminton courts, which is not the recommended size for a sports hall. The optimum size is a 4 court hall measuring 33 x 18.5m. This enables it to be used for a wider variety of sports which will benefit not only the school but also the community which in turn may generate more income for the School. The hall should be extended in length a further 8m to meet the minimum standard for a 4-court hall.

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Sport England states that the only limitation appears to be the location but it would seem that if the footpaths around the sports hall were to be re-routed, then the 4 court hall could be accommodated. It is also noted that there are no shower or changing facilities for people with disabilities proposed. If the proposal was amended to meet the above requirements then Sport England would be able to lend its support for the proposal.

Sport England does not wish to raise objection to the proposed development.

Environment Agency: has no objection to the proposal, but would like to offer the following advice:

“The previous use of this building may have left contamination that could impact on the proposed development. The Agency recommends that, prior to determination, a desktop study is carried out which shall include the identification of previous site uses, potential contaminants that might reasonably be expected given those uses and other relevant information.

“If the desktop study identifies that contamination may be a problem then the Agency recommends that development is permitted subject to suitable conditions being imposed relating to site investigation, risk assessment and remediation Method Statement. The design of the site investigation and the remediation methods statements should be approved in writing by the County Planning Authority before being carried out.

“Any visibly contaminated or odorous material encountered on the site during the development work, must be investigated. The Planning Authority must be informed immediately of the nature and degree of contamination present. No soakaway shall be constructed in contaminated land.

“The applicant should ensure that the existing drainage systems are well maintained and of sufficient capacity to cope with any additional flow or loading that may occur as a result of this proposal”

Divisional Transport Manager: states that the use of an access onto Mascalls Court Road would be acceptable in principle subject to certain conditions, but the level of detail supplied is inadequate. I would recommend that a drawing at a scale of no less than 1:500 and ideally 1:200 be provided showing the full extent of the proposals including the precise location (this is particularly important owing to road curvature and limited forward visibility), visibility splays, levels, widths and radii. If this is received and is satisfactory, then conditions should be imposed to cover the following: -

1. Visibility splays to be provided and maintained at a height of no more than 900mm above adjoining carriageway level - the note on the drawing is inadequate and gives incorrect information
2. The first 10m of the access should be level to ensure that vehicles can enter and leave the highway safely.
3. Wheel washing facilities should be provided as close as possible to the highway to prevent mud and loose material from being tracked onto the highway.
4. Temporary signs (full details of which should be provided on the submitted drawings) should be provided and maintained for the duration of the works.
5. If crushed stone is to be used to form the access road, it must be well compacted to avoid it being tracked onto the highway and the contractor shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that no such material is allowed to remain on the highway.
6. Any gates at the access should either be set back to ensure that they cannot swing out across the highway, or restrained in such a way that they cannot do so. They should also

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remain open at all times on days when work is in progress to avoid vehicles waiting on the highway to enter the site.

7. All vehicles to turn right into and left out of the site to avoid the use of narrow country lanes.

Jacobs (Landscaping): comments as follows:

“Impact on the Landscape:

There are no landscape designations covering the site. The demolition and replacement of part E Block would cause little impact on the landscape due to the existing built character of the school complex. The proposed car park extension and bus turning area, however, would involve an increase in hard surfacing and a more developed character, providing a slight adverse impact on the landscape. In order to assess the impact fully, details of the proposed planting surrounding the car park as screening and on the proposed roundabout central to the bus turning area are required. Full landscape plans should provide details of proposed surface treatments, plant numbers, species and sizes.

“Visual Impact:

The demolition of part Block E would not cause any adverse visual impact due to the nature of the replacement development. Proposals for additional car parking and the bus turning area would have visual implications. However, visibility of the site from surrounding public rights of way and residential areas is limited. Visibility of the proposals will only be significantly evident from upon the site itself. The proposals have the potential to provide a beneficial visual impact to the school entrance with careful specification of planting and materials. Again, full landscape plans should be submitted so that a fair analysis of impact can be made.

“Impact on Trees:

Existing trees on site would be affected by the proposals for the additional car parking and bus turning area. In order to comment fully on the removal and management of trees affected by the proposed development, the applicant should submit a survey and report on all existing trees within the site boundary in accordance with BS5837: 2005 ‘Trees in Relation to Construction’. That should be carried out by a qualified arborist to ascertain the trees’ type, worth and size, and to look at their retention or removal. Development should not take place, or levels be substantially altered, within the crown spread of trees which are worthy of retention. Tree protection plans should also be submitted in accordance with BS5837: 2005 ‘Trees in Relation to Construction’.

“Conclusion:

We have no objections to the development with regard to impacts on the landscape and views caused by the plans provided. However, it is necessary for the applicant to submit a full tree survey and plans for the removal and protection of existing trees within the site boundary in accordance with BS5837: 2005 ‘Trees in Relation to Construction’ for us to provide comments on the impact on trees. Proposed landscape plans should also be submitted with details of additional planting including plant species, sizes and numbers and any hard surfacing details for landscape comment.”

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Local Member

11. The local County Member, Mr. A. King was notified of the application on the 18 April 2006. He would like to express his full support for all the proposals as detailed within the application.

Publicity

12. The application was publicised by an advertisement in the local paper, the posting of 2 site notices and the notification of 5 neighbouring properties.

Representations

13. One letter of representation has been received to date. The main points raised can be summarised as follows:

- The proposed enlargement of the car park would result in the removal of 2 mature trees, which are visually attractive and help break up the mass of the school.
- Extension to the car park would increase amount of noise and disturbance to residents.
- There is no reason given as to why the green area between the existing car park and footpath cannot be retained, maintaining the existing trees.
- There is adequate facility to enlarge the car park in the direction of the school.
- The creation of a coach drop off point and turning circle will necessitate the removal of existing trees.
- Concern over environmental impact of the development, if approved a condition should be placed on the decision requesting the replacement of trees lost.
- No provision included for dealing with unauthorised parking of cars by sixth formers.
- Continuing problem of litter needs to be addressed.
- The school is visually intrusive and does not show any difference to the character and landscape of the countryside.

Discussion

14. 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.

Policy

15. The key policies for consideration regarding the proposed development are S2 (environment), S9 (community), ENV4 (Special Landscape Areas), ENV13 (Rural Lanes) and ENV15 (built environment). The principle of the development accords with Policy S9 and the detailed layout and design is such that the overall impact on the wider landscape and environment is minimised and is generally acceptable.

16. Overall I consider that the proposed development is in general in 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 the

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original footprint of the part demolished E Block. However, there are detailed layout and parking issues, which need to be addressed further.

Location

17. Mascalls School is situated on the southern outskirts of Paddock Wood occupying approximately 34 acres. Its main pedestrian and vehicular access point is off Maidstone Road. Phase 2 of the 'programme of improved works' encompasses the redevelopment and refurbishment of Block E, which is situated slightly off centre, to the east of the main school buildings between blocks D and G. It consists of a 1960s, partly 2-storey SEAC building with a later single storey brick built extension to the west. The building has a flat roof that has been replaced within the last 2 years. The ground level to the north of Block E is approximately 1.5m lower than the existing floor level and the building is cut into the ground approximately 1.2m on the south side.
18. It is proposed to remove the later single storey brick built extension and replace it with a Multi Purpose Hall and changing facilities. The remainder of the building, with the exception of some additional plant on the existing flat roof would remain unaltered externally. Under the circumstances I consider the location of the proposed development to be acceptable, since it would involve a rationalisation of the existing built up part of the site.

Design

19. Due to the restrictive nature of the site, financial constraints and level of accommodation required by the School, I consider a mix of new build and refurbishment to be an appropriate design approach.
20. Access to the new building would primarily be from the south side, entering at ground floor level into the entrance lobby with access to all floor via stairs and lift (disabled access has also been addressed). A centrally located staff office would provide good visual control over the entrance lobby, adjacent corridor and access to the changing rooms and multi purpose hall. Upon completion, a wide corridor linking this area with 2 large circulation/social spaces would run east connecting both the existing and proposed stairwells and providing spacious circulation leading to all classrooms on the ground floor. Initially this area would access only the changing rooms and multi-purpose hall.
21. The multi-purpose hall is designed to provide the recognised short fall in area that the school requires for indoor sports, gymnastics, assemblies and examinations. The hall is of sufficient height to play badminton at national level and adjacent storage for the associated sports equipment, chairs and examination tables. Adjacent to the Hall and housed within the new build are two changing rooms with associated showers and sanitary accommodation. The changing rooms have direct access to external sports areas via steps and a ramp on the north side of the building that lead to the playing fields and tennis courts adjacent.
22. Concern was raised by Sport England regarding the number of badminton courts proposed and appearance that no provision was to be made for disabled changing facilities. Concern was also raised with regards to the location of the proposed multi-purpose hall and it was suggested that relocating the proposed hall would make room for a further court. It has been confirmed by the applicant that Mascalls School has an existing sports hall accommodating badminton courts and various other sports facilities, located to the rear of Block E. The proposal for a new multi-purpose hall is in addition to the facilities the existing sports hall already offers. With regard to the disabled shower

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and changing facilities, the applicant confirms that these have been included within the second phase of the project and are indicated within the submitted drawings, which formed part of the planning application. Given the existing sporting facilities on site, and that the proposed location essentially replaces part of the proposed demolished E Block, generally within the existing foot print of the former building, I consider that the proposals are satisfactory and that the proposed facilities are also adequate.

23. The remainder of the ground floor of the existing building would be refurbished to include a general teaching classroom, technology rooms (replacing two existing rooms that are undersized) and two new science demonstration rooms that would compliment the existing science department facilities housed in Block G adjacent. The first floor would accommodate four general teaching classrooms and a wide circulation area. There would also be the introduction of additional storage and a faculty office.
24. Externally, the proposed multi-purpose hall would be designed to complement the adjacent buildings with the use of red stock facing brickwork to match adjacent buildings with coloured cladding to the upper areas. The multi-purpose hall would be 10m at its highest point and 2m higher than the existing building to be extended. The part of the existing building to be extended would retain its flat roof, although the multi-purpose sports hall's roof would have a shallow pitch. I accept that the incorporation of materials, cladding and brick, would help to elevate the building from an industrial to a 'commercial campus' style development. Although this design style would introduce a potentially austere building compared to the essentially rural character that the Local Plan Policy CS5 seeks to maintain, I do not consider that it is visually intrusive in any way and therefore would be acceptable under that policy.
25. Overall, I consider that the design approach is of a satisfactory standard for this particular site, which is unconstrained by any special architectural or historic context. The proposed building form complements the existing buildings and I consider that it is appropriate to its location (situated adjacent to other school buildings). Moreover, the demolition of an old, 1960s style building (albeit part demolition) and replacement with a more modern style structure should be welcomed. Under the circumstances, I consider that the new building would enhance the visual appearance of the site.

Parking and Access

26. Mascalls suffers from a lack of on site car parking. To compensate for this parking currently overflows onto Maidstone Road. This however is a contentious issue with local residents and those who use the road. It is proposed within this application to introduce additional car parking adjacent to the Maidstone Road entrance and provide improved hard standing to facilitate coach/bus parking and turning. The new bus turning area would result in the loss of some trees but would be compensated by the planting of additional trees to the north of this area and the new car park in general. I consider that a condition requesting the submission of a full landscaping, highlighting those trees to be removed and replaced be included on the decision notice should Members be minded to permit.
27. The applicant has also stated that the amendments to the location of the parking bays closest to Maidstone Road would have little or no effect on the properties outside the school. The car park is currently separated from these houses by the busy Maidstone Road and on completion of these works the closest point of the car park would still be 88ft from the closest property.

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28. Although the car park proposal encroaches onto the playing field, it does not affect the layout of the existing pitches. The existing cricket practice nets that are located within the area to be redeveloped as car parking would be relocated and would not result in the loss of this facility.
29. The School is currently compiling a new School Travel Plan that will be submitted to Kent County Council once completed. This will reinforce the School's encouragement of the School community to use more sustainable modes of transport in the future.
30. I consider that the proposed extended parking facilities would reduce the problem of students and visitors parking along the grass verges of Maidstone Road, raised as a concern by neighbours and consultees. I would also suggest that a detailed landscaping scheme would help reduce any visual impacts that the proposed car parking and new build would have. Jacobs (Landscaping) has also stated that visibility of the site from the surrounding public rights of way and residential areas is limited and that the proposals do in fact have the potential to provide a beneficial visual impact to the school entrance with careful specification of planting and materials.
31. The School's intention is to create a car park close to the existing main road to reduce the visual impact of cars that currently park in various locations both on the approach to the school and within the school curtilage. As mentioned above, it is also proposed that additional trees are planted along the northern boundary of the car park to reduce visibility of the parking area from the north.
32. The applicant has stated that the alterations to the parking arrangements on site are proposed to increase site security (reduction in vehicles entering the main built-up school environment), improve pedestrian safety by introducing designated footpaths for pupil and staff movement away from vehicular areas. The parking arrangements would also include a designated bus drop-off and collection area with dedicated queuing areas (currently the buses park wherever they can stop, mainly in amongst parked cars, which is dangerous when students are entering/exiting the buses and moving between various vehicles). Dedicated turning facilities are also proposed, again to increase pedestrian safety. Currently the coaches and large vehicles carry out three point turns presenting a danger to the many students who enter and exit the site on foot moving between these vehicles.
33. I consider that any noise disturbance from the proposed parking would be limited given the transfer of parked cars from along Maidstone Road and into the school grounds. Overall I consider that the proposal would improve noise impacts on neighbouring properties because of the relocation of vehicle activity.
34. The applicant proposes a temporary site access and objections have been raised by Paddock Wood Town Council. Comments have been made by the Divisional Transport Manager, who has requested that the applicant provide further plans and drawings showing the full extent of the proposals, including the precise location, visibility splays, levels, widths and radii. Although the use of an access onto Mascalls Court Road would be acceptable in principle, the level of detail regarding this aspect of the proposal is limited, I therefore recommend that any granting of planning permission be withheld until such a time as these drawings are submitted and approved.

Landscaping

35. As mentioned in paragraph 18 above, there is a loss of a few trees as a result of

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creating a new coach and bus turning area. However, it is proposed that new trees would be planted to the north of this area and the new car park in general to compensate for their loss. The applicant has confirmed that a management plan would also be established to ensure the remainder of the trees adjacent to this area are maintained, with careful pruning and management. Further information has been submitted following concern regarding the loss of trees, which highlights which trees need to be removed to facilitate the alterations to the car park. Indications are also made regarding the introduction of new trees to soften the visual impact when viewed from Maidstone Road and the adjacent Sports Field. I consider that to be acceptable in terms of protecting the visual amenity of the area. However, I would advise that, should Members be minded to permit, that a condition be included requesting the submission of a landscaping scheme.

Contaminated Land

36. The Environment Agency has requested that a desktop study be carried out and submitted for approval prior to determination. I can confirm that the Ground Investigation has been carried out by the applicant and the report submitted to the Environment Agency. I consider it necessary, along with the further comments from the Divisional Transportation Manager, to withhold issuing any consent until comments regarding the report have been received by the Environment Agency. All other requested conditions shall be included.

Other

37. Concerns raised by objectors regarding the dropping of litter by pupils of the school, creating a visually offensive mark on the landscape, have been conveyed to the School, and I would advise that that this issue is a school management issue and not a material planning consideration.

Conclusion

38. The application has to be considered in relation to the location of the proposed development set against the impact of the proposal in the context of the Development Plan. I consider that the location and proposed design of the proposed development to be acceptable and that the proposal would represent an opportunity to improve the physical image of the school site overall, in conjunction with Phase 1 of the project (already given planning permission), in line with the Development Plan Policies Whilst a number of detailed concerns have been raised, mainly relating to parking, landscaping and visual impact, these matters can be addressed through suitably worded conditions. I therefore recommend accordingly.

Recommendation

39. I RECOMMEND that, SUBJECT TO the further views of the Environment Agency and the submission of additional drawings regarding the temporary access, PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO conditions including the standard time condition, that the development be carried out in accordance with the approved plans, the submission and prior approval of samples of external materials, the submission of a landscaping scheme prior to commencement of the development, the installation of signs to warn of the construction access and controls over hours of use of the construction access and delivery of materials.

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Case officer – Helena Woodcock

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Background documents - See section heading
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