Construction of two storey extension to provide additional classroom facilities at Sedleys C of E Primary School, Southfleet – DA/05/768

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

Application submitted by Kent County Council Education and Libraries for a two storey extension to existing school building, comprising facing brick external walls and pitched tiled roof to match existing, to provide additional classroom facilities, plus internal rationalisation of existing building and external ramps to improve DDA provisions, at Sedleys C of E Primary School, Church Street, Southfleet. (Ref: DA/05/768)

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mr Bertie Bassam

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

Sedleys Church of England Primary School is located on Church Street within the built confines of the village of Southfleet. The main school building is Grade II Listed and the whole of the school site is included within a Conservation Area. The main school building is a single storey Listed Victorian structure which has been extended at the rear to provide toilets and administration offices. The school site also contains a brick built air-raid shelter which is used as a reception classroom and PE equipment store, and a temporary mobile classroom. The main school building is located in the north eastern corner of the site on Church Street, with playground extending to the southern and western sides of the school. The site is bound by a residential property to the south west, Hook Green Road and facing residential properties to the south and east, and Church Street and further facing residential properties to the north. A number of Listed Buildings are located on Church Street, including the Grade I Listed Parish Church of St Nicholas, and many Grade II Listed properties, the setting of which may be affected should this application be granted. A site plan is attached.

Background

2. This application has been amended since its submission due to objections from neighbouring properties, Dartford Borough Council and Kent County Council's Conservation Officer, and concerns raised by Kent Highways and Southfleet Parish Council. The original application met with objection on the grounds of design and massing, the obscuring of views to Listed Buildings, including St Nicholas Church, impact upon the Conservation Area, proximity to neighbouring properties (particularly Court House), loss of privacy and overlooking, loss of playground space, traffic and highways implications and lack of car parking. Following a number of meetings between the applicant and relevant consultees, which discussed various alternatives for the site, the application has been formally amended. The amended proposal addresses the design concerns and has moved the footprint of the building further towards Hook Green Road in an effort to open up the views through to the Church and reduce the impact on neighbouring properties. It is the revised submission that will be outlined and discussed throughout this report.

Proposal

- 3. This application has been submitted by Kent County Council Education & Libraries and proposes the construction of a two storey extension to the existing school building to provide two additional classrooms with associated circulation space. That would facilitate the removal of the existing temporary mobile classroom, currently in a poor state of repair, which the applicant advises would reinstate the area of playground lost by the extension. In addition to this, internal works within the school building are proposed to rationalise and enhance the available space. Due to financial constraints it is proposed to carry out these works in two phases: phase 1 comprising the construction of the extension and associated works, and phase 2 comprising the internal alterations.
- 4. The applicant advises that the new classroom extension is required to create a unified school building with all facilities contained under one roof. Two classrooms are currently remote from the main building; one classroom is located in an existing outbuilding, which is understood be a former air raid shelter, and is far to small and cramped for use as a classroom. The other is located in a temporary mobile classroom, which is now beyond its serviceable life.
- 5. The two storey extension would be located on the southern elevation of the existing school building and would be constructed of traditional materials to match the existing. The proposed materials include brickwork walls with herringbone detailing and corbelling, clay tile roofing, timber windows and cast iron rainwater goods. The building would have a pitched roof with a ridgeline that matches that of the existing building. A number of design features have been included to ensure that the proposed extension is sympathetic to the existing Grade II Listed school building. These include, high level brick corbelling, a brick plinth at the bottom of all external elevations, two vertical projecting bays to add a vertical element to the façade of the Hook Green Road elevation, the provision of dormer windows with herringbone infill panelling and brick band courses. High level dormer windows have been added to the rear elevation, and the fenestration has been amended as far as is practical to avoid overlooking of neighbouring properties.
- 6. The applicant advises that due to the nature and layout of the existing school buildings, and the limited space available on site, the location of the extension is probably the only one feasible. The buildings footprint is as far away from neighbouring properties as is practically possible, although due to the small size of the site the building would be within 11 metres of the nearest neighbouring property at the closest point. Alternative locations for the extension were considered, but the applicant advises that they impinged too much on the area of playground available and obscured the view of the local church and other Listed buildings from Hook Green Road. Although the footprint of the extension would take up an area of the existing playground, the demolition of the mobile classroom would provide an additional area of playground to compensate for this 'loss'.
- 7. The extension would be linked to the existing school building by a single storey corridor, which would have a flat roof and rooflights. The extension would be accessed via a new secure entrance lobby, and is designed to be fully DDA compliant with a lift to access the first floor and doors wide enough for wheel chair access. There would be some associated works to the existing building under phase 1, including the formation of an opening from the new extension to the existing building, a new partition and addition of a children's toilet to create a new reception classroom and widening an existing opening adjacent to the existing reception area to enable wheelchair users to access the existing school building from the new extension.

- 8. Phase 2 of the works proposes the internal rationalisation of existing accommodation to reconfigure the headteacher's office, reception area, staff room and children's toilets, all of which are located within a single storey extension to the rear of the school. This reorganisation aims to maximise use of the space available, facilitate circulation, improve security and further improve the access arrangements initiated with the phase 1 extension.
- 9. Disabled access would be provided externally by means of a proposed ramp and steps up to the new reception area and school entrance from Hook Green Road. The entrance is existing but is not currently used. This application includes the provision of a pedestrian safety barrier and 'keep clear' road painting with zig-zag lines at this access point in order to improve the safety of its use.
- 10. There is no car parking within the boundary of the school site, with all staff parking on local roads. Although the size of the existing building is to be increased, it is understood that the new accommodation is the replace substandard existing accommodation. However, due to the current confines of the existing accommodation the school can only admit 11 pupils in the Key Stage 1 year groups (ages 4-6) but 15 pupils in Key Stage 2 (ages 7-10). The new classrooms would enable the school to admit 15 pupils in Key Stage 1 as well as Key Stage 2, so it would increase the overall school roll by 12 pupils. The school roll would increase from what should be 77 to 89, although the current roll is already 82 so the increase over present numbers is 7 pupils in total. No additional staff would be recruited as a result of this application.

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

Planning Policy

- 11. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to the consideration of the application:
 - (i) The Adopted 1996 **Kent County Structure Plan**:
 - **Policy S2** Seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of Kent's Environment.
 - **Policy S9** In considering development proposals, local authorities will have regard to the need for community facilities, including education.
 - **Policy ENV2** Kent's landscape and wildlife (flora and fauna) habitats will be conserved and enhanced.
 - **Policy ENV15** New development should be well designed and respect its setting.
 - **Policy ENV17** The primary planning policy towards Conservation Areas is to preserve or enhance their special character and appearance (including buildings and related spaces). Development which would harm that special character will not normally be permitted.

- **Policy ENV19** In the control of development and through policies and proposals in local plans:
 - Listed buildings will be preserved and their architectural and historic integrity and the character of their settings will be protected and enhanced.

[.....]

- (ii) The Deposit 2003 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.
 - **Policy E3** Kent's landscape and wildlife (flora and fauna) habitats will be conserved and enhanced.
 - **Policy QL7** Development within Conservation Areas should preserve and enhance the character of the Conservation Area. Development which would harm the character of a conservation area will not be permitted.
 - **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** -Community Services, including schools and education provision, will be provided as long as there is a demonstrable need for them.
- (iii) The adopted (1995) **Borough of Dartford Local Plan**:
 - **Policy S2 -** Encouragement will be given to the provision of community facilities.
 - **Policy B1** The following factors will be taken into account in considering development proposals:
 - a) Proposed Use, which should be appropriate for its location and should not have a detrimental effect on the local area through visual impact, traffic generation, noise or other factors.
 - b) Design, which should be off a high standard and respect and integrate with the surroundings. Particular attention should be paid to the mass, form and scale of the proposed development and its impact on the environment and neighbouring uses.
 - c) Materials, which should be of good quality, pleasing in appearance and durable.
 - d) Amenity of adjoining properties, particularly in the case of residential properties, should not be materially detracted from by development proposals. This includes the loss of daylight or sunlight, and overlooking from habitable rooms.

e/f) Access and parking.

- Policy B6 Proposals for the alteration or extension of a Listed Building will only be permitted where they respect the character and appearance of the building, particularly in terms of the use materials, and do not involve the loss of features or detailing of architectural or historic interest.
- Policy B8 Within Conservation Areas, proposals for new development, alterations, extensions or changes of use will only be permitted where they respect the special character of the particular area concerned and are well designed. The requirements of Policy B1 will be strictly applied, especially in relation to design, materials and use.
- **Policy CF3** The Council will encourage and support the provision of social, community, educational and cultural facilities and infrastructure to meet the current and future needs of the Borough.
- (iv) Second Deposit Draft (2002) **Dartford Borough Local Plan Review**:
 - Policy DD11 A high standard of design will be sought in all proposals. Planning Permission will be granted if the proposed development:
 - 1) Is compatible with neighbouring buildings and spaces or improves their surroundings in terms of scale, height, massing, materials and site coverage.
 - Incorporates a layout that respects the original topography of the site and retains trees, hedgerows and shrubs which are important landscape features.
 - Retains or enhances the privacy and amenity of the local area by reason of form, scale, height, outlook, noise and light intrusion or activity levels including vehicular or pedestrian movements.
 - 4) Retains important buildings.

[......]

- **Policy BE2** Within a Conservation Area, proposals for new development will only be permitted if the following criteria are met:
 - 1) the scale, volume, form, materials and detailing respect the characteristics of buildings in the conservation area;
 - 2) the proposal incorporates a high standard of quality of design;
 - 3) local vernacular architectural features are incorporated;

[.....]

5) Important views within, into and out of the Conservation Area are protected;

[.....]

Policy BE5 - Proposals for the alteration, extension or minor demolition of a Listed Building will not be permitted unless they would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the building and its setting and do not involve the loss of features or detailing of architectural or historic interest. **Policy BE8** - Proposals for development will not be permitted if they would cause harm to the setting of a Listed Building.

Consultations

12. **Dartford Borough Council:** raises no objections to the revised plans. It is suggested that conditions be attached to any permission requiring the submission of details and samples of all external materials, as well as details of any joinery prior to the commencement of works on site

Southfleet Parish Council: welcomes the measures now proposed to address concerns relating to construction and materials, Listed Buildings and Conservation Area issues, access and highway safety, and overlooking of neighbouring properties.

The Parish Council wishes to liase closely with Kent Highways with regard to safety measures at the new pedestrian access into Hook Green Road, and express concern over existing problems, particularly a lack of on site car parking.

The Parish Council wishes to see the two sheds on site removed upon completion of the extension. A number of planning conditions are suggested.

The Divisional Transport Manager: raises no objections.

Conservation Officer: raises no objections as the final scheme is as discussed.

Biodiversity Officer: recommends that the precautionary measures detailed in paragraphs 5.2-5.5 of the submitted Bat Survey Report are made a condition on any planning permission granted.

County Archaeologist: requests that a condition is placed on any grant of planning permission requiring the securing of the implementation of a watching brief, to be undertaken by an archaeologist approved by the County Planning Authority. The watching brief shall be carried out in accordance with a written programme and specification and shall be submitted to the County Planning Authority for written approval.

The Environment Agency: raises no objection but makes a number of detailed comments regarding Source Protection Zones, the design of soakaways and the discharge of sewage or trade effluent into controlled waters.

Local Member

13. The local County Member, Mr Bertie Bassam, was notified of the original application on the 27 July 2005. Mr Bassam was notified of the amended proposal on the 10th April 2006.

Publicity

14. The application was publicised by advertisement in a local newspaper, the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 15 nearby properties. 16 neighbouring properties were notified of the amended proposal.

Representations

- 15. 4 letters of representation were received regarding the initial proposal. Concern was expressed over the design, scale and massing of the proposed extension, loss of privacy and overlooking, increases in noise and disturbance, loss of views through the Conservation Area to Listed Buildings, loss of playground space and highways implications. Following the submission of a revised proposal the neighbouring properties were re-notified and given a further 21 days to comment.
 - 1 further letter of representation has been received. The main comments/points of concern and objection can be summarised as follows:
 - Although improvements have been made to the original submission, concern is expressed over the erection of an extension which is 9 metres high, 12 metres in length and 8 metres in width.
 - The extension would dramatically effect the residents 'Right to Light', in that the siting of the extension would be directly in line with where the sun rises.
 - A resident wishes to see the reinstatement of a brick wall along the boundary between the school and their property once the mobile classroom is removed. A wooden fence would not afford protection from footballs, rubbish and noise etc.

Discussion

- 16. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan policies outlined in paragraph (11) above. Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, this proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. Issues of particular relevance include impact upon residential and local amenity, massing and design, visual impacts and possible effects on the local environment, particularly the setting of a number of Listed Buildings and a Conservation Area.
- 17. Policies S2 and ENV15 of the Adopted Kent Structure Plan, SP1 and QL1 of the Deposit Kent and Medway Structure Plan, and Policy B1 of the adopted Dartford Borough Local Plan, seek to conserve and enhance the environment and require development to be well designed and respect its setting. That is particularly relevant to this site which is within a Conservation Area and is adjacent to a number of Listed Buildings.

Siting and Design

18. Policy ENV17 of the Kent Structure Plan states that the primary planning policy towards Conservation Areas is to preserve or enhance their special character and appearance, and that development which would harm that special character will not normally be permitted. The design and siting of any new development here therefore needs careful consideration and thought, exacerbated by the fact that this site is surrounded by Listed Buildings, and that the original school building is itself Listed. Policy ENV19 of the Kent Structure Plan states that Listed Buildings will be preserved, and their architectural and

historic integrity, and the character of their settings, will be protected and enhanced. All of the policies outlined above are echoed in the Deposit Kent and Medway Structure Plan and the adopted Dartford Borough Local Plan, and are therefore a key determining factor in this application. In addition, Policy BE2 of the Second Deposit Draft (2002) Dartford Borough Local Plan Review amplifies this, and states that within a Conservation Area proposals for new development will only be permitted if the scale, volume, form, materials and detailing respect the characteristics of buildings in the conservation area, and the proposal incorporates a high standard of quality of design. In addition local vernacular architectural features must be incorporated and important views within, into and out of the Conservation Area must be protected. In conjunction with other relevant landscape protection and design policies, these issues need to be considered in the determination of this application and will be discussed below.

- 19. First, the design of the building must be considered in conjunction with its scale, massing and siting. The proposed extension is located to the side of the main school building and would be clearly visible from Hook Green Road. The two new classrooms would be sited upon the existing tarmac playground, although the removal of the mobile classroom would compensate for most of this loss by freeing up further playground. The applicant states that the positioning of the proposed extension was carefully considered during the design process, and I consider that the proposed siting is the most appropriate given the context of the site. Due to the nature and layout of the existing school buildings the location of the proposed extension is probably the only one feasible. Other arrangements were considered but would have resulted in the loss of more playground space, which is already limited, or would have obscured the view of the Listed Buildings, including the Parish Church, from Hook Green Road. The retention of views through the Conservation Area is protected by Policy BE2 of the Deposit Draft (2002) Dartford Local Plan Review, and was a point of objection to the original proposal (which was further back from the road frontage and therefore obscured more of the view). The siting of the proposed extension does impact upon a neighbouring property, which will be discussed below, although the positioning has been carefully considered in order to minimise its impact as far as practicably possible. I do not consider that the siting of the extension would harm the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area. However, the design, choice of materials, and massing of the classrooms needs to be considered in the determination of this application.
- 20. The proposed extension has been designed to visually fit with the existing buildings without being a simple pastiche. The removal of the mobile classroom, would enhance the site in terms of design and visual amenity, but it is imperative that the replacement extension does not harm the character of the site and the surrounding Conservation Area, or the setting of Listed Buildings. The applicant advises that the extension would be constructed using traditional materials, with brickwork walls to match the existing building as closely as possible, clay tile roofing, timber windows and cast iron rain water goods. However, the precise specifications of the materials would be dealt with under planning condition to allow greater detail, including samples, of the proposed materials and colour finishes to be submitted. The applicant is aware of the sensitive location of the school and the need to use materials that are sympathetic and in keeping with the surrounding listed properties. Therefore I consider that, provided it is conditioned that no works commence on site until the details of all materials to be used externally are submitted and approved, any potential visual intrusion or harm to the local area would be controlled. In addition, the two sheds on site, which are currently used for storage, would be required to be removed upon completion of the works. That would ensure that all temporary buildings are removed from the site enhancing local visual amenity. Therefore, the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and the setting of

the Listed Buildings, would not be detrimentally or materially altered, and arguably would be enhanced.

- 21. The design of the proposed building has been subject to much discussion and negotiation. The design of the original proposal met with objection from Dartford Borough Council and Kent County Councils Conservation Officer, and following a series of meetings has been amended to incorporate appropriate design features. Both parties are now satisfied with the design, which includes features such as two vertical projecting bays to add a vertical element to the façade, a brick plinth to the base of all external elevations, high level brick corbelling, dormer windows with brick band courses and herringbone infill panelling. In addition to this, the fenestration has been amended as far as is practical to avoid overlooking to nearby properties, including the provision of high level dormer windows to the rear elevation. The design of the extension borrows from the original Listed school building without trying to produce an exact replica, and is therefore subservient in appearance to the original school. That ensures that the setting of the Listed Buildings, and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, is not detrimentally or materially altered. The design is therefore considered appropriate for its setting in my view.
- 22. Although the proposed extension is two storeys in height, compared to the rest of the original school, which is single storey, the ridge height is the same as the upper storey of the new extension is designed to maximise available roof space. The massing of the extension is therefore not out of character with the existing school buildings, or surrounding residential properties, and is therefore deemed to be acceptable in my view.
- 23. The design of the extension reflects that of the existing Victorian school building, complementing its design and height. The applicant has demonstrated a case of need for the proposed classrooms, and I consider that the impact of the extension has been mitigated as much as practically possible. The character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and the setting of Listed Buildings, may be affected by the massing and design of the proposed extension, but I do not consider this impact to be significantly adverse. 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

24. Sedleys School is currently accessed via Church Road, a narrow no-through road with very limited on street car parking. Hook Green Road is a busy rural road, which becomes heavily congested at school peak times and is used by large lorries accessing nearby farming facilities. The School has no on-site car parking provision due to the confined nature of the site, and therefore local highway concerns have been raised. However, this application would not lead to an increase in staff numbers and the school roll, which is currently 82, would increase only to a maximum of 89. Should Members be minded to permit, the new extension would merely replace the current substandard accommodation on site. Therefore, the only impact that this application would have on the local highway network would be construction traffic and associated vehicles. Unfortunately, the construction of any development does have short term impacts upon the local highway and this cannot be avoided. However, the impact can be minimised through the imposition of conditions. Should Members be minded to permit, conditions would be imposed to ensure that construction traffic does not enter/egress the site at peak school times and that mud and debris is not deposited on the local highway.

25. In addition, the reinstatement of the pedestrian access on Hook Green Road, the provision of safety barriers, and the installation of 'school keep clear' zig zag lines to the front of the school, are all measures that would improve safety and alleviate congestion outside of the school. The School has recently produced an approved School Travel Plan which aims to encourage more sustainable methods of transport, and reduce the reliance on the car. This application therefore, would not have a detrimental impact upon the local highway network, but could in fact improve the existing situation.

Residential and local amenity

- 26. Due to the confined nature of the site, an extension would impact upon neighbouring residents no matter where it was sited within the school grounds. However, as discussed in paragraph (19) various options have been considered and the siting proposed is deemed the most appropriate for a number of reasons. The applicant has made a number of changes to the original proposal which aim to reduce any negative impacts upon neighbouring properties. First, the extension has been moved away from the closest property and further towards Hook Green Road. This not only maintains views through to the Parish Church and other Listed Buildings, but also alleviates the issues of loss of light and overlooking to neighbouring properties. However, the proposed extension is still only 10metres away from the neighbouring property, with the closest window measuring a distance of 11metres. The issue of overlooking therefore needs to be addressed.
- 27. The upper floor windows at the rear of the extension would look out over a neighbouring property at a slightly oblique angle, but views into habitable rooms would be possible. The applicant has sought to address the issue of overlooking by raising the cill height of the first floor windows, at the rear of the extension, to 1.8 metres from the floor. Therefore, unless over 1.8 metres tall, staff and pupils would not be able to see out of these windows and, therefore, would not impinge on the privacy of neighbouring residents.
- 28. Upon completion of the extension the mobile classroom on site would be removed. A brick wall once ran along the boundary behind this mobile classroom, and it is understood that this has been removed. Concern is expressed that replacement boundary treatment is needed once the mobile classroom is removed in order to protect the privacy of neighbouring residents. However, wooden fencing would not afford protection from noise, and could be subject to damage. Therefore a brick wall would be preferred, to run along the boundary between the school and the neighbouring property, details of which would be required under condition. This would give the neighbouring residents privacy, and protection from noise and nuisance. I am satisfied that the applicant has amended the proposal as far as practicably possible in order to reduce the impact upon neighbouring residents. Therefore, subject to a condition to control construction hours, I do not consider that this application would have a detrimental impact on the amenity of neighbouring residents.

Conclusion

29. In summary, I consider that there are special circumstances to justify the proposed development within a Conservation Area and affecting Listed Buildings. Overall, I consider that the siting and design of the proposed extension would not have a detrimental effect on the amenity of local residents, the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, or the setting of Listed Buildings. Overall, I consider that the design solution proposed is a sensitive approach to the heritage and landscape aspects relevant to this particular location. Subject to the imposition of conditions, I am of the

opinion that the proposed development, as now amended, would not give rise to any material harm and is otherwise in accordance with the general principles of the relevant Development Plan Policies. Therefore, I recommend that permission be granted subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

Recommendation

- 31. 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,
- details of joinery to be submitted for approval,
- hours of working during construction,
- recommendations of the protected species survey to be followed,
- a programme of archaeological work and building recording,
- sheds to be removed upon completion of the extension,
- removal of the mobile classroom upon completion of the extension and details of reinstatement boundary treatment,

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