

**Application for retention of a mobile office at Sandhurst Primary School – TW/06/270**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 21 March 2006.

Application by The Governors of Sandhurst Primary School for the provision of mobile office for use by the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and other agencies, at Sandhurst Primary School, Rye Road, Sandhurst – TW/06/270

Recommendation: Planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mr R. S. Manning

Classification: Unrestricted

**Site**

1. Sandhurst Primary School is located to the north of the A268 Rye Road at the eastern end of Sandhurst village. Two public rights of way cross the school site; one through the centre part of the site to the north and the other across the southern part of the playing field to the east. The site is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Special Landscape Area and adjoins the Sandhurst Conservation Area. *A site location plan is attached.*

**Background and Proposal**

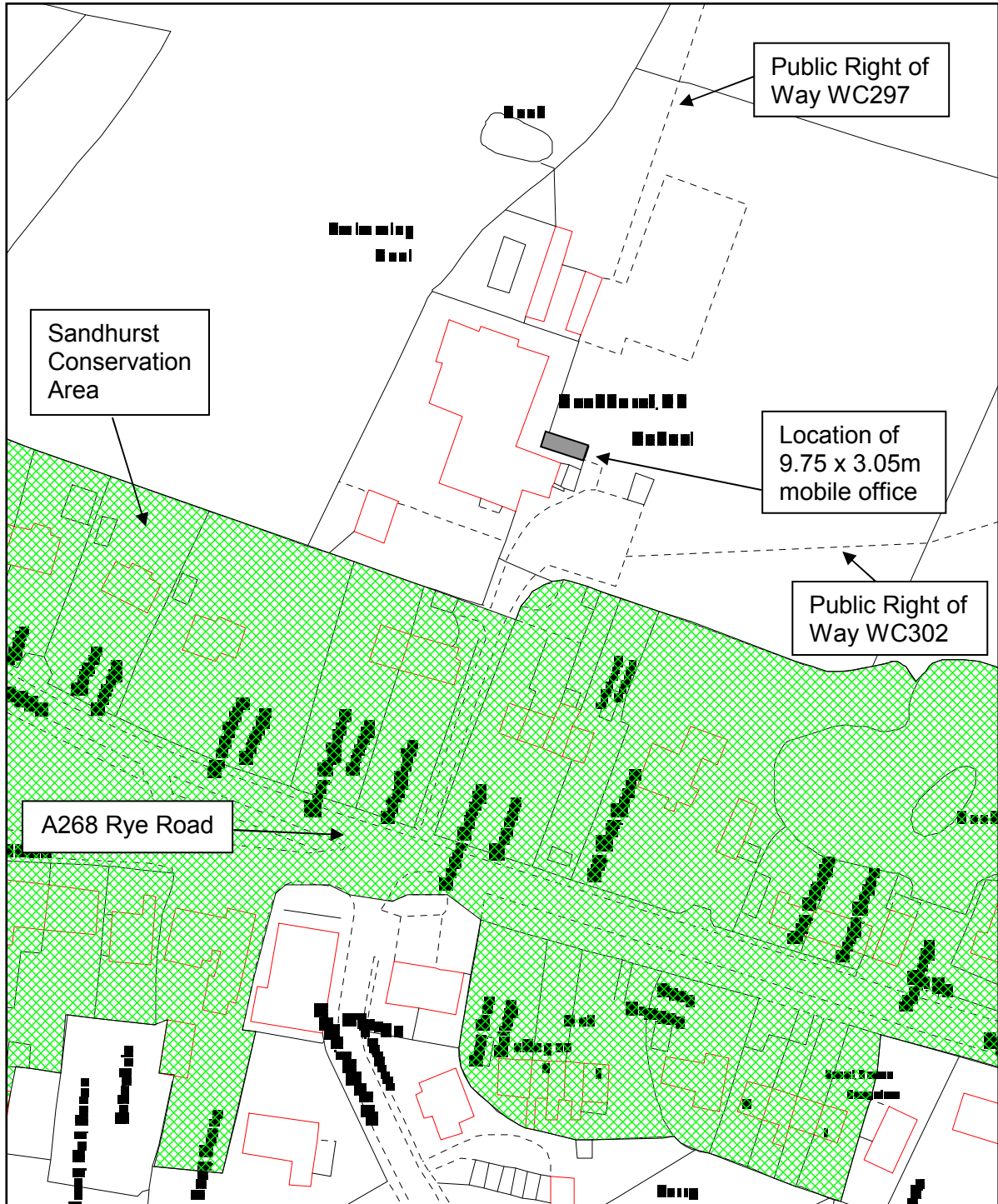
2. A mobile office building measuring 9.75 x 3.05m (32' x 10') was provided in 2001 to increase the administration space of the School and to provide the Head Teacher with an office adjacent to the School Secretary. A planning permission for a permanent extension to the administration and staff facilities at Sandhurst Primary School requires the mobile office to be removed from the school site. However, the Governors of the School seek to retain the mobile office on site. It is proposed that the office be used by the Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), for one-to-one teaching of pupils who require additional teaching resources. It is also proposed that it be used at other times by the Designated Child Protection Officer (DCPO) and parents / other agencies as encouraged by Central Government and the Kent County Council.

**Planning History**

3. In December 2003, planning permission was granted for a four-classroom extension with a covered link to the existing school; the relocation and eventual removal of a mobile classroom from the site; a new enclosed Reception playground; a soft play area and a new car park to provide an additional 14 parking spaces under permission TW/03/2351.
4. In March 2005, planning permission was granted for the extension to the existing school building to provide administration space and associated staff facilities within the school site, under permission TW/05/34. That application indicated that the existing mobile office accommodation within the school site, used by the Headteacher and administration staff, would be demolished as part of the extension and that the space created would provide additional playground space.

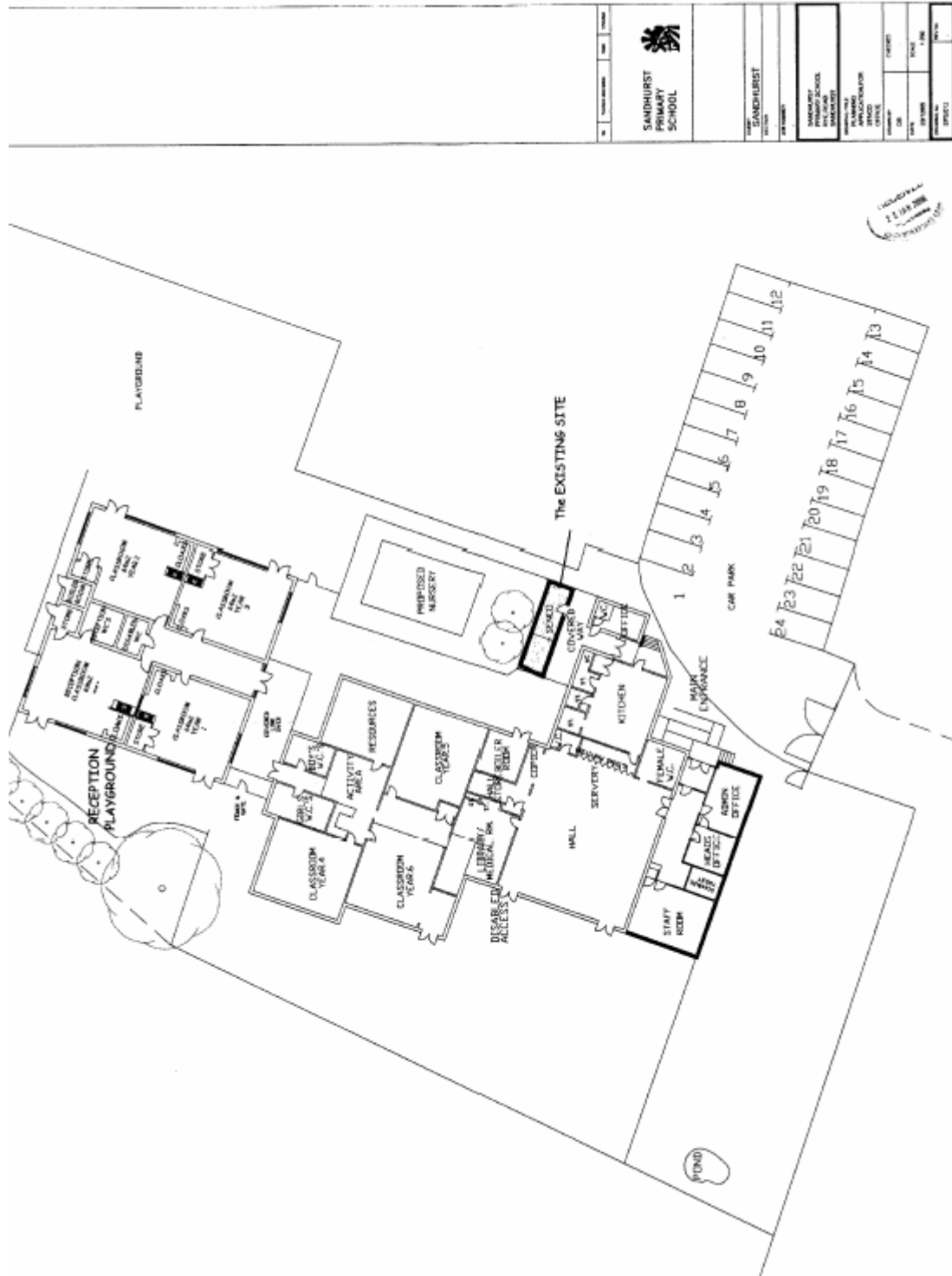
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**Site Location Plan**



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**Site Layout Plan**



NO.	DATE	BY	FOR
 SANDHURST PRIMARY SCHOOL			
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SANDHURST PRIMARY SCHOOL TW/06/270 APPLICATION FOR RETENTION OF A MOBILE OFFICE			
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5. In March 2005, planning permission was granted by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to retain another mobile on the school site to relocate the privately run Sandhurst Nursery from the unsuitable Church Hall onto the school site (under permission TW/05/238).

**Planning Policy**

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

(i) The adopted 1996 **Kent Structure Plan:**

Policy S2      The quality of Kent's environment will be conserved and enhanced and measures taken to minimise any adverse impacts arising from the development.

Policy S9      Has regard for the need for community facilities and services, including education.

Policy ENV3   Long-term protection for the designated Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Priority will be given to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, including landscape, wildlife and geological features, over other planning considerations.

Policy ENV4   Long-term protection of Special Landscape Areas. Enhancement of the landscape will be given priority over other planning considerations, whilst having regard to the economic and social well being of the area.

Policy ENV15   The character, quality and functioning of Kent's built environment will be conserved and enhanced. Development should respect its settings. Development which would be incompatible with the conservation or enhancement of the character of settlement, or detrimental to its amenity or functioning, will not normally be permitted.

Policy ENV17   The primary planning policy towards conservation areas is to preserve or enhance their special character and appearance. Development, which would harm that special character, will not normally be permitted.

Policy RS1      All development permitted in villages and small rural towns and in the open countryside should be appropriate in location, scale, density and appearance to its surroundings and acceptable in highway and infrastructure terms.

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

Policy E4      Carries forward and amplifies Policy ENV3 of the Adopted Plan

Policy E5      Carries forward Policy ENV4 of the Adopted Plan

Policy QL1     Development should be well designed and respect its setting

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Policy QL7 Carries forward and amplifies Policy ENV17 of the Adopted Plan

Policy QL12 Carries forward and amplifies Policy S9 of the Adopted Plan

**(iii) The 1996 Adopted Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan:**

Policy EN1 Requires all proposals for development to satisfy certain criteria, including: no unacceptable loss of/affect on amenity; respect for the context of the site; no loss of significant buildings, related spaces, trees, shrubs, hedges or other features important to the character of the area; no significant adverse impact on highways safety; services for foul and surface water sewerage and water supply have sufficient capacity/can be improved; no significant adverse effect on any features of nature conservation importance; and design, layout and landscaping take account of the security of people and property.

Policy EN5 Development within or affecting conservation areas should be well designed and respect its setting.

Policy EN23 - Proposals for development within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will only be permitted if they would conserved or enhance the natural beauty and special character of the landscape.  
- Proposals for development within the High Weald Special Landscape Area but outside the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will only be permitted where they would cause no significant harm to the important landscape character of the area; and  
- Where development is to be allowed in either the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or the High Weald Special Landscape Area, particular attention will be paid to the design, layout and landscaping in order to minimise impact on the natural beauty and landscape quality of the surrounding area.

**(iv) The Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan Review October 2002:**

Policy EN1 Carries forward, amends and amplifies Policy EN1 of the Adopted Plan

Policy EN5 Carries forward Policy EN5 of the Adopted Plan

**Consultations**

7. **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council** – raise no objections to the proposal subject to the permission being granted for a limited time period only, expiring 28 February 2010.

**Sandhurst Parish Council** – comments that:

“The school has been extended quite considerably and the Portakabin was only supposed to be there for a limited time period. We are in the High Weald AONB and Portakabin / mobile classrooms are not a welcome sight. It would be much appreciated by the Parish Council if space could be found within the school building instead to enable the removal of this Portakabin”.

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**Divisional Transport Manager** has raised no objections to the application from a highway point of view

**Public Rights of Way Officer** has raised no objection to the application, as he believes that the proposal would not have an adverse effect on the Public Right of Way.

**Local Members**

8. The local County Member, Mr R. S. Manning, was notified of the application on the 30 January 2006.

**Publicity**

9. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice, a formal newspaper advertisement and the individual notification of 13 neighbouring residential properties, since the application may affect the character and/or appearance of the Sandhurst Conservation Area and Public Rights of Way.

**Representations**

10. No letters of representation have been received from neighbours to date on this application.

**Discussion**

11. This proposal seeks to provide the school with a mobile office to accommodate the school SENCO officer, the DCPO and other agencies and/ or parents as required by the school. The main issue to consider here is the suitability of a mobile structure in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where this development may effect the character and/ or appearance of the Sandhurst Conservation Area. Whilst the provision for education needs are acknowledged by Structure Plan Policies S9, the proposal must also be considered against the relevant Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (7) above. These policies give long-term protection to the landscape over other considerations, and are concerned with the preservation and enhancement of the built environment and protection of local amenity.
12. The proposed mobile office block is located within the built confines of the school site, and is located between an existing office and a recently permitted mobile classroom for use as a private nursery on the school site by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The mobile office block appears joined to the school building by a covered walkway which extends between the mobile office unit, existing school kitchens and office space.
13. In terms of appearance, given that the application entails a mobile office that is already in situ, there would be no further visual impact caused by the temporary structure on the existing landscape. However, given the fact that this temporary structure does not already have planning consent, it should be noted that this mobile building arguably would not respect the design and appearance of the existing school buildings and the adjacent Sandhurst Conservation Area. In this regard, an objection has been received from the Parish Council regarding the suitability of a mobile office block being located in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

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Need for the SENCO Office

14. In respect of the Parish Council's concerns on the application, the applicant has considered the views at the School Building Committee Meeting and has responded as follows:
- Even after the recent building work the School does not have sufficient space elsewhere in the building to use as a SENCO room where confidential meetings can be held with Social Services and parents.
  - The present building replaced a smaller office some three years ago and in that time not a single objection has been raised from either neighbours, members of public using the footpath immediately adjacent or the residents of the windmill, which is the only property to actually overlook the site.
  - Although we fully understand that planning permissions have to be viewed by the Parish Council the Governors always endeavour to meet the special educational needs of our children, at both ends of the spectrum, who should also have a right to be represented by the elected members of the Parish Council. The feedback from the pupils using the building is that they like their space to be apart from the rest of the school, and as most pupils use the building in small groups we are finding that the right learning environment is being created.
  - With this in mind, we consider that the continued use of this building presents the best value option to meet the needs of the National Curriculum and recommend that this application is given approval".
15. In terms of need of the mobile office, the Local Education Officer has stated that the mobile classroom is suitable for a SENCO office and the Local Education Officer supports its retention. It is noted that this type of temporary accommodation is not the only suitable option for this SENCO office, and the School should consider an alternative location for the office within the main School building in the future.
16. Under planning consent TW/05/34, for the erection of additional administration and staff facilities at the school, it was stated that "the existing mobile accommodation will be demolished as part of the works and the space created will provide additional playground space". As such, permission was granted for the extension under the proviso that this mobile office would be demolished and removed from site when the works had been completed. Therefore, this application has been submitted for the continued use of the mobile office within the school site. My own view is that it is unfortunate that the need for this accommodation was not made clear at the time of the previous application, since the removal of temporary buildings on this site was a key element of the justification for the new building adjacent to the Conservation Area.

Impact on Conservation Area & Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

17. Policy ENV3 of the Adopted Kent Structure Plan seeks to protect and enhance the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Priority is given to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty over other planning considerations. This is reflected in Policy EN23 of the Adopted Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan where proposals would only be permitted if they conserve or enhance the natural beauty and special character of the landscape. Whilst the proposal needs to conserve, or enhance the special landscape character of the area, I consider that its visual impact on the wider landscape is visually very limited due to its relatively secluded siting.

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18. Given the colour differences between the recently permitted nursery and the proposed SENCO mobile office block, should members be minded to grant permission, it would seem sensible to require by condition that the mobile office be painted light green to match the existing mobile nursery within the school site. By ensuring that the colours of the two mobile buildings match, the visual impact of the structures would be less intrusive from the adjacent Conservation Area and the two Public Rights of Way that run through the school site
19. In my opinion, the mobile office would be significantly screened through the existing fencing and vegetation that would ensure the views of the temporary office would only be minimal on the adjacent Conservation Area. Whilst I accept that temporary accommodation is not ideal in this case, I acknowledge the support for the retention of the office from the Local Education Officer and consider that its temporary retention would be acceptable providing the provision of permanent accommodation in the future.
20. Similarly, Policy ENV17 of the Adopted Kent Structure Plan seeks to preserve and enhance Conservation Areas. This is supported by Policy EN5 of the Adopted Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan which states that development affecting Conservation Areas should be well designed and respect their setting. Given the fact that the mobile office is already in situ, and has been for some time, and it is not within the Conservation Area, I would argue that once painted to match the adjacent nursery building, the proposal would have a marginal additional impact on the adjacent Sandhurst Conservation Area. However, given the temporary nature of the structure and the fact that it is located on the boundary of a Conservation Area, I would recommend that planning permission be granted for a temporary time period of up to three years.
21. It should be noted that under Policy S9 of the Adopted Kent Structure Plan, there is regard given to the need for community facilities including education. Although a temporary mobile building would not normally be acceptable in/or adjacent to a Conservation Area, in this particular case given the defined need for the SENCO office and the support for its retention by the Local Education Officer, I would raise no objection to the proposal and recommend that temporary planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

**Conclusion**

22. In conclusion, whilst I acknowledge the effect that this mobile office has on the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the proximity to the adjacent Sandhurst Conservation Area and the two Public Rights of Way which run through the site, given that it is a temporary structure and would be given planning consent for a limited period only, I recommend that planning permission be granted subject to conditions including painting to match adjacent buildings. Additionally however, I would urge that the school investigate an alternative location for this SENCO office within the main buildings in the future.

**Recommendation**

23. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO conditions requiring the painting of the mobile office to match the adjoining mobile nursery building; the removal of the mobile classroom from the site by 31 March 2009; and the development being carried out in accordance with the approved plans.



## Item D2

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I FURTHER RECOMMEND that the School be urged to investigate the provision of alternative accommodation within the main school building by the expiry of this temporary consent.

Case officer – Julian Moat	01622 696978
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Background documents - See section heading
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