

Construction of single storey extension to provide two classrooms and hall at High Halden C of E Primary School, High Halden – AS/05/2144

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

Application submitted by Kent County Council Education and Libraries & The Canterbury Diocese for the removal of mobile classroom and the demolition of timber framed classroom, the construction of single storey extension to provide two classrooms and hall with internal alterations to the remaining building, at High Halden C of E Primary School, Church Hill, High Halden, Ashford. (Ref:AS/05/2144)

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mr Richard King

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. High Halden Church of England Primary School is located off Church Hill within the curtilage of the village of High Halden. The main school building is Grade II Listed and the whole of the school site is included within a Conservation Area and Special Landscape Area. The main school building is a Listed Victorian structure comprising the School Master's House spread over 3 floors, a large school room (hall) and a small entrance lobby. The building has been extended to the side and rear in the 1930's to provide toilets, administration offices and a timber framed classroom. Further extensions have been added since and comprise of a prefabricated classroom, a mobile classroom, and most recently new staff facilities. The school buildings are located to the front of the site on Church Hill, with playground and playing fields extending to the rear. A nursery is located within the school grounds and is accessed via a public footpath. The site is bound by residential properties to the north and south, and open fields to the west. A number of Listed Buildings are located on Church Hill, including the Grade I Listed Parish Church of St Mary, 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 due to objection from neighbouring properties. When the application was originally submitted it was intended that the area of lost playground would be replaced by extending the existing side playground to the south, taking in some of the site currently occupied by the mobile classroom. That met with objection on the grounds of ecological concerns, loss of greenspace, impact on the Conservation Area and the detrimental impact upon neighbouring properties. In addition, it was intended that the new hall could have a community use out-of-school hours for small groups and clubs. This also met with objection on the grounds of traffic generation and lack of parking facilities. These two elements have been amended in the current application, but the design and positioning of the proposed extension remains as originally submitted. It is the revised submission that will be outlined and discussed throughout this report.

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Proposal

3. This application has been submitted by Kent County Council Education & Libraries and The Diocese of Canterbury and proposes the removal of a mobile classroom and the demolition of a timber frame prefabricated classroom. This accommodation would be replaced by the construction of a single storey extension, which would provide two new classrooms and a hall, with internal alterations to the remaining existing building.
4. The mobile classroom and the prefabricated classroom to be removed are below national standards for teaching spaces, and suffer from poor insulation due to construction materials. In addition, teaching spaces within the main school building fall below Kent County Council area standards and this has been identified in past Ofsted reports. The school also lacks the facilities required to accommodate disabled pupils. Ofsted have made the following comments regarding the current School accommodation:

OfSTED 1998 pg.5...."In spite of the school's best efforts, the quality of accommodation is unsatisfactory overall and gives rise to some concerns in relation to curriculum delivery, high maintenance costs and welfare of the school community to provide a safe environment of good quality. A high priority for the school is to improve accommodation."

OfSTED 2002...."The school has good quality outside accommodation with suitable hard areas and a large playing field.....The hall, however, is too narrow for the effective teaching of gymnastics for the older pupils and this restricts their access to the physical education curriculum."

5. The current standard for classroom sizes is set at 60metres squared and assembly halls at 140metres squared, which is far higher than the present accommodation within the school. The hall is less than half the size set by DfES which precludes the whole school meeting for assemblies and group activities. It is also not possible, for health and safety reasons, to use the hall climbing bars and other equipment when teaching physical education in the hall. To reduce future maintenance costs and bring the accommodation up to standard the proposal is to replace the mobile classroom and prefabricated building with permanent accommodation and to make internal alterations to the existing buildings.
6. It is proposed to replace these buildings with a single storey extension comprising two classrooms, an assembly hall with store and kitchen, and a new pupil entrance. The new extension would be constructed on the site of the demolished prefabricated classroom and part of the rear playground. The lost area of playground would be replaced by extending the existing playground to the west over the school playing field, adjacent to the existing nursery. Sufficient space would remain for the school field to accommodate a football pitch. The present pond and nature area would be retained and enlarged in area with additional planting added to improve the habitat. The hedge which currently forms a boundary between the playground and school field would need to be removed and replanted in order to accommodate the new hall and playground extension.
7. The applicant advises that the new buildings have been designed to relate with the existing structures without producing a pastiche. The existing slate roof over the timber framed classroom would be extended over the two new classrooms with a shallow pitched standing seam zinc roof making up the roof line beyond the line of the pitched roof. The new slate roof would have rooflights providing natural daylight and ventilation to the rear of the new classrooms. The proposed hall roof would be tiled with plain tiles

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to match those of the existing Victorian building, and the ridge height of the new hall would be lower than that of the existing building in an effort to reduce its impact.

8. It is intended that internally the hall space would be open to the ridge level and rooflights would be provided on the west facing roof slope which would provide natural daylight and ventilation to the hall. The applicant has advised that externally the walls would generally be of red facing brickwork to contrast with the existing Victorian buildings, and a new plinth and mid-height band course would be similar to the existing and would link the old and new buildings together. The hall gables, eaves and single storey kitchen extension walls would be clad in self-coloured fibrous boards that would be arranged in panels with divisions formed in aluminium sections. The new pupils entrance is proposed to be formed of UPVC glazed screens and doors to provide daylight into the new and existing circulation areas. The applicant states that the 'proposed materials stated on the submitted drawings were chosen to help reduce the future financial drain on the School's limited budget, but maintain the spirit of matching with materials currently used on the school buildings'. The materials are, however, indicative and the applicant requests that the materials and colour finishes be dealt with as a planning condition.
9. Internally the existing Victorian structure would have minor alterations to make the spaces suitable to meet the current standards. The intention is to convert the existing hall into a classroom, and to convert 2 small rooms in the school house into a single large space by removing the division wall. In addition the existing hall store has a lean to roof which it is intended to replace with a continuation of the main roof to improve the headroom and form part of a new circulation corridor serving the rooms in the School House. This would improve disabled access to all parts of the school.
10. The proposal would not involve an increase in staff numbers and it is not intended to increase staff parking areas, which are currently sufficient. The school roll is 101 pupils which could increase to a maximum of 105 should this application be permitted. The School are currently in the process of preparing a school travel plan and the applicant advises that this will be available early in 2006. At this stage it is not proposed to use the hall out of school hours for community use, and the applicant advises that should a future need be identified consent will be sought through the planning process.

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.

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Policy ENV2 – Kent’s landscape and wildlife (flora and fauna) habitats will be conserved and enhanced.

Policy ENV4 – Local Planning Authorities will provide long term protection for Special Landscape Areas, and will give priority to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty of the landscape over other planning considerations, whilst having due respect to the economic and social well being of the area.

Policy ENV7 – It is policy to maintain tree cover and the hedgerow network in the County, and to enhance these where compatible with the character of the landscape.

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:

- i) 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 E5 - The primary objective of Special Landscape Areas will be the long term protection and enhancement of the quality of the landscape whilst having regard to their economic and social well being.

Policy E8 - Important wildlife habitats and species will be protected, maintained and enhanced, especially through long term management and habitat creation schemes.

Policy E9- Tree cover and the hedgerow network should be maintained and, where it would improve the landscape, enhanced.

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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 2000 **Ashford Borough Local Plan:**

Policy DP1 - Requires development to be thought out in design terms in relation to their scale, density, height, massing, landscape, access and detailing.

Policy DP2 - New development must be designed in a way which respects the character and appearance of the area around it, particularly where this has a special character, for example, in Conservation Areas and close to Listed Buildings, and respect the ability of neighbours to enjoy reasonable levels of privacy, peace and quiet and natural light. The local transport system must be capable of properly serving the development proposed.

Policy DP7 – Wherever practical, all new development proposals should provide for the enhancement of nature conservation by maintaining and/or creating suitable habitats.

Policy GP4 -To propose development on specific sites in a way which minimises damage to the environment by respecting the character of surrounding areas, protecting important features in the landscape, heritage features and wildlife habitats and providing compensating environmental benefits where damage by development cannot be avoided.

Policy EN16 – Development or redevelopment within Conservation Areas will be permitted provided such proposals preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area.

Policy EN21 -Applications for planning permission for development which affects a Listed Building or its setting will be considered in the light of a number of factors including the buildings scale, architectural features and materials, structure, historic character and setting.

Policy EN27 -Long term protection will be given to Special Landscape Areas and other important landscape features.

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Policy EN31 -Development which is likely to significantly affect semi-natural habitats or any other important habitat will not be permitted unless measures have been taken to limit significantly this Impact and long term habitat protection is provided where appropriate.

Consultations

12. **Ashford Borough Council:** No written comments have been received to date.

High Halden Parish Council: comments as follows:

- More slate tiles should be used to match the existing.
- Matching materials should be used. These should be a reserved matter and the Parish Council would like to have the opportunity to comment on them before permission is given for their use.
- Builders should ensure safety at all times during school days, and parking should not be on the road outside the school. The Highways Department should address any issues.
- Builders should be made aware of the close proximity to Listed Buildings these being Swallow House and the Old Bakery.
- The Public Right Of Way should not be blocked.

The Divisional Transport Manager: confirms that the proposal is unlikely to increase traffic generation, or parking requirements, and therefore raises no objection subject to the imposition of conditions controlling parking for site personnel and the prevention of the deposit of mud and other material on the local highway.

Conservation Officer: states that this is a good scheme in general but questions why the existing school entrance cannot be retained, and requests that the hall roof lights be omitted to increase the gable wall glazing. Advice is given regarding the internal alterations to the original school building, but it is stated that the comments made are not grounds for refusal.

Biodiversity Officer: makes a number of detailed comments regarding protected species and the habitats that support them. These comments include:

- The protected species survey has identified that the buildings affected by the development have low potential for bats. This means that no further survey work will be required but best practice must be followed as their absence from the site cannot be guaranteed.
- Signs of badger have been identified within the school grounds, but no setts were found. The precautionary measures suggested in the protected species survey should be implemented.
- No disturbance to birds should be carried out during the nesting season (March to August). Any work that affects possible nesting sites should be completed outside of the breeding season, or supervised by an experienced ecologist. If any nesting birds are found during work development must cease until the juveniles have fledged.
- The protected species survey has identified the aquatic and terrestrial habitats in the school grounds, and the surrounding area, as being a potential habitat for Great Crested Newts. The School's pond is classed as being a 'moderate to good' habitat with the grassland, woodland and hedgerow areas also forming important parts of the Great Crested Newt habitat. The applicant is required to obtain a DEFRA licence to determine if Great Crested Newts are present on site, and a mitigation plan designed if they are.

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- The hedgerow that is to be removed may form an important habitat feature for the Great Crested Newt, and as such, its removal would have to be considered in the survey of potential impacts on this species and included in the licence application mitigation strategy.
- The hedgerow to be removed has been identified in the protected species survey as likely to support a variety of wildlife due to its age, quality and composition. Due to its species rich composition it is extremely unfortunate that this hedge would be affected by the development. It is noted that there are plans to incorporate a new hedge around the proposed play area but this is not seen as adequate mitigation. It is suggested that plans are made, in conjunction with expert advice, to translocate the existing hedgerow and create a management and monitoring plan to ensure the best possible chance of survival for the hedge. No work on the hedgerow can be carried out until the results of the Great Crested Newt survey are available, due to the potential importance of the hedgerow as a migration corridor for the species, and translocation of the hedgerow can only be carried out during the winter months. Therefore the timing of the Great Crested Newt mitigation work and the hedgerow works would need to be planned with consideration of each other
- As the areas to be developed or demolished are extremely close to the areas which have been identified as important wildlife habitats, disturbance on site should be limited exclusively to the actual development area and the existing hard standings. Disturbance must be kept to a minimum around the pond area and this should be included as a condition of planning permission and be communicated beyond any doubt to the construction contractors.
- There should also be plans for habitat and biodiversity enhancement. For example, bat bricks in the new extension, bird and bat boxes in the surrounding woodland and refugia for herpetofauna could be included.

Sport England: raises no objection to the proposed development as the proposal affects only land incapable of forming, or forming part of, a playing pitch, and does not result in the loss of, or inability to make use of any playing pitch, a reduction in the size of the playing area of any playing pitch or the loss of any other sporting/ancillary facility on this site.

The Environment Agency: No written comments have been received to date.

Public Right of Way Officer: No written comments have been received to date.

Local Member

13. The local County Member, Mr Richard King, was notified of the application on the 22 December 2005.

Publicity

14. The application was publicised by advertisement in a local newspaper, the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 14 nearby properties.

Representations

15. 10 letters of representation were received regarding the initial proposal. Concern was expressed over the proposed community use of the hall, and the proposed location for the playground extension. Following the removal of community use and the relocation of

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the playground extension the neighbouring properties were re-notified and given a further 21 days to comment.

9 further letters of representation have been received. The main comments/points of concern and objection can be summarised as follows:

- The proposal would impact greatly upon the setting of a Grade I and many Grade II Listed Buildings, including the main school building, which are all within a Conservation Area.
- The proposed hall is two and a half times the size of that existing. Its height and mass would make it imposing and visible from all sides, and this alone skews the development, making the whole proposal too large for its setting.
- The proposed hall is not in keeping with the existing buildings and is too ambitious for the site.
- The proposed materials are not in keeping with the surrounding Listed Buildings or the Conservation Area, and fibrous cement boards and UPVC should not even be considered for use.
- It is of vital importance that the Conservation Area is not permanently scarred by a modern new build which uses materials out of character to the area due to funding and maintenance implications.
- Viewed from the public footpaths, one of which runs immediately adjacent to the school, the large hall would produce the impression of an industrial building.
- Attention is drawn to the surrounding roads and infrastructure, and the parking and traffic control problems that currently exist at school start and finish times. Church Hill is blocked daily by parents and coaches.
- How long will Church Hill be subject to inconvenience and lorry movements whilst the building work is carried out?
- The proposal would impact upon flora and fauna, including protected species such as Great Crested newts.
- Concern is expressed over the loss of the hedgerow due to its importance as a habitat for wildlife.

In addition, 1 letter has been received from the Weald of Kent Protection Society which commented as follows:

- The Society applauds the Education Authorities plans for improving this rural Church School, where some of the facilities are antiquated and the presence of a mobile classroom is not helpful to modern standards of learning.
- Concern is expressed over parking and congestion on Church Hill, which is a minor road.
- The cladding to the new hall is described as 'self coloured fibrous cement' with aluminium dividers. Would not some other traditional material be more in keeping with the rest of the buildings?

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 protected species and their habitats, residential and local amenity, massing and design, visual

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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 DP1 and DP2 of the adopted Ashford Borough Local Plan, seek to conserve and enhance the environment and require development to be well designed and respect its setting. This is particularly relevant to this site which is within a Special Landscape Area, 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. In addition, Policy ENV4 requires the long term protection of Special Landscape Areas, and states that Local Planning Authorities will give priority to the enhancement of natural beauty of the landscape over other planning considerations, whilst having due respect to the economic and social wellbeing of the area. 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 Ashford Borough Local Plan, and are therefore a key determining factor in this application. In addition, Policy EN21 of the Ashford Borough Local Plan amplifies Policy ENV19 of the Kent Structure Plan stating that applications for development which affect a Listed Building, or its setting, will be considered in the light of a number of factors including the buildings scale, architectural features and materials, structure, historic character and setting. 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 rear of the main school building, although it would still be partially visible from Church Road. The two new classrooms would be mainly sited on the footprint of the existing prefabricated classroom which would be demolished, and the school hall upon the existing tarmac playground. The position of the new classrooms would provide good internal circulation, linking to the existing accommodation, but more importantly provides a low single storey link which would separate the Listed school building and the new hall. 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. The siting of the proposed extension minimises the impact on neighbouring properties, does not directly impact upon the frontage of the school, or the Listed school building and, as its footprint would be upon existing hardstandings, reduces any impacts on local flora and fauna. The siting of the extension therefore does not harm the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area or Local Landscape Area. However, the design, choice of materials, and massing of hall and classrooms is the subject of much concern and needs to be considered in the determination of this application.

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20. The proposed extension has been designed to visually fit with the existing buildings without being a simple pastiche. The demolition of the existing prefabricated classroom, and 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 choice of materials and the massing of the hall are the two design elements which have generated objection and concern and they will be discussed below.
21. The applicant suggests that the existing slate roof over the timber framed classroom would be extended over the two new classrooms with a shallow pitched standing seam zinc roof making up the roof line beyond the line of the pitched roof. The new slate roof would have rooflights providing natural daylight and ventilation to the rear of the new classrooms. The use of slate on this part of the extension is considered acceptable as, although tiles are used on the main school building, slate has been used on the timber framed classroom. The use of slate is therefore a natural continuation to the existing roof, whereas the use of tiles here would lead to a change in roofing material and would be disjointed, clearly distinguishing the new extension from the existing accommodation. The proposed hall roof would be tiled with plain tiles to match those of the existing Victorian building, and the ridge height of the new hall would be lower than that of the existing building in an effort to reduce its impact. Externally the walls would be generally of red facing brickwork to contrast with the existing Victorian building, and a new plinth and mid-height band course would be similar to the existing and would link the old and new together. The applicant has suggested that the hall gables, eaves, and single storey kitchen extension walls would be clad in self coloured fibrous cement boards that would be arranged in panels with divisions formed in aluminium sections. UPVC glazed screens and doors are also suggested for the new pupil entrance.
22. The applicant has requested that precise specifications of the materials be dealt with under planning condition. I consider that to be an acceptable approach as greater detail, including samples, of the proposed materials and colour finishes would need 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. The Parish Council has requested that the materials are dealt with as a reserved detail and that they are consulted on any subsequent submission. This would ensure that the local community has chance to comment on the materials at a later date. The applicant is aware that the use of UPVC would not be encouraged, and that the choice of materials and colour finishes is imperative in ensuring the extension would not harm the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area, or the setting of nearby Listed Buildings. However, 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. Therefore, the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and the setting of the Listed Buildings, would not be detrimentally or materially altered.
23. Lastly, the massing of the proposed extension needs to be considered. The massing and scale of the two classrooms is considered acceptable as these are single storey and follow the footprint of the prefabricated classroom which is to be demolished. The massing and height of the school hall is, however, a cause for concern. School halls, by their very nature and use, are large open spaces which need to cater for a wide range of academic uses including assemblies, performances and sports. Therefore a large space is required, which in this case cannot be provided within the existing school buildings. OfSTED reports, detailed in paragraph (4) of this report, refer to the existing accommodation as unsatisfactory. Kent County Council provides a Schedule for

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Primary School Accommodation, which mirrors the guidelines set out in Building Bulletin 99 – Briefing Framework for Primary School Projects. Both documents state that the size of a hall in a Primary School, for use by juniors, should be a minimum of 140 metres squared, with the Building Bulletin 99 adding that, when funding and space is available, the hall should be able to accommodate a badminton court of 18m x 10m x 6.1 in height.

24. The applicant advises that the proposed hall has internal dimensions of 16.10m x 8.8m and an eaves height of 3m, which increases into the roof space to provide extra height. These dimensions give the hall a square metre floor space of 141.68. This is only 1.68metres over the minimum requirements, and in addition, does not meet the additional requirement to accommodate a badminton sized court. The hall would merely be of a size where children could play badminton or other racket games at a recreational standard to gain experience before possibly taking the game up at a higher level. The hall also requires height to enable the safe use of wall bars and climbing equipment, which is required to meet the level of physical education set down in the National Curriculum.
25. From an aesthetic point of view, the applicant advises that the hall requires height to provide quality of space when it is used for large gatherings, such as assemblies and Christmas plays. Without the height the hall would be oppressive and it would be difficult to maintain a comfortable environment for those using the space. In addition, the design of the hall reflects that of the existing Victorian school building, complementing its design and height. A flat roof or lower pitched roof would not be sympathetic to the existing building. The applicant has demonstrated a case of need for the proposed classrooms and hall, and has adequately justified the requirement for the massing and height of the hall. Due to its siting at the rear of the site, and the fact that the ridge height would be lower than that of the existing school building, I consider that the impact of the hall has been mitigated as much as practically possible. The character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting of Listed Buildings may be effected by the massing and height 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.

Biodiversity

26. Concerns have been expressed over the impacts of this application upon protected species and the habitats that support them. Much of this concern stemmed from the original proposal, which saw an extension of the playground to the south of the school building, impacting upon trees and the school pond. It is now proposed to extend the playground to the rear of the school, into the top of the playing field. This has a far lesser impact and is a welcome amendment. For information, the removal and replanting of the hedge would be required regardless of the playground positioning to provide sufficient circulation space around the new hall. This application does not propose the removal of any trees.
27. The loss of the hedge, although regrettable, would be mitigated by the requirements of the Biodiversity Officer. It is requested that the hedge be relocated, rather than replanted, and that a management and monitoring plan be submitted to ensure the best possible chances of survival of the hedge. The hedgerow may be an important migration corridor for Great Crested Newts and, therefore, any work on the hedgerow would not be allowed until further surveys to ascertain whether Great Crested Newts are present at the site were completed. The applicant has submitted a protected species

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survey which identified the site as being a 'moderate to good' habitat for Great Crested Newts, and therefore it would be conditioned that a DEFRA licence is obtained to determine if Great Crested Newts are present on site, and a mitigation plan designed if they are.

28. In addition, should Members be minded to permit, conditions would be placed on any subsequent decision requiring that the recommendations of the protected species survey are implemented and followed, that any works that affect possible bird nesting sites are not carried out during the breeding season unless supervised by an experienced ecologist, that disturbance on site is limited to the development area and existing hard standings, and that biodiversity enhancement methods such as bird and bat boxes are provided. Kent Structure Plan Policy ENV2 requires Kent's landscape and wildlife habitats to be conserved and enhanced, which is amplified by Ashford Borough Local Plan Policy EN31, which requires measures to be taken to significantly limit the impact of a development on semi-natural habitats. I consider that the conditions outlined above would successfully and effectively mitigate the adverse impacts of this proposal upon protected species and their habitats, and would provide compensating environmental benefits. This is in accordance with the principles of Local Plan Policies.

Highways

29. Traffic generation and impact upon the local highway network are further concerns expressed by local residents. However, this application would not lead to an increase in staff numbers and the school roll, which is currently 101, would increase only to a maximum of 105. 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. If the application was permitted details of a parking area for site personnel would be required to ensure that Church Hill is not used as a car park. In addition, 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.

Residential and local amenity

30. When this application was originally submitted it included the possible use of the proposed school hall out-of-school hours for small-scale community uses. That met with objection and was removed from the revised and current scheme. The applicant states that should a future need for community use arise then consent would be sought through the planning process. The impact of the proposed development upon residential amenity has therefore been reduced. The extension would not move any elements of the school building closer to neighbouring residential properties, and the loss of residential amenity has not been a ground for objection following the removal of possible community use from the application. In addition, a hedgerow is proposed to be planted on the southern boundary of the school site to further mitigate any impacts of the development. 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.

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Conclusion

30. In summary, I consider that there are special circumstances to justify the proposed development within a Conservation Area and a Special Landscape Area. 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 and Special Landscape 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 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,
- a scheme of landscaping, its implementation and maintenance,
- tree protection and a methodology for working in close proximity to trees,
- location of contractors parking facilities,
- hours of working during construction,
- mitigation relating to Great Crested Newts,
- recommendations of the protected species survey to be followed,
- management and monitoring of the hedge relocation,
- provision of biodiversity enhancement methods,
- protection of nesting birds,

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