

SECTION D
DEVELOPMENT TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Background Documents - the deposited documents, views and representations received as referred to in the reports and included in the development proposal dossier for each case and also as might be additionally indicated.

Item D1

New Modular Classroom Building, Highview School, Moat Farm Road, Folkestone – SH/11/738

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 8 November 2011

Application by Kent County Council (Property and Infrastructure Support) for provision of a new modular classroom, new fire access road and new car park, Highview School, Moat Farm Road, Folkestone Kent, CT19 5DJ – SH/11/738

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr. R. Pascoe

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

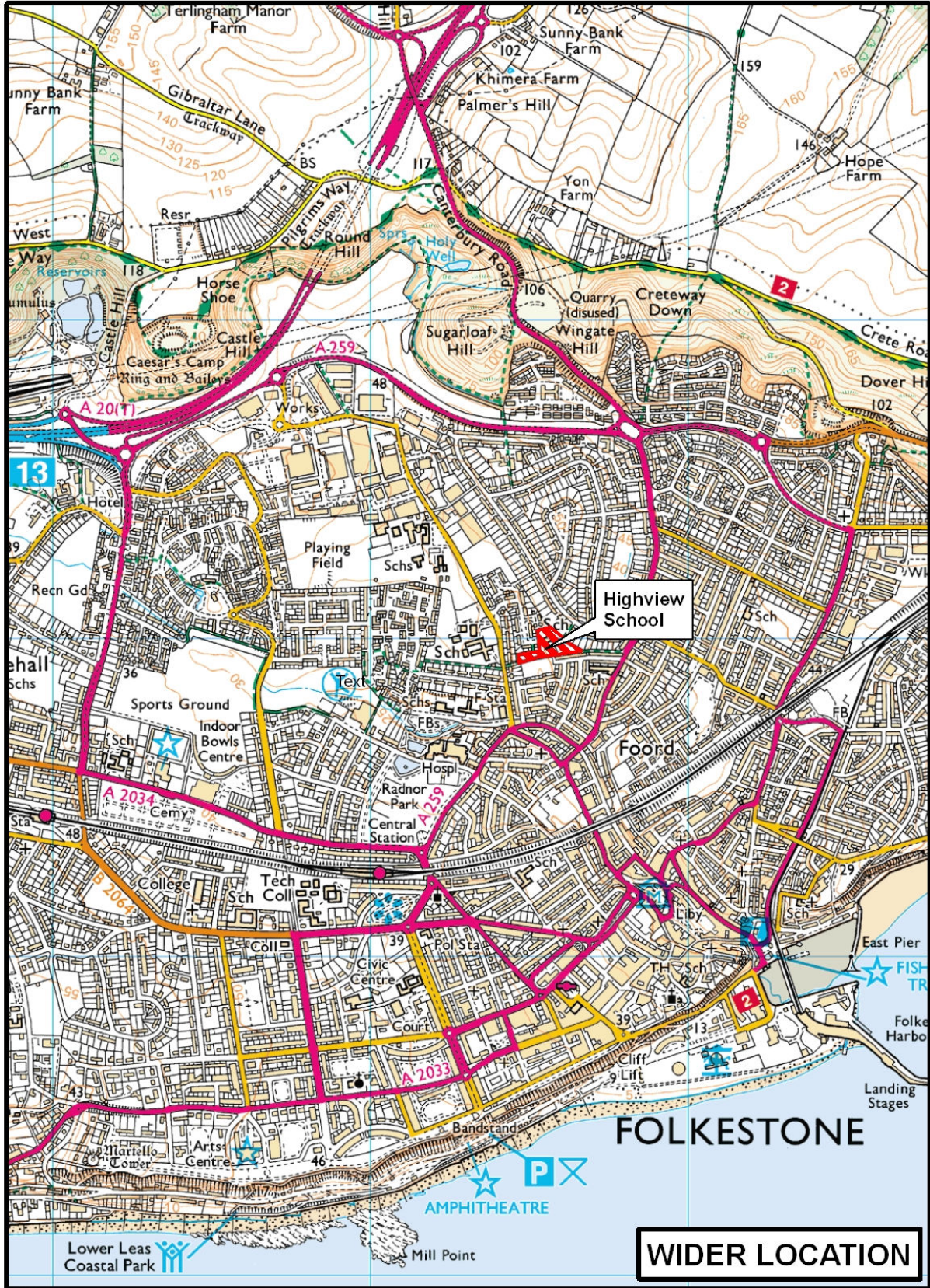
1. Highview School Folkestone is located in a predominantly residential area at the end of Moat Farm Road, a cul-de-sac linked to Park Farm Road to the west via Downside. Plans showing the wider and more immediate location are attached. Public rights of way run along the southern boundary and part way along the eastern, northern and western boundaries as shown on the location plan. In addition to boundary fencing most of the school site is also enclosed by hedgerows. On the south side of the school and public right of way there is a playing field (belonging to the nearby Mundella Primary School) but the school is otherwise surrounded by residential properties. Part of the school site and the playing field to the south are identified in the Shepway Local Plan as School Playing Fields subject to Policy LR12 which provides for their protection.

Background

2. Highview School is a special school catering for pupils from age 4 to 18 and has been federated with Foxwood School, Hythe since 2008. The applicant advises that it is intended to rebuild the Foxwood and Highview Federation on a new site and that both of the current sites will not be required in the near future. The present position is that feasibility work for a new building is being carried out and Foxwood and Highview are included in a programme in the County Council's budget which is intended to be delivered by the end of the 2013/2014 financial year.
3. Over recent years a number of temporary planning permissions have been granted for mobile/modular accommodation to cater for an increase in the school roll. There are currently seven such buildings on the site, the two most recent of which provide double classroom accommodation. Several of these buildings are located in a row linked by a walkway, in the narrow part of the site and formerly playing field land. This area is enclosed on three sides by a mature hedgerow, which the applicant states is on average 1.65 metres high, with 2.45 metre high green palisade fencing on the inside of the boundary.

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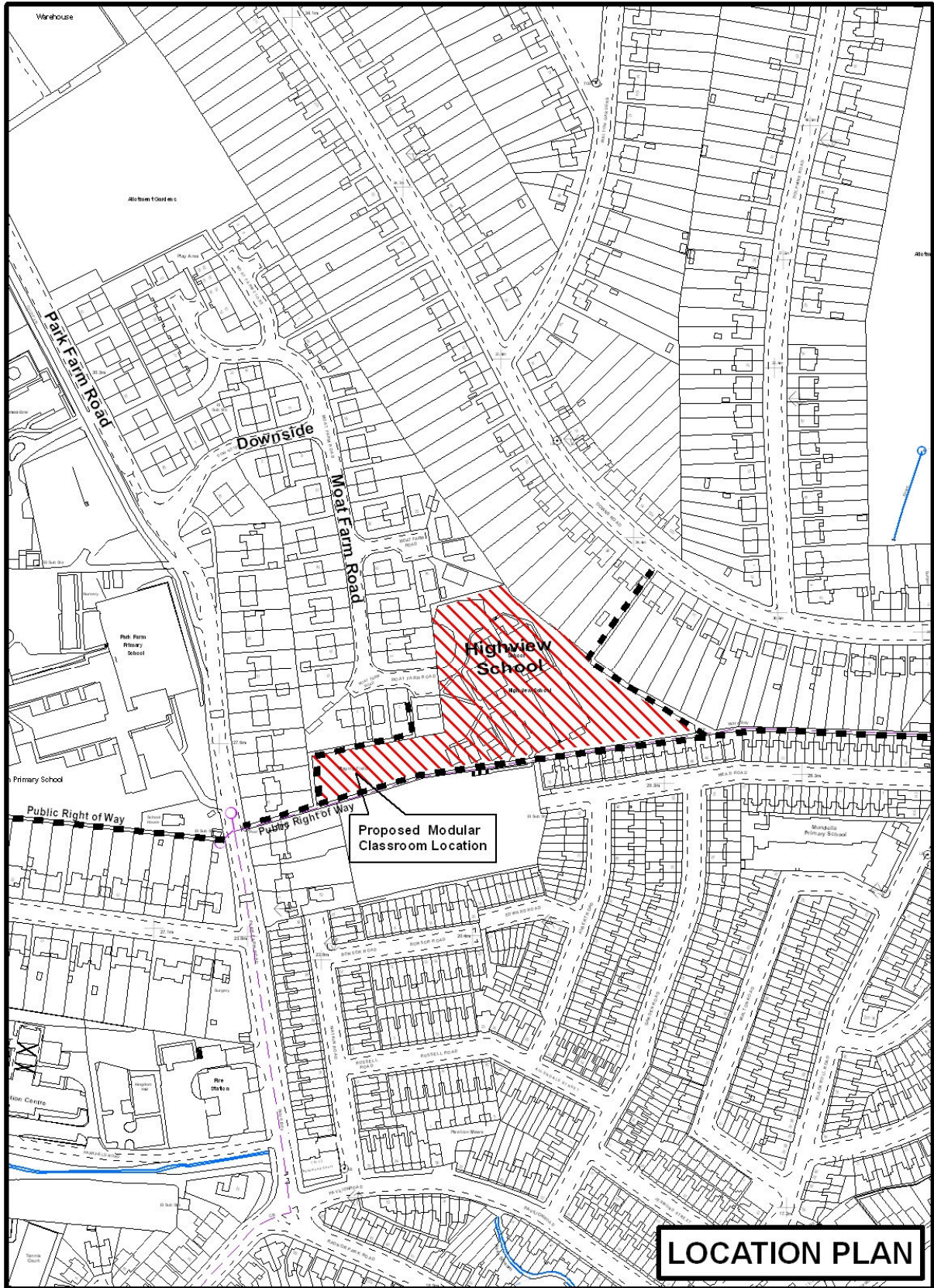
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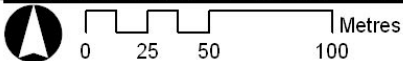
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LOCATION PLAN



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Proposal

4. The current application proposes a modular building that would provide one further classroom (with cloakroom, boiler room and storage) to the west side of the row of existing mobile/modular buildings. This is needed to cater for 13 additional pupils in the sixth form, which would increase the school roll to 140 students, and to improve the facilities for existing pupils. The applicant states that this would prevent local pupils having to travel to schools out of the local area. It is also stated that three additional members of staff would be employed.
5. The proposal also includes 8 additional car parking spaces and a fire access road to the row of mobile/modular buildings, both of which would be constructed of a grass reinforcing system. Originally only 5 car parking spaces were included in the application, these having been permitted under the previous proposal for classroom accommodation but subsequently not provided. However, the number of spaces was increased to cater for the three additional members of staff and to reduce the occurrence of on-street parking following discussions with the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation). New fencing and gates are shown to separate the car parking from the area where the mobile/modular buildings are but no details have been provided. A reduced copy of the submitted drawing is attached showing the site location, relevant part of the site layout, floor plan, elevations and section.
6. The proposed building is shown to be 9.6 by 10 metres with an overall height of 3.05 metres from ground level. The finished floor level of the building is shown to be at ground level to allow for level access. The walls of the proposed building would be clad in light grey plastisol steel sheeting with white UPVC windows and blue aluminium doors. The flat roof would be covered with green/grey bituminous felt.

Planning Policy

7. The national planning policy guidance that is most relevant to this application includes:

Planning Policy Statement 1 - Delivering Sustainable Development.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 - Transport.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 - Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation

Policy Statement – Planning for Schools Development August 2011. Sets out that there should be a presumption in favour of state funded schools, as expressed in the (Draft) National Planning Policy Framework.

Draft National Planning Policy Framework July 2011. *This draft document is a material planning consideration, although the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the decision maker.*

8. **The South East Plan:**

Policy CC1 Seeks to achieve and maintain sustainable development in the region.

Policy CC4 Expects that all new development will adopt and incorporate sustainable construction standards and techniques.

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- Policy CC6 Seeks sustainable and distinctive communities that respect the character of settlements and landscapes, and achieve a high quality built environment.
- Policy S3 States that local planning authorities, taking into account demographic projections, should work with partners to ensure adequate provision of school facilities.

Important note regarding the South East Plan:

Members will already be aware of the relevant South East Plan policy considerations in relation to the proposed development, in that The Plan was revoked and later reinstated pending the enactment of the Localism Bill. Members will also be aware that they have to have regard to the policies in the SEP and the Government's intention to abolish the Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) as material considerations. However the weight to be accorded is a matter for the decision makers.

9. Shepway District Local Plan Review adopted March 2006:

- Policy SD1** All development proposals should take account of the broad aim of sustainable development - ensuring that development contributes towards ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come.
- Policy BE1** A high standard of layout, design and choice of materials will be expected for all new development. Materials should be sympathetic to those predominating locally in type, colour and texture. Development should accord with existing development in the locality, where the site and surrounding development are physically and visually interrelated in respect of building form, mass, height, and elevational details.
- Policy SC2** The District Planning Authority will grant planning permission for new or improved social and community facilities where the proposal meets set criteria relating to compatibility with surrounding land uses, accessibility by a range of transport alternatives to the car, access for disabled people and acceptability in highway, infrastructure and environmental terms.
- Policy LR12** Proposals resulting in the loss of school playing fields or grass play and amenity areas at school sites, as shown on the Proposals Map, will only be permitted where development would not cause an unacceptable loss in local environmental quality and where it also accords with both the following criteria:
- a) In the case of school playing fields, sufficient alternative open space provision exists or new sport and recreational facilities will be provided of at least equivalent community benefit having regard to any deficiencies in the locality;
 - b) The land required is for an alternative educational purpose which cannot reasonably be met in another way.
- Policy TR12** Proposals for new development will only be permitted if provision is made for off street parking in accordance with the current maximum vehicle parking standards.

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Policy TR13 Applications for new or expanded school facilities should be accompanied by a School Travel Plan.

Consultations

10. **Shepway District Council** raises no objection but wishes to make the following comment:

“In view of the indication previously to replace the existing mobile units with permanent buildings, it is recommended that a temporary permission be granted for this additional mobile unit to enable an assessment to be undertaken at the expiry of the relevant period to further consider the impact of the units within the surrounding built form, subject to a suitable external finish colour being conditioned to best match the existing units.”

Folkestone Town Council - no comments received.

Sport England notes that the linear shaped area of grass where the building is proposed to be located is already occupied by other modular buildings and is of the view that it is incapable of forming, or forming part of, a playing pitch. They also note that it is a temporary solution until the school is relocated to a new site. They conclude that as no pitches would be affected by the proposal that it satisfies its Exception Policy 3 and therefore does not wish to raise objection.

KCC Highways and Transportation raises no objections to the proposal subject to conditions to secure provision and retention of the additional car parking spaces and requiring the school travel plan to be revised to take account of the latest proposals.

KCC Public Rights of Way Officer - no comments received.

Local Member

11. The local County Member, Mr. R. Pascoe, was notified of the application on the 22 July 2011.

Publicity

12. The application was publicised by an advertisement in a local newspaper (as the site adjoins public rights of way), the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 19 neighbouring residential properties. Further neighbour notification letters were also sent advising of the amendment to include additional car parking spaces.

Representations

13. Representations to the application have been received from residents of 2 nearby properties. The concerns and objections raised to the proposal include the following:
- Objects to the new modular classroom directly behind his property.
 - The proposal would most likely mean more traffic which is likely to be unacceptable unless something is done about the parking.
 - What was once a quiet cul-de-sac has become with the increasing number of pupils an extremely busy and often dangerous road for residents, particularly at drop off/ collection times during school term time.

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- It is often the case that traffic can only pass in one direction owing to the large volume of parked cars in the area, and residents are unable to use their driveways, and it is extremely worrying that should the need arise, emergency vehicles would be unable to access all the premises in the cul-de-sac. Bearing in mind that this is an elderly neighbourhood it is not uncommon for ambulances, for example, to have the need for access to residents in this area. He understands that the local fire service has already notified the Highways Agency [highway authority] of similar concerns.
- There has already been damage to local pavements due to the volume of traffic trying to manoeuvre in such a confined space.
- The proposed additional modular classroom would exacerbate the situation further.
- The residents have been subject to a great increase in the number of coaches and taxis in the last two years. The resident states that her particular problem is coaches using the footpath [footway] as a road causing damage to it and her garden wall. She therefore considers that only way to address the problem is to restrict parking on both sides of the road in the vicinity of her property (which is close to the school entrance) during school hours.
- There is particular problem for several elderly people in poor health as there are times when people cannot get down the road.
- The resident understands that it is illegal to drive on the pavement.

DiscussionIntroduction

14. This proposal has arisen as the result of a small increase in the school roll and need for additional accommodation. Whilst the education use of the site is well established there are issues relating to the siting and design of the mobile classroom, the increase in the number of pupils and staff, and associated additional traffic. These latter issues are also reflected in the representations that have been received, summarised in paragraph (13). The proposal needs to be considered in the context of the relevant Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. In brief, the relevant planning policies, as well as supporting provision of education facilities, protect playing field land, promote sustainable development, seek a high standard of design, have regard to local context, the amenity of nearby properties and the surrounding area, and require adequate access and parking.

Siting and design

15. The proposed building would be sited at the western end of the narrow western part of the site and at the end of the row of existing mobile/modular buildings. The site is part of the school playing field land and is specifically protected by Local Plan policy LR12 designation, as well as more generally by Planning Policy Guidance Note17 relating to Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, and is also subject to a requirement to consult Sport England. In terms of the Local Plan policy, arguably the application site is needed for an alternative educational purpose that cannot be met in another way, and the school has sufficient alternative open space and use of the playing field to the south of the school site when needed. Also, I do not consider that the proposal would cause an unacceptable loss in local environmental quality. Sport England acknowledges that the earlier siting of other mobiles means that the area remaining cannot be used for formal recreation and is incapable of forming, or forming part of, a playing pitch. Furthermore, it notes that the proposed modular building is intended only to be a temporary solution pending the school relocating to a new site, as referred to in

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paragraph (2) above. No objection is therefore raised to loss of playing field land or playing pitches.

16. In terms of sustainable design and construction, I understand that the proposed modular building would be prefabricated to current standards incorporating all the necessary elements to meet Building Regulation requirements, including those for energy efficiency. However given the type of building, it would be rather utilitarian in appearance and therefore it could be argued that the building does not meet all the planning policy objectives for a high standard of design. Nevertheless, as it is intended to be temporary I do not consider an objection on these grounds would be justified in this particular case. It is proposed that the cladding be finished in light grey to match the adjoining building and this could be covered by condition if permission is granted. Although the line of existing modular/mobile buildings would be extended, it is a relatively small building in terms of height and mass and would not be out of scale with surrounding development. Furthermore, as with the existing buildings, even though the proposed building would be partly visible from the surrounding area, there is some sense of enclosure of the application site provided by the boundary hedgerow and a degree of separation from nearby properties afforded by the intervening public rights of way to the north and west.
17. The nearest properties are a pair of semi-detached bungalows immediately to the north, the facades of which are about 21 metres from the proposed building, with the boundaries of the gardens being about 12 metres away. The southern boundaries of these two gardens are enclosed by a timber panelled fence. This would further help with screening the proposed building from these two properties, particularly bearing in mind the time of the year when the hedgerow around the school site has shed its leaves. I do not therefore consider that the siting and design would result in an unacceptable impact on visual amenity. In addition, given the boundary treatment and separation distance I do not consider that the siting of the building would lead to loss of privacy from overlooking.
18. In terms of any noise disturbance as a result of the siting of the proposed building, arguably it could bring an increased concentration of activity closer to further residential properties. However, the applicant advises that the classroom would mainly be used for small groups, and in any case, the general area of this part of the school site is already in use and there are pupils going to and from the existing modular/mobile buildings. I am also mindful of the relatively short duration of the school day, the break in activities at the site during weekends and school holidays, and of the intended temporary nature of the development and use proposed. On this basis I do not consider that residential amenity would be adversely affected.
19. The proposal also involves provision of a fire access road (to address a Building Control requirement) with an area of additional car parking accessed from the first part of it. Both of these would be constructed in reinforced grass system which would soften their visual appearance compared to, for example, a tar paved surface. The car parking area is to be fenced off on the south side and although no details have been provided, if planning permission is granted, this could be covered by an appropriate condition to ensure that the specification is acceptable.
20. The fire access road would be close to the eastern boundary of the adjoining bungalow. Its main use at this point except for emergency use would be to access the 8 additional car parking spaces. There would therefore be some limited visual impact from parked cars and noise experienced by the adjoining property from cars manoeuvring in and out

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of the spaces. There is a reasonable boundary hedge which would provide some screening of the parked cars from this property. In terms of any noise impact from cars manoeuvring this would mainly be experienced for a short time at the beginning and end of the school day and I therefore do not consider an objection on grounds of unacceptable noise impact would be justified. Although not implemented, 5 additional car parking spaces have already been granted permission in a similar position as part of an earlier application.

Transport, access and parking issues

21. Representations have been received from residents of two properties which cite issues about the current situation with regard to transport, access and parking in the locality as a result of the school, and the possibility of the proposal making matters worse, as set out in paragraph (13) above. In the light of this and following discussions with the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation), the application has been amended to include 3 additional spaces providing a total of 8 additional spaces on site which should help reduce the occurrence of parking on the highway just outside the entrance to the site during the school day, as well as catering for the 3 additional members of staff. In respect of the 13 additional pupils the applicant has advised that they would travel to/from school using existing taxis and minibuses (etc.) that are already bringing in the existing students. They state therefore that no additional vehicle transport would be required, only the number of the students in the existing transport would increase.
22. Even though additional parking is now being provided to cater for staff, and that the applicant has indicated that there would be no increase in traffic from the additional pupils, I have discussed with the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) whether or not any thing further can be done to ease the current problems outside the site at school drop off/pick up times. Residential properties already have white lining across driveways to indicate that drivers should not obstruct them, and he considers that further parking restrictions would not necessarily help and would only shift the problem further away from the site access. He does however consider that the School should look at how it can improve the drop off/pick up management on the site so that the queuing (which he has observed) outside of the site does not occur. Subject to conditions to secure provision and retention of the additional car parking spaces and requiring the school travel plan to be revised to take account of the latest proposals (including a review of the management of school transport at pick up and drop off times), the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) raises no objections to the proposal. I do not therefore consider that there is any basis on which to raise a highway objection to the provision of the additional classroom.

Conclusion

23. The applicant's reasons for the installation of the modular classroom building will be noted, together with the current intentions to relocate this school to another site. Whilst the proposal does not fully accord with Development Plan Policies relating to design, given the temporary nature of the building, and the context of the school site, I do not consider that an objection would be warranted. I am of the opinion that the proposed development would otherwise be in accordance with the general aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies and do not consider the proposal would have any significant detrimental impact on local/residential amenity or as a result of transport to and from the school. I therefore recommend that planning permission be granted for

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a temporary period of five years from the date of the permission subject to the further conditions discussed above.

Recommendation

24. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to a condition requiring the mobile classroom to be removed from the site no later than five years from the date of the permission, and to conditions requiring the building to be finished in light grey to match the adjoining building, details of the fencing to be submitted for approval, provision and retention of the 8 additional car parking spaces and a revised school travel plan to be submitted for approval.

Case officer - Paul Hopkins	01622 221051
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Background documents - See section heading
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