

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 proposals dossier for each case; and other documents as might be additionally indicated.

Item D1

Construction of a single storey pre-school building, St Richard's Catholic Primary School, Dover – DO/11/956

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 17 January 2012

DO/11/956 - Application by Federation of Dover Catholic Schools for the construction of a single storey pre-school building at St. Richard's Catholic Primary School, Castle Avenue, Dover

Recommendation: Planning permission be granted subject to conditions

Local Member(s): Mr N.Collor

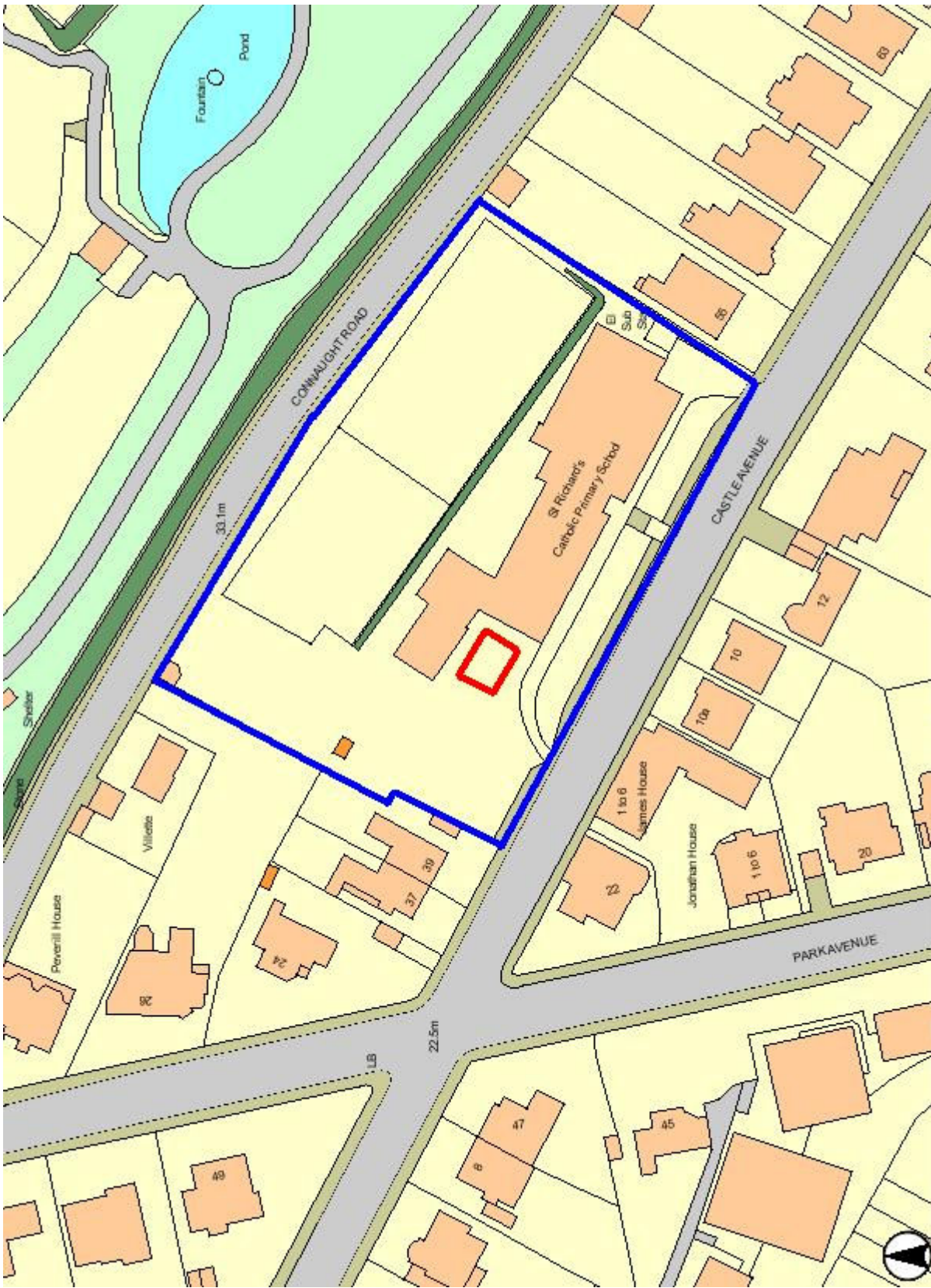
Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. St. Richards Catholic Primary School consists of a 1960's style designed two storey, shallow-pitched roof large building, with a couple of single storey extensions of a similar style and appearance. It is located along Castle Avenue, within a predominantly residential area of Dover. The area is characterised by its position on the Southern slope of the main hill above Dover, and this dictates the design and ordering of the built environment and road system.
2. Castle Avenue is a quiet residential road which is distinguished by its feature of having large trees down both sides of the road, located on the road itself. The houses, although of a mixture of styles and materials, are of a detached 'townhouse' appearance and are large (between two and three storeys) making the most of the hillside location. Castle Avenue runs along the side of the hill, and is mainly level, but has sharp turns onto the steep downhill roads of Park Avenue to the North Western end, and Godwyne Road to the South East.
3. St. Richards School occupies a rectangular plot of land, with the main school buildings located along Castle Avenue, whilst its recreational space is behind the main buildings abutting Connaught Avenue – a main route into the residential areas of Dover. The school site is enclosed by houses to the East and West. The top half of the school site is landscaped to a flat sports field, and a tarmac recreation area. An outdoor activity area links this open space around the west of the buildings to Castle Avenue, and has a number of mature trees. The most recent planning permission is for a wooden shed for the outdoor play area.

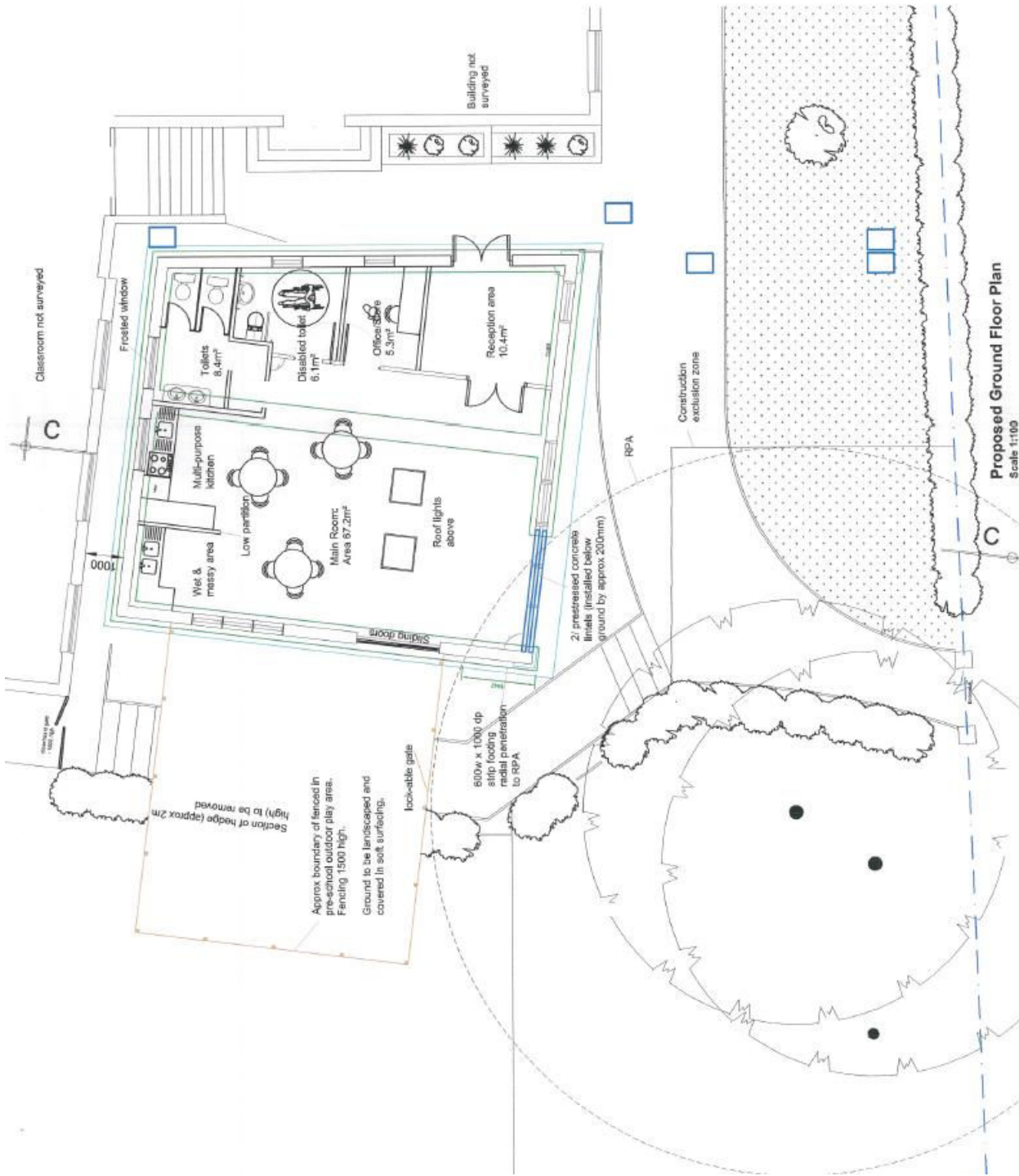
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Site Location Plan

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Revision
Drawing Status
Planning

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Client
St Richards Catholic Primary School, Dover

Project Title
Proposed Pre-School Building, St Richard's Catholic Primary School

Drawing Title
Proposed Ground Plan

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Proposal and Background

4. This application is for the erection of a new single storey pre-school building of approximately 112sqm. The building would be constructed on the open parcel of land adjacent to the western elevation of the main building, and next to Castle Avenue. The development would be a standalone building constructed of a timber frame, using brick face finished walls on three elevations. The front elevation, visible from Castle Avenue, is proposed to incorporate design features including floor to ceiling glazing and cedar cladding, with sage green render finishing. The proposal incorporates a small outdoor area, finished in soft-surfacing and with low level fencing.
5. The pre-school building has been proposed in order to compliment the Federation of Dover Catholic Schools existing arrangements. Currently the federation consists of the current primary school and St. Edmunds Catholic Secondary School, therefore providing schooling for children from the age of 4 through to 19. The current proposal has been put forward to enable the federation to expand the age range they currently cater for to the ages of 2 through to 19. The aim is to create a holistic approach to education by having institutions for all ages of education under the control of the Federation of Dover Catholic Schools.
6. The applicant has stated that the School predicts to have a pre-school role of 16 pupils in order to maintain affordable staff/pupil ratios. However, due to best practice guidelines which guide the design of building such as is proposed, the classroom space would be able to accommodate up to a maximum of 26 children. The applicants have stated the extra 16 pupils would equate to a 9% increase in the total number of children attending the site.

Planning Policy

7. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:
 - (i) The adopted (2009) **South East Plan**

Regional policy is contained within the South East Plan 2009.

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. Members will note that the Localism Bill has now been enacted; however the SEP remains in effect until such time as the Government complete the formal process of revoking the Plan.

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

Policy CC4 Expects that all 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 S6** States that local planning authorities, taking into account demographic projections, should work with partners to ensure adequate provision of pre-school, school, and community learning facilities.
- Policy BE1** In managing an Urban Renaissance, Local Authorities will promote and support design solutions relevant to context and which build upon local character and distinctiveness and sense of place.
- (ii) The adopted **Dover District Core Strategy 2010 & Saved Local Plan Policies 2002**

Consultations

8. **Dover District Council:** No objections

Dover Town Council: No objections

KCC Highways and Transportation: No objections provided that:

- There is a maximum number of 16 children in attendance at any one time
- Opening hours are staggered
- Provision and maintenance of a Travel Plan in accordance with details previously submitted to and agreed by the Planning Authority.

Local Member

9. The local County Member for Dover Town, Mr N. Collor, was notified of the application on the 28 October 2011.

Publicity

10. The application was advertised by the posting of a site notice and the notification of 47 neighbours.

Representations

11. There have been 5 letters from nearby residents, and the main points raised can be summarised as follows:

- The trees along Castle Avenue need to be protected and should not be harmed by the development.
- Concern over the impact of the development on parking and traffic along Castle Avenue, by parents dropping off and staff. Currently parents park illegally and dangerously. These problems will be increased due to the increase of activity caused by the development. Too many teachers park on the road which puts pressure on parking as the school has no off-street parking and they should provide this instead of building the pre-school. The problems are under control when there

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is a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) present, but despite ticketing, the problem returns when PCSOs are not around. CCTV should be used.

- Children have been looking into a neighbouring garden, therefore the hedge and shrubs need to be maintained.

Discussion

12. In considering this proposal regard must be had to Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (7) above. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) 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 Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations including those arising from consultation and publicity.
13. This application has been brought for determination by Members of the Planning Applications Committee following the receipt of objections received from neighbouring residents. The main issue that is raised relates to highways and traffic issues. The comments relating to the trees and maintaining the hedgerows were agreed by neighbours to be able to be dealt with adequately by the imposition of conditions.

Design

14. The proposed new building has been designed in order to provide an economical solution to the needs of the pre-school. Whilst the School emphasised the need to remain within a budget, following pre-application discussion with officers at Kent County Council Planning Application Group, the agents have submitted plans for an interesting design to the principal elevation, incorporating cedar cladding, green render and floor to ceiling glass to maximise natural light. The building has been designed to fit in to an area of grass adjacent to the main school building, but not protruding forward of the front elevation. The orientation and size of the building has been dictated by the steep slope of the land in this area. The section drawings provided demonstrate that the building would be 'cut-in' to the hillside, which would reduce the visual bulk of the building and prevent any reduction in natural light available to the rear single storey wing of the school.
15. The new building does not replicate any design detailing from the original school building and is designed to be 'read' as a separate design entity. In my opinion the proposed building would introduce an interesting modern architectural feature to a rather bland 1960's style main school building. It would also screen a rear flat-roofed single storey extension from view along Castle Avenue. In my opinion the design is appropriate within this location and offers to improve the aesthetic value of the school as a whole. I note that there were no objections to the design of the proposed new building.

Trees

16. A number of the representations mention the need to retain and protect the trees along Castle Avenue. This road in Dover is characterised by its unique tree-lined carriageway, and a number of mature trees within private properties adjacent to the road. The applicants were advised during pre-application discussions that the group of sycamore trees to the frontage of the development site are important to the character of the school and to the street scene of Castle Avenue therefore they should be retained and

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protected from damage during construction. The agent submitted a Tree Survey and plans which demonstrate that the building would not encroach upon the Root Protection Zone (RPZ) of the nearest tree. The survey concluded that tree protection fencing must be installed prior to the commencement of works on site. The details of this fencing were included within the application, therefore I am satisfied that the trees can be protected by the imposition of a condition requiring that tree protection fencing be installed, in accordance with the relevant drawing submitted, prior to works commencing on site.

Amenity Concerns

17. A near neighbour to the site expressed concerns relating to children looking into their garden and rear dining room window through the boundary hedgerow. They were satisfied that the proposed development would not encroach upon this further, but request that if play equipment is installed in the outdoor area for the pre-school, that this is of a non-noisy design – for example, they mention that the metal slide is particularly noisy. The applicants are happy to accept a requirement to maintain the boundary hedge and planting to a reasonable height and depth, as well as refraining from installing noisy equipment. The neighbour is satisfied that these issues can be controlled by condition, therefore, I do not feel that these are issues affecting the recommendation as set out in paragraph 24.

Traffic and Parking

18. The main issue raised by neighbours, and the main point of objection, relates to highways matters. Neighbours comment that parents persistently park illegally at peak times, which forces traffic to back up onto the steep 'artery' road of Park Avenue, causing tailbacks and making crossing dangerous. Residents state that there is no problem when enforcement officers are present and ticketing cars, however on other days the problem returns. Residents also state that parking on Castle Avenue has been strained due to an increase in the number of houses in multiple occupation on the road, and the increase in the number of teachers as the school does not have any on site parking. Neighbours are concerned that the construction of the pre-school would increase activity on the school site and therefore increase the level of the current problems. One comment suggested that the School should provide off-street parking for teachers, and that CCTV should be installed to monitor and enforce illegal parking.
19. The Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) initially raised concerns regarding the impact of the proposals in relation to additional parking demand and its effect on the highway.
20. The supporting statement with the application asserts that due to operational and staffing constraints the number of pupils that would be accepted at the pre-school would be limited to 16, and the impact can be reduced by staggering opening times with the main School. It is also stated that this low number would have a minimal impact upon the existing highway network, especially as they expect many of the potential attendees to be siblings of children who currently attend the main primary school, therefore there should be minimal additional cars visiting the site. The Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) accepts this view, however is concerned that any additional demand could potentially exacerbate the existing level of illegal parking and the associated impact on the local highway network. He considers that in order to make the development acceptable the Pre-School should be limited to a maximum of 16 pupils attending any one session; the opening hours be staggered; and that a Travel

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Plan should be implemented in accordance with details previously submitted to and agreed by the County Planning Authority.

21. Following discussions between the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) and the applicant, it became clear that the level of staggering suggested by the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) would not be feasible. Negotiations have been taking place between them as to the content of a Travel Plan which would contain provisions for reducing the number of staff parking on Castle Avenue, and therefore mitigate the impacts of the additional cars produced by the development. Therefore, I am of the opinion that the highways impacts can be reduced to an acceptable level with the imposition of conditions limiting the number of pupils to 16; staggering the opening times of the pre-school and primary (to times to be agreed in consultation with the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) before development is commenced); and the development not to commence until an updated Travel Plan has been submitted and approved. The proposed development can not unfortunately serve to improve the current situation, and the School is not able to directly influence the behaviour of private individuals who choose to park illegally on a public road, therefore I agree with the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) that a reasonable approach to the current situation is to encourage enforcement by the PCSOs, and attempt to reduce pressure on the parking by adopting a suitable Travel Plan.
22. Several comments were received suggesting that the School provide off-street parking within the site, and that this is incorporated instead of building the new pre-school. Due to the topography of the site, and the limited space available, this would not be a feasible solution. I agree with the conclusion of the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) that providing off-street parking would not improve the situation, as on-street spaces would have to be lost in order to create the access to the school site, and the number of spaces that could be created within the site would not give a net gain in spaces.

Conclusion

23. The proposed development would serve to integrate educational facilities for the Federation of Dover Catholic Schools, and in my opinion is of a suitable design. On balance, I am of the opinion that through the imposition of conditions and the adoption of a Travel Plan as discussed above then the development would not have an unacceptable impact on the local highway network which would warrant refusal of the application. The existing highway situation is unfortunate, but in my view can be best controlled by enforcement by the appropriate bodies. The requirement for the Travel Plan to be adopted before development commences could go some way to improving the situation. Due to the importance of the highways issues, and the opinions of the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation), I would stress that the Travel Plan must be submitted and approved before the building works commence.

Recommendation

24. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED to the proposal as now amended, subject to conditions:
 - The standard time condition for implementation;
 - The development to be completed in accordance with the approved plans;

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- Pupil numbers limited to 16 attending any one session;
- Existing boundary hedging be maintained;
- Tree protection measures, as shown on relevant plan, implemented before construction starts;
Details required prior to commencement
- Opening times to be staggered to set times to be agreed in consultation with the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation);
- A Travel Plan be submitted to and approved by the County Planning Authority;

Case officer – Jeff Dummett

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Background documents - See section heading
