

**New Modular Two Classroom Building, Highview School,  
Moat Farm Road, Folkestone – SH/12/109  
(KCC/SH/0543/2011)**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 10 April 2012

Application by Kent County Council (Property and Infrastructure Support) for provision of a new two modular classroom building, new fire access road and additional car park and relocation of poly tunnel (this is an alternative to the single modular classroom permitted under SH/11/738), Highview School, Moat Farm Road, Folkestone Kent, CT19 5DJ – SH/12/109 (KCC/SH/0543/2011).

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

**Local Member:** Mr. R. Pascoe

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Site**

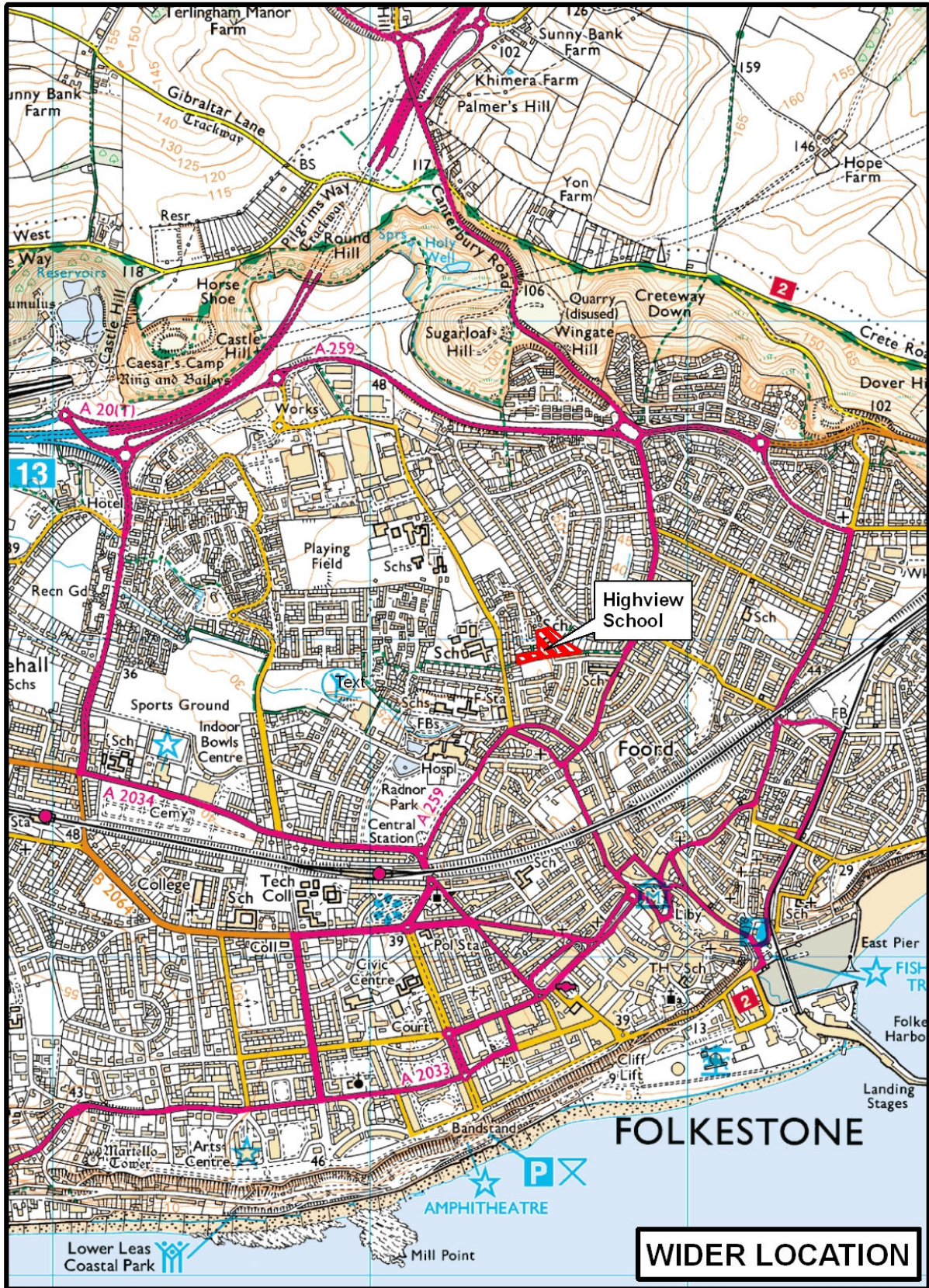
1. Highview School Folkestone is located in a predominantly residential area at the end of Moat Farm Road, a cul-de-sac linked to Park Farm Road to the west via Downside. Plans showing the wider and more immediate location are attached. Public Rights of Way run along the southern boundary and part way 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. The latest of these proposals was considered by Members at the November 2011 committee meeting. This was for a single modular building, however this current planning application proposes to be an alternative to that approved application, as explained in paragraph 4 below. There are currently seven temporary 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.

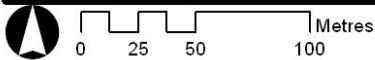
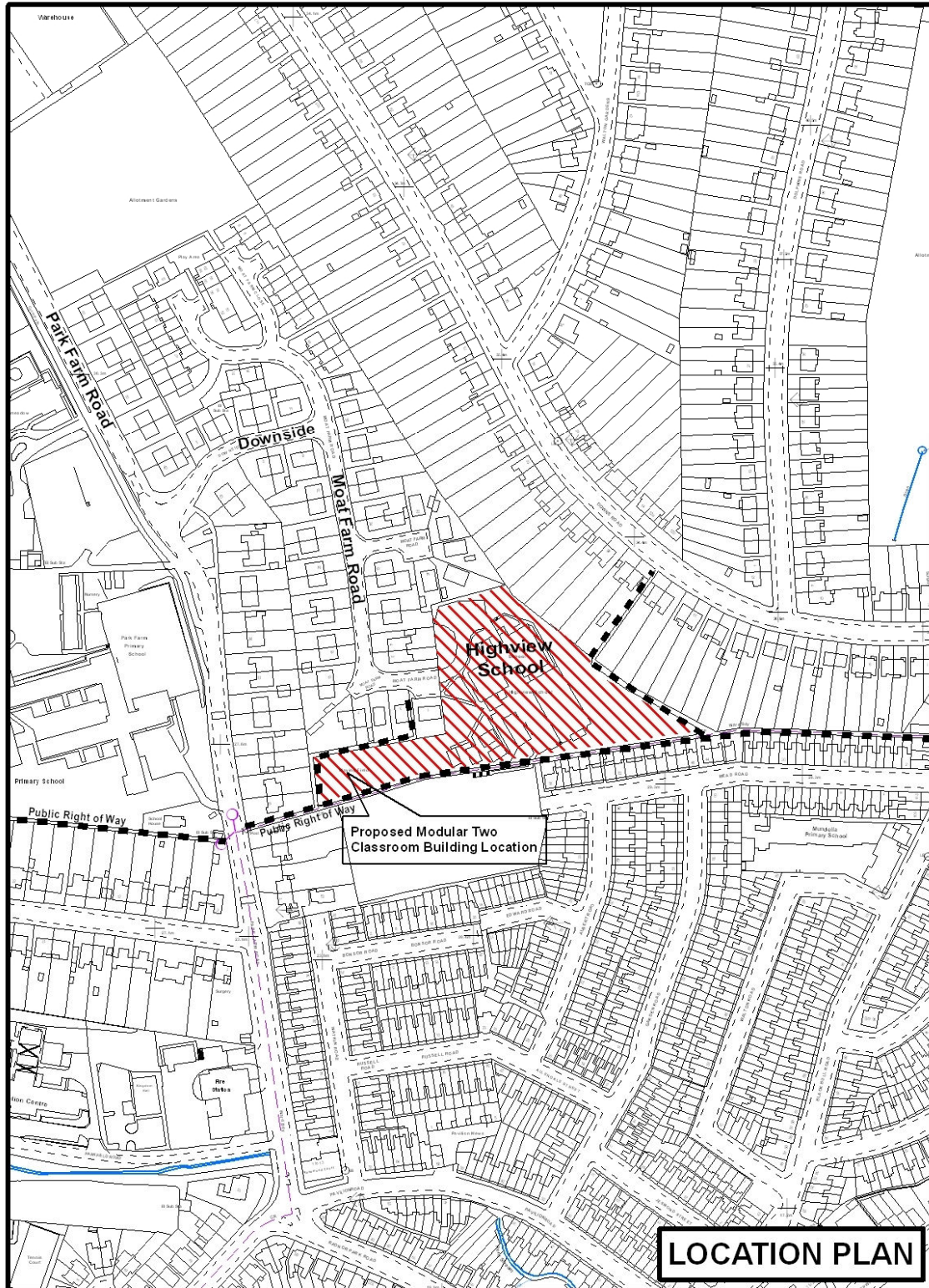
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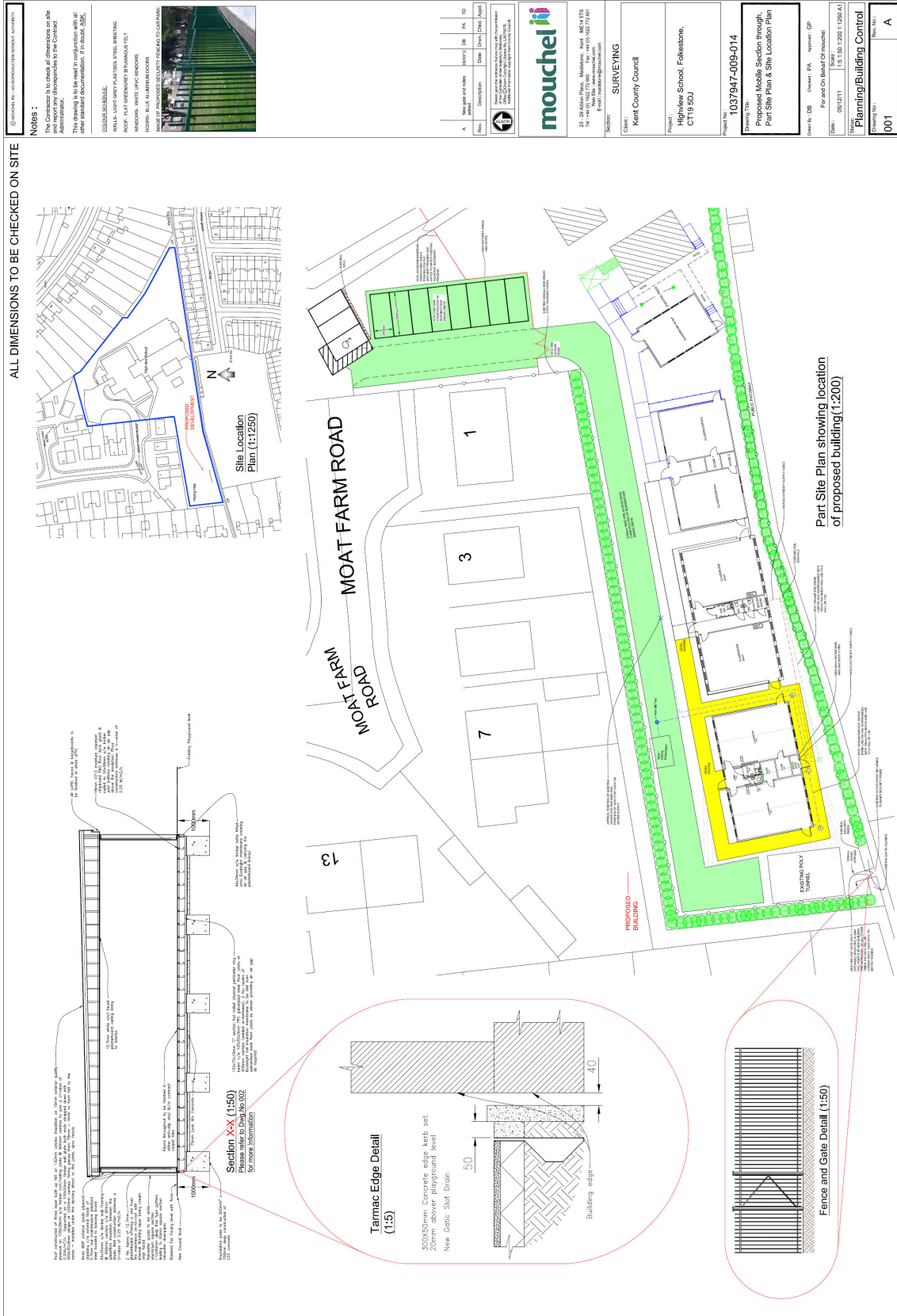
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4. Following receipt of approval of the previous planning application (SH/11/738) for a single modular building complete with store and cloakroom, fire access road, 8 additional car parking spaces and fencing, the applicant decided that they would like to install a two classroom modular building instead. The previous planning application for the single modular classroom was 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 stated that this would prevent local pupils having to travel to schools out of the local area. It was also stated that three additional members of staff would be employed.

#### **Proposal**

5. The current application proposes a two classroom modular building that would provide a further classroom (as an alternative to the one classroom building that has been recently approved) to the west side of the row of existing mobile/modular buildings. The additional one classroom is required to enable a small class of pupils at present being taught in the Therapy Room to have their own classroom. The Therapy Room would then be able to be used again for its proper use. **Therefore this planning application does not propose to increase the number of school pupils or staff numbers.** The proposal also includes the previously approved 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 and which were approved under the previous planning permission SH/11/738. This application also proposes to relocate the existing poly tunnel to the opposite corner to accommodate the modular building and fire access road. 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 16 metres with an overall height of 3.05 metres from ground level. The single modular building approved previously was 10 metres in length, therefore there is a proposed increase of 6 metres. 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:

##### **National Planning Policy Framework March 2012**

The new NPPF is guidance and a material consideration for the determination of planning applications. It does not change the statutory status of the development plan which remains the starting point for decision making. The NPPF replaces the majority of the Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and Planning Policy Statements (PPSs), although PPS10 relating to Planning for Sustainable Waste Management is currently retained.

The NPPF contains a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The new Framework refers to the UK Sustainable Development Strategy Securing the Future which sets out 5 guiding principles for sustainable development: living within the planet's environmental limits; ensuring a strong, healthy and just society, achieving a sustainable economy; promoting good governance and using sound science

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responsibly. In terms of the planning system, the NPPF identifies that there are 3 dimensions to sustainable development which create 3 overarching roles in the planning system – economic, social and environmental. These roles are mutually dependent. Within the over-arching roles there are 12 core principles that planning should achieve. These can be summarised as:

1. be genuinely plan-led;
2. a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places people live their lives;
3. proactively drive and support sustainable economic development;
4. secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity;
5. take account of the different roles and character of different areas, including protecting Green Belts, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities;
6. support the transition to a low carbon future, taking account of flood risk and coastal change and encourage the reuse of existing resources and the development of renewable energy;
7. contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution
8. encourage the effective use of land by reusing brownfield land, providing that it is not of high environmental value;
9. promote mixed use developments
10. conserve heritage assets
11. manage patterns of growth to make fullest use of public transport, walking and cycling and focus significant development in locations which can be made sustainable;
12. take account of strategies to improve health, social and cultural well being, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs.

In terms of delivering sustainable development in relation to this development proposal, the following NPPF guidance is particularly relevant:

Paragraph 72 attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities and that great weight is given to the need to create, expand or alter schools.

Paragraph 187 also requires that local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems. It states that those determining applications should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

**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.

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**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.
- 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.

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**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.

**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:

“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, with the additional parking area, details of the fencing, details of the external finish colour and the submission of a revised School Travel Plan being secured by condition.”

**Folkestone Town Council** – the application has been noted.

**Sport England** notes that as the proposal does not have any impact on sports facilities or playing field, Sport England has no comments to make.

**Environment Agency** – raises no objection subject to standard conditions on contamination and surface water drainage.

**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.

*As part of the previous permission there was a condition requiring a revised Travel Plan including improvements to management of the pick up/drop off arrangements so that queuing outside the school does not occur and management of the car parking arrangements to reduce the occurrence of the need to park in the highway. There was also a condition requiring the 8 parking spaces to be available at all times.*

**KCC Public Rights of Way Officer** – has commented that the proposed gate should not open onto a highway (Public Right of Way) as it could impede the intended escape route, therefore it is recommended that the gate should open into the school ground.

#### **Local Member**

11. The local County Member, Mr. R. Pascoe, was notified of the application on the 30 January 2012. Mr Pascoe commented that he had no objection in principle but he did wonder if there was expected to be a larger influx of children and thus a larger number of vehicles in Moat Farm Road.

#### **Publicity**

12. The application was publicised by an advertisement in a local newspaper (as the site adjoins a Public Right of Way), the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 34 neighbouring residential properties.

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**Representations**

13. Representations to the application have been received from residents of 4 nearby properties. The concerns and objections raised to the proposal can be summarised as:
- The proposed increases in staff parking is leading to a point where the whole street is clogged up with vehicles belonging to staff, parents and visitors, which sometimes are double parked.
  - A funeral was disrupted when a hearse could not leave the street and a dustcart unable to do their job and caused absolute mayhem, let alone getting a fire engine or ambulance to any of our bungalows.
  - At the end of school the whole road is at a standstill, putting everyone at risk and traffic starts queuing in the afternoon at 2.15pm and residents have problems getting onto their driveways
  - Would like to see the parking in place BEFORE any additional/larger modular classrooms are considered for this application.
  - This application would entail even more problems with parking in Moat Farm Road.
  - The footpath is once more sinking.
  - There should be zig zags or double yellow lines around the school entrance
  - The proposed 4 parking spaces will not help.

**Discussion**Introduction

14. This proposal has arisen after the school being granted temporary planning permission for a single modular classroom, for a proposal to relocate existing school pupils out of the Therapy Room to their own classroom and to provide a double modular building instead. This would enable the Therapy Room to be used again for its proper use. Whilst the education use of the site is well established there are issues relating to the siting and design of the mobile classroom, and associated traffic conditions. 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, including the NPPF. 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. This is the same location as the approved single modular building, but is now required for a slightly larger building. The site is part of the school playing field land and is specifically protected by Local Plan Policy LR12 designation. 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 mobile units means that the area

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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 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. It is the same type of building as the approved single modular building but just a slightly larger building. However given the type of building, it would be rather utilitarian in appearance and therefore it could be argued that the building does not fully meet 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 this has previously been considered under the single modular building application and considered not be an overriding issue. Furthermore 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.

**Transport, access and parking issues**

19. Representations have been received from residents of four 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. However this application does not propose to increase the number of school pupil or staff, as this additional classroom is to accommodate existing

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pupils. As part of the previous planning application for a single modular classroom, where there was a proposed increase of 13 school pupils, previous discussions with the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation), resulted in the provision of a total of 8 additional spaces on site which would help to reduce the occurrence of parking on the highway just outside the entrance to the site during the school day. This was accepted as part of the previous application.

20. As discussed in the November 2011 committee report in respect of the single modular classroom, the applicant indicated that there would be no increase in traffic because the 13 additional pupils would travel to/from school using existing taxis and minibuses (etc.) that are already bringing in the existing students. No further additional pupils are proposed as a result of the additional classroom included as part of this proposal. Discussions have taken place with the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) whether or not anything 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 did consider that further parking restrictions would not necessarily help and would only shift the problem further away from the site access. The Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) did 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. A condition was attached to the temporary planning permission for the single modular classroom building, 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) to be submitted for approval within six months of that permission (granted on the 9 November 2012). At the time of writing the revised School Travel Plan has just been received and is currently being consulted upon, to ensure that the comments made previously by the Highways and Transportation Manager have been taken into consideration as part of the revised document. Therefore I do not consider that there is any basis on which to raise a highway objection to the provision of the additional classroom.

**Conclusion**

21. The applicant's reasons for the installation of the additional 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 and other plans considerations, I do not consider that an objection would be warranted especially as there would be no further increase in pupils if this two classroom modular building is permitted instead of the single modular building which has already been granted temporary planning permission. 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 a temporary period of five years from the date of the permission subject to the further conditions discussed above.

**Recommendation**

22. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT to a condition requiring the double modular building to be removed from the site no later

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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, fencing, provision and retention of the 8 additional car parking spaces and a revised school travel plan to be submitted for approval.

Case officer – Lidia Cook	01622 221063
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Background documents - See section heading
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