

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

Provision of modular building to provide 2 classrooms and extension to playground at St Francis Catholic School, Queen's Road, Maidstone – MA/12/488 (KCC/MA/0044/2012)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 12 June 2012.

Application by KCC Property & Infrastructure Support for the provision of new modular building to provide 2 classrooms and extension to existing playground at St Francis Catholic School, Queen's Road, Maidstone – MA/12/488 (KCC/MA/0044/2012).

Recommendation: Permission be granted, subject to conditions.

Local Members: Mr D Daley and Mr M Robertson

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. The application site falls within the grounds of St Francis Catholic School, Queen's Road, Maidstone. St Francis School is a voluntary aided Catholic Primary School located to the west of Maidstone town centre. The school is located within the northern boundary of Oakwood Park in close proximity to a number of senior schools and colleges that share the campus. The only pedestrian and vehicle access to the site lies directly off Queen's Road, which is a through road connecting Tonbridge Road (A26) and London Road (A20). There is no direct access to the site from within Oakwood Park. The school consists of a modern purpose built single storey building, oriented east-west parallel with the Queen's Road, with an access drive, circulation space and car parking positioned north of the main school building. Hard play space is located to the east and west of this building with the playing field position further to the west. The school currently accommodates approximately 351 pupils and 43 (full time equivalent) members of staff.
2. The application site covers an area of approximately 360m² within the school grounds. The land affected consisting of an area of hard play to the north-west of the main school building, alongside a 4m wide strip of land that runs along the western edge of this playground.
3. The St Francis School site is surrounded by St Simon Stock School grounds to the south and west. The Saxon Chief Public House is located immediately to the east with residential property beyond; further residential properties are located on the opposite side of Queen's Road approximately 35m to the north. The northern boundary of the school grounds with

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Queen's Road consists of a 1.8m stone retaining wall, beyond which the ground rises up and plateaus out within Oakwood Park. The school buildings and application site are set back from the public highway with a substantial mature tree / shrub landscape screen running the length of the boundary within the site. Please see site location plan included.

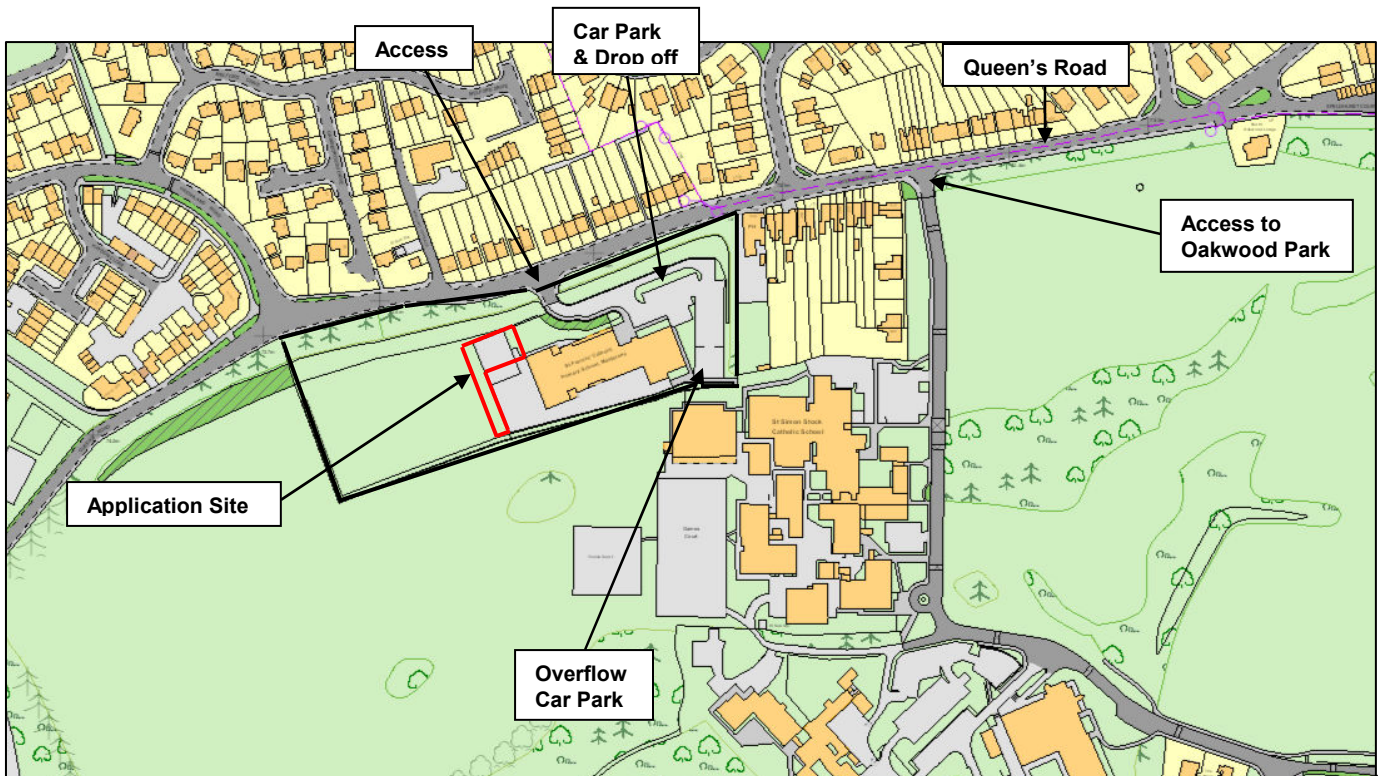
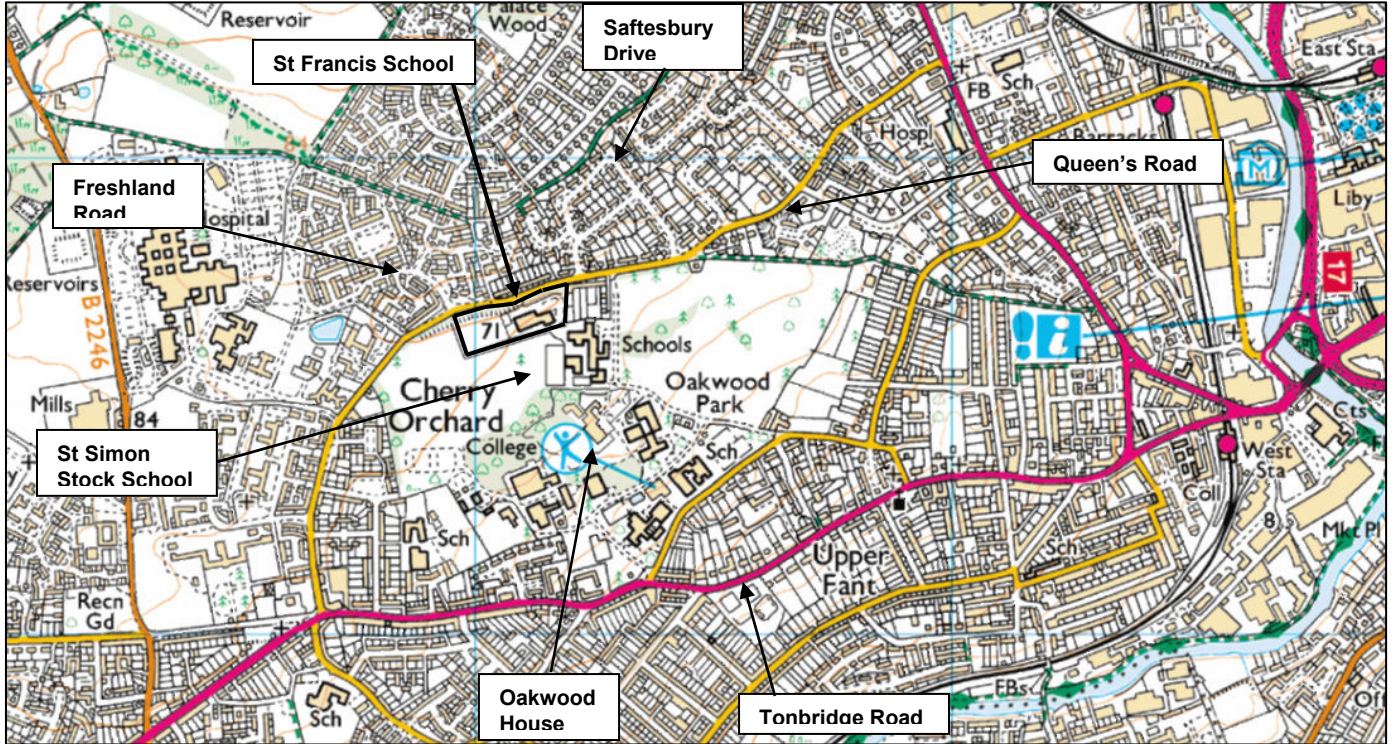
4. The School benefits from a dedicated car park and access, which is laid out to provide circulation space for both vehicles and pedestrians, drop off facilities and parking for 37 vehicles. At drop-off and pick-up times the playground to the east of the school building is made available to provide an overflow car park for parents use, allowing approximately 22 additional spaces.
5. The application site falls within the urban boundary of Maidstone as defined by the Local Plan Proposals Map. The area also falls within a Groundwater Vulnerability Zone overlying a Major Aquifer, as defined by the Environment Agency. There are no other site specific designations, although more general development plan policies are set out in paragraph (15) below.

Background

6. St Francis School was relocated to the Oakwood Park campus in 2001 from two sites elsewhere within the town. Planning permission for the new school site was granted in March 2000 under reference MA/99/1940. This permission allowed for the construction of a modern single storey school building with a shallow pitched roof to provide 12 classrooms and ancillary accommodation, together with a new vehicle and pedestrian access off Queen's Road.
7. The more recent planning history includes minor applications to provide an outdoor shelter (MA/06/1001) and an extension to the main building to provide an additional classroom break out space and storage (MA/08/924).
8. The County Planning Authority has recently granted permission for one other proposal within the Oakwood Park campus; that is for a change of use at Oakwood House from a training centre with overnight accommodation to regularise its use as a hotel (use class C1) with ancillary training facilities including use for D1 provision of vocational training (KCC/MA/0054/2012). In addition there is a major application pending to redevelop St Augustine Academy, formerly The Astor of Hever Community School, which is located on the south side of the Park.
9. Members maybe aware that highway safety improvements are planned to the stretch of Queen's Road that adjoins the Oakwood Park campus, to address local concerns about congestion and safety issues at peak times. These improvements are being financed as part of the local Members' Highway Grant. The changes proposed include a 20mph zone, signage and road markings, along with the provision of new double yellow lines to both sides of Queen's Road starting to the west of the vehicle access to St Francis School encompassing the junction with Freshlands Road.

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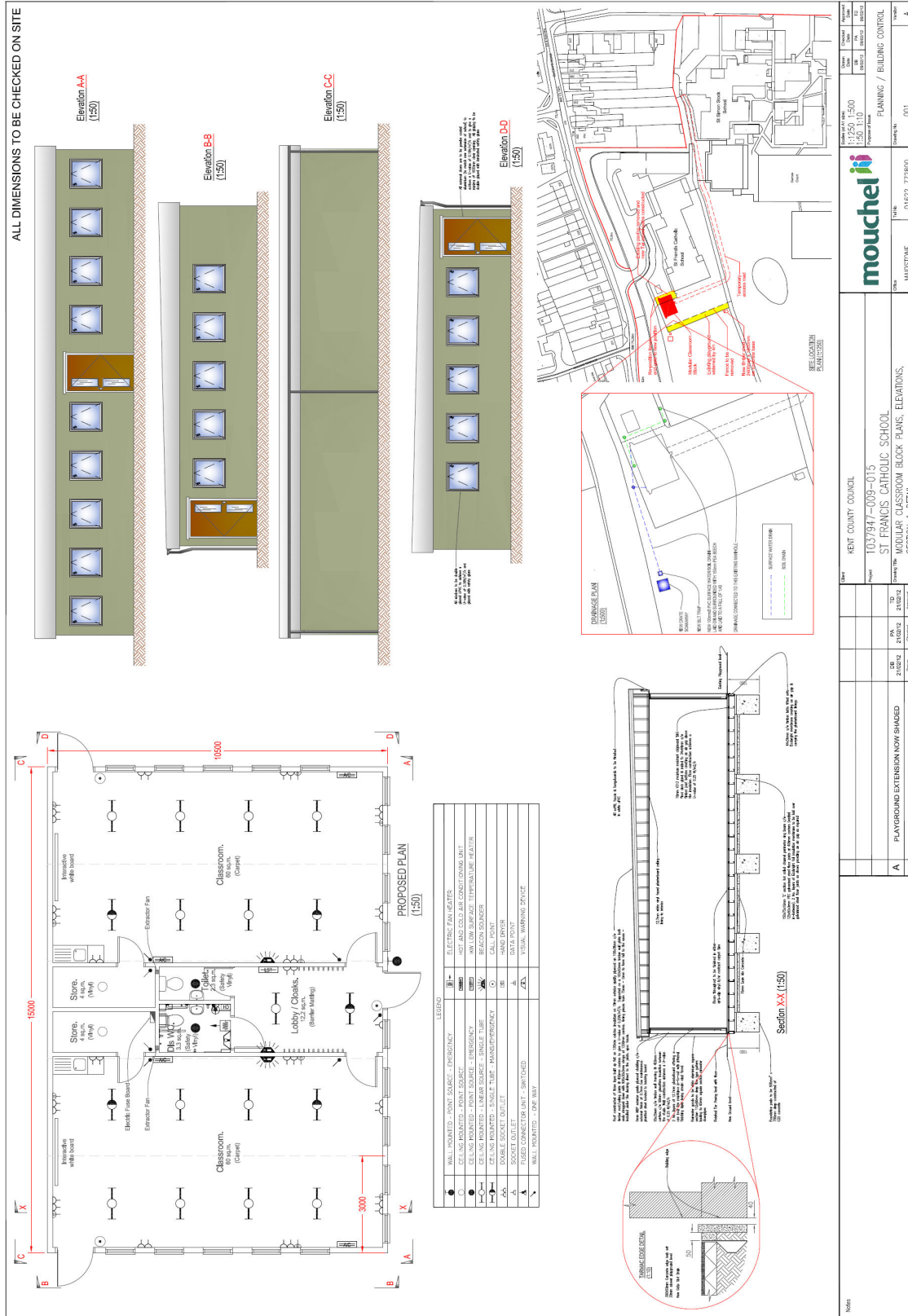
General Location Plan



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Elevations and Floor Plan



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Proposal

10. The application proposes the construction of a modular building to provide 2 new classrooms. The additional classrooms are required to allow the school to more easily deliver the curriculum to the children attending the site and would enable an increase in the annual intake by approximately 10 pupils to meet demand for places. The applicant notes that legally the infant classes (Key Stage 1) cannot exceed 30 pupils in each class. Under the current arrangements some classes consist of mixed year groups; the proposals would enable the school to provide infant classes where no children are in mixed-age groups. The additional capacity would allow the school roll to steadily increase over the coming years to a maximum of 420 pupils, from the current 351 pupils (an increase of up to 69 pupils). To support this increase in capacity, staff numbers would also rise from 43 to 46 full-time equivalents.
11. The applicant expects the expansion to be a temporary measure to cover a medium term demand for school places. Future provisions on site will be dependent upon the demographic changes in the local area. At present the applicant suggests that it would be premature to begin to consider a permanent construction due to the lack of evidence with regard to future changes in the school's demography.
12. The proposed single storey modular building would measure approximately 15m by 10m by 3m high and is shown as a conventional design, similar to other modular buildings located within schools around the county. The building would be sited on a playground and paved area to the north-west of the main school, and is shown with a level access and finished floor levels throughout. The design incorporates 2 classrooms, associated storage space, toilets and entrance lobby. The application confirms that the proposed building would be fully Disabled Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant.
13. The application includes provision of 200m² of new hard play to replace the area of playground that would be lost under the footprint of the proposed building (approximately 150 m²). The new playground area would be provided by a 4m wide extension along the western boundary of the existing provisions. The application also includes provision of a small timber storage shed measuring 2.4m by 1.8m, adjacent to the playground extension and southern site boundary.

Additional information received from the applicant

14. In response to objections received from nearby residents the applicant has provided additional supporting information in respect of the highways issues faced by the School on a day to day basis, and the measures in place to help mitigate for / reduce the traffic generated. The points raised can be summarised as follows:
 - The School has a School Travel Plan and is currently working on updating the contents.
 - Currently there are 20+ children walking to school on the Walking Bus every morning. The Walking Bus was recently awarded the top new Walking Bus and top volunteer by the Kent Messenger's Walking Bus initiative.

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- The School runs a Breakfast Club, which starts at 7.30am accommodating between 50 and 60 children daily, staggering the traffic generated during the mornings over a longer period.
- The School encourages 'park and stride' as well as Walk On Wednesdays as a means of encouraging parents to park away from the school site.
- The school operates a variety of after school clubs every day of the school week. This also reduces the number of trips for parents during the afternoon pick up and spreads out the journeys.
- The school drop-off area is managed every morning by staff members and parent volunteers from 8.45am which helps the efficiency of the drop-off area. The drop-off can accommodate up to 3 cars at any one time, with further vehicles queuing within the site on the internal circulation road.
- Parents are allowed to park on site throughout the day, and use the school's internal roads to queue in the afternoon to use the available parking spaces within the site.
- The School staggers the finish times in the afternoons for infants (3.00pm finish time) and for juniors (3.15pm finish time) so that vehicle trips to the site can be staggered and so that not all parents turn up at one collection time.
- Parking on Queen's Road happens during the afternoon pick-up when parents have to park and come into the site to collect their children. As with any school, the afternoon pick-up causes parking outside the school as the pick-up does not run as efficiently as the morning drop-off. However the school does allow parents onto the site as a means of reducing the parking in the surrounding roads.
- There is adequate parking on site for staff. There are currently 37 marked car parking spaces, including 2 disabled car parking spaces, of which staff occupy (on average) 25 car parking spaces. The remaining 12 or so spaces are then used by parents in the morning and afternoon and there are a further 22 unmarked car parking spaces within the tennis courts which again the parents are allowed to use both in the morning and afternoon.

Planning Policy

15. The most relevant Government Guidance and Development Plan Policies summarised below are appropriate to the consideration of this application:

- (i) **National Planning Policy and Guidance** – the most relevant National planning policies and policy guidance are set out in:

National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) sets out the Government's planning policy guidance for England and as guidance is 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).

The NPPF contains a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The new Framework also refers to the UK Sustainable Development Strategy Securing the

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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 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:

- be genuinely plan-led;
- a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places people live their lives;
- proactively drive and support sustainable economic development;
- secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity;
- 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;
- support the transition to a low carbon future, taking account of flood risk and costal change and encourage the reuse of existing resources and the development of renewable energy;
- contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution
- encourage the effective use of land by reusing brownfield land, providing that it is not of high environmental value;
- promote mixed use developments;
- conserve heritage assets;
- 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; and
- 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:

- Chapter 4 (Promoting sustainable transport);
- Chapter 7 (Requiring good design);and
- Chapter 8 (Promoting healthy communities);

The Framework 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.

(ii) The South East Plan (2009):

Policy SP3 Seeks to focus development within urban areas to foster access to

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services and avoid unnecessary travel.

- Policy CC1 Seeks to achieve and maintain sustainable development in the region.
- Policy CC4 Seeks new development to adopt 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 T4 Seeks development to adopt restraint-based maximum levels of parking provision for non-residential developments.
- Policy T5 Seeks to encourage the use of travel plans.
- Policy NRM1 Seeks to maintain and enhance ground water quality through the avoiding adverse effects of development on the water environment.
- Policy BE1 Seeks new development to help improve the built environment with design solutions relevant to local character, distinctiveness and sense of place.
- Policy S3 Seeks to ensure the adequate provision of pre-school, school, and community learning facilities.

Important note concerning 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. 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

(iii) Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan (2000) (Saved) Policies:

- Policy ENV22 Seeks development within existing open areas to: have regard to the visual impact of the development on the urban landscape; uphold and improve the appearance of the locality; and conserve wildlife habitats.
- Policy T1 Seeks all development to be safely and securely related the highway network.
- Policy T13 Seeks development that meets adopted parking standards.

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Policy T23 Seeks to ensure that traffic generated by development proposals is acceptable in terms of its impact on the transport network and on the local environment.

(iv) **Maidstone Local Development Framework: Core Strategy (2011) Public Participation Consultation Policies:**

Policy CS1 Seeks new development to be focused within and next to Maidstone's urban areas and infrastructure to be brought forward in a timely way to provide for the needs arising from development.

Policy CS3 Seeks development within urban boundary of Maidstone that contributes positively to the locality's distinctive character.

Policy CS6 Seeks sustainable design and development that responds positively to and maintains local distinctiveness and townscape.

Policy CS7 Seeks to guide the location of development in order to reduce the need for private transport and maintain highway safety, and ensure the highways, public transport, walking and cycling needs arising from development are satisfied.

Consultations

16. Maidstone Borough Council – no objection to the application.

Environment Agency – taking account of the application and proposed location, the Agency has assessed the application as posing a low environmental risk and recommended that the developer follows its best practice guidance in developing the site should planning permission be granted.

Kent Highways and Transportation – no objection, subject to standard conditions covering controls during the construction phase, including provisions to accommodate construction vehicles on site, and to guard against the deposit of mud on the public highway.

In response to the application Kent Highways comment as follows:

'The information provided by the applicant indicates that this application is likely to lead to an increase in pupil numbers of 10 each year for 7 years. This increase in pupil numbers is not likely to have any significant impact initially, although eventually there may be some impact on the local highway.'

The School are actively engaging in activities to reduce the traffic impact by providing before and after school facilities allowing early drop offs in the morning and late pick ups in the afternoon, managing the drop off facility and allowing parking in the tennis court.

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Additionally a percentage of the pupils walk to school and approximately 50% of new pupils have siblings at the school. Taking this into consideration the traffic impact of the proposal is reduced significantly. However there is some congestion in the area at the start of the school day and at the end of the school day and residents are concerned in relation to this and also regarding parking. Some of these concerns will be addressed by the highway safety scheme which has been promoted by County Members and due to be implemented before the 2012/2013 school year begins.

In light of the temporary nature of the buildings KCC Highways do not wish to raise objection; however would wish to review this position if the buildings are retained or alternative permanent buildings provided'.

Local Member

17. The local County Members for Maidstone Central, Mr D. Daley and Mr M. Robertson were notified of the application on 13 March 2012.

Publicity

18. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice, and the individual notification of 19 residential properties.

Representations

19. In response to the publicity, 6 letters of representation have been received. The key points raised can be summarized as follows:

- Objects to the proposed expansion of the school on the grounds of the highway impacts resulting from increased traffic and congestion that would be generated by the development;
- Considers that the existing levels of traffic generated by the school at the beginning and end of the school day to be untenable;
- Objects to the impacts of traffic generated by the school on residential amenity and considers that a further expansion would exacerbate the situation;
- Notes that no impact assessment of projected vehicle movements has been submitted, and highlights that 60 additional pupils could potential equate to 120 additional vehicle movements a day and approximately 600 extra journeys a week;
- Considers that the number of parents parking on the Queen's Road already creates highway safety and access problems; raises concern that emergency vehicles would not be able to negotiate the traffic generated;
- Raises concern about existing inconsiderate and dangerous parking on the highway;
- Highlights that congestion and parking issues are particularly bad at the end of the school day;
- Considers that the drop-off facilities within the school are not used as effectively as possible;

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- Suggests that consideration should be given to the traffic impacts of extra-curricular functions, such as sports days and fetes, given that there is no parking on site for parents during these activities resulting in inconvenience to the local community;
- Suggests onsite parking provisions should be increased, a proper pick up zone provided within the grounds, or alternate vehicle access arrangements should be required;
- Considers that the original design of the access to the site is flawed, on the grounds it opens onto a main road and that parents are not allowed to park on site causing havoc for residents of the surrounding streets twice a day;
- Raises concerns that the new road safety scheme proposed on Queen's Road would force more parents seeking parking spaces on the public highway onto other local residential roads;
- Notes that there are 3 other current or pending applications for development within Oakwood Park and representations made to those are relevant; considers that a co-ordinated overview to the traffic generated by the campus as a whole should be taken which has regard to the character of the Park and residential amenities.

Discussion

20. The application seeks planning permission for the installation of a modular building, including 2 classrooms, within St Francis Catholic School enabling the school to expand its roll incrementally over the coming years (by approximately 10 pupils per year for up to 7 years). The application is being reported to the Planning Applications Committee as a result of 6 letters of representation received from nearby residents objecting to the application, primarily on highway grounds. Please see paragraphs (16) and (19) for details of the representations received.
21. In considering this proposal, regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies and Government Guidance outlined in paragraph (15) above. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires that applications are 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, National Planning Policy Framework, other Government Guidance and any other material planning considerations arising during the consideration of the application.
22. In my opinion, the main determining issues in this particular case can be summarised by the following:
 - location and design;
 - highway considerations;
 - the need for the development; and
 - other relevant planning considerations.

Location and design

23. The proposed application site is located within the Oakwood Park campus and falls within the curtilage of St Francis School. The use of the proposed buildings would be incidental to

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the continued operation of the primary school, allowing an expansion of the scale of the permitted use.

24. The buildings proposed would be located approximately 4 metres north west of the main school building and 20m south from the boundary with Queens Road. The application site is positioned on a plateau within Oakwood Park. Despite its elevated position in relation to the public highway, the development would have a limited visual impact on the street scene due to a mature landscaping screen planted adjacent to the northern boundary, which practically screens views of the site. The building and storage shed would be visible from the surrounding school/ college sites to the south, from within Oakwood Park. However, due to the proposed position and small scale of the proposals, in my opinion, the development would not significantly impact on the open character of the campus or the character of the Park, since it would be viewed in the context of the adjoining main school building.
25. The design of the modular building is reasonably standard in appearance and would be similar in construction to a number of units used across the County in recent years - single storey timber framed construction, finished in green with UPVC windows. The design allows for a level access to the adjacent hard standing, with no void spaces below the building. This approach improves access provision and serves to improve the overall visual appearance of the proposal.
26. In my opinion, due to the nature of the design and usable lifespan, the building would be unlikely to be considered as an acceptable permanent solution in this locality. Whilst the design might be acceptable as a temporary provision, it would be difficult to conclude that the single storey, shallow pitched roof construction would enhance the character of the surrounding environment, albeit that it would not necessarily detract from the character. It is noted that the application is only being proposed as a temporary arrangement to meet local need for the coming few years. The applicant has confirmed that there is insufficient evidence to support the need for a permanent extension of the school at this time. On this basis it is my opinion that the layout and design of the building would be acceptable in the location for a temporary period. Subject to a condition restricting the length of time the building can be retained, I consider that the development as proposed would be acceptable in the context of the Development Plan Policies in place in terms of its location and design, including South East Plan Policies CC6 and BE1, Local Plan Policy ENV22 and Maidstone Core Strategy Policies CS3 and CS6.

Highway considerations

27. The application has generated a number of objections from nearby residents; these primarily focus on the highway impacts of the existing school, the wider Oakwood Park campus as a whole, and the potential implications of the proposed expansion of the school roll. It is acknowledged that the site generates a large number of vehicles movements, particularly as it is a Catholic School and as such potentially has a wider catchment area. The concentration of these movements on short peak travel times inevitably causes congestion and puts pressure on the local highway network. This issue is more notable during the afternoon pick-up as parents arrive early to find a parking space either within the

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school grounds or on the surrounding public highway. It should also be noted that the traffic generated in the area is cumulative as the other schools and colleges within Oakwood Park also generate significant movements. This is a concern that is faced across the county and one that is not easily solved. Members will note that Queen's Road is a through route; consequently it has to sustain traffic flow as well as local residential traffic, and vehicles attending the various schools within Oakwood Park. Concerns about traffic safety issues during peak times have prompted the provision of a new safety scheme covering this stretch of road financed by the local Member's Highway Grant.

28. Given the scale of the development being proposed within the current application, it would be unreasonable to expect the St Francis School to seek to resolve the wider travel issues of the Oakwood Park campus. Members will note that whilst the application is for 2 additional classrooms, these are required to support the education provision on site over the coming few years. If planning permission were to be granted the increase in pupil numbers would be gradual with the reception intake rising by approximately 10 children (to approximately 60 pupils) each year for up to 7 years. This could take the school roll from the existing 351 pupils to 420 if the demand for places continues. The School has indicated that based on current figures, 50% of the proposed additional children would potentially already have siblings at the school. This would serve to reduce the number of additional vehicle movements generated as families are likely to travel to site together. The projected increase in staff numbers is expected to equate to 3 full time equivalents. It is on this basis that no additional vehicle parking is being proposed on site as a result of the current applications.
29. The school's existing car park allows provision for 37 dedicated spaces, with a further 22 spaces provided as overflow parking for parents during peak travel times (59 spaces total). Under the current arrangements, I am advised that approximately 25 spaces are used by staff with the remainder made available for use by parents. Kent Vehicle Parking Standards recommends a maximum of 51 spaces for the primary school (as proposed). Whilst the dedicated number of spaces falls below the maximum recommended standards for a school of this size, the available provisions are well above average, and in combination with the provision of overflow parking exceed the recommended levels.
30. The school grounds also already include the provision of a drop-off / pick-up facility fronting the school and circulation space for vehicles within the grounds. In addition to the before mentioned overflow parking, this allows some parents attending site by car to move off the public highway reducing the overall impact of the site. The facility is most effective during the morning peak, with the drop-off managed to allow for parents to literally drop-off their children to a member of staff and then leave the site (thereby minimising congestion within and entering the site). The afternoon peaks are more complicated with those children needing to be collected, which results in a higher demand for parking space, with parents arriving early to ensure that they are there to receive the children. The provision of circulation space and overflow parking on site helps to reduce the impact from parents parking on the public highway; however this by no means meets the total demand and the relevant development plan policies would not require that to be so. To help further reduce the impact, the School operates a staggered finish time for infant and junior school children attending site (15:00 and 15:15 hours respectively). It is noted that the provision of

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staggered finish times, as well as breakfast and after school clubs, serves to spread the traffic movements generated by the school over a longer period, helping to lessen the difficulties faced at peak times. The school start and finish times are also staggered from other schools on the Oakwood Park Campus, which cater for older pupils who tend to start earlier and finish later in the day.

31. The School has an existing travel plan which sets out the issues, objectives, targets and actions in place to reduce the levels of congestion and traffic movements associated with the site. A number of the initiatives put in place are well supported, including a daily Walking Bus that allows 20+ children to walk to school most days, 'park and stride' and Walk On Wednesdays. The Travel Plan is currently being updated and could be secured by a suitable planning condition, should Members be minded to approve the current application.
32. Members will note that Kent Highways has raised no objection to the application, subject to controls during the construction phase to prevent any undue impact on the public highway. Kent Highways has indicated that the increase in pupil numbers is not likely to have any significant impact initially, although eventually if the expansion continues at the same rate there may be some impact on the local highway. However, it acknowledges that the School are actively engaging in activities to reduce the traffic impact, and that subject to planning permission being for a temporary period it would expect to review the position at the end of this period, should the applicant seek to retain the building or seek to propose a more permanent solution.
33. In my opinion, the school is well provided for in terms of car parking and its pupil drop-off / pick-up facilities, particularly when compared to most other schools around the County. I also consider that the School continues to deliver a number of initiatives through its travel plan that again go above and beyond the arrangements available to many schools; these include, amongst others, the well supported walking bus, the staffed drop-off facilities, the provision of parent parking and waiting areas off the public highway and staggered finish times. All of the above serve to minimise the inevitable impact of the number of people all moving to and from the site within such short passages of time. The proposed increase in capacity could potentially result in up to 69 additional pupils; however it should be borne in mind that this would be an incremental increase over a number of years which is dependent on local demand. It is noted that should Members be minded to grant temporary permission for a period of 5 years, at the projected rate of increase it is unlikely that the school roll will have reached the maximum capacity. Taking into account provisions made available by the School to help mitigate for highway issues, I would find it very difficult to sustain an objection to the proposed development on highway grounds given the limited scale and slow rate of the change in use being proposed.
34. I consider that whilst the proposal would inevitably result an increase in vehicle movements, the level of change would not result in an unacceptable additional impact on highway safety, efficiency, or on the amenities of surrounding area. In my opinion, any impact that would result from the development would be outweighed by the benefit to the community through the provision of adequate school places to serve the local need. Subject to a condition seeking the update of the Travel Plan, the proposed development is considered to accord

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with the relevant Development Plan Policies, including South East Plan Policies SP3, T4 and T5, Local Plan Policies T1, T13 and T23 and Maidstone Core Strategy Policy CS7.

Need for the development

35. The Government attaches great importance to ensuring sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities, this includes giving greater weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools. The applicant has provided information demonstrating that the proposed building is required to support the existing education provision on site by providing additional classroom spaces. These additional spaces would allow children attending the infant school to be taught in same-age class groups rather than the mixed-age classes operated under the current arrangements. The mixed-age classes are currently necessary due to a legal requirement to ensure all Key Stage 1 classes are kept below 30 pupils. The additional classrooms would also enable a small incremental increase in the school roll over the coming years, catering for a number of pupils that are on the waiting list for places at the school. For the first year only, one of the new classrooms would be used to accommodate a class; the other classroom would be used as break out space for group work until such time as the pupil numbers increase sufficiently resulting in the need for the further room.
36. I am satisfied that the applicant has been able to demonstrate a case of need for the proposed classrooms for a temporary period, which is supported by Chapter 8 of the NPPF and South East Plan Policies S3. This support would need to be balanced against any detrimental impacts of the development as proposed.

Other relevant planning considerations

37. The application site overlies an aquifer, which means groundwater potentially would be at risk from activities on site. The Environment Agency has assessed the proposals as having a low potential risk to the environment, indicating that any development should follow its best practice. I recommend that should permission be granted the applicant be made aware of this advice by way of an informative.

Conclusion

38. Overall, I consider that the development as proposed is appropriate in terms of its design, layout and siting in relation to the surrounding built development and the character of the local environment for a temporary period. Whilst the development would result in an increase in the number of people attending the site, I am satisfied that this will be a gradual change that would not materially alter existing traffic patterns over the coming years sufficiently to warrant an objection on highway grounds. As noted above, the School already actively delivers a number of measures that seek to reduce the effect of traffic associated with the use. A continued commitment to the travel plan process would serve to reduce the highway impacts to an acceptable level. Accordingly, I consider that the development as proposed would be acceptable in terms of the Development Plan Policies in place and recommend that planning permission be granted.

Provision of modular building and extension to playground at St Francis Catholic School, Queen's Road, Maidstone – MA/12/488 (KCC/MA/0044/2012)

Recommendation

39. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO the imposition of conditions covering (amongst other matters) the following:

- temporary consent for a period of 5 years from date of permission for the proposed modular building and removal of this building at expiration of the period with the restoration of the site thereafter;
- the development be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
- controls on the construction phase to minimise any impact on the public highway during this period; and
- the submission of an updated school travel plan.

I FURTHER RECOMMEND THAT INFORMATIVES be added to the decision notice drawing the applicant's attention to the Environment Agency's advice concerning best practice during construction, and Kent Highways and Transportation's comment that it would wish to review the highways and parking implications again if at the end of the temporary consent planning permission is sought to retain the building or to provide alternative permanent facilities.

Case Officer: James Bickle

Tel. no: 01622 221068

Background Documents: see section heading
