

Item D2

Construction of a two-storey extension, single-storey toilet block, and extension to existing canopy at Fordcombe C of E Primary School – SE/12/2146 (KCC/SE/0243/2012)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 6 November 2012.

Application by the Governors of Fordcombe C of E Primary School for construction of a two storey extension to existing staffroom/classroom, a single storey toilet block, and extension to existing canopy over external decked area at Fordcombe C of E Primary School, The Green, Fordcombe, Tunbridge Wells, TN3 0RY – SE/12/2146 (KCC/SE/0243/2012)

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions

Local Member: Mr P.Lake

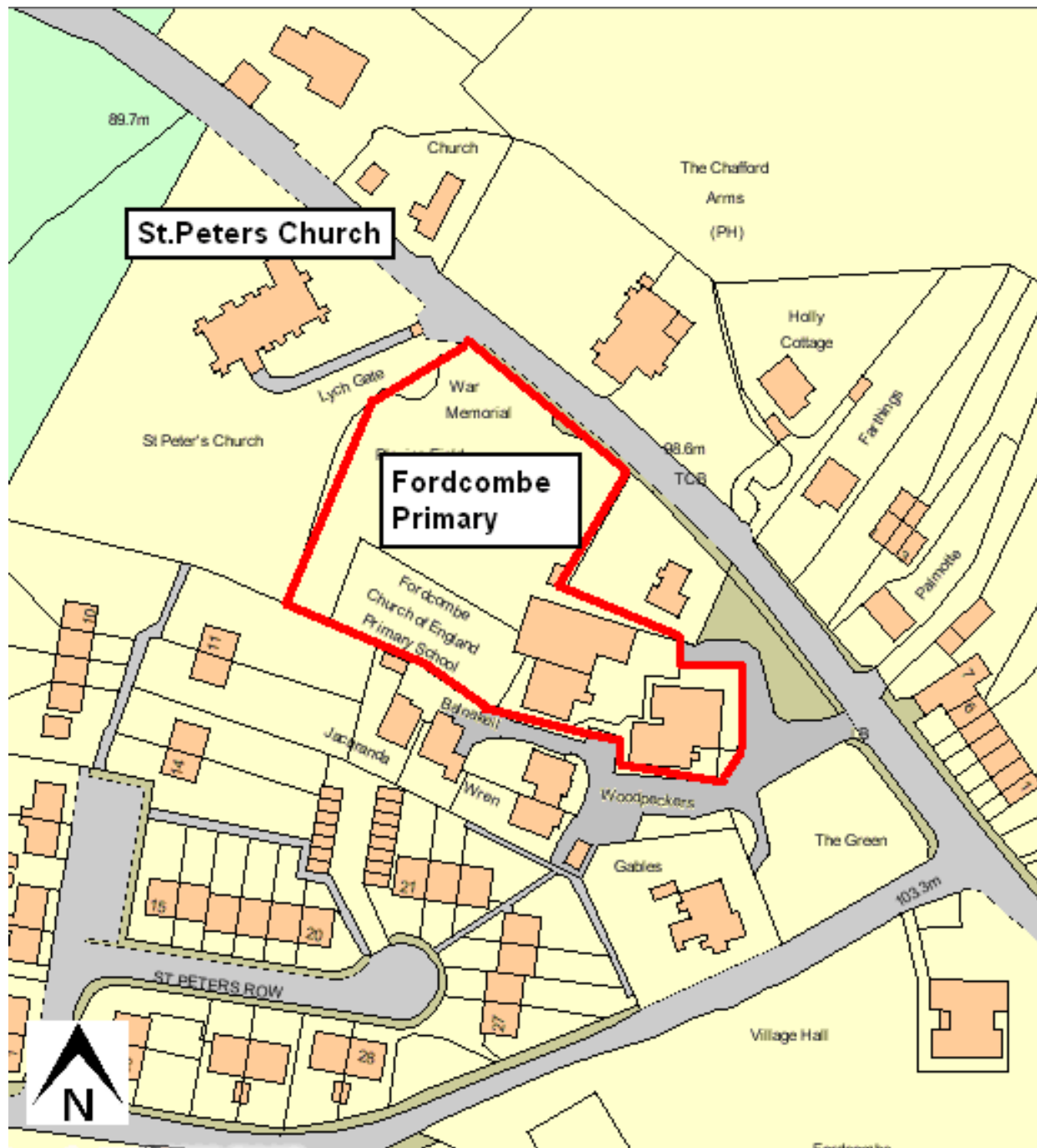
Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Fordcombe Church of England Primary School is situated on the village green, at the centre of the village of Fordcombe, approximately 3 miles West of Tunbridge Wells. The site occupies an area of 3900m², with the school buildings, a hard surfaced play area, and grass play/activity space and a sports field. The original school building dates back to 1862, although there are several extensions and alterations which have taken place over the years. The site is bounded to the east by the village green, with the B2188 Penshurst to Langton Green road running along the border of the green, and along the northern boundary of the school grounds. Residential properties and gardens form the boundary to the south, and the west is bordered by St. Peter's Church and its curtilage.
2. The school site is set back from the main road, and is accessed via a driveway through the village green. The driveway is a shared access with residents of the four dwellings to the south. The school is wholly within the Fordcombe Conservation Area, and there are a number of nearby listed buildings, the nearest being the Church 75m to the northwest of the development site. *[Please note: the nearby 'Old School House' has been identified as a Listed Building, however no record exists on the Listed Building Register. The main school building may also have been listed 2001-2003, although no record exists at present].* Fordcombe lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are no public rights of way affected by this proposal.
3. Fordcombe is a small Primary School and consists of 4 classrooms with a current roll of 105 pupils. It is a mixed gender voluntary aided Church of England Primary School, catering for children aged 4 to 11, with an 'above average' proportion of children with Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities. The school structure consists of an Early Years Foundation (with Reception Class) and from then on classes have a mixture of two ages groups.

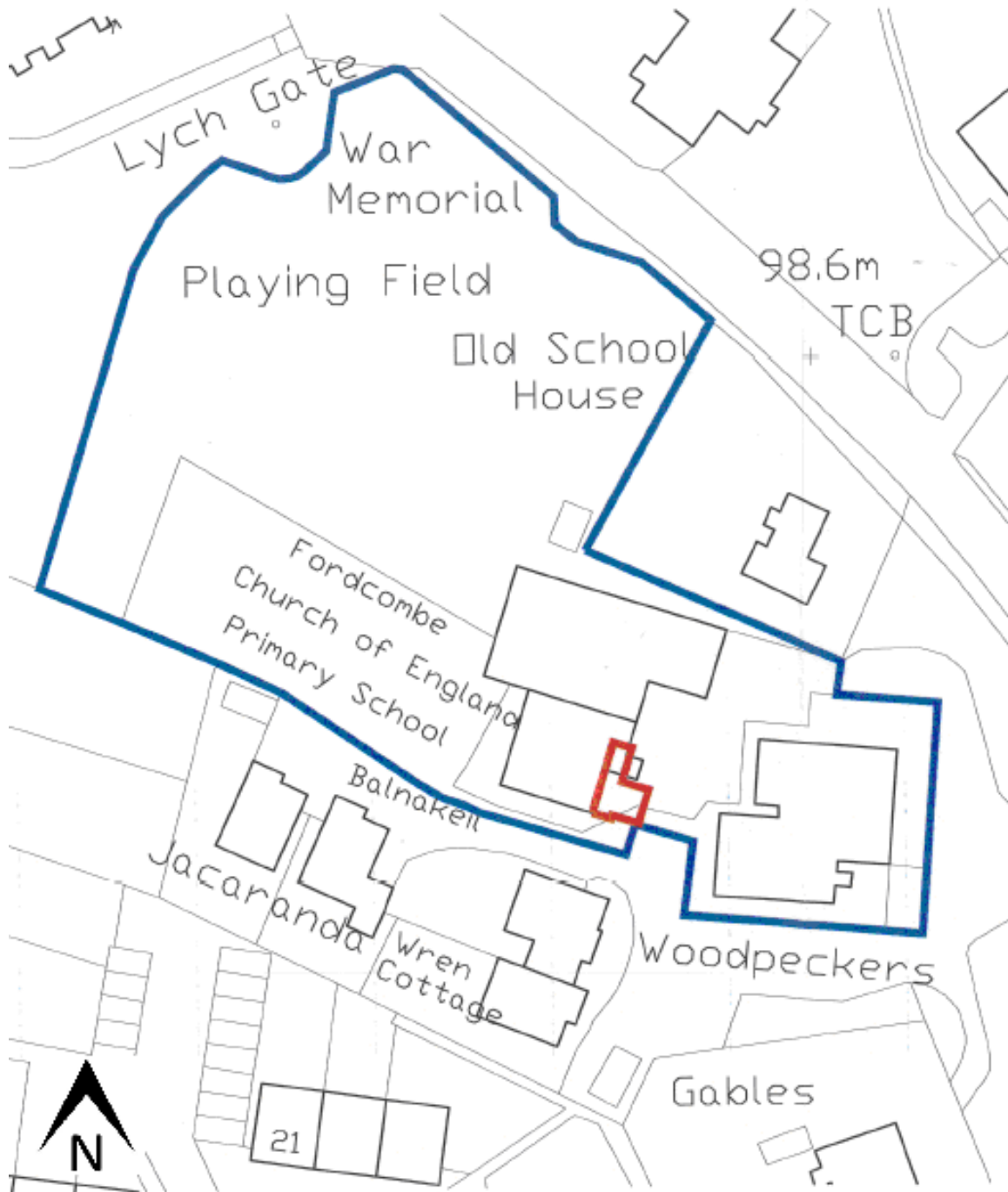
Two-store extension, toilet block and canopy – Fordcombe Primary

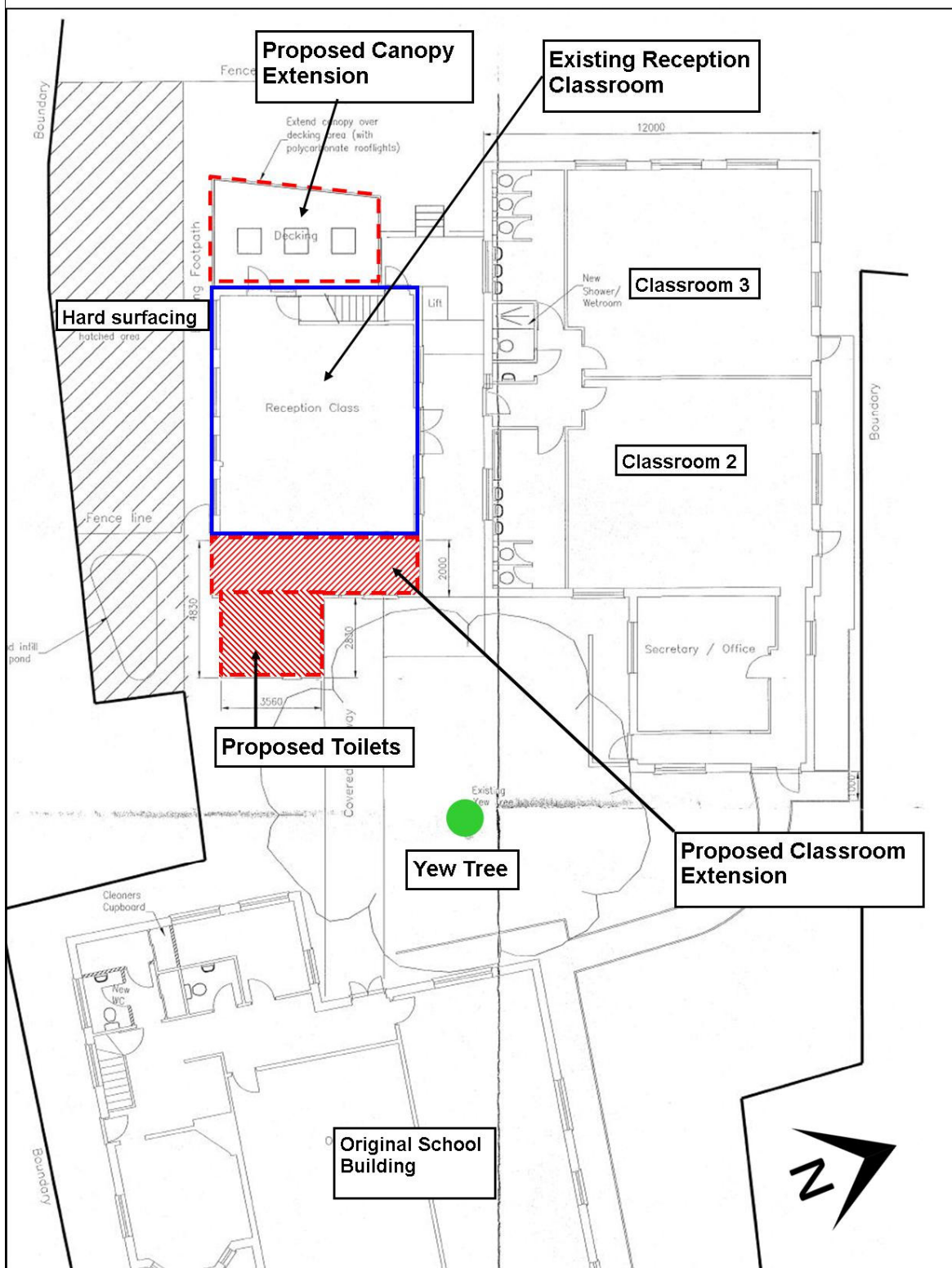
General Location Plan



Two-store extension, toilet block and canopy – Fordcombe Primary

Site Location Plan



Two-store extension, toilet block and canopy – Fordcombe Primary**Site Plan**

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Elevations



Proposed North-West Elevation



Proposed North-East Elevation

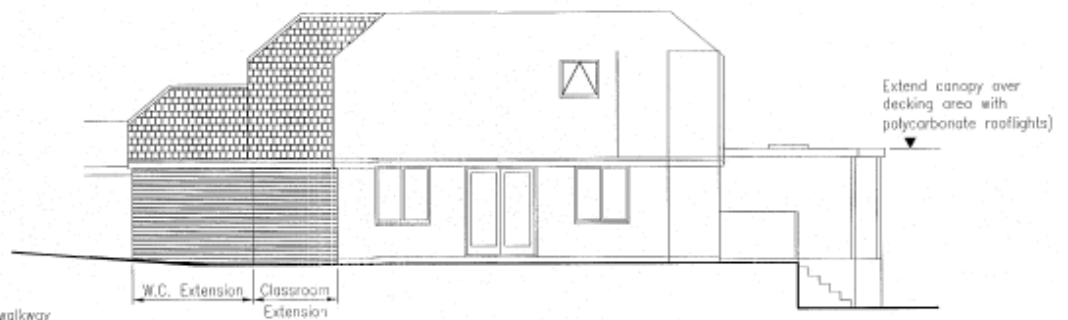
Clay roof tiles to match existing

Facing bricks to match existing.

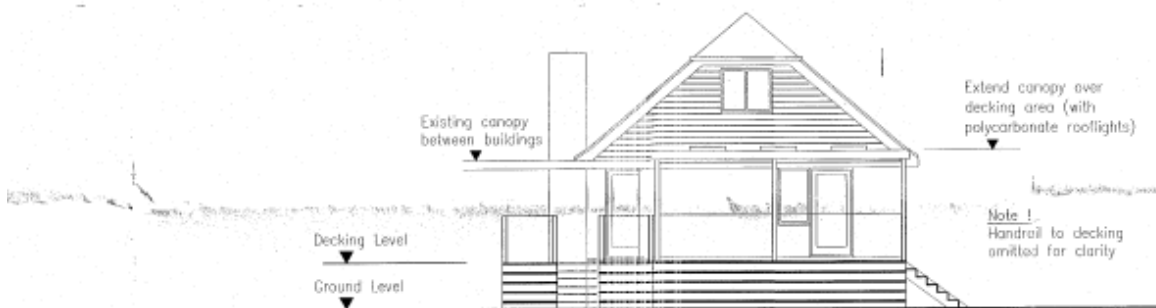
Weather boarding to gable end to match existing.

Doors and windows to be timber to match existing

Note !
Covered walkway omitted for clarity



Proposed South-East Elevation



Proposed South-West Elevation

Two-store extension, toilet block and canopy – Fordcombe Primary

Background and ProposalDevelopment Proposal

4. The Governors of Fordcombe Primary School are proposing several minor developments and alterations. The first element involves the extension of both storeys of the existing reception class (ground floor) and staffroom (first floor). The works would extend the south eastern elevation of the building by 2m, and extend and replicate the roofline over this area. The proposal would increase the internal floor space of the reception classroom from approx 53.5m² to approx. 67.5m². Access arrangements would remain unaltered, and the proposal seeks to use matching external building materials and finishing – face brickwork with weatherboarding, clay roof tiles, double glazed timber window units and timber double glazed doors.
5. The application also proposes the construction of a single storey toilet block to the south-east elevation of the extended reception classroom. The toilets would have a footprint of approximately 10m², and would be accessed solely through the existing (and extended) reception classroom. Additionally, the applicant is proposing to extend the existing external canopy, over the external decking area to the rear of the reception classroom.
6. The above described development has been proposed in order to improve the undersized reception classroom and staffroom and to bring it to the standards recommended within Building Bulletin 99. The proposal does not seek to increase the intake of the school, and the other classrooms are not due to increase in size.
7. Following the receipt of an objection, the School submitted further information to explain that the aim of the proposal is to increase the internal floor space of the undersized reception classroom. Currently it is smaller than the other classrooms on site, and the improvement would allow more flexibility in using the space. Assurance has been made that the 2m extension would not lead to an increase in the school roll, and that this would not be possible as the remaining classrooms on site are not increasing (the reception class being the entry form).

Planning History

8. Recent planning history includes the conversion of roof space into a classroom, with internal alterations, connecting bridge, lift and outside teaching area (2002). In 2003 permission was granted to alter access arrangements with a new fire escape door and other external works. Also in 2003, permission was granted to widen the access track and to install temporary offices. The most recent permission was granted in 2009 for the erection of a timber shelter and to extend the hard surfaced play area.
9. The most major development at the school was granted in 2001 for two new classrooms and administration block, with relocation of a mobile classroom.

Planning Policy

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

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- (i) **National Planning Policy and Guidance** – the most relevant National Planning Policies are set out in:

National Planning Policy Framework – Presumption in favour of sustainable development. In terms of delivering sustainable development in relation to this development proposal, the following NPPF guidance is particularly relevant:

- Chapter 1 (Building a strong, competitive economy);
- Chapter 7 (Requiring good design);
- Chapter 9 (Protection Green Belt Land);
- Chapter 11 (Conserving and enhancing the natural environment);
- Chapter 12 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment); and

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.

Policy Statement on Planning for Schools Development - There should be a presumption in favour of the sustainable development of state-funded schools, as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework.

- (ii) **Development Plan Policies** –
The adopted **South East Plan** Policies:

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.

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

Important note concerning the South East Plan:

Members will 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

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The adopted **Sevenoaks Core Strategy DPD 2011** Policies:

Policy LO7 Development in Rural Settlements

Policy LO8 The Countryside and Rural Economy

Policy SP1 Design of New Development and Conservation

Policy SP2 Sustainable Development

The adopted **Sevenoaks Local Plan 2007** Saved Policies:

Policy EN1 General development criteria

Policy EN4A Accessibility for disabled to non-residential development

Policy EN6 High Weald AONB – development which would harm or detract will not be permitted.

Policy EN23 Development affecting Conservation Areas

Policy EN34 Traffic flows from development in rural areas

Policy GB1 Extent of Metropolitan Green Belt

Consultations

11. **Sevenoaks District Council:** No objections subject to the County Planning Authority being satisfied with the very special circumstances submitted to allow inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

Penshurst Parish Council: Support.

Conservation Officer: No response received.

KCC Highways & Transportation: The car park provision is not being altered by the proposal and the number of staff is to remain unaltered; there would therefore appear to be no highway implications.

Local Member

12. The local County Member for Sevenoaks South, Mr Peter Lake, was notified of the application on 13 August 2012. Although no comments have been received specific to this proposal, Mr Lake has been involved in wider discussions with the School and the neighbours in relation to seeking highways improvements.

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Publicity

13. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 2 residential properties and businesses.

Representations

14. In response to the publicity, one letter of objection was received from a nearby resident. The objection relates to the potential impact that an increase in school roll could have upon the local highway network and highway safety, with the view that this proposal could increase pupil numbers now or in the future. The objector would like a condition imposed which limits the potential for more pupils: *"The planning application is approved on condition that the school roll numbers do not increase as a result of the unilateral decision of the school"*. With any subsequent plans to increase pupil numbers therefore requiring planning permission. The objector also wishes for the School to satisfactorily deal with existing highway safety concerns.

Discussion

15. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (10) 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 the proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity.
16. This application has been brought for determination by Members of the Planning Applications Committee following the objections of a local resident, in relation to the potential for the development to impact upon the local road network by increasing the number of pupils attending the school.
17. Other considerations material to the determination of this application, although not raised as grounds for objections, include the impact of the development on the Conservation Area, the location within the Green Belt and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, retention of trees with amenity value, landscape impact and educational need.

Highways Impacts

18. The main reason for objection - as highlighted in paragraph (14) above – relates to highways concerns. The material objection to this application is that the proposed development would result in an increase in pupil numbers and therefore an increase in traffic. This is not the case as there would be no increase in pupils arising from this development. The extension as proposed would increase the reception classroom floorspace by approximately 13.8m², resulting in an internal usable increase from approximately 53.5m² to approx. 67.5m². The current classroom is described as being undersized and therefore the School is restricted in how it uses this space. There would be no increase in the size of the other classrooms. Therefore I am of the opinion that there is little scope for this application to have highways implications.

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19. The objector's concerns relate to a perceived dangerous highway situation with regard to the access for the school onto the main road network. The school is similar to other rural primary schools around the County, and experiences peak traffic flows connected with pick-up and drop-off. I note that Kent Highways & Transportation have raised no objection to the proposal, and that the School have a Travel Plan in place. Also, in conjunction with the local County Councillor, they are campaigning for Kent Highways & Transportation to paint yellow zig-zag lines on the main road. I am therefore satisfied that this development is acceptable and does not have any direct highway safety impacts.
20. The objector to this application suggested that a condition could be attached which would ensure "...school roll numbers do not increase as a result of the unilateral decision of the school". Conditions on planning applications are required to be necessary, relevant to planning and to the development, enforceable, precise, and reasonable (para.206 NPPF). Accordingly, I can not support the framing of a condition which would require the School to seek planning permission to allow more pupils onto the roll. Firstly, the condition would seemingly attempt to impinge on the legal duties and functions of the School to provide for pupils, and therefore it would be *ultra vires* for the Planning Authority to be the decision maker on how, if and when this might take place. Secondly, in my opinion the condition would not pass the tests laid out in para.206 of the NPPF because, as is set out in the discussion above, it is not directly related to the development proposed; is not precise in terms of its scope and duration; is not relevant to land use planning; and would not be reasonable given the scope of the development.
21. Whilst I understand the concerns of the objector, any significant alteration to the school roll is quite likely to require a further and more substantial expansion of classroom accommodation, for which a further planning consent would be required. The appropriate time for consideration of the implications of additional pupils would be at the time of such a further planning application, and it would be quite wrong to seek to prejudge or prejudice that consideration by imposing restrictive conditions on the current planning application.

Conservation Area and Listed Buildings

22. The proposal site lies within the Fordcombe Conservation Area, where under planning law any development should 'preserve and enhance' the character and appearance. In my opinion the proposed development is sympathetic to the designation, by incorporating existing materials and recreating the existing roof form. The materials chosen also include timber framed windows and doors. Important trees of amenity value to the Conservation Area are identified for retention. Therefore I am satisfied that the proposal would be acceptable in terms of its impacts on the Conservation Area subject to the imposition of conditions requiring pre-submission of external materials (to ensure quality), and a condition requiring tree protection measures be incorporated during construction.
23. The application was also advertised as it may affect the setting of a Listed Building. Although there is no current record on the Listed Buildings Register, there is evidence that the nearby Old School House is listed, and that the main school building itself may have been listed between 2001 and 2003. Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that should these designations exist, the siting of the extensions and the materials preserve the setting of these buildings. The Old School House is on the opposite side of the existing classrooms to the proposal site, and therefore would not be impacted by the development.

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Green Belt

24. Sevenoaks District Council raised no objections, subject to the County Council being satisfied that the very special circumstances submitted are sufficient to allow inappropriate development within the Green Belt. I am of the opinion that the proposal does not constitute inappropriate development, as it is an *'an extension or alteration of a building... that does not result in a disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building'* (this test is set out in para.89 of the NPPF). In particular, the proposed minor extension would extend an elevation of an existing building, within an area enclosed predominantly by the surrounding school buildings. The selection of matching materials, and the location within the site, in my opinion would result in the extension not having any material impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Notwithstanding this, the applicant has submitted information sufficient to prove very special circumstances, insofar as the purpose of the development being to address a current deficiency in the accommodation standards within the school.

Landscape and Visual Impact

25. The School lies within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a rural village and therefore development should be sensitive to these designations. The proposal site lies within the built form of the existing buildings, and as such would not be visible from the wider landscape. The minor scale of the extension combined with the proposed matching materials and recreated roof form and features would mean there would be no discernible visual impact above existing. I am of opinion that the condition recommended above, for the pre-submission of external materials, would be sufficient to protect the landscape character of the AONB and the visual amenity of the locality.

Sustainable Development

26. The NPPF requires planning authorities to balance economic, social and environmental concerns in seeking to apply the presumption in favour of Sustainable Development. The proposal involves the use of materials sensitive to the historic value of the local area, and utilises timber framed windows and doors, rather than uPVC. The proposal seeks to maximise the flexibility of the classroom space within the school – an important community facility – and would have a minimal impact on the amenity of locality. The NPPF states that planning authorities should seek solutions, rather than problems, and therefore I am of the opinion that, as the proposal can be viewed as sustainable development, planning permission should be granted.

Conclusion

27. The proposed development constitutes a minor extension to an existing building, with matching materials and a replicated roof line and form. The increase in the floor space of the classroom would be 13.8m², and would not result in an increase in pupil numbers, and therefore would not impact upon highway safety. The design and materials are sensitive to the location, being within a Conservation Area, Green Belt and High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Therefore, I am of the opinion that the development would be acceptable in planning terms, subject to a condition requiring the prior approval of external

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materials, and that there are no overriding material planning reasons to recommend refusal.

Recommendation

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

- The standard time limit condition for commencement of 5 years;
- Development to be completed in accordance with approved plans;
- Approval of external materials; and
- Tree protection;

Case Officer: Jeff Dummett	Tel. no: 01622 221058
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Background Documents: see section heading
