

Extensions and alterations at St. Katherine's School, Snodland - KCC/TM/0273/2012 (TM/12/2777)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 11 December 2012.

Application by St. Katherine's School for extensions and alterations to existing office, swimming pool and nursery buildings at St. Katherine's School, St. Katherine's Lane, Snodland, Kent, ME6 5EJ - KCC/TM/0273/2012.

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mrs Sarah Hohler

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. St Katherine's School is a primary school located in St Katherine's Lane to the west of Snodland. The school site is shared with a nursery to the east of the site. Holmesdale Technology College is to the south east of the site and residential property adjoins other areas of the school field. A map showing the location of the site in relation to its surroundings is included.

Background

2. This application seeks to improve existing facilities at the site and to modernise the teaching environment. There are three elements to the current proposal: an extension to the existing school office allowing revisions to internal layout, reconfiguration of the reception area, provision of a lobby, meeting / office area, kitchen and toilet facilities; an extension to the existing swimming pool allowing a starter pool, improved toilet and changing facilities and an extensions to the existing nursery buildings. The existing nursery block, external play area and car park with new vehicular access was permitted in 2004 (TM/04/02277).
3. Other recently approved planning applications at the school site have included the erection of a staff planning preparation and assessment building and an extended hours activity centre (TM/09/00263) which according to the applicant was completed in 2011; a canopy (application reference TM/05/3666) and double garage (application reference TM/06/4009).
4. The location of each of these three elements of the proposal is as shown in figure 2.

Proposal

5. It is proposed to extend the existing staff office block. The existing building is a single storey flat roof building finished in brown brick and white UPVC windows with UPVC weatherboard cladding above. The proposed extension would be approximately 7.5m wide by 8.5m deep with a curved outer wall and would result in an additional footprint of 55m² which would also be single storey with a flat roof designed to match and naturally assimilate with the existing building.

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Figure 1 General Location Plan

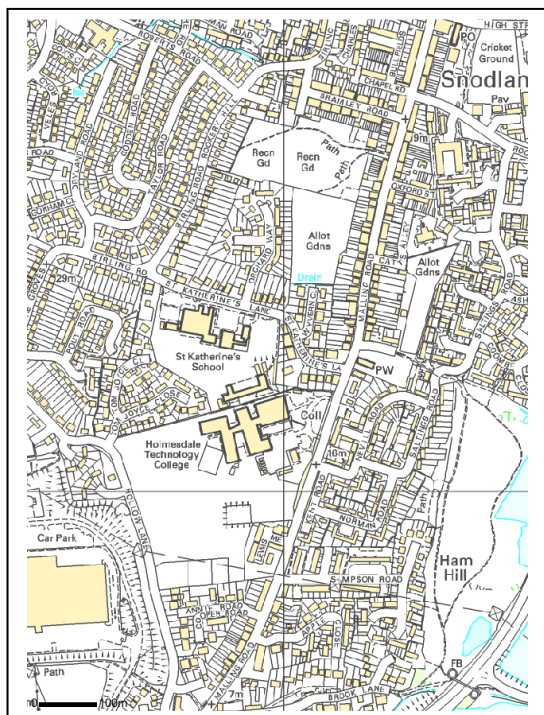
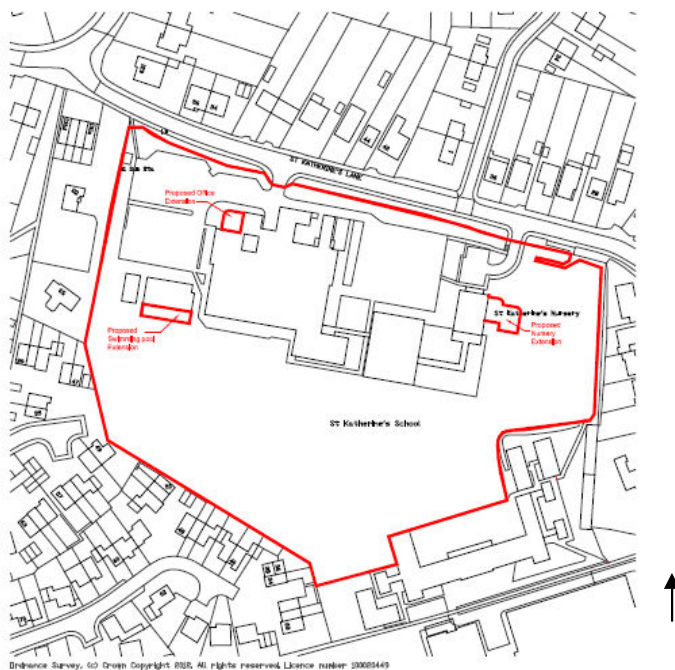


Figure 2 Location of proposed development



6. It is also proposed to extend the existing swimming pool. The existing pool is detached, single storey and a predominantly a white rendered building with red brick columns, white UPVC windows and a gable end corrugated roof. It is proposed to extend this extending approximately 5m from the south facing elevation across the full length of the existing building (approximately 20m), thus providing an additional 100m² floor area in a style designed to appear as a natural extension of the existing building.
7. It is also proposed to extend the existing nursery building. The existing building is purpose built, single storey building with a mix of red and yellow brick, white UPVC windows and gable roof with grey concrete tiles. It is proposed to extend the existing building to the east onto a grassed area which is part of the school field. The extension would provide additional internal floor space of 50m² for the nursery area which would lead to a new glazed link allowing access to a new external play area (90m²) and also to a further extended nursery area (80m²) which would include additional toilet facilities. The proposed extension would protrude 14m from the east elevation of the existing building and would measure 13.5m from north to south. The ridge height proposed would be 4.3m and it is proposed that the building would use matching materials, massing, form and architectural design to the existing nursery building with the exception of a glazed link at the rear and two curved feature windows extending from the floor to the ceiling at the front of the proposed extended areas.
8. The application originally proposed that part of the nursery extension would be a community hall for community use. The community use aspect is no longer proposed and the description of the proposal has been amended accordingly. That part of the proposal is now referred to as an "extended nursery area". However, in relation to that part of the proposed nursery extension it is intended by the applicant that the facility be used during on weekdays only and not after 6.30pm. The applicant stated that during

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school hours it would be used by the School, serving as a dining space for the nursery at lunch time and that it would also be used for reading groups and existing school clubs and by the existing mother/toddler groups run at the school. The applicant states that these activities are not new and already occur at the school.

9. No increase to the existing school roll or teacher numbers is therefore being proposed by the applicant. There are 28 part time staff and 55 full time staff and the applicant states that the majority of these walk to school, whilst some get the bus and a minority drive. The on-site parking provides for 25 spaces (including 1 disabled space) for staff car parking in the upper school and 8 spaces (including 1 disabled space) at the nursery (33 in total). There is no on-site car parking for parents to drop off or pick up.
10. There is a school roll of approximately 530 pupils (ages of 3 and 11). The proposal does not include alteration to existing parking or access arrangements at the site.
11. Elevations have been submitted for each of the three elements of the proposal. However, only elevations showing the proposed nursery element are included in this report to aid discussion and consideration of the key issues raised by the proposed nursery extension. Additional elevational details will be displayed at the Committee meeting.

Figure 3 - Views of the front (northern elevation) and rear (southern and eastern elevation) of nursery



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Figure 4 Existing and proposed north and south nursery elevations

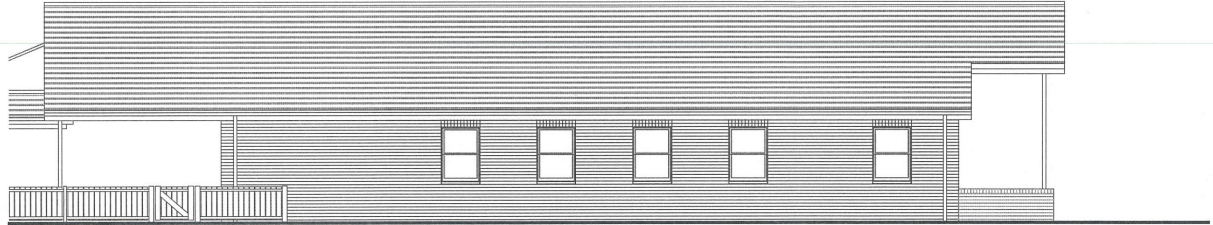


Figure 5 - View of the eastern elevation also showing the front of the building

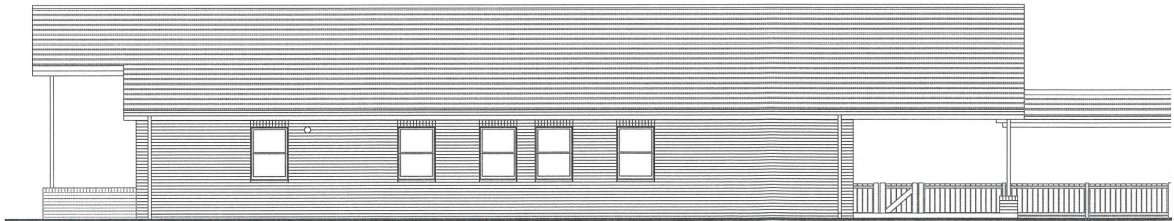


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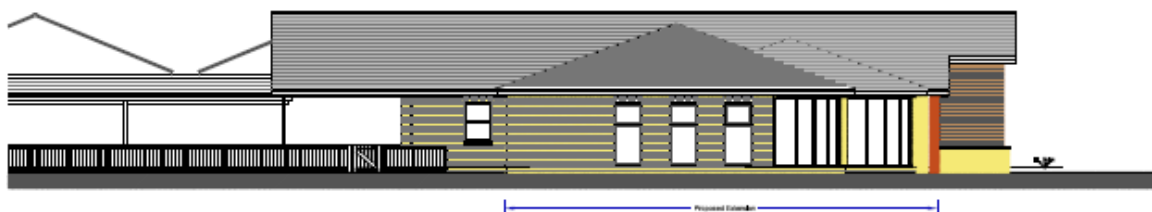
Figure 6 Existing and proposed east and west nursery elevations



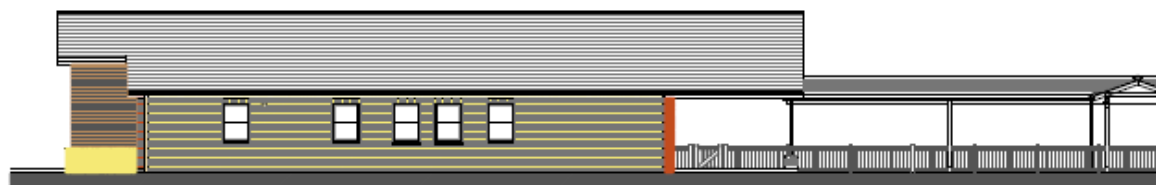
Existing east elevation



Existing west elevation



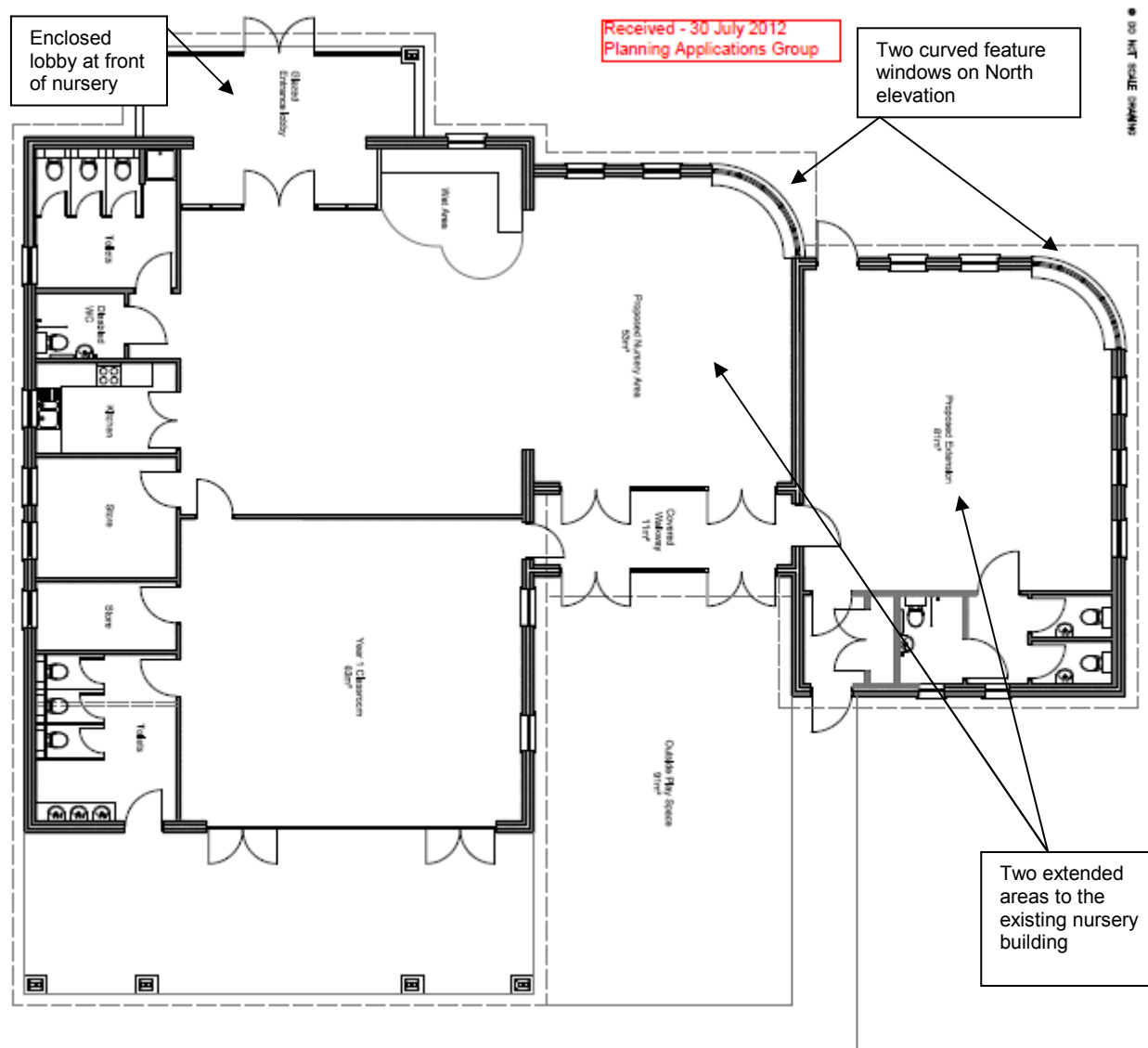
Proposed East Elevation



Proposed West Elevation

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Figure 7 Proposed nursery floor plan



Planning Policy

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

- (i) **National Planning Policy and Guidance** – the most relevant National Planning Policies are set out in the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** where there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In relation to this particular development proposal the following NPPF guidance is particularly relevant:
 - Chapter 1 – building a strong, competitive economy
 - Chapter 4 – promoting sustainable transport
 - Chapter 7 – requiring good design
 - Chapter 8 – promoting healthy communities

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Chapter 11 – conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Planning Statement on planning for schools development - where there is commitment for planning to work in a positive manner when dealing with proposals for the creation, expansion and alteration of state-funded schools and that there should be a presumption in favour of the sustainable development of state-funded schools as expressed in the NPPF.

- (ii) **Regional Development Plan policies**, contained in the adopted South East Plan (2009):

Policy CC1 Seeks to achieve and maintain sustainable development.

Policy CC4 Seeks to encourage development that incorporates sustainable design and construction

Policy CC6 Seeks to create sustainable and distinctive communities

Policy BE1 Seeks to promote development that contributes to local character and sense of place.

Policy S1 Supports the development of healthy communities.

Policy S3 Supports adequate provision and access to education facilities.

Policy C5 Seeks to encourage increased and sustainable participation in sport and recreation.

Policy C6 Seeks to encourage mixed use of community facilities where appropriate.

- (iii) **Borough/ District Local Plan / Local Development Framework policies**, contained in the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Development Framework development plan document (2010) and the Core Strategy (2007)

Policy OS1a Seeks to prevent the loss of recreational open space.

Policy CP1 Encourages high quality development.

Policy CP2 Seeks to encourage more sustainable transport patterns.

Policy CP24 Encourages development designed to respect the site and surroundings.

Policy CP26 Safeguards land for provision of community needs and recreation.

Consultations

13. **Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (TMBC)**: Raises objections to the proposals due to concerns about exacerbating existing traffic concerns in the vicinity.

Snodland Town Council: Requested the deletion of the wording for community use of the hall from the application and raised concerns about lack of parking. (Note the community use is no longer part of the proposal).

Kent Highways and Transportation: Does not object to the proposal subject to conditions regarding the provision of construction vehicle loading/unloading and turning facilities prior to commencement of work on site and for the duration of construction; provision of parking facilities for site personnel and visitors prior to commencement of work on site and for the duration of construction; provision of measures to prevent discharge of surface water onto the highway; and provision of wheel washing facilities

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prior to the commencement of work on site and for the duration of construction.

Sport England: No objection.

Biodiversity: Comment that the proposal has limited potential to impact protected species and that there are small trees on site which may be used by breeding birds which are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Works would need to take account of that. They also suggest enhancements to biodiversity might be incorporated such as bat bricks or tiles, bird boxes.

Environment Agency: No objections

Force Crime Prevention Design Advisor: No comments received.

Public Rights of Way (West Kent PROW Team): No comments received.

Local Member

14. The local County Member, Mrs Sarah Hohler was notified of the application on 21st September 2012. Mrs Hohler responded that in her opinion parking is an issue which she would like to see addressed and that the application is an opportunity to address traffic congestion in St Katherine's Lane. Mrs Hohler also requested that the community use of the proposal be clarified. Further information on the proposal from the applicant and the removal of community use, have clarified the matters raised by Mrs Hohler.

Publicity

15. The application was publicised by the posting of two site notice(s), and the individual notification of 56 neighbouring residential properties. It has also been advertised on the County Council's website. Following additional clarification and information from the applicant, further neighbour notification was carried out to those that originally responded.

Representations

16. In response to the original publicity, 6 neighbour letters of representation have been received. A response was also received from the Borough Councillor for Snodland West. All neighbour responses expressed concerns about the traffic, congestion, parking and highway safety. Three responses also related to the original proposed community use. One response also had further concerns about visual impact of the proposed community hall and one additionally had concerns about the extent of public consultation. That is addressed above.
17. With regard to traffic and highways matters, neighbour concerns were about traffic congestion; volume of traffic and the potential for increased impacts from the development (in particular community use); the need for additional car parking on site and off road and before further buildings are allowed on site; inconsiderate parking and congestion; adequacy of current on site parking arrangements for the number of site personnel and use of on site street parking for this; emergency services access to the school; effectiveness of parking enforcement.

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18. With regard to the community use of the proposed hall, concerns were about the need for the facility, potential impacts of noise, anti-social behaviour, hours, usage and impact on highway.
19. With regard to visual impact the concern related to the need for the proposal, the change in view and the adequacy of screening of the proposed extension to nursery building.
20. In addition, the Borough Councillor for Snodland West regarded the proposal as an opportunity to look at current and future parking issues at the school and alleviate the very worst of the problems, including by provision of a child drop off point within the school or creation of a lay-by in St Katherine's Lane.
21. Following amendments to the application further notifications were carried out which resulted in further comments from the Borough Councillor regarding the appropriateness of addressing parking and highway issues, and urging KCC to address these issues at the same time as improving the school environment and to use this application to improve highway safety at the site.
22. One further comment was received as a result of further neighbour notification following amendments to the application. That related to the visual impact of the development from the properties at 32 and 34 St Katherine's Lane.

Discussion

23. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in **paragraph 12** 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. In my opinion, the key planning considerations in this particular case can be summarised within the following headings:

Need

24. The overall proposal aims to improve the existing facilities at the school to allow continual improvement of what the applicant describes as "outdated" facilities and to improve the teaching environment. The School seeks cost effective, attractive and durable development which improves upon the existing accommodation at the site and which therefore contributes to improvements of the teaching and learning environment.
25. The original proposal included community use (by community groups and non school affiliated groups) as part of the proposed extension to the nursery building. That aspect of the proposal has been removed from the application and so addresses neighbour concerns regarding the need within Snodland for an additional community hall. The proposal does not include wider community use of the proposed swimming pool extension, beyond the current school use.

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26. Planning policy seeks to encourage Schools to adapt and improve their facilities and for the planning system to operate in a positive manner when dealing with school applications. In my view, this objective needs to be balanced against the likely impacts of the proposal in the decision making process.

Location

27. Planning policy seeks to promote healthy communities and open space together with opportunity for sport and recreation as this contributes to the health and well being of communities. Planning policy also seeks to prevent the loss of recreational and open space. In particular, TMBC planning policies seek to prevent the loss of outdoor sports facilities and parts of the St Katherine's School site fall within the scope of this policy. However, TMBC do not object to the proposal on these policy grounds. Sport England has also considered the proposal in the context of playing field policy which also seeks to protect playing fields and outdoor sports facilities from development. Their view is that the proposed office extension is on a small site area not big enough to accommodate playing pitch and that an appropriate policy exception applies in this case in relation to the proposal to extend the swimming pool and nursery buildings. The benefit to sport provided by the proposed swimming pool extension in their view would outweigh any detriment caused by loss of potential sports facility where the proposed nursery extension is located. Sport England therefore does not object to this proposal.
28. Balanced against policy which seeks to protect open space from development is the need to support healthy communities and to provide adequate educational facilities. In my opinion, this proposal contributes to both of these policy objectives and the location of each of the three aspects to this proposal is acceptable in these policy terms.
29. The location of the proposed extension to the existing school office and swimming pool has not attracted any neighbour objection. However, the location of the proposed nursery extension has attracted neighbour concern in relation to visual impact of the proposal and screening. The impacts of the proposal are further discussed below.

Impact of this proposal on the highway

30. St Katherine's Lane is a busy suburban road running between Malling Road and Birling Road. It is also a bus route. Figure 8 below shows the general setting and illustrates that travelling west from Malling Road along St Katherine's Lane there is a bend in the road beyond which there are double yellow lines, "on road" parking areas, the nursery entrance where there are yellow zig zag lines. Further beyond there is another "on road" parking area, the main school entrance, further zig zag lines, a bus stop and keep clear signage on the road.
31. Figure 9 shows that from the west travelling towards the Malling Road there is a mix of single yellow and double yellow lines, a bus stop and the junction for Orchard Way, close to the nursery entrance.

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Figure 8 Views of St Katherine's Lane from the east to the west**Figure 9 Views of St Katherine's Lane from the west to east and the main school entrance**

32. Inconsiderate driving and illegal parking issues are well illustrated by neighbour representations received, which also describe issues such as poor access for buses and emergency services. Neighbours indicate concerns about the potential increase to traffic impacts including congestion, access difficulties and concerns that the existing situation would be made worse with this proposal. Some of these concerns were expressed at the early stages of the application when it included proposals for community use of part of the nursery extension (referred to at that stage as a “proposed hall”) although other concerns related to traffic and congestion generally at the school and as such represented what neighbours perceive as the existing situation, which in their view would be worsened by the proposal.
33. TMBC raised objections to the proposals because in their view there is potential for the traffic concerns in the vicinity to be exacerbated and there was insufficient information about the use. However, in response to these concerns the applicant has amended the proposal and confirmed that it would not be used as a community hall by the general public. The applicant therefore proposes that the development would have negligible impact on the existing parking situation and traffic generation at the site and that the existing on site car parking spaces together with the existing on street car parking provision would comfortably accommodate this. In responding to the concerns about highways issues, the applicant has stated that the proposals are not intended to

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accommodate any increase in pupils, teacher or other staff at the school and that the existing school and nursery roll would not change.

34. The School is already well aware of current issues in relation to parking at the beginning and end of the school day and of complaints from residents about their driveways being blocked by inconsiderate parking, difficulties with using the footpaths and also the reliance on the car. The updated school Travel Plan submitted describes these issues which appear to have been ongoing for a number of years.
35. The Travel Plan also includes general aims to reduce the volume of vehicles on the school run, improvement of the safety of children as they walk to school and to raise awareness of the benefits of walking. It includes targets and monitoring for the reduction of car use and to increase walking and cycling to school. This seeks positive and ongoing improvements.
36. It has been suggested by the Borough Councillor for Snodland West that this planning proposal provides an opportunity for addressing the existing parking issues at the site and to explore new ideas so as to alleviate the very worst of the likely future parking problems. Suggestions have been made that a safe child drop off point might be provided within the school grounds or that that a lay-by could be formed outside the school so as to allow two way traffic to use the road at peak times. These additional works would involve significant additional engineering works and are not part of the current proposals.
37. The applicant in considering these suggestions submits that it would be unreasonable in planning terms to request construction of new car parks or drop off zones within the school grounds as part of this particular proposal as the proposal has no bearing on pupil or staff numbers or on increased traffic generation. The applicant has not therefore included any amendments to the existing parking regime at the school within the proposal. The application will therefore need to be decided on this basis.
38. National planning policy guidance on promoting sustainable transport is that development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the cumulative impacts of development are severe.
39. Local planning policy CP2 seeks to ensure that new development likely to generate a significant number of trips is well located and is compatible with the character and capacity of the highways network in terms of the volume and nature of traffic generated and provides any necessary enhancements to the safety of the highways network. Whilst this proposal is new development it relates to existing use as a school site and is not likely to generate a significant number of trips. This proposal would not lead to any long term increase to the number of highway users to and from the site and the existing access arrangements (ie design and function) have already been granted permission by virtue of previous development.
40. In my opinion, in deciding this application, consideration needs to be given to whether it is reasonable to withhold planning approval based on a desire for the proposal to be much more proactive in addressing concerns regarding the existing traffic and highways environment. This needs to be balanced against national planning policy to deliver facilities needed by the community, such as improvements to schools and policy encouragement for planning to look to solutions rather than problems; seeking to

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approve applications for sustainable development where possible and working proactively with applicants to secure developments that improve the area. In this context, the applicant has amended the proposal to exclude any additional traffic that may have been created by community use of the hall and provided an updated School Travel Plan.

41. The advice from the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation) is that whilst there is already significant congestion and indiscriminate parking at the start and end of the school day on St Katherine's Lane and neighbouring roads, the proposal is unlikely to lead to any substantial increase in traffic flows during the peak school start and finish times. That is because the information within the application indicates that there would be no increase to the school roll, the school numbers or the visitors arising from the proposal. Furthermore the advice is that there would not be sufficient grounds to recommend refusal on highway grounds because of this and that conditions could be used to control the provision of construction vehicle loading/unloading and turning facilities prior to commencement of work on site and for the duration of construction; provision of parking facilities for site personnel and visitors prior to commencement of work on site and for the duration of construction; provision of measures to prevent discharge of surface water onto the highway and provision of wheel washing facilities prior to the commencement of work on site and for the duration of construction. Should the school numbers increase additional information on the parking and access arrangements for parents and guardians would be required.
42. On balance therefore, the proposal would not be likely to result in a material increase to traffic needing to access the site, other than for the short term duration in relation to site construction works and I am satisfied that this can be adequately controlled via condition. The applicant has made amendments to the proposal removing community use; clarified the purpose of the proposal and provided assurances that there would be no impact to the school roll and therefore no additional long term traffic generation as a result of this particular proposal.
43. In considering the scale of the proposal in this location and the potential for additional impact, together with the technical advice from the Development Planning Manager (Highways and Transportation), I am satisfied that the proposal is in accordance with Development Plan policy and that it would not be reasonable to refuse permission on the basis of the highway impacts of the proposal in this particular case.

Impacts in terms of good design, healthy communities, visual and residential amenity

44. The visual impact of the proposed extension to the existing school office and swimming pool has not attracted any neighbour objection. However one neighbour indicated concern about its visual impact and adequacy of screening of the proposed nursery extension. This issue relates to good design, visual and residential amenity.
45. The existing school and nursery buildings are set back from the highway and are largely screened by a mature hedge and tree line, although in places particularly at the newer entrance to the nursery which was permitted in 2004, screening is less well established and there are clear views to the existing nursery and entrance arrangement.
46. The proposed extension to the east of the existing nursery is single storey and would be set back from the current principal elevation. It would protrude 14m in two staggered

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sections (6m and 8m). The ridge height would be lower than the existing nursery and the proposal uses matching materials, and design in massing and form. The two floor to ceiling curved feature windows would be modern but well positioned. The existing nursery porch would be enclosed by a new lobby which would update the appearance of that building.

47. To the east of the proposed nursery extension, the nearest properties are approximately 40m from the proposed building. However, between the school field and these properties is close board fencing and a mature tree line which in my view provides adequate screening to the east elevation.
48. To the north, the nearest properties are numbers 36, 34, 32, and 30 St Katherine's Lane. These are approximately 45m from the proposed buildings (measured to the front of the building). Numbers 34 and 32 are directly opposite the existing nursery entrance and the current views would change as a result of this proposal. The main effect would be to reduce the extent of open school playing field visible beyond the existing access gate. The current view of a relatively open green school field would need to also incorporate the proposed nursery extension building. However, planning policy does not provide a right to keep an unaltered view. The proposed extension would be largely within the same line of vision of the existing drop kerb and access and in my view would not be out of keeping with the street scene.
49. National planning policy requires good design and positive contributions to making better places for people and this includes making developments visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping. In my opinion, care has been taken to ensure that the proposal is well designed. It incorporates the existing building form as well as introducing a more modern appearance by use of curved glass windows. It would be set back and subservient to the existing frontage and would not result in a bringing forward of the current building line.
50. However, no new planting has been proposed by the applicant as part of this proposal. In response to concerns about screening, the applicant has advised that whilst it would be willing to implement further natural screening in the form of hedges and trees along the boundary of the field with St Katherine's Lane, in their view it is not necessary as the proposal would not detract from the visual amenity of the area. However, given the change in aspect, and also the apparent failure of previous planting in the bank of the school field alongside the nursery access, in my view additional screening should be encouraged as a positive improvement to the proposal. This can be dealt with by condition requiring further submission.

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Figure 10 View of school field from the corner of Orchard Drive near to number 36 St Katherine's Lane, looking south east towards the existing nursery building



Figure 11 View from the school field toward property on St Katherine's Lane



51. Concerns have also been expressed about increased potential for increased anti-social behaviour as a result of the proposal. This relates to planning and promoting healthy communities. Given the location within the school grounds and the removal of community use from the proposal, in my opinion the amended proposal would not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion as a result of increasing the potential for crime and disorder.

Conclusion

52. In summary, I consider that on balance the proposal accords with the general aims and objectives of national and local planning policy in relation to transport, requiring good design, and promoting healthy communities. It respects the character and quality of the area and the location, scale, design and quality of each element of the proposal would not, in my view, be significantly detrimental to the built environment, highway network or to residential and visual amenity. The parking and highway congestion in the area is an

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ongoing issue of concern but one which in my view should be addressed outside the determination of this particular planning proposal as the development would not result in an increase in the existing school roll or teaching staff. I consider that this proposal accords with the development plan and that there are no material planning considerations that indicate that planning permission should be withheld. I would however recommend the inclusion of various planning conditions.

Recommendation

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

- The standard 5 year time limit,
- That the development be carried out in accordance with submitted details,
- That a scheme of landscaping be submitted prior to commencement of the nursery extension,
- Restriction on the hours of operation of the proposed nursery extension from 07.30am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday only,
- Restriction on the hours of working during construction to between 0800 and 1800 Monday to Friday and between the hours of 0900 to 1300 Saturdays with no operation on Sundays or Bank Holidays,
- Restriction of the development to school use only as described in the application,
- Submission of details of construction access, construction vehicle loading, unloading, turning, circulation and parking for the duration of the construction works, prior to commencement of work on site,
- Restoration and making good of any disturbed areas of field or planting,
- Provision of parking facilities for site personnel and visitors for the duration of construction works, prior to commencement of work on site,
- Provision of measures to prevent the discharge of surface water onto the highway prior to the commencement of the development,
- Provision of wheel washing facilities prior to commencement of work on site and for the duration of construction,
- Implementation of the School Travel Plan, and
- Protection to breeding birds.

Case Officer: H Mallett	Tel. no: 01622 221075
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Background Documents: see section heading
