

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

Single storey building to accommodate five classrooms, and associated works at Lady Boswell's CofE Primary School, Plymouth Drive, Sevenoaks – SE/13/487 (KCC/SE/0039/2013)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 7 June 2013.

Application by Kent County Council Property & Infrastructure Support for a single storey building to accommodate five classrooms with associated welfare facilities, extension to the existing hall to achieve a second hall space, extension to existing classrooms, extension of playground area, upgrading of existing pedestrian access path from the Leisure Centre, installation of wall mounted canopy and existing bank adaptations to provide new emergency vehicle access to the rear of the school at Lady Boswell's CofE Primary School, Plymouth Drive, Sevenoaks – SE/13/487.

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mrs Margaret Crabtree

Classification: Unrestricted

Members' Site Visit

1. Representatives of the Planning Application Committee visited the application site on the 27 March 2013 to acquaint themselves with the proposals and the issues they raise. The Democratic Services Officer's notes of the visit are attached as Appendix 1.

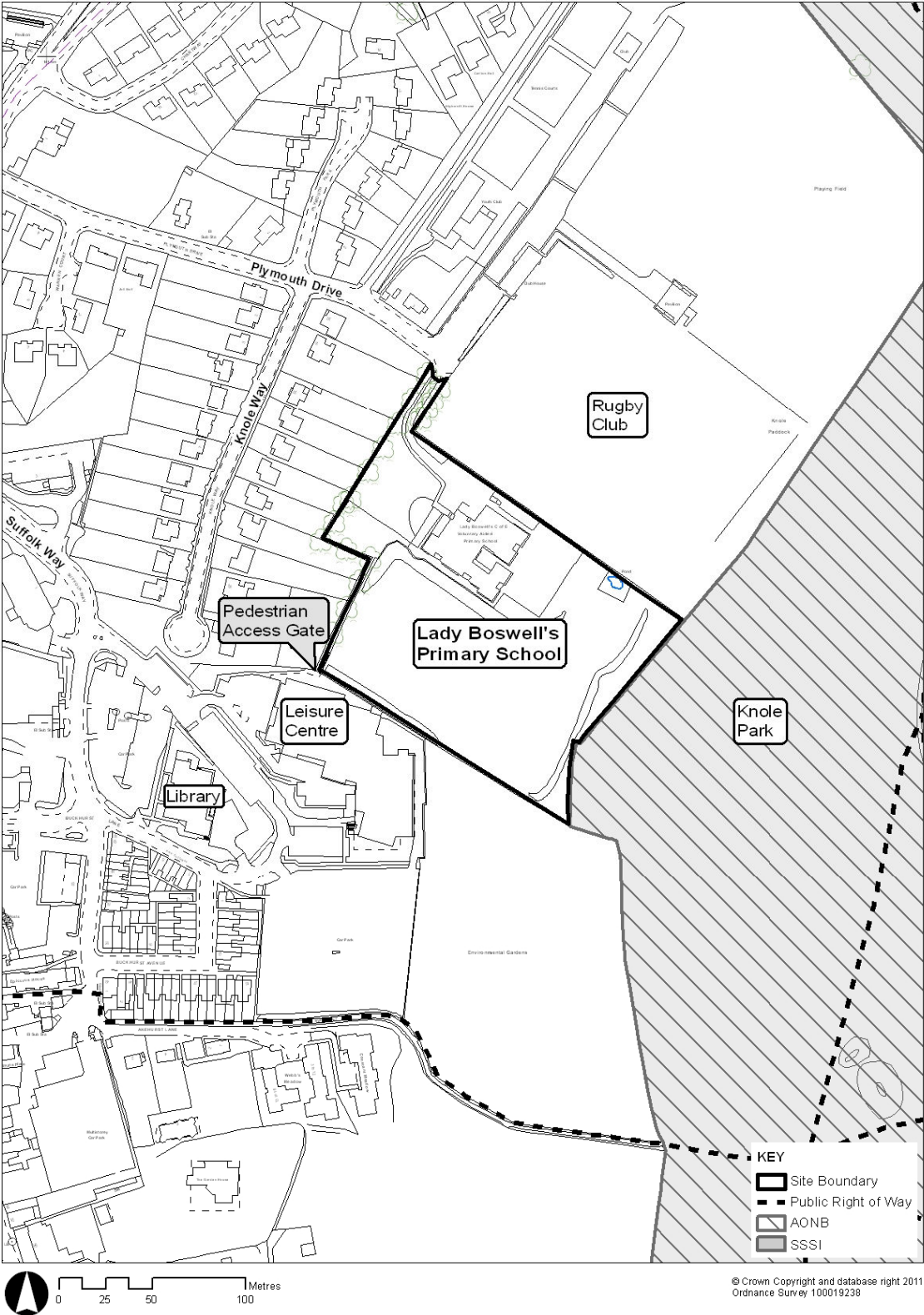
Site Description

2. Lady Boswell's Primary School is located to the south east of Plymouth Drive, approximately 300 metres to the east of Sevenoaks Town Centre. Surrounding the site, the Sevenoaks Rugby Club at Plymouth Drive lies directly to the north of the school. A residential area lies to the west of the site, with an area of wooded park land (Knole Park) to the east and the Sevenoaks Leisure Centre to the south.
3. The part of the school site affected by the proposed development includes a strip of land on the north side of the existing school buildings, a strip of land to the south side of the buildings, infill of an existing courtyard space, the extension of the existing playground to the east side of the school buildings and some minor works to the existing south west corner access path. The rest of the school site is otherwise not directly affected, although the site as a whole is included within the Metropolitan Green Belt, and is adjacent to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which includes Knole Park (which is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest). The application has, due to the site's location within the Green Belt, been advertised as a Departure to the Development Plan.

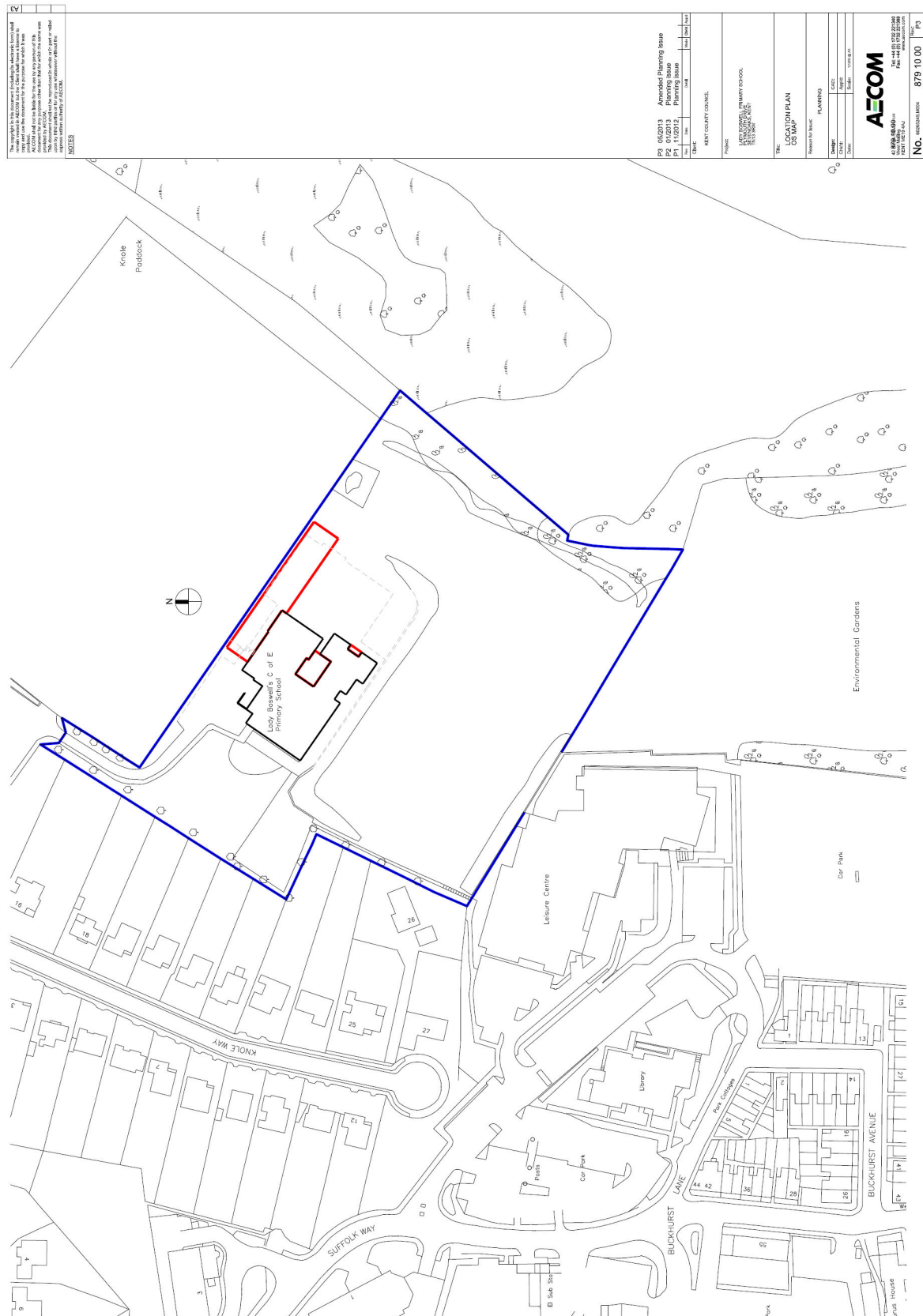
A site location plan is attached.

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Site Location Plan

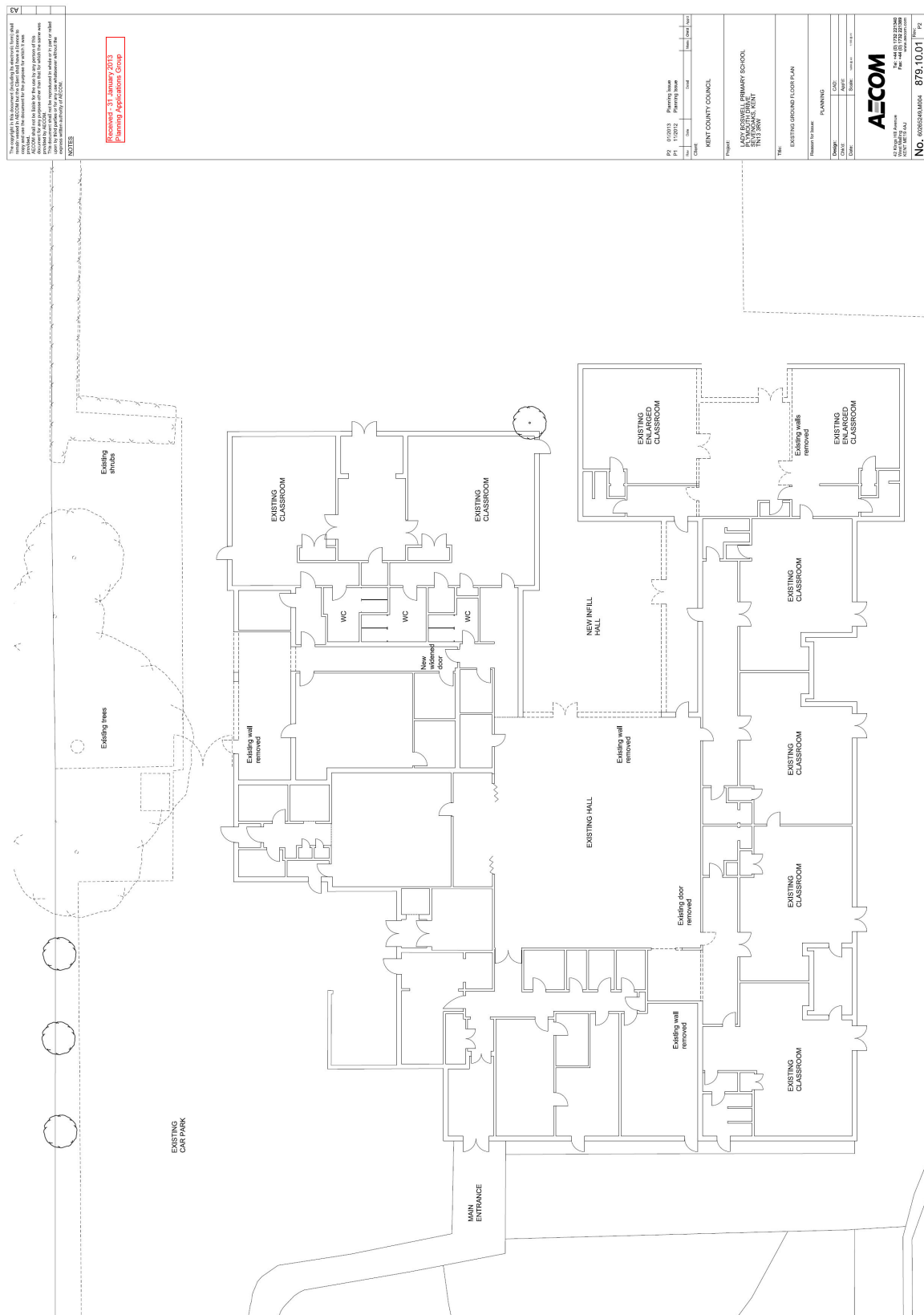


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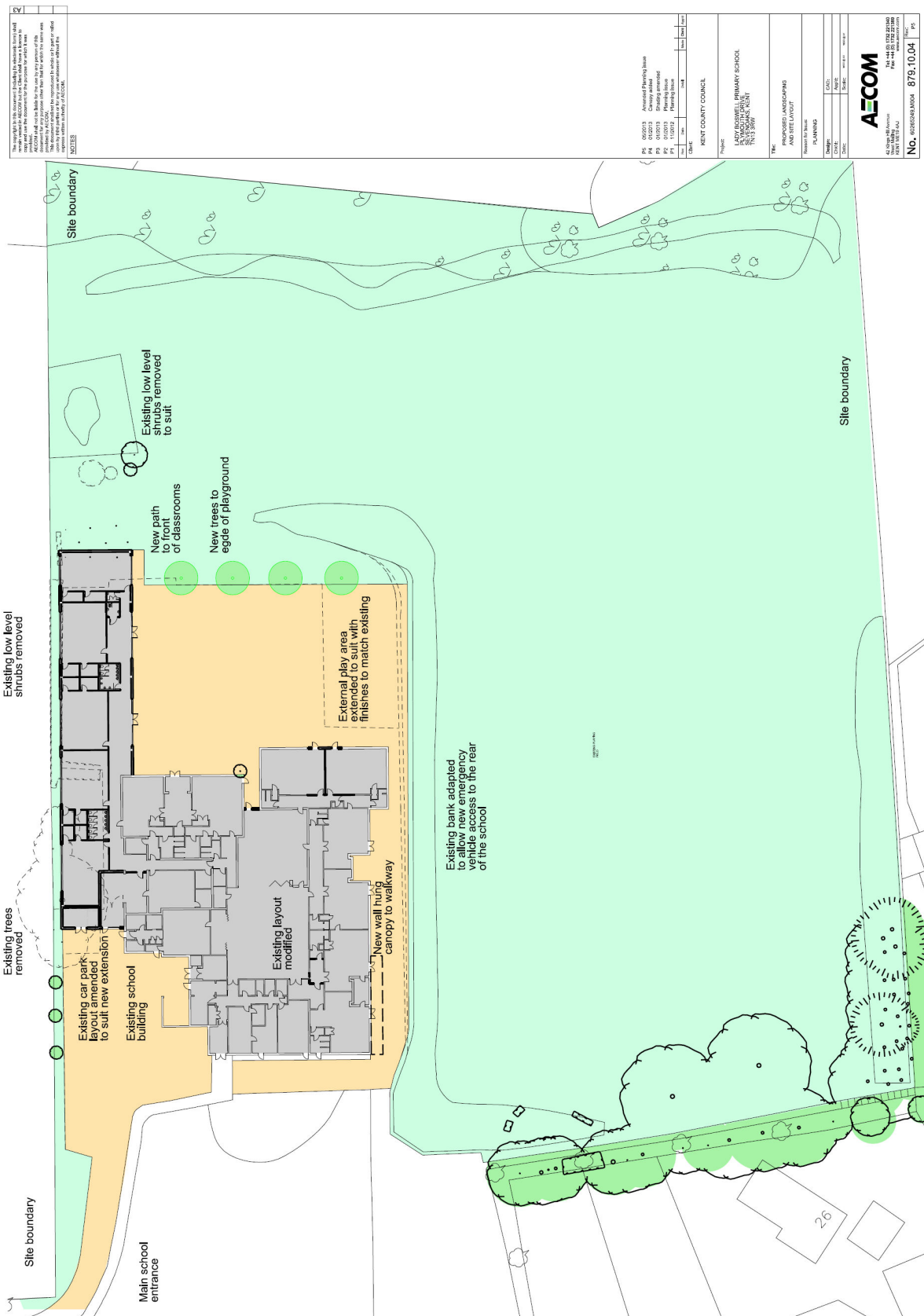
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Existing Ground Floor Layout Plans



Single storey building to accommodate five classrooms, and associated works at Lady Boswell's CofE Primary School, Plymouth Drive, Sevenoaks – SE/13/487 (KCC/SE/0039/2013)

Proposed Site Plan



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Proposed Elevations (North and West)

NOTES

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Project: LADY GODDARD PRIMARY SCHOOL
SOUTHWICK, KENT
TN11 2BN

Client: KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

Revision:

Rev	Date	Description
1	11/02/13	Issued for planning
2	11/02/13	Issued for planning
3	11/02/13	Issued for planning
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Background and amendments

4. The proposed development is part of the County Council's current Basic Need programme for the expansion of school places across the county. Lady Bowell's CofE Primary School provides schooling for central Sevenoaks, but also draws pupils from a wider catchment because of its faith status. Because of the changing population demographics in the area there is a demand for this school to enlarge its Pupil Admission Number from one to two Forms of Entry (ie. from 30 to 60 pupils per year). The County Council as Education Authority has a statutory duty to provide school places for these children. However, such growth would be incremental year on year with overall pupil numbers at this school predicted to rise from 216 in September 2012, to 248 in 2013, 278 in 2014 and thence 30 per year until reaching 420 by 2019. The Kent Commissioning Plan 2012-2017, produced by the Education Authority and setting out how it is intended to meet the demand for school places, forecasts Reception Year pupil numbers to continue to increase and to outstrip the actual number of available places.
5. When this application was originally submitted, the proposal was for a six classroom extension, which extended approximately 6 metres further to the south east than the five classroom extension as now proposed. The applicant has confirmed that the sixth classroom has been omitted from the proposal due to the location of an existing mains gas supply, which was identified as part of the survey work undertaken following submission of the application. The gas main cannot be built over. The cost of diversion would be substantial, and would affect the gas supply to the Leisure Centre. Therefore, it is proposed that the future requirement for the School to become a full 2FE would be met with a sixth classroom to be proposed to the front of the school building. That proposal would be subject to a future planning application. It is the amended proposal that will be discussed and considered throughout this report.

Proposal

6. The existing school development comprises a single storey, flat roofed arrangement of buildings, with largely brick faced walls. It dates from the mid 1980s, but has had some extensions in 2002 and 2010 of similar construction. The proposed new development would enable the school to expand within a permanent timber framed structure linked to the main school building. An extension to the existing school hall would provide a second large space, as required to comply with Department for Education guidance. The key elements of the proposals include:
 - a. **new teaching accommodation** – an extension on the north east side of the school building is proposed, along the boundary with the neighbouring Rugby Club site, to provide 5 additional classrooms (65m² each with 4m² store) with associated storage and cloakrooms, and additional toilets. The existing prayer room would also be extended into the new extension to form a new IT suite, whilst the adjacent music room would be removed to provide a connecting corridor and the main entrance in on the north east elevation;
 - b. **hall extension** – an extension to the existing hall would be created by a single storey infill to the adjacent courtyard, providing an extra 80m² of floorspace, with a sliding partition to provide flexibility of use;
 - c. **other works** - the existing IT room and lobby would need to be converted into an additional Year 2 classroom, and the existing Year 4 classroom would be enlarged to

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ultimately provide a further Year 2 classroom. A small infill to the existing classrooms on the south east side of the main buildings would enable the provision of the two classrooms (of 60m²). The IT suite would be relocated to the new extension;

- d. **outdoor play space** – an extension to the existing hard games court to the south east of the site would be provided, to compensate for the encroachment of the building works onto the existing hard play area. The existing layout of sports pitches is otherwise unaffected by the proposed developments;
 - e. **upgraded pedestrian access** – the pathway from the adjacent Sevenoaks Leisure Centre would be upgraded by removing the existing steps to provide ramped access with some low level bollard lighting, to accord with DDA requirements; and
 - f. **emergency access** – a new access route for emergency vehicles would be created by works to the embankment area and adjusting an existing footpath alignment.
7. The proposed new build would be of timber frame construction, cavity brick/block work, with cream colour rendered panels and external brickwork to match that of the existing school elevations. The proposed roofing would be grey powder coated standing seam aluminium, and the windows and doors would be aluminium framed units, in white powder coated finish, to match existing replacement windows at the school. The proposed rainwater goods would similarly be white coated aluminium. The flat roofed hall extension is also proposed to be constructed using a facing brick to match the existing, with roof lights in the flat roof to provide additional light and ventilation to the hall. To the south west of the existing school building it is proposed to erect a wall mounted powder coated aluminium framed canopy, to serve the reception year classroom. The applicant advises that the project would achieve a minimum 'Very Good' rating under BREEAM for schools.
 8. A Tree Survey has been undertaken and submitted with this application, which concludes that the proposed five classroom extension would result in the loss of 4 trees which are all adjacent to the boundary with the Rugby Club. The applicant has confirmed that replacement tree planting would be provided on site. With regard to ecology, an Ecological Scoping Survey Report has been submitted which concludes that the development would not have a detrimental impact on biodiversity, subject to precautionary approaches with regard to nesting birds, bats, hedgehogs and the common toad.
 9. The existing school car park provides 21 spaces for staff only, with visitors and parents using the adjacent Sevenoaks District Council car park at the Leisure Centre (Suffolk Way Car Park). Due to the restricted access and lack of parking within the school grounds, restricted on-street parking within Plymouth Drive and at the adjoining Rugby Club, a significant number of parents use the pedestrian access in the south west corner of the site, which links to the Suffolk Way car park. Proposals to upgrade this access, to remove the steps and provide low level bollard lighting, are to further encourage its use. In addition, the School are reviewing a walking bus scheme, with allocated car parking bays proposed within the public car park for parent drop off and pick up. It is advised by the applicant that approval has been obtained for these works, for use a peak school times. In addition, the submitted Transport Statement Addendum confirms that parents are issued with permits to park in the Suffolk Way car park, which are recognised by Sevenoaks District Council. The permits allow for up to half an hour free car parking between 8.45am and 9.15am, and 3.15pm and 3.45pm, on school days only.

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10. No extension to the school car park is proposed because it is not physically practicable without removing important landscape planting, or impinging on areas needed for sports and outdoor play purposes. The School currently have 34 teaching staff and are expecting to manage the available parking facility, in association with their School Travel Plan, which accompanies the planning application and includes initiatives to reduce car travel associated with the school.

The planning application is accompanied by a Supporting Statement & Design and Access Statement, Tree Survey Report, Arboricultural Implications Assessments and Method Statement, Ecological Scoping Survey Report, School Travel Plan, Transport Statement, and a Transport Statement Addendum.

Planning Policy Context

11. **National Planning Policies** – the most relevant National Planning Policies are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) which 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. However, the weight given to development plan policies will depend on their consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the development plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given). 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 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 three dimensions to sustainable development which create three overarching roles in the planning system - economic, social and environmental. These roles are mutually dependent. Within the over-arching roles there are twelve 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 coastal 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;

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- 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);
- Chapter 8 (Promoting healthy communities);
- Chapter 9 (Protecting Green Belt land)
- Chapter 10 (Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change);
- Chapter 11 (Conserving and enhancing the natural environment); and
- Chapter 12 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment).

Chapter 9 states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts, with the fundamental aim of Green Belt Policy being to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Chapter 11 states that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in (amongst other designated areas) Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. It goes on to state that planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
- the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
- any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.

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.

The **Policy Statement on Planning for Schools Development (August 2011)** is also relevant, in so far as it identifies that there should be a presumption in favour of the development of state-funded schools.

12. Sevenoaks District Local Plan: Adopted 2000:

- Policy EN1 -** Proposals for all forms of development and land use must comply with the policies set out in this Plan, unless there are overriding material considerations. Scale, height, design, layout, retention of important features (such as trees), residential and local amenity, access and parking are just some of the criteria which should be considered in the determination of a planning application.

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- Policy EN4A** - Proposals for all forms of non-residential development must make satisfactory provision for the safe and easy access of those with disabilities.
- Policy EN6** - The Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are shown on the Proposals Map. Development which would harm or detract from the landscape character of these areas will not be permitted.
- Policy EN26** - The Proposals Map identifies a number of historic parks and gardens and the Local Planning Authority will protect these sites and their settings from intrusive development.
- Policy NR10** – Proposals for all forms of development should minimise pollution of the environment through the careful design and layout of any buildings or land uses.
- Policy VP1** – Vehicle parking provision in new developments will be made in accordance with KCC adopted vehicles parking standards.

Sevenoaks District Core Strategy: Adopted February 2011:

- Policy LO8** – Seeks to maintain the extent of Green Belt, and conserve and enhance the countryside, including the distinctive features that contribute to the special character of its landscape and its biodiversity. The distinctive character of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting, will be conserved and enhanced.
- Policy SP1** – Requires all new development to be designed to a high standard, reflect the distinctive local character of an area, create safe, inclusive and attractive environments, incorporate sustainable development principles and maintain biodiversity. Account should be taken of guidance adopted by the District Council in the form of Conservation Area Appraisals and Parish Plans, amongst other matters. The Districts heritage assets and their settings, including listed buildings, conservation areas, historic buildings, archaeological remains, landscapes and outstanding views will be protected and enhanced.
- Policy SP2** - Sets standards for sustainable design and construction. Institutional development will be required to achieve a BREEAM rating of at least 'very good'. In order to achieve this, the proposal will be expected to demonstrate 10% energy savings through renewable sources.
- Policy SP11** - Seeks to conserve biodiversity, to ensure no net loss through development and to promote opportunities to enhance biodiversity.

Consultations

13. **Sevenoaks District Council** – Objects on the basis that the proposals would have a detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt. It does not consider that the "very special circumstances" put forward clearly outweigh this harm.

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The Council also objects to the proposals on the basis that they would have a detrimental highway impact upon the amenities of local residents in the surrounding area. The proposals are therefore considered to conflict with Policies EN1 and VP1 of the Sevenoaks Local Plan.

Sevenoaks Town Council – *initially* recommended refusal on the following grounds: -

- the “very special circumstances” required by the NPPF have not been demonstrated to justify development within the Green Belt;
- the included travel plan is speculative and inadequate, and will not mitigate the significant increase in traffic as a result of the proposed extension;
- the on-site parking is inadequate;
- the reduction in outside amenity space is unacceptable, and would result in insufficient recreation area;
- there would be an unacceptable loss of trees on the site;
- the proposal would have a detrimental impact on the amenities of neighbouring properties and result in an ‘urbanisation’ of the area; and
- the proposal would have a detrimental impact on the setting of Knole Park.

However, following the submission of the Transport Statement Addendum, Sevenoaks Town Council now recommends approval of the proposed development.

Kent Highways and Transportation – comment as follows:

“I am grateful for the additional work which has been undertaken with respect to Highways and Transportation matters and for the further information provided in the Transport Statement Addendum. This provides a much clearer understanding of the car parking permit scheme arrangements undertaken at the southern access point to Lady Boswell School and I note the school and Sevenoaks District Council’s commitment to continue and extend this scheme at the Suffolk Way car park. I note in paragraph 3.2.4 of this document that it is also intended to encourage older children at this point to walk the short distance from the car park to the school southern entrance independently. Whilst it may be that more than one staff member in attendance would be better to give more confidence in this activity, both the permit scheme and a commitment to oversee a drop off arrangement is welcomed.

I also note the School’s commitment to hold regular consultations as necessary with professionals and local residents in the school’s build up to a two form entry to 2019 and beyond. This again is considered to be good practice and is welcomed. Development of the School Travel Plan as outlined involving liaison with officers in Highways and Transportation, including walking buses and engagement of parent ‘champions’ to bring this about is similarly considered to be an achievable and positive step forwards. I consider that the Transport Addendum provided addresses initial concerns and gives a greater confidence to the application and School’s commitment to minimise impacts in Transport terms.

I would not wish to recommend a refusal. However, suitable conditions regarding the following matters are considered necessary should approval be given:

- *Continuation and extension of the car parking permit scheme;*
- *Holding regular liaison meetings including invitations to residents; and*
- *Supervision at the southern access gate and Suffolk car park to encourage a dropping off arrangement;*

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In addition suitable conditions regarding the following matters are also considered necessary:

- *the continued development of the School Travel Plan; and*
- *the applicant providing a construction method statement prior to commencement, which should include*
 - securing safe compound(s),
 - hours of working,
 - delivery procedures,
 - before and after highway condition surveys,
 - any abnormal loads and/or delivery times,
 - community relations, contact arrangements and site notices.”

Environment Agency – No objection to the proposals, however requests conditions be attached to any consent covering the following matters:

- no infiltration of surface water drainage into the ground is permitted other than with the express written consent of the County Planning Authority; and
- potential ground contamination and any necessary remediation.

English Heritage – no comments received.

National Trust – no comments received.

Natural England – Notes that the application is within the setting of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, however has no comment to make on the proposals in this respect as it does not consider that the development is likely to impact on the reasons for which the site is designated. The application is also in close proximity to the Knole Park Site of Special Scientific Interest. However, given the nature and scale of the proposals, it is satisfied that there is not likely to be an adverse effect on this site as a result of the proposal being carried out in accordance with the details submitted in the application. Aside from the comments on designated sites, it expects the County Planning Authority to assess and consider other possible impacts resulting from this proposal on the following matters:

- Protected or Biodiversity Action Plan species on the site;
- Local wildlife sites;
- Local landscape character; and
- Biodiversity enhancements.

KCC Landscape Advisor – concludes as follows:

“The overall scheme generates limited landscape issues. The building design is in keeping with the existing school and remains within the school boundary. The scheme is supported and we would simply stress the use of landscape information to inform the final planting on site, and any boundary treatments required. Any views into the school from the AONB and Knole Park should also be borne in mind.”

Kent Downs AONB Unit – no comments received .

KCC Biodiversity Projects Officer – is satisfied that sufficient information has been provided with the application. It is noted that the Ecological Survey has identified a low potential of bats and reptiles being present within the site and it is recommended that precautionary mitigation is carried out to minimise the potential of these species being

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impacted. It is therefore recommended that a condition be imposed on any consent securing the precautionary mitigation details in the application. The Officer considers that any site lighting should be designed appropriately and that the potential for biodiversity enhancements be explored as part of the proposals.

KCC Archaeological Officer – states that the site lies adjacent to the registered parkland of Knole Park. The historic landscaped grounds are of heritage interest, and measures should be taken to ensure that there is no detrimental impact on the setting of the park.

Sport England – Does not object to the application, on the grounds that the proposed developments would appear to be sited on areas incapable of accommodating a playing pitch.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service – Confirms that the means of access is considered satisfactory. On site fire safety issues will be addressed during the Building Regulations process with the Building Control Department.

Representations

14. The application was publicised by the posting of several site notices around the application site, a newspaper advertisement, and the individual notification of 21 nearby properties. The site notices and newspaper advertisement identified that the proposed development is a departure application as it does not accord with the provisions of the development plan in force in the area, owing to the site's location within the Metropolitan Green Belt.
15. Following the submission of the amended proposal, which removed a classroom from the development, those residents who had made representations on the application were notified of the amended details.
16. At the time of writing this report, 8 letters of representation have been received. The main points of objection are summarised as follows:-

Access and Highway matters

- Parking and traffic implications of the expansion have not been properly assessed, and a doubling of pupil numbers would increase traffic volumes and create gridlock in Plymouth Drive, which had to be widened a few years after the school opened to cater for the traffic;
- Increasing the average distance for pupil journeys conflicts with the KCC Transport Plan relating to developing a strategy to encourage greater levels of active travel to schools, and the Sustainable Travel to School Strategy which aims to boost walking to school. 50% of the additional pupils should be allocated on the basis of proximity to the school;
- The parking in the area is already inadequate for the numbers using the area, and the narrow cul-de-sac would become even more hazardous and congested;
- Congestion will also arise at the top of Seal Hollow Road, together with greater pressure being put on the South Park traffic lights and the junctions with Plymouth Drive and the Dartford Road;
- Parents already stop on double yellow lines when the permissive spaces are all taken;
- There would be an increase in noise and air pollution from the increased traffic, and

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- a 20mph limit should be introduced;
- The submitted Transport Statement is shockingly poor and unconvincing, with many non-sequitur conclusions and heroic assumptions;
- To permit expansion of the school without even a traffic survey of the local road network would create enormous problems for the future;
- The Transport Statement assumes that parents and children will continue to respond to 'good practice', with no sanctions if they do not;
- Pedestrian access via Plymouth Way is hampered by overgrown vegetation and parked cars, and the poor condition of the road will deteriorate with increased traffic;
- Basing the Transport Statement's projections on the Travel Plan rather than facts produces unsubstantiated and over-optimistic conclusions;
- The Town Council car park is already fully occupied by commuters from 8.30 am;

General matters

- Little regard has been taken of the school's wider catchment on faith grounds, so there is little prospect of more places being taken up by local children;
- This is not a local school because as a near neighbour, I have to take my child by car to another school, since places are taken up by church going families from further afield;
- No objection to the siting or the design of the proposed buildings;
- As a neighbour occupier, we were assured that there would be no expansion of the school because it was in the Green Belt;
- If the development proceeds, then the boundary fencing should be upgraded to provide some noise attenuation, given the increase in number of children.

17. Representations have also been received from the **Knole Paddock Residents' Association**, which objects to the application as follows:

"KPRA strongly objects to the proposal on the grounds that the road network and parking infrastructure surrounding the site are not sufficient to withstand the increase in traffic movements that would arise from the proposed expansion. Our objection fully supports that of the Sevenoaks Town Council Planning Committee (ref. minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2012). Please note that KPRA does not contest the need for the expansion of Lady Boswell's School, and has no objection to the design of the proposed new buildings.

We submitted our concerns and suggestions about the proposed expansion during the Public Consultation phase of the project and fully anticipated that they would be addressed in the Transport Statement which was published in February 2013. However, the Transport Statement completely fails to address our concerns, is badly written with poorly argued points, and relies far too heavily on inadequately researched data and a revised Travel Plan (a document produced by the School itself rather than professional consultants) which is nothing more than a wish list, when what is needed is a committed, fully researched plan to reduce traffic and improve road safety.

Contrary to the astonishing conclusion in the Transport Statement, (*"the uplift in pupil numbers can be mitigated to the point where the increase in traffic movements is not material or significant"*) we believe that the expansion of the school will result in a huge increase in vehicle numbers, causing traffic gridlock, continuing and aggravated deterioration of the road surface in Plymouth Drive and an increased safety risk to pedestrians, cyclists and other road users.

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The document contains a number of serious errors and omissions, and we reiterate that we are extremely concerned that the Transport Statement is of such a poor quality and fails to address the very real concerns expressed by Sevenoaks Town Council and ourselves on behalf of over 50 affected households during the public consultation on this expansion proposal. Unless and until these concerns are properly researched and practicable solutions developed, this planning application should not be granted consent."

Local Member

18. At the time the application was submitted, the County Council Local Member Mr John London was notified of the application, in February 2013. Mr London commented as follows:

"Road safety measures need to be addressed, particularly at the end of the school day, with parents collecting their children from the main entrance in Plymouth Drive. It would be preferable if children being collected by car could use the Leisure Centre car park if some arrangement could be organised with Sevenoaks District Council."

Following the County Council elections on the 2 May 2013, the County Council Local Member is now Mrs Margaret Crabtree. Mrs Crabtree was notified of the application on the 13 May 2013

Discussion

19. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraphs 11 & 12 above. Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, this proposal needs to be considered in the context of Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance, including the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. Issues of particular relevance include impact upon the Metropolitan Green Belt and wider landscape (including siting, massing & design), highway implications and access, and whether the development is sustainable in light of the NPPF.
20. In this case the key determining factors, in my view, are the impact upon the local highway network, the local protected landscape and the Green Belt, and the policy support for the development of schools to ensure that there is sufficient provision to meet growing demand, increased choice and raised educational standards, subject to being satisfied on amenity and other material considerations. In the Government's view the creation and development of schools is strongly in the national interest and planning authorities should support this objective, in a manner consistent with their statutory obligations. In considering proposals for the creation, expansion and alteration of schools, the Government considers that there is a strong presumption in favour of state funded schools, as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework and reflected in the Policy Statement for Schools. Planning Authorities should give full and thorough consideration to the importance of enabling such development, attaching significant weight to the need to establish and develop state funded schools, and making full use of their planning powers to support such development, only imposing conditions that are absolutely necessary and that meet the tests set out in Circular 11/95.

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21. Policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan, and Core Strategy Policy SP1, seek to conserve and enhance the environment and require development to be well designed and respect its setting. This is particularly relevant to this site which is identified within the Sevenoaks District Local Plan as being within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The site is also adjacent to the National Trust property of Knole Park, and borders the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Policy LO8 of the Sevenoaks District Core Strategy seeks to resist inappropriate development within the Green Belt, unless justified by exceptional circumstances. The Policy also states that the distinctive character of the AONB and its setting will be conserved and enhanced. Reference is made within Policy LO8 to PPG2 which has been replaced by the NPPF. The NPPF states “as with previous Green Belt Policy, inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances”. The NPPF does not explain in any detail what ‘very special circumstances’ means, but does go on to state “very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations”. Any built development within the Metropolitan Green Belt could affect the openness of it and would be contrary to planning policies. On this basis the development proposed must be considered as a departure from the Development Plan, and has been advertised as such. The need, or otherwise, to refer the application to the Secretary of State for determination will be considered and assessed in the following section of this report

Green Belt and wider landscape considerations

22. The NPPF, section 9, paragraph 80 states that the Green Belt serves five purposes:
- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;
 - to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The NPPF goes on to state (paragraph 89), that local planning authorities should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt, but lists a number of exceptions to this assumption. One such exception is the extension or alteration of a building provided it does not result on disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. Although the proposed extensions are of a similar scale and massing to that of the original building, in terms of being single storey, the provision of an additional 5 classrooms, and associated amenity spaces, cannot be considered to be a proportionate addition in this regard. The development is therefore, in my mind inappropriate and needs to be considered accordingly.

23. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and it is for the applicant to demonstrate why permission should be granted. Such development should not be approved, except in very special circumstances. It is, therefore, necessary to consider the impact of the development on the openness of the Green Belt and whether or not there are very special circumstances that would warrant setting aside the general presumption against inappropriate development.
24. Sevenoaks District Council raises objection to this application on the basis that they consider that the development would have a detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt. The District Council does not consider that the case of very special circumstances put forward by the applicant clearly outweighs ‘this harm’. The Town Council also initially raised objection on this ground but, following the submission of the

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Transport Statement Addendum, now recommends approval of this application. The applicants have accepted that the development is, by definition, inappropriate and have, therefore, set out the planning policies relevant to the development and have provided what they consider to be a case of very special circumstances.

25. First, the applicant states that extensions to the school are necessary to provide adequate educational facilities to meet the demand of the locality. The publication of the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2012-2017 provided forecasting that clearly indicated that demand in Sevenoaks Town Centre (as a planning area as defined by the Education Authority) was exceeding the number of places available. Permanent extensions in Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) were considered necessary. A preliminary study on possible solutions to this situation identified that, although all schools in the planning area were forecast to exceed their capacity in the coming years, only three schools could accommodate a permanent expansion. These three Primary Schools are St Johns CofE, Sevenoaks and Lady Boswell's.
26. The prospect of a reversal of demand has also been considered by the applicant but, as the future pupils already live within the area, the applicant considers that any such change would have to relate to a sudden out migration of young families. There is no evidence that this is likely to occur, or that the demand for new residential development is to decline. The applicant states that there is a basic demand from the population for Primary School education. There is a duty on the Education Authority to meet that demand and it is reasonable, in the case of state funded primary provision, that this be located fairly close to the homes of the pupils. The Education Authority has explored all options for capacity increases, and no other alternatives to the three Primary Schools listed above exist. The applicant considers this need to be a very special circumstance, which they consider should override the presumption against inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
27. In addition to the need outlined by the applicant above, it should be noted that the NPPF and the Policy Statement 'Planning for Schools Development' (August 2011), fully support the creation and development of state funded schools. The Statement requires Local Authorities to apply a presumption in favour of the development of state funded schools, and states that the Secretary of State will attach significant weight to the need to establish and develop state funded school when determining applications that come before him. This strong Policy support further expands on the case provided by the applicant, and in my view constitutes part of the case of very special circumstances to be considered in the determination of this application. However, other matters must also be considered, such as the siting of the development and its impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and the impact of the development of the functioning of the Green Belt.
28. It is important to note that Sevenoaks is surrounded by Green Belt. As previously explained, there are no alternative school sites (other than the three identified) that could accommodate an expansion, but before considering the merits of the development proposed, it is important to consider if a non-school site could accommodate a 1FE school to account for the additional demand for Primary School places. However, the applicant confirms that there are no sites available within the urban confines of Sevenoaks which are of a suitable size and nature to accommodate a new Primary School. Any new site would therefore be outside of the urban confines of the town and would, therefore, be within the Green Belt. The redevelopment of an existing developed site would be preferable in Planning Policy terms to the development of the green field site and, therefore, the development of Lady Boswell's Primary School

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would, in my view, be preferable to the establishment of an additional school. The use of an existing site has benefits in that the core school building and infrastructure is already in situ. Use of an alternative site, which would also be within the Green Belt in this case, would involve the provision of a whole new school, including the associated infrastructure and outside space requirements. I therefore consider that use of the Lady Boswell site is an acceptable option in this instance, with the expansion of the existing school being a more efficient use of land, minimising land take and impact on the Green Belt.

29. The proposed expansion of Lady Boswell's Primary School would be contained within the existing grounds of the school, with no expansion of the boundaries required to accommodate the space requirements associated with a 2 form of entry school. In order to minimise the impact of the development on the functioning and openness of the Green Belt, the built development proposed either infills spaces between existing buildings (the hall extension for example), or has been sited on existing hard standing as far as is practicable. In addition, the five classroom extension would be attached to the side elevation of the school building, minimising the amount of built development which would extend beyond the existing building line. The five classroom extension would also run along the site boundary, minimising the perception of encroachment into any open areas and would result in a compact grouping of buildings. The site boundary to the South East of the site is heavily wooded and well screened, with the National Trust property of Knole Park, which is within the AONB, lying beyond this boundary. The school site and the adjoining rugby club almost act as a buffer between the urban edge of Sevenoaks and the AONB and Knole Park beyond. The character and appearance of the AONB would not, in my view, be adversely affected by the proposed development, and the development itself would not be visible from with Knole Park due to the extensive mature screening. The low ridge height of the single storey classroom extension, with its shallow pitch roof, would also aid in reducing the impact of the development on the openness and functioning of the Green Belt, and the character and appearance of the wider landscape beyond.
30. Overall, I accept the applicant's assessment and application of Green Belt Policy as set out in the submitted documentation, and I have considered this in the context of the amended policy following publication of the NPPF. The development is inappropriate development for the purposes of Green Belt consideration and is, therefore, by definition harmful. Nevertheless, in my view, the considerations summarised above are sufficient collectively to constitute very special circumstances capable of outweighing harm, in this particular case. Furthermore, I accept that the particular siting and design of the proposals has been carefully considered to help mitigate and minimise the impact of the development on the functioning and openness of the Green Belt. The proposed layout represents the option which strikes the best balance between minimising intrusion into the Green Belt and providing sufficient accommodation and facilities to enable the School to deliver its educational requirements and operate successfully. Accordingly, I do not consider that an objection on Green Belt grounds would be warranted in this particular case. In addition, I do not consider that the development as proposed would adversely affect the character and appearance of the adjoining AONB and/or Knole Park. This view is supported by Natural England, who state that they have no comment to make on the proposals in respect of the AONB as they 'do not consider that the development is likely to impact on the reasons for which the AONB is designated'.
31. The Town and County Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009 states that inappropriate developments within the Green Belt should be referred to the Secretary of

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State for determination if the floor space to be created is 1000 square metres or more, or if the development, by reason of its scale or nature or location, would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt. In considering this application, and taking into account the matters discussed and addressed above, I do not consider that the scale, nature or location of this development would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt. In addition, the development is under the 1000 square metre threshold. For these reason, I do not consider that this application needs to be referred to the Secretary of State for determination in this instance.

Siting and Design

32. Having accepted the siting of the proposed facilities in Green Belt terms, the siting must also be considered in terms of residential and local amenity. It should be noted that the local residents' association and local residents have expressed in writing that they have no objection to the siting or design of the development as proposed. The built development proposed, including the playground extension, is all to the east and south east of the existing school building, screened from local properties by the existing school building. A neighbouring resident has requested that the boundary fencing be upgraded to provide some noise attenuation given the increase in pupil numbers. However, due to the fact the properties back onto the site, separated from the school boundary by fairly sizeable rear gardens, and the fact that the school building itself is fairly central to the site, with the main playground to the rear of the school, I do not consider that additional noise from the increase in pupils would be perceptible or detrimental to local residents. In addition, to upgrade the boundary fencing would reduce the open nature of the site, and would affect boundary hedging and planting, which would be detrimental to the character of the site.
33. The design of the proposed hall extension and classroom infill is appropriate for the site, and would be visually unobtrusive due to the location and choice of materials to match the existing. With regard to the five classroom extension, the building would be single storey, with a shallow pitched roof, with facing brickwork to match the existing. The only concern that I have regarding the design and materials proposed is the proposed use of a standing seam aluminium roof. I would like to see a higher quality of roof finish. However, should that not be possible, the powder coated colour finish to the roof would need to be carefully considered, and should be of a dark shade so as not to appear as a galvanised/patinated finish. Therefore, in order to control the development and to ensure a satisfactory appearance, I consider that final details of all materials to be used externally should be submitted pursuant to condition, should permission be granted. Subject to the imposition of this condition, I see no reason to refuse this application on the grounds of the building materials proposed. I also see no reason to refuse the application on the grounds of siting and/or design.

Landscaping and Biodiversity

34. As detailed in paragraph 8 of this report a Tree Survey has been undertaken and submitted with this application, which concludes that the proposed five classroom extension would result in the loss of 4 trees which are all adjacent to the boundary with the Rugby Club. The trees to be removed are not important in terms of boundary screening, and are not of significance in terms of species, age or height. In my view, the removal of the trees as proposed would not adversely affect the overall character and appearance of the adjoining AONB, or that of the school site and the adjoining rugby club, given the extent of mature trees surrounding the site that are not affected by these proposals. The County Council's Landscape Advisor also confirms that 'overall, the

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scheme generates limited landscape issues'. However, I do consider that replacement tree planting should be provided, and the applicant has confirmed that that is their intention. Should permission be granted, I consider that it would be appropriate to require the submission of a scheme of landscaping, to include replacement tree planting and protection of trees to be retained, pursuant to condition.

35. With regard the ecology, an Ecological Scoping Survey Report has been submitted which concludes that the development would not have a detrimental impact on biodiversity, subject to precautionary approaches with regard to nesting birds, bats, hedgehogs and the common toad. The school site is adjacent to an SSSI, which further adds to the importance in considering the ecological impacts of the proposed development. However, Natural England states that 'given the nature and scale of the proposals, it is satisfied that there is not likely to be an adverse effect on the SSSI as a result of the proposal being carried out in accordance with the details submitted'. The County Council's Biodiversity Officer is also satisfied with the information provided. However, should permission be granted, conditions of consent should be imposed requiring that the development is undertaken in accordance with the recommendations and precautionary measures as detailed within the submitted Ecological Scoping Survey Report. Biodiversity enhancement measures should also be explored, and I consider that this matter could be dealt with by way of an informative.

Access, parking and highway issues

36. Having accepted the proposed development in terms of siting, design, and impact on the Green Belt and wider landscape, it is now important to consider the implications of the expansion of the school in terms of impact on the local highway network. Sevenoaks District Council, the Town Council, and local residents, including the Knole Paddock Residents Association, have all raised objection to this application on the basis that the proposals would 'be detrimental to the local highway network', impacting upon the amenity of local residents in the surrounding area.
37. As outlined in paragraph 4 of this report, this application is part of the County wide Educational Basic Needs Programme, and is proposing to provide sufficient accommodation on site to accommodate a full 2 form of entry (2FE). At present the total number of pupils at Lady Boswell's Primary School is 216, with pupils at the school aged from 4 – 11 years old. The current total number of staff employed at the school is 34, although the applicant considers that no more than 20 staff are on site at any one time. The school has 21 formal car parking bays on site, and parents are not permitted to use the on site parking facilities at peak school times. Parents that take their children to school by car instead make use of local roads, the adjacent Sevenoaks Town Council parking facilities at the Rugby Club, and the Suffolk Way car park to the south east of the school site.
38. This application seeks to expand the existing primary school from 1FE to 2 FE, which would increase pupil numbers from the current 216 to approximately 420. Currently, each year group comprises around 30 pupils. It is proposed that in September 2013 the pupil admission numbers increase to 60 per year. However, such growth would be incremental year on year with overall pupil numbers at this school predicted to rise from 216 in September 2012, to 248 in 2013, 278 in 2014 and thence 30 per year until reaching 420 by 2019. To accompany the pupil increase, it is proposed that a total of 42 staff would be employed (8 more than existing), although it is not expected that more than 30 staff would be on site at any one time.

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39. This application, which is for 5 of the 6 classrooms required to accommodate a full 2FE, does not propose any change to the vehicle access to the school via Plymouth Drive, or any additional car parking. Pedestrian accesses are also to remain as existing, via Plymouth Drive and the Suffolk Way car park to the south east of the site. It is, however, proposed to upgrade the pedestrian access path to the south east of the site, removing the existing steps to create a ramped access which would be DDA compliant, and to provide low level bollard lighting. It is expected that such an upgrade, in addition to Travel Plan targets, to be discussed later in this report, would encourage increased use of this access, reducing the use of Plymouth Drive and other local roads.
40. It should be noted that the school is a faith school and, therefore, has a large catchment area. Having such a wide catchment area does mean that some parents have no option other than to travel to the school by car, and this matter has been referred to by the local community as being contrary to the County Council's policies to encourage active and more sustainable transport to schools. Admissions are, however, not something that the Planning Authority can control, and this matter cannot be considered in the determination of this application, nor would it be appropriate to discriminate against faith schools. However, the highway implications of the expansion of the school must be considered, taking into account the concern expressed by the local community with regard to inadequate parking provision, increased congestion at school peak times, air and noise pollution, and inconsiderate/unsafe driving. It is also suggested that the Transport Statement 'is poor and unconvincing'.
41. It should be noted that a Transport Statement Addendum was submitted during the determination process, which was sent to consultation with relevant interested parties. As a result of this submission, Sevenoaks Town Council now recommends approval of the proposed development, which suggests that the content of the document has addressed their initial points of objection with regard to traffic and highway impacts. It is also important to note that Kent County Council Highways and Transportation raise no objection subject to the imposition of various conditions of consent, as outlined in paragraph 13 of this report, primarily relating to initiatives included within the submitted Transport Statement Addendum, which I shall discuss below.
42. The Highway and Transportation Officer considers that the Transport Statement Addendum gives a 'greater confidence to the application and the School's commitment to minimising impacts in transport terms'. The Addendum sets out how the school intend to manage the increase in traffic associated with the expansion of the School, including the main initiative to direct the majority of vehicles towards to Suffolk Way/leisure centre car park, and the upgraded pick-up/drop-off system. That would limit the increase in traffic on Plymouth Drive and other local roads, mitigating the impact on local residents in terms of additional traffic and inconsiderate parking. In order to further increase and encourage use of the Suffolk Way Car Park the School are reviewing a walking bus scheme, with allocated car parking bays proposed within the public car park for parent drop off and pick up. It is advised by the applicant that permission has been obtained for these works within the car park, for use at peak school times. In addition, the submitted Transport Statement Addendum confirms that parents can apply for permits to park in the Suffolk Way car park, which are recognised by Sevenoaks District Council. The permits allow for up to half an hours free car parking between 8.45am and 9.15am, and 3.15pm and 3.45pm, on school days only.
43. The Transport Statement estimates that there may be up to 54 additional vehicles travelling to and from the school by the time the school reached full 2FE capacity in 2019. However, independence for children at primary school age is encouraged, and

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the School intend to operate a drop-off/collection system whereby pupils are dropped off by parents and escorted to the pedestrian access from the Suffolk Way car park by school staff. This initiative would, it is estimated, reduce the demand for additional parking spaces within the Suffolk Way car park from 54 to approximately 27. This increase in use of the public car park has been discussed with the District Council, who have, I am advised, provided approval, and the permit based system for parents would be continued and amended as necessary to allow for the additional numbers. This would be reviewed through the School Travel Plan on an annual basis. It should also be borne in mind that this increase is incremental, with an increase of 30 pupils per year until full capacity is reached in 2019.

44. Kent County Council Highways and Transportation raise no objection to this application subject to the imposition of conditions to cover the following:

- *continuation and extension of the car parking permit scheme;*
- *holding regular liaison meetings including invitations to residents;*
- *supervision at the southern access gate and Suffolk Way car park to encourage a dropping off arrangement; and*
- *the continued development of the school travel plan.*

I consider that, should permission be granted, conditions covering these matters should be included within the planning permission. It is essential that the Travel Plan initiatives, the car park permit scheme, and staff supervision of the Suffolk Way access are continued, and reviewed on a regular basis. In addition, representatives from local residents should be included within this review process, and given opportunity to express their concerns, views and suggestions. In my view, this liaison should be undertaken as part of the School Travel Plan annual review process, and this matter could be secured by condition of consent should permission be granted.

45. It is considered by the applicant that, following the implementation of the Travel Plan initiatives, which include those discussed above, which would be secured by condition of consent, that the uplift in pupil numbers could be mitigated to the point where the increase in traffic movements would not be material and/or significant. This view is supported by Kent County Council Highways and Transportation. I consider that, subject to the imposition of conditions regarding the continuation and extension of the permit scheme, drop off supervision at the Suffolk Road car park, and the submission of an updated School Travel Plan, to be prepared in conjunction with liaison with local residents, that the development would not have a significantly detrimental impact on the local highway network. I therefore see no reason to refuse the application on this ground.

Drainage and land contamination

46. The Environment Agency raises no objection to the proposal, however requests a condition be attached to any consent requiring that there is no infiltration of surface water drainage into the ground at the site without the express written consent of the County Planning Authority. A further condition regarding land contamination is required. Therefore, should permission be granted, conditions would be imposed covering the matters raised above. That would ensure that the development would not result in an unacceptable level of pollution, in accordance with the principles of Development Plan Policy.

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Construction matters

47. Given that there are neighbouring residential properties, if planning permission is granted it would, in my view, be appropriate to impose a condition restricting hours of construction to protect residential amenity. I would suggest that works should be undertaken only between the hours of 0800 and 1800 Monday to Friday and between the hours of 0900 and 1300 on Saturdays, with no operations on Sundays and Bank Holidays. It is also good practice on school sites for contractors to be required under the terms of their contract to manage construction traffic/deliveries to minimise conflict with traffic and pedestrians at the beginning and end of the school day. I consider it appropriate that details of how the site access would be managed to avoid peak school times should also be included within the Construction Management Strategy.
48. I consider it appropriate that details of a full Construction Management Strategy be submitted for approval prior to the commencement of development. That should include details of the methods and hours of working, location of site compounds and operative/visitors parking, details of site security and safety measures, lorry waiting and wheel washing facilities, community liaison & contact arrangements, details of how the site access would be managed to avoid peak school times and details of any construction accesses. Therefore, should permission be granted, a Construction Management Strategy would be required pursuant to condition and the development would thereafter have to be undertaken in accordance with the approved strategy. In addition, I consider it appropriate that a further condition of consent requires the submission of a pre-construction condition survey of local roads, a post construction condition survey, and that any damage as a result of vehicles associated with the construction of the development be made good within an agreed timeframe. The conditions outlined above also address the requirements of Kent County Council Highways and Transportation.
49. In addition to the above, should permission be granted, conditions of consent would ensure that dust, mud on the local highway network, and other matters associated with construction, would be mitigated as far as reasonably possible so as to minimise disruption to local residents.

Conclusion

50. This proposal has given rise to a variety of issues, including the need for very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the impact of the proposed development on the openness of the Green Belt. However, I consider that very special circumstances have been demonstrated in this particular case for overriding Green Belt policy constraints in terms of i) the education need for additional school accommodation to cater for pupils resident in this Green Belt District, ii) the lack of alternative sites and sites not in the Green Belt and iii) the design and siting of the development with regard to minimising the visual impact on this part of the Green Belt, and its functioning. In addition, subject to the imposition of the conditions outlined throughout this report, I consider that the proposed development would not have a significantly detrimental impact on the local highway network or residential amenity, and would accord with the principles of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF. Therefore, subject to the imposition of conditions, I am of the opinion that the proposed development would not give rise to any material harm and is otherwise in accordance with the general aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies and the guidance contained in the NPPF. Therefore, I recommend that permission be granted subject to appropriate conditions

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Recommendation

51. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions, including conditions covering:
- the standard time limit;
 - the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
 - the submission of details of all materials to be used externally;
 - the submission of a scheme of landscaping;
 - tree protection measures;
 - the development to be undertaken in accordance with the recommendations of the Ecological Scoping Survey;
 - surface water drainage and infiltration to ground;
 - land contamination;
 - submission of a revised School Travel Plan within 6 months of the date of this permission, its implementation and ongoing review. This document is to be prepared in liaison with local residents, and should include mechanisms for ongoing liaison in the future. Continuation and expansion of the parent permit scheme and increased supervision of the drop-off at the Suffolk Road car park should also be included;
 - hours of working during construction and demolition to be restricted to between 0800 and 1800 Monday to Friday and between the hours of 0900 and 1300 on Saturdays, with no operations on Sundays and Bank Holidays;
 - the submission of a Construction Management Strategy, including the location of site compounds and operative/visitors parking, details of site security and safety measures, lorry waiting and wheel washing facilities, community liaison & contact arrangements, and details of any construction accesses & management of the site access to avoid peak school times;
 - the submission of pre construction and post construction road condition surveys, and the making good of any damage;
 - measures to prevent mud and debris being taken onto the public highway.
52. I FURTHER RECOMMEND THAT the applicant BE ADVISED of the following informatives:
- Account should be taken of Environment Agency's advice relating to surface water drainage, waste and pollution prevention;
 - the potential for biodiversity enhancements should be explored.

Case officer – Mary Green	01622 221066
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Background documents - See section heading
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Single storey building to accommodate five classrooms, and associated works at Lady Boswell's CofE Primary School, Plymouth Drive, Sevenoaks – SE/13/487 (KCC/SE/0039/2013)

Appendix 1

APPLICATION KCC/SE/0039 – SINGLE STOREY BUILDING TO ACCOMMODATE 6 CLASSROOMS WITH WELFARE FACILITIES. EXTENSION TO HALL, CLASSROOMS AND PLAYGROUND AREA, UPGRADING OF PEDESTRIAN ACCESS PATH FROM THE LEISURE CENTRE, ETC AT LADY BOSWELL'S CEP SCHOOL, PLYMOUTH DRIVE, SEVENOAKS

NOTES of a Planning Applications Committee Site Visit to Lady Boswell's CEP School, Sevenoaks on Wednesday, 27 March 2013.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr J A Davies (Chairman), Mr C P Smith (Vice-Chairman), Mr R E Brookbank, Mr R F Manning, Mrs E M Tweed and Mr A T Willicombe.

OFFICERS: Mrs S Thompson, Mr J Crossley and Ms M Green (Planning); Mr R White (Highways) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services).

THE APPLICANTS: Lady Boswell's CEP School: represented by Mrs S Saunders (Head Teacher), Mrs E Holmes (Deputy Head Teacher), Mrs C Whitaker (Chair of Governors), Mr J Saunders (Project Manager) and Ms K Wicks (Tuke Manton Architects).

(1) The Chairman explained that the purpose of the visit was for Members of the Planning Applications Committee to familiarise themselves with the application site. Although invitations had been sent to both Sevenoaks District and Town Councils, neither of them was represented.

(2) Mr Crossley introduced the application which was part of a programme of expansions to primary schools in Kent designed to cater for the high demand for school places, and several schools in the Sevenoaks area were affected. This was reflected by the need for Lady Boswell's CEP School to enlarge its Pupil Admission Number (PAN) from 30 to 60 pupils per year.

(3) The school had been built in the early 1980s and was sited in a residential area near the town centre. The main entry point to the site was via a cul-de-sac. The school lay within the Metropolitan Green Belt, next to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which included Knole Park (a Site of Special Scientific Interest).

(4) Mr Crossley then turned to the proposal itself. He said that six additional classrooms would be provided in the main extension with associated storage and cloakrooms, with additional toilets. The existing prayer room would be extended to provide a new IT suite, whilst the adjacent music room would be removed to provide a connecting corridor and the main entrance on the north east elevation.

(5) The proposal also involved an extension to the existing hall, the conversion of the existing IT room and lobby into an additional Year 2 classroom, the enlargement of the existing Year 4 classroom to provide a further Year 2 classroom, an extension to the existing hard games court to the south west of the site, upgraded pedestrian access from the adjacent Sevenoaks Leisure Centre, and emergency access which would be created by works to the embankment area and adjusting an existing footpath alignment.

(6) Mr Crossley then said that Sevenoaks DC had objected to the proposal due to its impact on the Green Belt. The District Council also considered that the proposal would

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have a detrimental highway impact on the amenity of local residents in the surrounding area.

(7) Sevenoaks Town Council had also objected because of the impact on the Green Belt. It did not consider that the travel plan was fit for purpose. It also objected on grounds of the inadequacy of the on-site parking, the reduction of outside amenity space, the loss of trees on site, the detrimental impact on the amenities of neighbouring properties and on the setting of Knole Park.

(8) Mr Crossley continued by saying that 8 local residents had written to object to the proposal. Their main grounds were noise, air pollution, traffic and impact on the Green Belt and AONB.

(9) Mr Crossley concluded his presentation by outlining the determining issues. The National Planning Policy Framework contained a presumption in favour of sustainable development as well as a policy presumption relating to schools developments. In this case, the determining issues were: the principle of development of extending a primary school within the Metropolitan Green Belt; the quality of the proposed design solution and its relationship to existing built developments; the impacts on the AONB and SSSI; the impact on traffic and road safety; and the impacts on neighbouring residential amenity.

(10) Mr White (KCC Highways) commented that the arrangements to cater for the doubling of the traffic numbers were surprisingly generous. There was room to turn round and drop-off, and there were no space constraints. It was recognised that difficulties could arise at the junction of Plymouth Drive. Consequently, KCC Highways was assisting the School in the development of its Travel Plan. A clear and forceful travel plan, developed through full engagement with the local community, would offset the effects of increased traffic. For this reason, there were no objections on highways grounds.

(11) Mr Willicombe asked whether any comments had been received from the Kent Downs AONB. Mr Crossley replied that they had not responded to date.

(12) Mrs Tweed asked why the Rugby Club Car Park at the bottom of Plymouth Drive was full. Mr Crossley replied that this car park was owned by the Town Council. He did not know why it was fully occupied, but being close to the town centre, it would, no doubt, be used by various users.

(13) Ms Wicks (Tuke Manton Architects) said that the Town Council was organising a Forum to see if it would be possible to set aside some spaces in the car park for use by the School.

(14) Following the discussion, Members inspected the site. They saw the trees that were to be removed, the area where it was proposed to build the new classrooms, and the Quiet Area where the new connecting corridor would be located.

(15) The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the visit. The notes would be appended to the report to the Committee meeting which determined the application.

END