

Two timber framed classrooms, Highview School, Moat Farm Road, Folkestone – SH/13/415 (KCC/SH/0139/2013)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 17 July 2013

Application by Highview School for provision of two timber framed classrooms, Highview School, Moat Farm Road, Folkestone Kent, CT19 5DJ – SH/13/415 (KCC/SH/0139/2013).

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr. F. McKenna

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

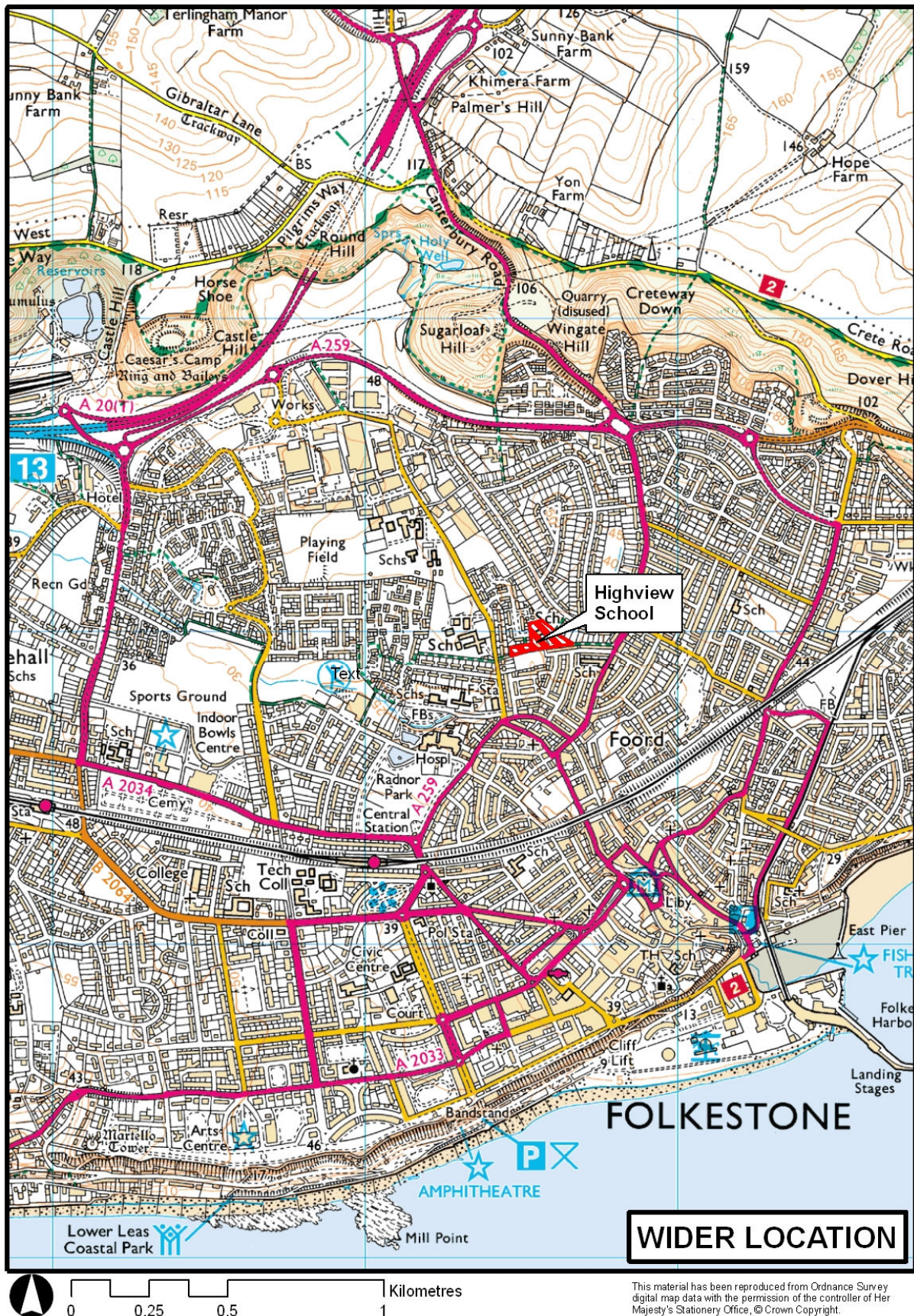
1. Highview School Folkestone is located in a predominantly residential area at the end of Moat Farm Road, a cul-de-sac linked to Park Farm Road to the west via Downside. Plans showing the wider and more immediate location are attached. Public Rights of Way run along the southern boundary and part way along the eastern, northern and western boundaries as shown on the location plan. In addition to boundary fencing, most of the school site is also enclosed by hedgerows. On the south side of the school and Public Right of Way there is a playing field (belonging to the nearby Mundella Primary School) but the school is otherwise surrounded by residential properties. Part of the school site and the playing field to the south are identified in the Shepway Local Plan as School Playing Fields subject to Policy LR12 which provides for their protection. A site location plan is attached.

Background

2. Highview School is a special school catering for pupils from age 4 to 18 and has been federated with Foxwood School, Hythe, since 2008. The applicant advises that it is intended to rebuild the Foxwood and Highview Federation on a new site and that both of the current sites will not be required in the near future. The present position is that feasibility work for a new building is being carried out and Foxwood and Highview are included in a programme in the County Council's budget which is intended to be delivered in due course.
3. Over recent years a number of temporary planning permissions have been granted for mobile/modular accommodation to cater for an increase in the school roll. The latest of these proposals was considered by Members at the April 2012 Committee Meeting under planning reference SH/12/109 (KCC/SH/0543/2011). This was for a double modular building and 8 additional on site parking spaces, and did not propose any increase in the number of staff or pupils, and was to enable pupils to be moved out of the Therapy Room into their own classroom and for the Therapy Room to be used for that purpose. Members were minded to grant temporary planning permission for the double mobile classroom for a period of 4 years and not the usual 5 years. Furthermore, there are currently eight temporary buildings on the site, the three most recent of which provide double classroom accommodation. Several of these buildings are located in a row linked by a walkway, in the narrow part of the site and formerly playing field land.

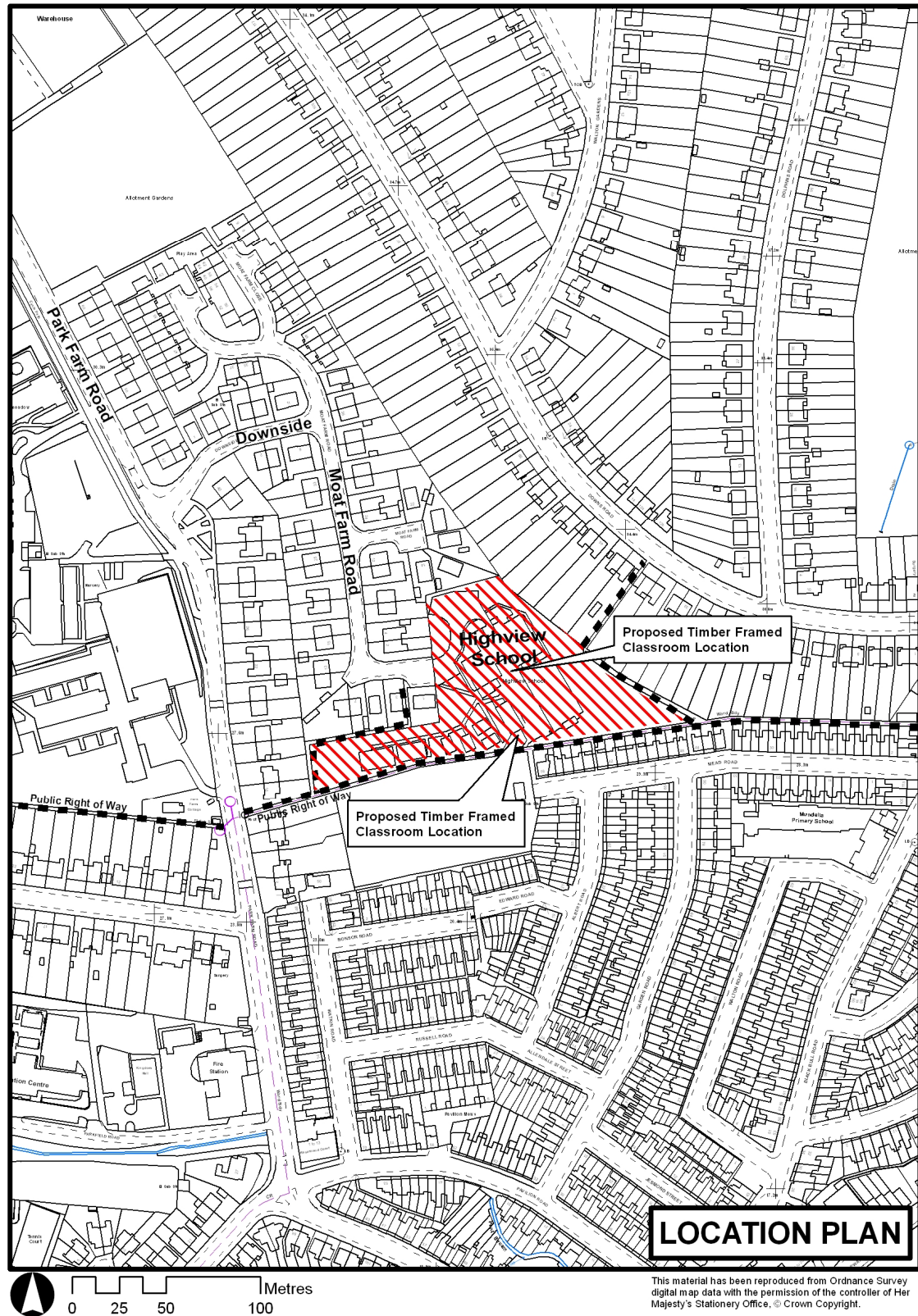
Item D3

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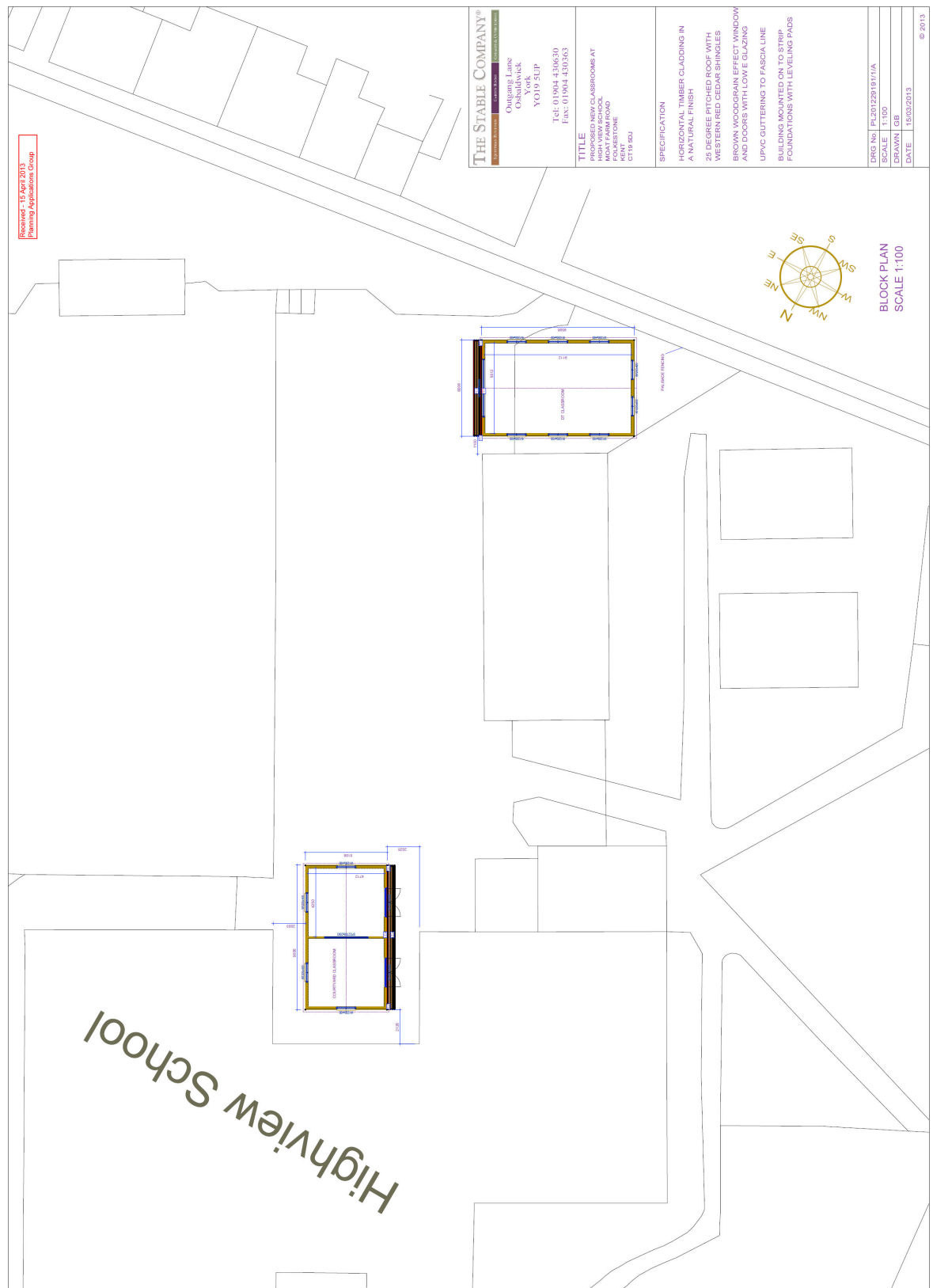
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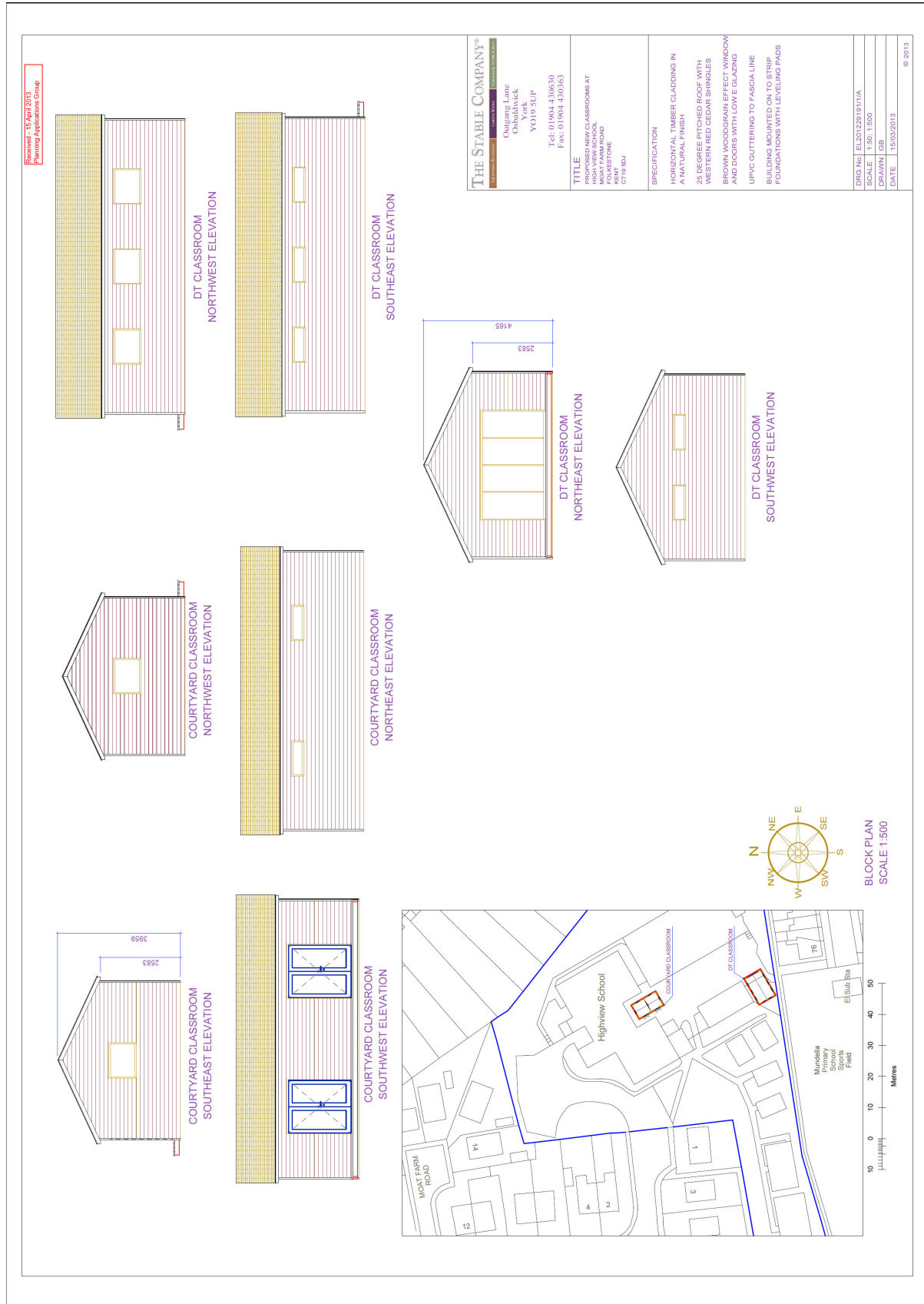


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Proposal

4. The current application proposes two single storey timber buildings, consisting of a two classroom teaching space and a second separate teaching space. The first building, referred to as the 'courtyard classroom', is proposed to be located on a courtyard area and would be used as a large group teaching space, divided into two classrooms. The building would have a floorspace of 46sqm and measure 4 metres in height at the apex of the roof. The second building referred to as the 'DT classroom', is proposed to be located on an unused small area of grassland, near to the school's site boundary. This building would be used as a design and technology teaching space and would have a floorspace of 57sqm and measure 4.2metres in height at the apex of the roof. Both proposed buildings are modular in construction and constructed from timber. The proposed external cladding would be a horizontal tongue and groove weatherboard with cedar roof tiles, which would complement the surrounding school buildings. The School has confirmed that it contains significant amounts of play area and greenery for the pupils, therefore this proposal will not affect any existing amenity space. There is a Public Right of Way between the School's boundary fence and the nearest residential property in Mead Road and the Mundella Primary School sports field, which is located opposite the Highview School site.
5. The school is a Special Needs School, with 167 pupils on its roll and 33 full time and 23 part time members of staff. There is a variety of outside agencies such as social workers, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, speech and language professionals and counsellors that work with the pupils. In order to facilitate these meetings and respect the confidential and professional nature of this work, the School requires a provision for these to be suitably catered for. The present arrangement at the school often results in pupils being assessed in corridors or shared spaces, which is regarded as far from satisfactorily. The School also has a sixth form provision on the site and many of the pupils follow a vocational curriculum which involves teaching in very small groups to ensure their complex needs are met. The proposed development **will not result in any additional pupils or staff numbers** as it is proposed to provide additional teaching space only for the existing number of school pupils.

Planning Policy

6. The most relevant Government Guidance and Development Plan Policies summarised below are appropriate to the consideration of this application:
 - (i) **National Planning Policy and Guidance** – the most relevant National planning policies and policy guidance are set out in:

National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) sets out the Government's planning policy guidance for England and as guidance is a material consideration for the determination of planning applications. It does not change the statutory status of the development plan which remains the starting point for decision making. However the weight given to the 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 contains a presumption in favour of sustainable development, identifying 3 overarching roles in the planning system – economic, social and environmental, which are considered mutually dependent. Within the over-arching roles there are 12 core principles that planning should achieve. These can be summarised as:

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- 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;
- 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 NPPF guidance and objections covering the following matters is particularly relevant:

- consideration of whether opportunities for sustainable transport have been taken up and safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people;
- achieving the requirement for high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings;
- the protection provided for open space, including playing fields;
- the great importance that the Government attaches to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities, and that great weight should be given to the need to create, expand or alter schools; and
- conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

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.

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7. Shepway District Local Plan Review adopted March 2006:

- Policy SD1** All development proposals should take account of the broad aim of sustainable development - ensuring that development contributes towards ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come.
- Policy BE1** A high standard of layout, design and choice of materials will be expected for all new development. Materials should be sympathetic to those predominating locally in type, colour and texture. Development should accord with existing development in the locality, where the site and surrounding development are physically and visually interrelated in respect of building form, mass, height, and elevational details.
- Policy SC2** The District Planning Authority will grant planning permission for new or improved social and community facilities where the proposal meets set criteria relating to compatibility with surrounding land uses, accessibility by a range of transport alternatives to the car, access for disabled people and acceptability in highway, infrastructure and environmental terms.
- Policy TR12** Proposals for new development will only be permitted if provision is made for off street parking in accordance with the current maximum vehicle parking standards.
- Policy TR13** Applications for new or expanded school facilities should be accompanied by a School Travel Plan.
- Policy LR12** Proposals for new development will only be permitted in the case of school playing fields, where there would be sufficient alternative open space provision.

Consultations**8. Shepway District Council** raises no objection, but wishes to make the following comment:

“It is recommended that a temporary permission be granted for the two timber framed classroom units to enable an assessment to be undertaken at the expiry of the relevant period to further consider the impact of the units within the surrounding built form.”

Folkestone Town Council – application has been noted and no concerns were raised.

KCC Public Rights of Way Officer – has written to confirm that as the proposal is within the school boundary and it does not affect any right of way, then the PROW team has no further comments to make.

Local Member**9.** The local County Member, Mr. R. Pascoe, was notified of the application on the 26 April 2013. Due to the County Council elections which took place on 2 May 2013, the local County Member for this division changed. Mr Frank McKenna was accordingly notified on 18 June 2013.

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Publicity

10. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 58 neighbouring residential properties.

Representations

11. Representations to the application have been received from residents of 3 nearby properties. The concerns and objections raised to the proposal can be summarised as:
- If installing two further classrooms means an increase in pupil numbers then it will make the current traffic and parking problems even worse.
 - The majority of pupils are either bussed in or brought in by car.
 - There is insufficient parking for staff and visitors which means the overflow park in Moat Farm Road.
 - As there are no parking restrictions haphazard parking often blocks the road to essential traffic.
 - Under no circumstances should the school be allowed to expand any further.
 - Local area is a complete 'no go' area from 8.30am to 9.10am and again from 14.30pm and 15.20pm Monday to Friday due to amount of traffic generated by teaching staff, parents/taxis and minibuses dropping off and collecting pupils.
 - Currently a minimum of six teachers cars parked in the road, limiting access for residents and service vehicles.
 - This School has no respect for the residents of the area and persists in expanding its own building footprint.
 - This school should be closed down and moved to the proposed site in Hythe where they have a suitable infrastructure.

DiscussionIntroduction

12. In considering this proposal regard must be had to Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 6 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 this proposal needs to be considered in the context of Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. In summary, the relevant planning policies, as well as strongly supporting provision of education facilities, promote sustainable development, seek a high standard of design, have regard to local context, the amenity of nearby properties and the surrounding area, seek to protect playing field land and require adequate access and parking.
13. This application has been reported for determination by the Planning Applications Committee following the receipt of objections from three local residents. The main issues relating to this application are siting, design and residential amenity, and the residents' concern about an increase in staff and pupil numbers and the implications upon traffic and parking.

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Siting and design

14. No objection has been received to the proposed location of the two timber framed building, which would be sited on an existing courtyard area and on an area of unused grassland very close to the school's site boundary. Both buildings are also relatively small in size and should not create a loss of playing space, especially the timber framed building which is proposed to be located on an unused area of grassland. The proposed siting for the new two timber framed buildings sits within the existing buildings so as not to cause any further spread of built development.
15. In terms of sustainable design and construction, both buildings would have the same specification, appearance and finished quality. The buildings have been designed to complement their surroundings and are to be constructed from timber and supported on a foundation system. The external cladding would be a horizontal tongue and groove weatherboard, left in a natural finish which would fade to a silvery colour within one year. To complement the walls, cedar tiles would be used on the roof of the building, which again would fade to a silvery colour in about one year. This colour would closely match the existing buildings. The doors and windows are to be a grey coloured uPVC to be hard wearing and practical. All trims, fascia and soffit boards would be in matching timber. The buildings are modular in construction, enabling a faster build on site, which would reduce the impact on the school and enable the buildings to be used almost immediately after construction.
16. Of the two proposed timber framed classrooms, the DT classroom is located nearest to the school's site boundary. Although the building line would be extended, this is a relatively small building in terms of height measuring 4.2metres at its height point. There is a degree of separation from the nearby residential properties afforded by the intervening Public Right of Way to the south of this building. However it must be noted that the nearest residential property is located only 13 metres away from DT classroom. On the elevation that faces this property there are windows proposed but they are too high for any pupils to look out of, so there would not be any overlooking or loss of privacy from this proposed classroom. The existing boundary fence is a palisade fence, which does have some planting within the school's site. However the planting does stop short of the proposed DT classroom and I consider that an extension of this planting would help to add an additional screening of this classroom from the Public Right of Way and residential properties in Mead Road. Subject to a planning condition being imposed to increase the existing boundary planting, and the fact that no objection has been received about the proposed location of either classroom, I do not consider that the siting of the building would lead to a loss of privacy from overlooking.
17. Notwithstanding the issues over siting and design, Shepway District Council has recommended that a temporary permission be granted to enable an assessment to be undertaken at the expiry of the relevant time period to further consider the impact of the units within the surrounding built form. A temporary permission would enable the School to assess the impact of these buildings, especially the DT classroom, which is located close to the school's boundary and near to residential properties. I therefore propose to support Shepway District Council's recommendation of a temporary planning permission, which I propose to coincide with the most recent temporary planning consent for a double mobile classroom, which expires on 30 April 2016.

Residential amenity

18. In terms of any noise disturbance as a result of the siting of the proposed building, arguably it could bring an increased concentration of activity closer to further residential

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properties. Furthermore the applicant advises that the classroom would mainly be used for small groups, and in any case there are already pupils going to and from the existing modular/mobile buildings elsewhere on this site. I am also mindful of the relatively short duration of the school day, the break in activities at the site during weekends and school holidays, and of the intended temporary nature of the development and use proposed. On this basis I do not consider that residential amenity would be adversely affected to any significant degree.

Transport, access and parking issues

19. Representations have been received from residents of three properties which cite issues about the current situation with regard to transport, access and parking in the locality as a result of the school, and the possibility of the proposal making matters worse, as set out in paragraph (11) above. However this application does not propose to increase the number of school pupil or staff, as the additional two timber framed classrooms is planned to accommodate the existing pupils. All 3 residents have expressed concern about additional traffic and parking issues as over a number of years there has been expansion at the school which has resulted in additional mobile buildings and the occasional increase in pupil and staff numbers.
20. However the last planning application that increased pupils was for a single mobile classroom that increased pupil numbers by 13 and was reported to this Committee in November 2011. At that time, the applicant indicated that there would be no increase in traffic because the 13 additional pupils would travel to/from school using existing taxis and minibuses (etc.) that are already bringing in the existing students. The latest planning application that was reported to Members was in April 2012 and there was no increase in pupil or staff numbers. Please refer to paragraph 3 for further information. A condition was attached to both planning permissions requiring the School Travel Plan to be revised to take account of the latest proposals, including a review of the management of school transport at pick up and drop off times. At the time of writing this Committee report, the revised School Travel Plan has been received and after consultation with the County Council's School Travel Planner, the document is being redrafted to include measures on how the School can further improve the current drop off/pick up arrangements. The School has already looked at ways of reducing the queuing by taxis and mini buses that occurs everyday by discouraging on-street parking up the left hand side to the school's entrance. That has allowed a quicker turnaround of taxis and mini buses as there is now more space to manoeuvre. The School has also opened up a rear pedestrian entrance to the school so that not all vehicles have to access the school via Moat Farm Road, plus the School is encouraging more staff to either car share or walk/cycle to work. There are also a number of other initiatives planned that the School is proactively looking into to reduce the traffic and parking issues in Moat Farm Road.
21. Overall I am satisfied that the School has made an effort to manage the traffic and parking problems in Moat Farm Road through the production and continual development of a School Travel Plan. There is no proposed increase in either pupil or staff numbers as these two timber framed buildings are to provide the school with more specialized teaching areas and meeting rooms. I would therefore not raise any objection on highway grounds subject to the continual development and implementation of measures proposed in the School Travel Plan to reduce traffic and parking to and from the site.

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Conclusion

22. The applicant's reasons for the installation of the two timber framed classrooms have been noted, together with the current intentions to relocate this school to another site in due course. Whilst the proposal does not fully accord with Development Plan Policies relating to design, given the temporary nature of the building, and the context of the school site and other plans considerations, I do not consider that an objection would be warranted especially as there would be no further increase in pupils if the two timber framed classroom buildings are permitted. I am of the opinion that the proposed development would otherwise be in accordance with the general aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies and do not consider the proposal would have any significant detrimental impact on local/residential amenity or as a result of transport to and from the school. I therefore recommend that planning permission be granted for a temporary period that coincides with the termination of the previous temporary planning consent for a double mobile classroom at the site, and be subject to the further conditions discussed above.

Recommendation

23. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT to the imposition of conditions, including the following:
- Temporary planning permission is granted until **30 April 2016** to coincide with the previous temporary consent that was granted for the double mobile classroom;
 - The development is carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
 - Hours of working during construction to be restricted to between the hours of 08.00 and 18.00 Monday to Friday and between the hours of 09.00 and 13.00 on Saturdays, with no operations on Sundays and Bank Holidays;
 - No construction vehicles delivering materials shall enter or leave the site between the hours of 08:00 to 09:00 and 14:30 to 15:30 Monday to Friday;
 - Increase the boundary planting around the DT classroom;
 - The School Travel Plan is monitored regularly to reduce traffic and parking around the school.

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