

Single storey extension comprising one classroom and library, at Lady Boswell's CofE Primary School, Plymouth Drive, Sevenoaks – SE/13/2187 (KCC/SE/0221/2013)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 11 September 2013.

Application by Kent County Council Property & Infrastructure Support for a single storey extension comprising one classroom, one library with associated facilities, outdoor soft and hard play/teaching area, and car park extension at Lady Boswell's CofE Primary School, Plymouth Drive, Sevenoaks – SE/13/2187.

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mrs Margaret Crabtree

Classification: Unrestricted

Site Description

1. 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 National Trust wooded park land (Knole Park) to the east and the Sevenoaks Leisure Centre to the south.
2. The part of the school site affected by the proposed development is to the north western side of the school building, and adjacent to the access road, which runs from Plymouth Drive along the northern edge of the site, to the school building. 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.

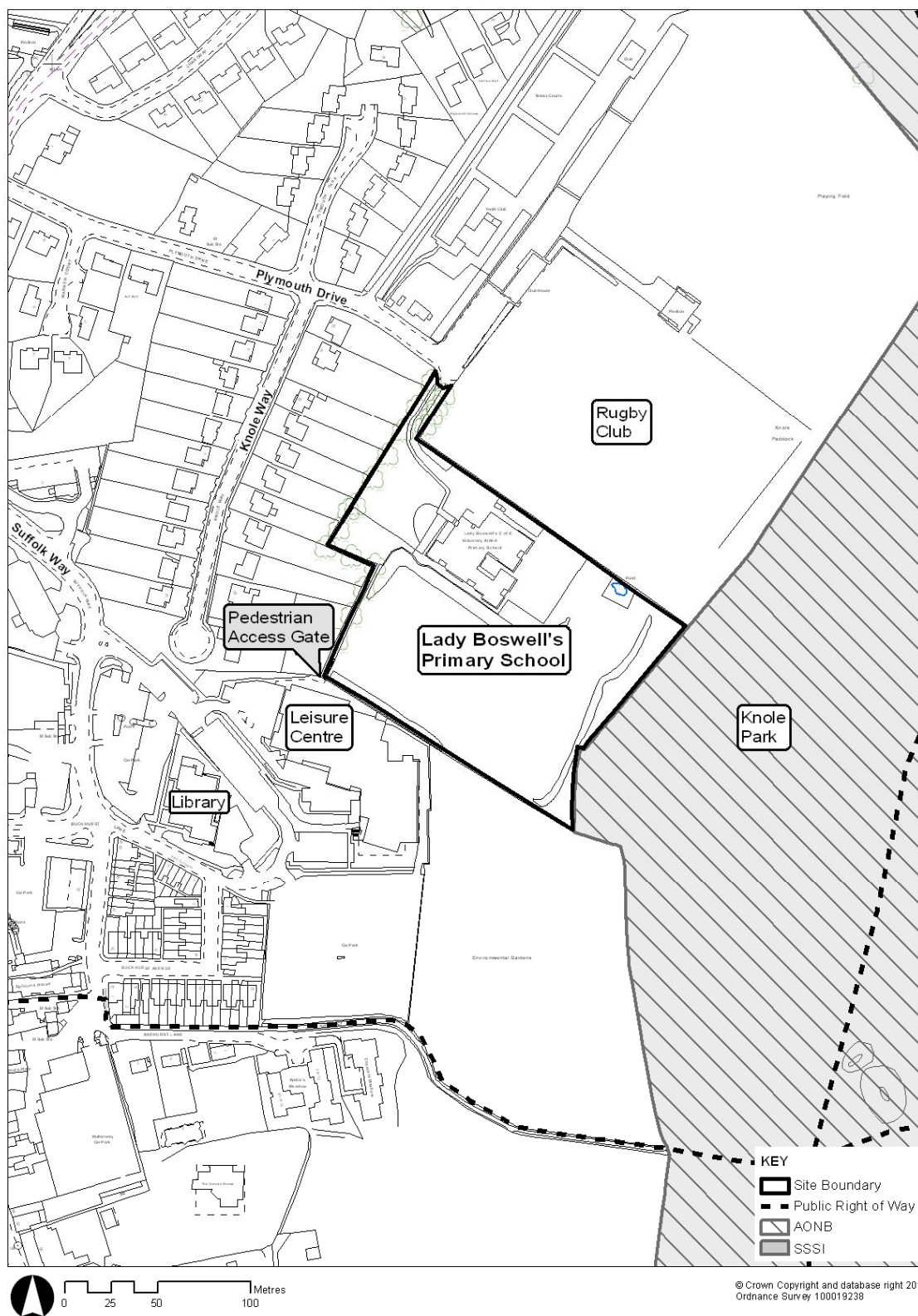
Background

3. 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.

Item D3

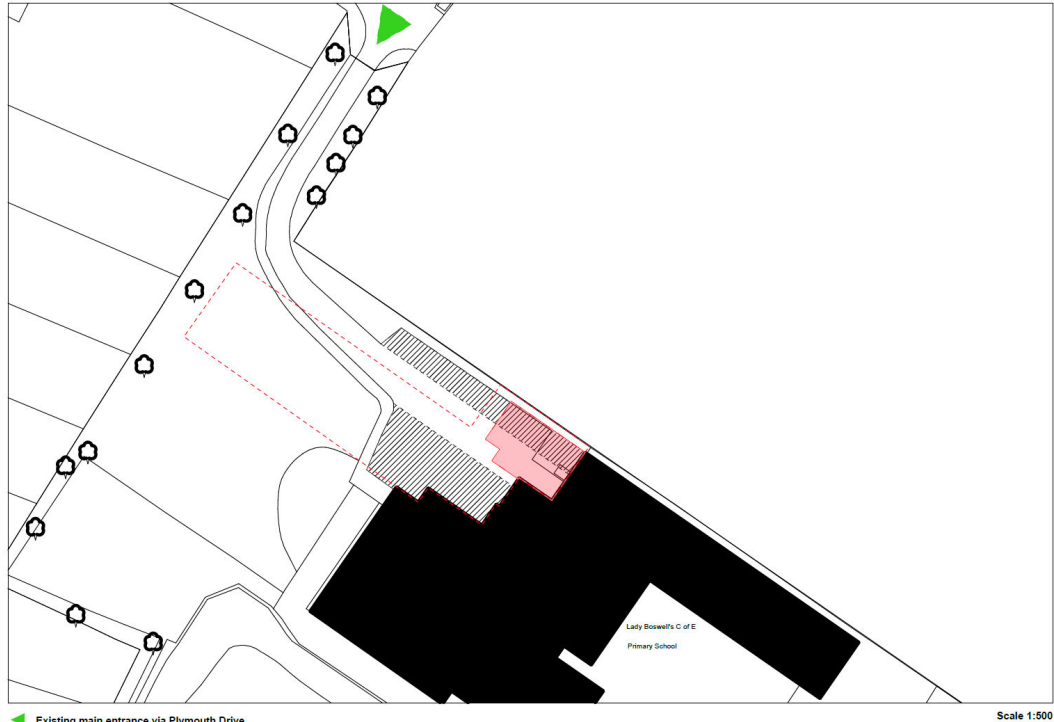
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Site Location Plan



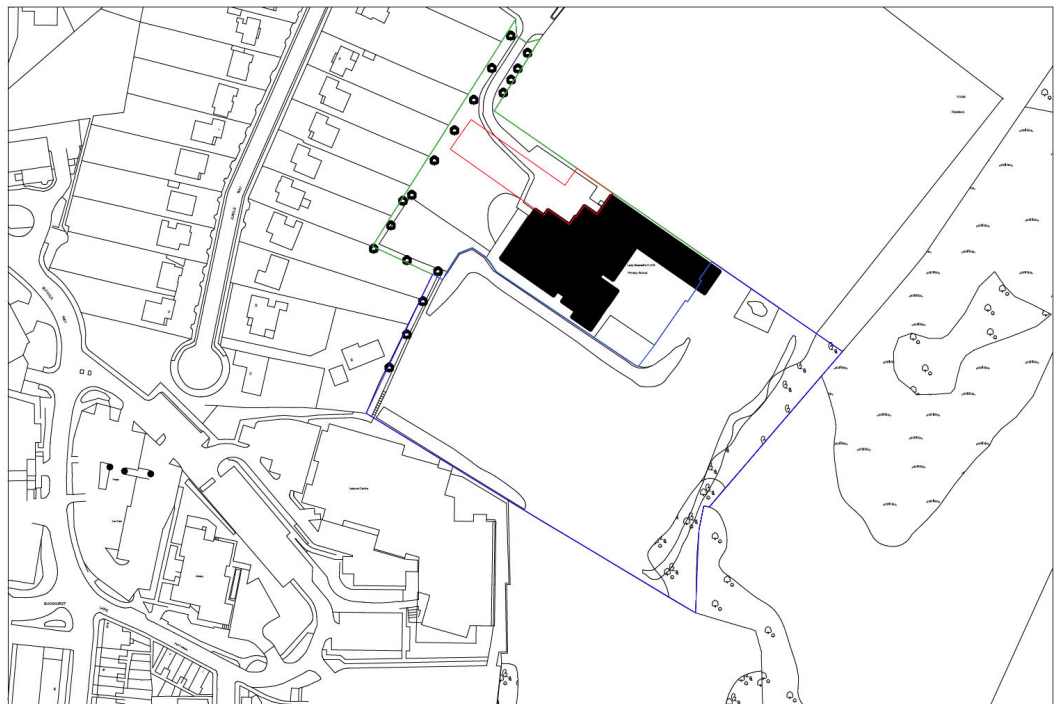
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- ▲ Existing main entrance via Plymouth Drive
- ▨ Existing on-site car parking area
- Existing & approved building footprint
- Proposed building footprint
- ▭ Outline of proposed works

Scale 1:500



- Rochester Diocese land ownership
- KCC land ownership
- ▭ Outline of proposed works
- Existing & approved building footprint

Scale 1:1250

WILLMOTT DIXON
LADY BOSWELL'S C.E. SCHOOL

scale 1:1250 / 1:500
date 16.07.13

drawn
checked TK

drawing name Existing site plans
job no. 12-162 dwg no. 004

revision

Bond Bryan
Architects



D3.3

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SITE PLAN 1:1000

Bond Bryan Architects

drawing name **Proposed Site Plan**
job no. **12-162** dwg no. **001**

Drawn PO
checked TK

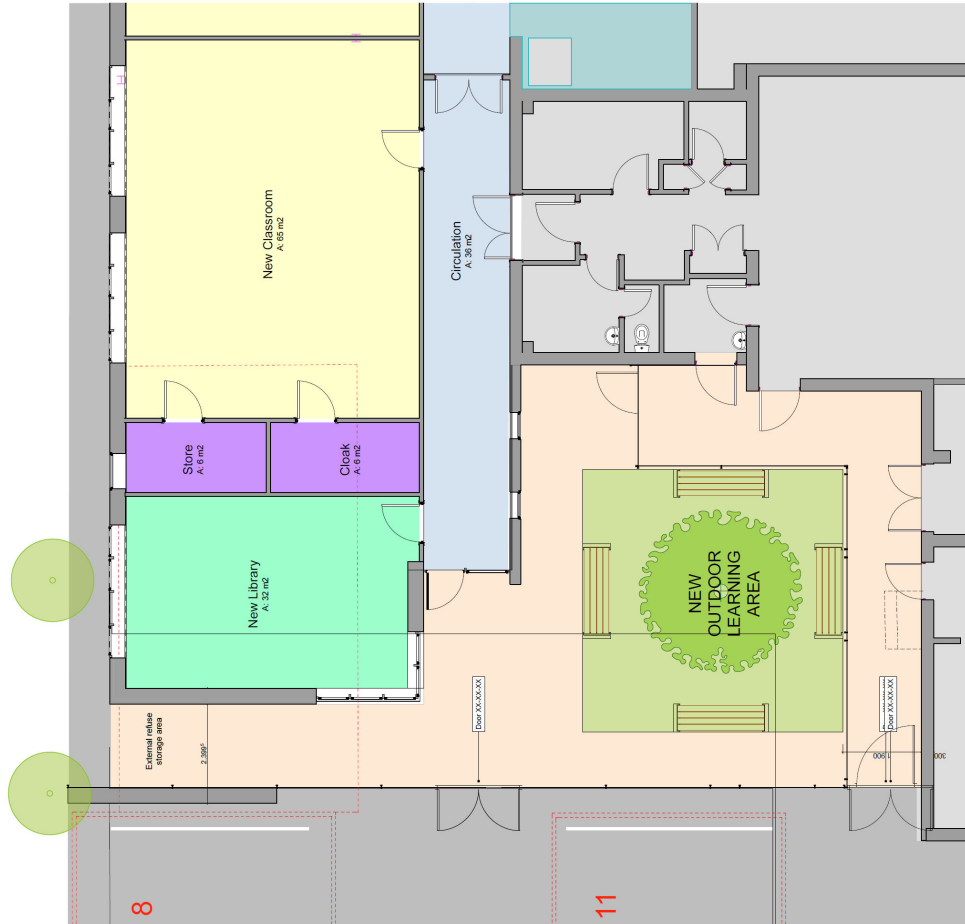
scale 1:200
date 12.06.13

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LADY BOSWELL'S C.E. SCHOOL

PREVIOUS PARKING: 21 Parking Spaces
PROPOSED PARKING: 23 Parking Spaces + 1 Disabled Parking Bay

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GROUND FLOOR PLAN 1:50



AERIAL PERSPECTIVE



VIEW FROM SITE ENTRANCE



Bond Bryan
Architects

revision

drawn by: **Proposed Plan**
job no. **12-162** sheet no. **002**

drawn by: **PO**
checked by: **TK**

scale: **1:50**
date: **12.06.13**

WILLMOTT DIXON
LADY BOSWELL'S C.E. SCHOOL

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4. This application proposes the second phase of building works on the site to complete the accommodation required for the 2FE expansion. The first phase of the development was considered by Members of the Planning Applications Committee on the 7 June 2013, and planning permission was subsequently granted (Members of the Planning Applications Committee also visited the site on the 27 March 2013). That application, consent reference SE/13/487, proposed a 5 classroom extension to the north of the school, with associated internal alterations and an extended playground area. However, when that 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 approved. The applicant omitted the sixth classroom 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 that 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 was agreed at that time that the future requirement for the School to become a full 2FE would be met with a second planning application for a sixth classroom to be proposed to the front of the school building. The sixth classroom is the subject of this proposal and will be discussed and considered throughout this report.

Proposal

5. 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 recently approved 5 classroom timber framed extension is also single storey, with a pitched roof, with cream colour rendered panels and external brickwork to match that of the existing school elevations. That extension will run along the northern boundary of the school site, and links to the existing school buildings where they meet at the western end of the row of 5 classrooms.
6. This application proposes a single classroom extension to be located at the western end of the recently approved classroom block. The implications of relocation of the sixth classroom from the eastern to the western end of the approved extension are as follows:
- the plant room would be omitted from the approved extension and relocated within the existing plant room in the original school building;
 - the proportions of the approved classrooms have been changed slightly so that they are all the same (internal alterations);
 - the library, which was approved within the 5 classroom extension, would need to be relocated due to the extended corridor which is required to link classroom 6 to the remainder of the development;
 - 4 existing car parking bays would be lost due to the location of the classroom as now proposed.
7. The footprint of proposed extension is 115m², and would provide the space required for the sixth classroom, and would also enable the library to be relocated to the western end of the extension adjacent to the proposed classroom. Internal alterations, and the relocation of the library, facilitate adequate internal circulation, and also provide space for a flexible learning area.

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8. Between the proposed new extension and the existing school building, a small 'courtyard' area would be created due to the layout of the buildings on site. It is proposed to securely fence off this area to create an outdoor space. This space would be landscaped to provide an informal hard and soft teaching/play area for small groups, and appropriate circulation and access routes.
9. The design and scale of the proposed development has been considered in relation to the recently approved classroom extension. The applicant states that the proposal would create a holistic appearance to the overall development by extending the height, design and massing of the 5 classroom extension which is already approved. The ridge heights and eaves would be maintained along the entirety of the new single storey classroom block, and materials would match. The western end of the building, which be visible when approaching the school via the access road, would consist of facing brickwork and full height glazing to the library, with powder coated aluminium fenestration and brise soleil solar screening. The pitch roof to the southern side of the western extension is proposed to be staggered with respect to the built footprint, to create a covered area at the corridor entrance.
10. As a result of the limited parking facilities available on site, and to mitigate the loss of the 4 spaces due to the footprint of the development, it is proposed to improve and extend the car parking at the front of the site. The car parking on site is not all formally marked at the moment, but the applicant advises that the school has restricted on site parking for 21 vehicles (staff and visitors only). It is proposed to provide a total of 24 car parking spaces, including a disabled car parking bay, an increase of 3 over the existing. The new car parking bays (3 additional, and 4 replacement) are proposed to be located to the south of the existing access road, extending the existing parking facility further to the west. The existing pedestrian access path would be diverted to the rear of the proposed parking bays, enabling safe pedestrian access. 4 trees would need to be removed to accommodate the car park extension, one a which (a cherry) is recommended for removal due to poor health. The applicant is proposing to provide 4 replacement trees to the south of the extended car park to replacement those removed.

This planning application is accompanied by a Design, Access & Planning Statement, Tree Survey Report, Arboricultural Impact Assessment, and School Travel Plan.

Planning Policy Context

11. The following Guidance/Statements and Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to the consideration of the application:
 - (i) **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** March 2012, sets out the Government's planning policy guidance for England at the heart of which is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The guidance is a material consideration for the determination of planning application but 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).

In determining applications the NPPF states that local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

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In terms of delivering sustainable development in relation to this development proposal, the NPPF guidance and objectives covering the following matters are of particular relevance:

- consideration of whether the 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 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
- the great importance the Government attached to Green Belts, with the fundamental aim of Green Belt Policy being to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. 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.

(ii) **Policy Statement – Planning for Schools Development** (15 August 2011) which sets out the Government's commitment to support the development of state-funded schools and their delivery through the planning system.

(iii) **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.

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.

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Policy VP1 –Vehicle parking provision in new developments will be made in accordance with KCC adopted vehicles parking standards.

(iv) **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

12. **Sevenoaks District Council** – Objects on the basis that the proposal 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.

The District Council also objects to the proposal on the basis that it would have a potentially detrimental impact upon the amenities of local residents in the surrounding area in terms of highway impact. In addition, the District Council is not able to guarantee to increase the parking concession in the Suffolk Way car park to accommodate the expansion of Lady Boswell's School and, subject to future reviews of parking in the town centre, it is not possible to guarantee to maintain the existing facility in future years. The proposal is therefore considered to conflict with Policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks Local Plan.

Sevenoaks Town Council – recommends approval, subject to the conditions included in permission reference SE/13/487.

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Kent Highways and Transportation – Comment as follows:

“This proposal constitutes the sixth classroom associated with a previous proposal for six additional classrooms, one of which was not able to be located as previously proposed as a result of existing underground services. As such, the highway impact of the current proposal was considered as part of that previous proposal through which a number of highway related conditions were secured. Furthermore, I understand that as a result of the newly proposed location for this classroom and the associated displacement of on-site parking, there will in fact be additional on-site parking created. As a result, I am satisfied that any highway impact associated with this proposal will be mitigated by both the imposition of previous conditions and by the creation of additional on-site parking and no highway objection is therefore raised.”

Environment Agency – has assessed this application as having a low environmental risk and, therefore, has no comment to make.

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; 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, given its sensitive location at the very edge of the AONB.”

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.

Local Member

13. The local County Member, Mrs Margaret Crabtree, was notified of the application on the 18 July 2013.

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Publicity

14. The application was publicised by the posting of several site notices around the application site, a newspaper advertisement, and the individual notification of 28 nearby properties. The Knole Paddock Residents Association was also notified directly of the application of the 18 July 2013. 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.

Representations

15. To date, I have received 1 letter of representation from a local resident. A summary of the main issues raised/points made is set out below:
- The local community and the District Council objected to the previous application, yet the County Council went ahead and approved it;
 - This proposal will further affect the Green Belt, and extends the school beyond initial proposals;
 - Provision must be made for sound proof fencing, not taking into account the noise effects of expanding a school on close neighbours is deeply distressing;
 - It is noted with disappointment that nothing has been done about the school's admissions policy. It is considered that the expansion is not providing fair places for the local community, but for a 'minority extreme faith selection' who exclude local children as far as they are able.

Discussion

16. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 11 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.
17. 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

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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.

18. 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 school 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

19. 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 in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. Although the recently approved 5 classroom extension was considered to be ‘inappropriate development’ on the basis that the provision of an additional 5 classrooms and associated amenity spaces, could not be considered to be a proportionate addition, the merits of that application were considered and discussed at the time of determining that application. This application only proposes a 115m² extension, with limited external works, including a car park expansion. In my view, the single classroom development as proposed is proportionate in terms of the original school building and the accommodation to be provided in the recently approved extension. However, the extension as proposed needs to be considered as a part of the school expansion, and the cumulative impact in conjunction with the 5 classroom extension already approved needs to be assessed. The development is therefore, to my mind inappropriate and needs to be considered accordingly.

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20. 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.
21. 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 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. It should be noted, that the previous application for the expansion of Lady Boswell's School (SE/13/487) included the provision of a sixth classroom, and the case of very special circumstances made with that application applied to a six classroom extension. Although the sixth classroom was omitted from that application before determination, in my view, the sixth classroom would not have changed the conclusion and recommendation of the Planning Applications Committee Report, as considered and agreed at the Committee Meeting on the 7 June 2013. The case of very special circumstances put forward for this application, for the sixth classroom, considers the development of the site as a whole, and therefore the following paragraphs will refer to the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE, and the provision of sufficient accommodation in that regard.
22. 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.
23. 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.
24. 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

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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.

25. 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 a green field site and, therefore, the development of Lady Boswell's Primary School would, in my view (and as accepted when considering application reference SE/13/487), 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.
26. 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 has been sited on existing hard standing as far as is practicable. In addition, the five classroom extension previously approved 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. That 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 single classroom extension which is being considered within this report would be located to the western end of the classroom extension, as opposed to the eastern end as previously proposed. This has the benefit of reducing encroachment into the open areas of the school site, and contains the built development of the school to the west of the site, which is already developed, and is closer to the urban edge of Sevenoaks.
27. 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

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impact of the development on the openness and functioning of the Green Belt, and the character and appearance of the wider landscape beyond. In addition, I consider that the car parking extension proposed is in a logical location, adjacent to the existing car park and access road, minimising land take, and containing the car parking in the north west corner of the school site. The car parking would not, in my view, impact upon the functioning and openness of the Green Belt due to its largely two dimensional nature, and well considered location.

28. 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'.
29. The Town and County Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009 states that inappropriate developments within the Green Belt should be referred to the Secretary of 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 well 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

30. 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, however, that no objections to the siting or design of the development have been received. The built development proposed, including the car park extension, is all to the north western side of the existing school building, at the western end of the five classroom extension already approved. The siting of the development is logical and would relate well to both the existing building and the five classroom extension, and the high level glazing proposed to the western elevation would add interest to the design, in my view, improving the overall quality of built development on site.
31. The building would be single storey, with a shallow pitched roof, with facing brickwork to match the existing school. The only concern that I have regarding the design and

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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 (that condition is also imposed on consent reference SE/13/487). 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

32. As detailed in paragraph 10 of this report, a Tree Survey has been undertaken and submitted with this application, which concludes that the proposed car park realignment/extension would result in the loss of 4 trees, one of which (a cherry) is recommended for removal due to poor health. The applicant is proposing to provide 4 replacement trees to the south of the extended car park to replace those removed. 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 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 scheme generates limited landscape issues'. However, as with application reference SE/13/487, and in accordance with the applicant's proposals, I do consider that replacement tree planting should be provided. 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.
33. With regard to the ecology, this application does not directly impact upon habitat that would be suitable for housing protected species and, as such, this matter has not been assessed in detail in the consideration of this application. However, with regard to application reference SE/13/487, an Ecological Scoping Survey Report was submitted which concluded 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. 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'. However, conditions of consent were imposed on consent reference SE/13/487 requiring that the development be undertaken in accordance with the recommendations and precautionary measures as detailed within the Ecological Scoping Survey Report. As this development is to be built as one 6 classroom extension, I consider it appropriate to impose these same conditions in this instance, should planning permission be granted, to ensure a uniform approach.

Access, parking and highway issues

34. 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.

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Sevenoaks District Council have 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. The previous application for the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE, which initially proposed a full 6 classroom extension, was accompanied by a Transport Statement, and Transport Statement Addendum, which fully assessed the impact of the expansion of the school on the local highway network. At the time of considering that application, Kent County Council Highways and Transportation, assessed the impact of the expansion of the school in its entirety, so one could conclude that the highway impacts associated with this application for the sixth classroom have already been assessed, with the conclusion being that the expansion of the school would not have a significantly detrimental impact on the local highway network subject to the imposition of conditions. The following matters were considered and addressed at that time, and are relevant to the determination of this application.

35. As outlined in paragraph 3 of this report, this application, in conjunction with application reference SE/13/487, is part of the County wide Educational Basic Needs Programme, and is proposing to provide the remainder of the accommodation required 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 currently 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.
36. The expansion of the existing primary school from 1FE to 2 FE, would increase pupil numbers from the current 216 to approximately 420. Currently, each year group comprises around 30 pupils. From 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.
37. Unlike the previous planning application for the 5 classroom extension, this planning application does provide additional car parking facilities for staff on site. Due to the siting of the single classroom extension upon 4 existing parking bays, it is proposed to mitigate the loss of the 4 spaces by improving and extending the car parking at the front of the site. It is proposed to provide a total of 24 car parking spaces, including a disabled car parking bay, an increase of 3 over the existing. The new car parking bays (3 additional, and 4 replacement) are proposed to be located to the south of the existing access road, extending the existing parking facility further to the west. The existing pedestrian access path would be diverted to the rear of the proposed parking bays, enabling safe pedestrian access. This application would, therefore, improve the provision of car parking on site. The conclusions made with regard to the previous application were made at a time when additional car parking was not proposed. Kent County Council Highways and Transportation are satisfied that any highway impact associated with this proposal would be mitigated by both the imposition of previous conditions and by the creation of additional on-site parking and no highway objection is

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therefore raised. I do, however, consider that an additional condition of consent should be imposed to ensure that the car parking is provided and operational prior to the occupation of the development, should permission be granted.

38. 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. This selection and admissions process has met with local objection, and is considered to increase car journeys to the school. Admission policies 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.
39. At the time of assessing the 5 classroom extension application, Kent County Council Highways and Transportation considered that the submitted Transport Statement Addendum gave a 'greater confidence to the application and the School's commitment to minimising impacts in transport terms'. The Addendum set out how the School intends 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. In addition, the submitted Transport Statement Addendum confirmed 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.
40. The previously submitted Transport Statement (which was based on a full 6 classroom expansion) estimated 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 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 was discussed with the District Council, who at the time of writing the Planning Applications Committee Report for the previous application (SE/13/487), agreed that the permit based system for parents would be continued and amended as necessary to allow for the additional numbers. However, the District Council have now stated that they may not be able to guarantee an increase in the parking concession in the Suffolk Way car park to accommodate the expansion of Lady Boswell's School and, subject to future reviews of parking in the town centre, it is not possible to guarantee to maintain the existing facility in future years. However, it should be noted that the County Planning Authority was made aware of this situation prior to the determination of the previous application, and Members were advised of this verbally at the Planning Applications Committee meeting on the 7 June.
41. Kent County Council Highways and Transportation were present at that Committee Meeting and advised Members that removal of the permit scheme would not change their views on the application. Parents could still use the public car park for drop off and pick up, and management of the pedestrian access at the Suffolk Road car park by the

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school could negate the need for parents to park at all. The pay and display car park can be used at anytime and, should the permit scheme not be extended, or be removed completely, Highway and Transportation are satisfied that the local highway network could accommodate any increase in traffic associated with the 2FE expansion. However, it was agreed that a condition of consent would require the review of the School Travel Plan on an annual basis, and that the Travel Plan would include the reference and promotion of various initiatives, including the car park permit scheme, and staff supervision of the Suffolk Way access. The Travel Plan should be reviewed annually and, in addition, representatives from local residents should be included within this review process, and given opportunity to express their concerns, views and suggestions. Members of the Planning Applications Committee agreed with this approach and, therefore, a condition of consent was imposed on consent reference SE/16/487 which is worded as follows:

Within 6 months of the date of this decision a revised School Travel Plan, with initiatives to be developed in liaison with representatives from the local community/residents, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the County Planning Authority, and thereafter be implemented as approved and subject to ongoing monitoring and review. The Travel Plan shall include, amongst other matters, continuation and expansion of the parent permit scheme and increased supervision of the drop off at the Suffolk Way Car Park.

42. Kent County Council Highways and Transportation have commented as follows with regard to this application:

“This proposal constitutes the sixth classroom associated with a previous proposal for six additional classrooms, one of which was not able to be located as previously proposed as a result of existing underground services. As such, the highway impact of the current proposal was considered as part of that previous proposal through which a number of highway related conditions were secured. Furthermore, I understand that as a result of the newly proposed location for this classroom and the associated displacement of on-site parking, there will in fact be additional on-site parking created. As a result, I am satisfied that any highway impact associated with this proposal will be mitigated by both the imposition of previous conditions and by the creation of additional on-site parking and no highway objection is therefore raised.”

43. I agree with this view, and am of the opinion that the highway impacts of the expansion of Lady Boswell's Primary School were assessed and deemed to be acceptable at the time of determining the previous application. However, for the avoidance of doubt and for consistency, I consider that the condition regarding the submission of an update Travel Plan, as seen in paragraph 41 above, should also be imposed upon this consent, should permission be granted. I also consider that a further condition of consent should require the provision of the replacement and additional car parking on site prior to occupation of the development. Subject to this, I see no reason the refuse this application on the grounds of impact on the local highway network.

Noise

44. A neighbouring resident has requested that the boundary fencing be upgraded to provide some noise attenuation given the increase in pupil numbers. First, it should be noted that outside play is only for short periods throughout the day, and is not a constant source of noise. In addition, in my view, the noise generated by an incremental

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increase of additional pupils would not be detectable over and above the existing level. Although there is playground space to the western side of the school site, it is not proposed to extend this in any way as part of the school expansion. The playground to the east of the site, to the rear of the school, is to be extended under consent reference SE/13/487, although this is to replace existing playground to be lost, rather than the provision of additional space. The school boundaries are well screened with existing trees and vegetation, and I see no need to require the provision of acoustic fencing, the provision of which would undoubtedly result in the removal of some of the trees and existing vegetated boundaries which would be detrimental to the character of the site. I do not consider that this application would lead to a discernibly audible increase in noise, and see no reason to refuse the application on this ground. However, adjoining residents could always add to their own boundary treatment if they were particularly concerned over the possibility of undue noise trespass.

Drainage and land contamination

45. Although the Environment Agency raises no objection to the proposal, and has not requested any conditions of consent, it should be noted that two conditions of consent were requested with regard to application reference SE/13/487 due to the larger scale of the development. As the development is to be constructed as one 6 classroom extension, I consider it appropriate to also impose the two conditions of consent in this instance, should permission be granted. The conditions would require 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, and a further condition regards land contamination. 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.

Construction matters

46. 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.
47. As with application reference SE/13/487, 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

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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.

48. 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

49. This proposal, in conjunction with application SE/13/487, 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

Recommendation

50. 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 previously submitted Ecological Scoping Survey;
- surface water drainage and infiltration to ground;
- land contamination;
- Provision of car parking prior to the occupation of the development;
- 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

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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.

Case officer – Mary Green	01622 221066
Background documents - See section heading	