

**Two mobile classrooms at The Norton Knatchbull School,
Hythe Road, Ashford – AS/08/1506**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 22 January 2008.

Application by the Governors of Norton Knatchbull School & Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for the provision of two mobile classrooms at Norton Knatchbull School, Hythe Road, Ashford (AS/08/1506).

Recommendation: Temporary planning permission be granted, subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mrs. E. Tweed

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Norton Knatchbull School is located to the east of the main town of Ashford on Hythe Road (A292). It is a voluntary controlled grammar school with a school roll which increased from 1045 to 1087 pupils in September 2008. The increase in students was mainly experienced in additional numbers of sixth form students from September 2008. The application site is bordered by residential properties and an elderly persons care centre (Bradbourne Care Centre) which front Hythe Road to the southern side of the school buildings, and residential properties to the eastern boundary beyond the railway line. To the northern side of the site are allotments and school playing fields beyond. The main school buildings are generally located in the south-eastern corner of the school site, with the main playing fields and sports pitches located to the north west of the site. There are no specific local plan policies which relate to this site. *A location plan of the site is attached on page D2.2.*

Background

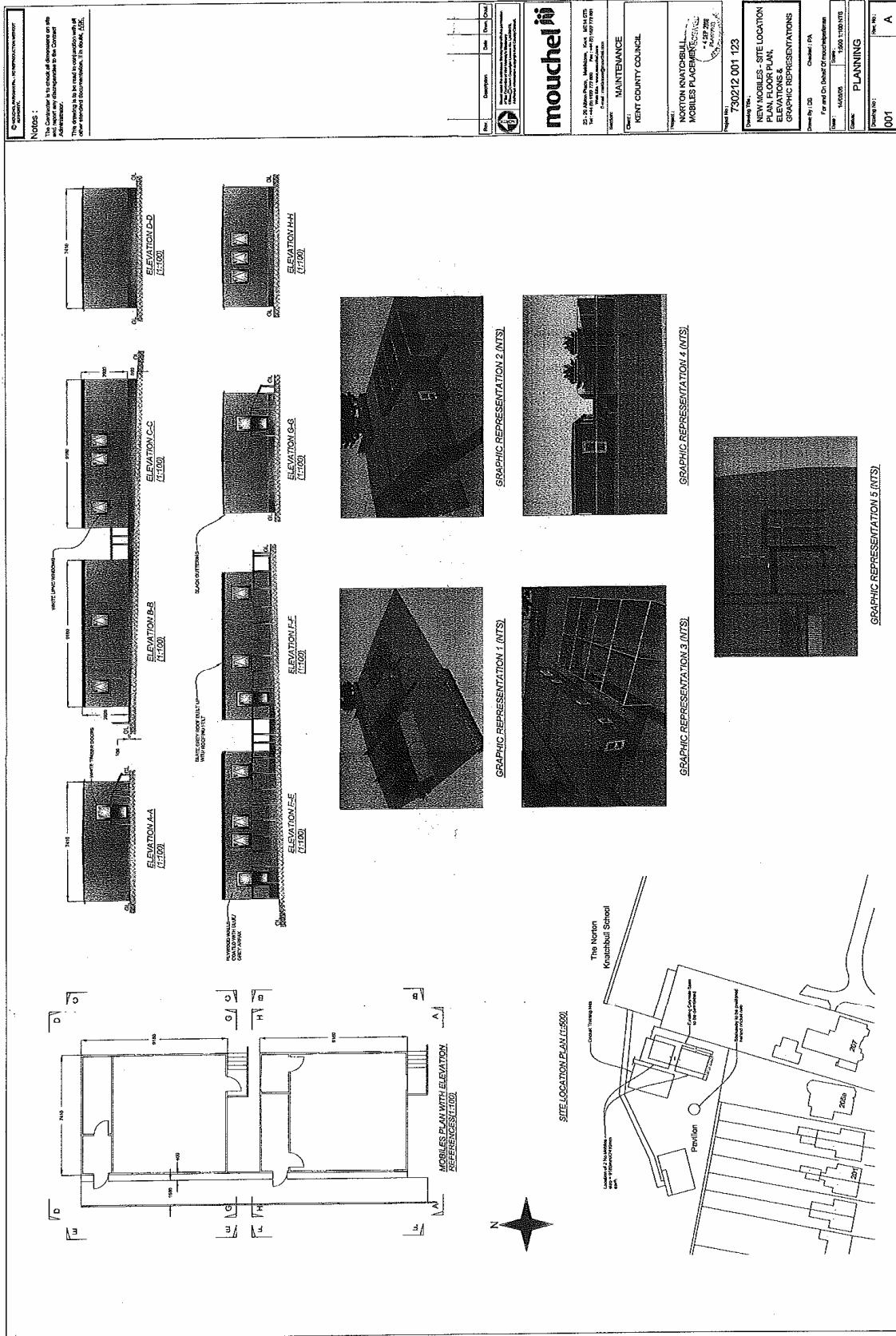
2. The County Planning Authority granted planning permission for the following developments at Norton Knatchbull as follows:
 - Creation of additional school playing fields (land to the north of main school buildings) under consent reference AS/04/1256 in January 2005;
 - Replacement of groundsman's hut and single storey demountable classroom block (both destroyed by fire) by two single storey metal storage containers, under consent reference AS/04/2225 in April 2005;
 - Construction of a sports hall complex, under consent reference AS/05/511 in December 2005;
 - Installation of solar panels on roof of existing school building, under consent reference AS/08/490 in May 2008.

Proposal

3. This application proposes the provision of two additional mobile classrooms to accommodate an increase in the school roll, mainly consisting of additional sixth form students, which took place from September 2008. The applicants have stated that the additional space required to accommodate an increased number of students in the short-term, can only be realistically met through the provision of two additional mobile classroom buildings. Whilst it is noted that the increased school roll has already taken place, a delay in the preparation and submission of a formal planning application to the County Planning Authority for the provision of temporary mobile classrooms accommodation, has resulted in cramped and unsuitable teaching conditions within the

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Proposed Mobile Classroom Details



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school. The applicants have stated that they are in urgent need of the additional space in the short term, in order to release classroom space and timetabling pressures within the main school buildings.

4. The provision of permanent accommodation to meet the needs of an increasing student roll has been considered by the applicants, but funding arrangements have not been agreed within a building programme at this stage. Therefore, the applicants believe that the only realistic short-term solution to the shortfall in classroom accommodation at the site is through the addition of two mobile classrooms as proposed.
5. It has been confirmed that the increase in pupil numbers, as occurred from September 2008, was accommodated by the existing number of teaching staff at the school. Therefore, as a result of the increase in the number of sixth form students, there was no additional requirement for extra teaching staff resources. Therefore, the applicants have confirmed that pressure on the existing staff car parking has not been experienced to date.
6. The mobile classrooms are proposed to be located adjacent to the southern boundary of the school playing fields (as identified on the site plan on page D2.2). This location has previously been used for mobile classroom and temporary storage accommodation, and is located near an existing sports pavilion building. The site chosen for the provision of mobile classrooms is physically detached from that of the main school buildings, by a distance of approximately 100 metres. The main reason for the proposed location of the classrooms away from the main cluster of school buildings has arisen due to a lack of alternative sites for the stationing of the temporary buildings elsewhere within the site which would not be detrimental to the operational activities of the school.
7. The location of the proposed mobile classrooms is adjacent to the boundary of residential properties fronting Hythe Road (Numbers 205a, 207 & 207a Hythe Road). The boundary is separated by a 1.8m high wooden close boarded fence and several shrubs and trees. Photographs showing the proposed location site, the existing boundary treatment and the adjacent residential properties can be found in Appendix 1.
8. The proposed classrooms would consist of a standard mobile classroom construction, similar to those found on many other educational sites across the County, comprising a felt flat roof and rough-cast green walls. Access to the mobile classrooms would be obtained through a series of timber ramps which would lead directly off an access path leading from the staff car park. The proposed main access points to the two mobile units would be located on the eastern elevations of the classrooms, facing the nearby residential property 207a Hythe Road.

Planning Policy

9. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:
 - (i) The adopted 2006 **Kent & Medway Structure Plan**:

Policy SP1 – The primary purpose of Kent’s development and environmental strategy will be to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern and form of development. This will be done principally by, amongst other matters:

- protecting the Kent countryside and its wildlife for future generations;

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- protecting and enhancing features of importance in the natural and built environment;
- encouraging high quality development and innovative design that reflects Kent's identity and local distinctiveness and promoting healthy, safe and secure living and working environments;

Policy QL1 – All development should be well designed and be of high quality. Developments, individually or taken together, should respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surroundings. Development which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, functioning and character of settlements or the countryside will not be permitted.

Policy QL11 – Provision will be made for the development and improvement of local services in existing residential areas and in town and district centres, particularly where services are deficient. Flexibility in the use of buildings for mixed community uses, and the concentration of sports facilities at schools, will be encouraged.

Policy QL12 – Provision will be made to accommodate additional requirements for local community services in response to growth in demand from the community as a whole. The services will be located where they are accessible by walking, cycling and by public transport

Policy EN9 – Tree cover and the hedgerow network should be maintained and enhanced where this would improve the landscape and/or biodiversity

(ii) The adopted 2000 **Ashford Borough Local Plan (Saved Policies)**:

Policy DP1 – Planning permission will not be granted for development proposals which are poorly designed in terms of their scale, density, height, layout, massing, landscape, access or detailing

(iii) The adopted 2008 **Ashford Borough Council Local Development Framework Core Strategy**:

Policy CS1 – Sets our key planning objectives which relate to encouraging sustainable development

Policy CS9 – development proposals must be of high quality design.

Consultations

10. **Ashford Borough Council**: has raised no objection to the application subject to the development being carried out in accordance with the materials specified within the application.

Divisional Transportation Manager: has raised no objections to the proposal in respect of highway matters.

Environment Agency: no comments received to date.

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Local Member

11. The local County Member, Mrs. E. Tweed, was notified of the application on the 25 September 2008.

Publicity

12. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice at the main entrance of the school with Hythe Road. In addition, 8 neighbouring residential properties and the neighbouring care centre were individually notified of the application.

Representations

13. I have received a letter of objection from a nearby resident in connection with this application. The main points of objection are as follows:
- my dwelling is not shown on the map and therefore it is not clear just how close the classrooms would be to my home;
 - there was a building sited here about 4 years ago, not 20 years ago as stated in the application, which burnt down due to arson causing great damage to my own property and expense to myself;
 - an application was made a few years ago to site large containers on the same site which was turned down;
 - strongly object to the proposal due to the size of the school, security cannot be guaranteed and therefore is a higher risk to my property being damaged again;
 - the strip of land between the classrooms and my property will once again become an area to throw rubbish and a place to congregate for smoking
 - view from property will be totally obscured if 2 classrooms are put on proposed site as they are considerably taller than my fencing;
 - currently my garden is overlooked by 18 windows from the nursing home [Bradbourne Care Centre] that was built on former school land
 - if proposal goes ahead, I will be totally 'penned in' by the existing nursing home and mobile classrooms.

Discussion

Introduction

14. The application seeks planning permission for the stationing of two temporary mobile classrooms to meet a current shortfall in classroom accommodation at Norton Knatchbull School. The application is being reported to the Planning Applications Committee as a result of the residential objection received relating to amenity issues, as identified in paragraph (13) above, mainly in terms of overlooking and visual impact from the proposed mobile classrooms into a nearby property.
15. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (9) above. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore the proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. In this particular case, I consider that the key considerations in relation to this application are: -

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- the location of the proposed mobile classrooms, particularly in relation to any potential overlooking and amenity issues on nearby residential properties;
- the design of the proposed buildings and any potential ways in which the development could be improved to reduce its impact on surrounding residential amenity;
- the need for the proposed temporary accommodation to meet a current shortfall in permanent classroom accommodation; and
- the temporary nature of proposal.

Location

17. The application site is located on the southern boundary of the school playing fields adjacent to several residential properties, most notably numbers 205, 207 and 207a Hythe Road. The distance between the façade of the nearest mobile classroom to the façade of the closest residential property, 207a Hythe Road, would be approximately 10 metres. Members will note that a letter of objection has been received from the adjacent residential property, expressing various amenity concerns such as a loss of privacy, increased overlooking and issues of security as reasons for objection in this particular case.
18. The proposed mobile classrooms would be located, as identified on page D2.2, approximately 4 metres to the south of the nearest residential boundary with 207a Hythe Road. Photographs (1) and (2) in Appendix 1 show the nature of the site boundary which consists of a 1.8m high wooden close-boarded fence and low level trees and vegetation. The proposed mobile classrooms consist of two units with external dimensions of approximately 9 x 7.4 metres. The height of the units would be just under 3 metres to the eaves height of the felt flat roof. In terms of the two elevations (south and east) facing residential properties, these would consist of various double-glazed windows and the main single access door on each of the two units. An access ramp is proposed to run along the eastern edge of the proposed classroom, directly adjacent to the nearest residential property in order to provide the main means of entrance/exit from both classrooms. The access ramp would provide a level threshold access into the mobile classrooms which would be above ground level on the basis that mobile classrooms would be based on a raised platform above surrounding ground level.
19. I consider that the raised ramped access to both classrooms on the eastern elevation (adjacent to 207a Hythe Road) has the potential to provide users of both mobile classrooms with a raised platform for which students could obtain views across the adjacent property and its garden. In my opinion, I consider that the orientation of the classrooms, particularly with their access ramp systems, therefore has the potential to have a detrimental impact on surrounding residential properties. To this effect, I consider that the re-orientation of the units through 180 degrees, together with the main access ramp systems being located on the western elevation (away from the nearest residential property), would provide a solution to the currently raised issues. It is accepted however that an emergency means of access would have to be provided along the rear of the units, nearest to residential properties, in order to ensure a secondary means of escape in the case of an evacuation of the building. I consider however that an emergency escape route would only be used on occasion as an emergency means of evacuation, and therefore I do not consider that there would be a significant detrimental impact on residential amenity.
20. Furthermore, I consider that the use of obscure glazing would be beneficial to ensure that windows and doors on the southern and eastern elevations of the mobile units would not allow users of the classrooms to obtain views across adjacent residential

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properties. I therefore consider that the use of a suitable planning condition to require the continued use of obscure glazing on all windows facing residential properties would seem appropriate in this particular case in order to safeguard residential amenity and avoid any potential overlooking issues. It is my opinion therefore that the rotation of the proposed classroom units, together with their associated ramp systems, through 180 degrees, and the use of obscure window glazing film would significantly help to reduce some of the residential concerns, particularly in terms of overlooking, which are set out in paragraph (13) above.

21. As previously noted, the location site for the proposed mobile classrooms is physically detached from the main school buildings by some 100 metres and is located adjacent to cricket playing nets and the school sports pavilion. This specific site has been used in the past as a location for a single storey demountable classroom block which was destroyed by fire as a result of arson at the school. Whilst I acknowledge that the location site is not ideal in terms of its proximity to surrounding residential properties, I note that alternative sites have been considered but in this instance have been discounted on the basis of their detriment to the functioning and operational activities of the school. Whilst it is noted that the site occupies a large parcel of land, most of this land is either taken up by existing built development, or comprises open land used as playing fields which would not be suitable, in planning terms, for the siting of such classrooms.

Design

22. Members will note the design of the proposed mobile classrooms is similar to that of typical temporary classroom units found elsewhere on education sites across the County. In this particular instance it is not so much a 'design' issue which is a cause for concern in terms of residential amenity, but more of a layout and proximity issue. Bearing that in mind, I am satisfied that the design of the units proposed in this particular instance are acceptable in planning terms on a temporary basis, and would accordingly not raise an objection on design grounds on the grounds of Policy QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan or Policy BE1 of the Ashford Local Plan.
23. As discussed in paragraph (20) above, I consider that the use of obscured window glazing film would be beneficial to ensure that windows on the southern and eastern elevations of the proposed mobile units would prevent users of the classrooms obtaining views out of the buildings across adjacent residential properties. A suitable planning condition requiring the continued use of obscure glazing on all windows facing residential properties would therefore seem appropriate in this particular case, in order to safeguard residential amenity and avoid any potential overlooking.

Landscaping

24. Given the proximity to the boundary in this particular instance, I do not feel that the proposed development would benefit from any additional landscaping planting measures to alleviate any of the residential concerns, as summarised above. In particular, the distance between the site boundary and that of the proposed mobile classrooms would not be sufficient to accommodate any additional tree or hedge planting that could make a valued contribution to the overall scheme. I would therefore not require the applicants to undertake any additional landscape planting in this instance.
25. I note that the existing fence between the school and nearest residential property (207a Hythe Road) consists of a 1.8m high timber close-boarded fence. Whilst the applicants have considered extending the height of the fence, it is understood that it is the property

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of the adjoining land owner. In my opinion, the use of a higher fence would do little to screen the overall visual impact of the proposed mobile classrooms and has the potential to cause an oppressive feel for surrounding residential properties. Accordingly, I would not require the applicants to install a higher boundary fence in this instance.

Need

26. As set out above the applicants have a short-term need for additional classroom space as a result of an increase in the number of sixth form students from September 2008. It is understood that timetabling of lessons is extremely difficult at present within the school given a lack of current classroom accommodation to cater for the increased school roll post September 2008. I therefore consider that in this instance the applicants have demonstrated the need for such temporary facility.

Temporary nature of proposal

27. Members will note that the applicants are seeking a temporary consent to site two additional mobile classrooms on the Norton Knatchbull School site in the short term to cater for an increase in school roll. It is expected that a permanent building proposal is likely to be brought forward in the coming future, but at present that option is not a viable short-term solution to meet the current need.
28. In light of the residential concerns expressed in this particular case, and the proximity of the mobile classrooms to residential boundaries, I consider that the duration of any temporary consent should be restricted to a maximum of 3 years. During this period, I believe that the applicants would have sufficient time to pursue funding, and seek the necessary consents for additional permanent classroom accommodation within the site. On this basis, I recommend that planning permission be granted on a temporary basis for a period of not longer than 3 years, after which the land should be restored to a grass surface.

Conclusion

29. Having regard to the Development Plan Policies, and the residential concerns as summarised in paragraph (13) above, I consider that subject to the re-orientation of both classrooms through 180 degrees, together with their associated access ramps, to reduce the residential amenity impacts, the temporary siting of the units for a period of not longer than 3 years, and the use of obscure glazing film applied to all windows and doors facing residential properties for the duration that the mobile classrooms are on site, would address the main grounds of objection in this particular case. I consider that subject to such measures, the proposal would be in general conformity with the Development Plan. I therefore recommend that planning permission be granted as set out in paragraph (30) below.

Recommendation

30. I RECOMMEND that SUBJECT TO the receipt of amended plans to show the rotation of the mobile classrooms through 180 degrees, together with their associated ramp system, TEMPORARY PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO conditions, including conditions to cover the following aspects:
- temporary consent for period of 3 years from date of permission;
 - removal of classroom units from site at expiration of 3 year period and the subsequent restoration of the site thereafter;

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- obscured glazing be installed and maintained on all windows facing residential properties for the duration that the units are on site;
- the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;

Case officer – Julian Moat	01622 696978
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Background documents - See section heading
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Appendix 1 – Photographs of Site Context

No. 207a Hythe Road

No. 2057a Hythe Road



View looking south across proposed location site towards adjacent residential properties

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Bradbourne Care Centre

No. 207a Hythe Road



View looking south-east across proposed location site towards adjacent residential properties and Bradbourne Care Centre