

Single storey classroom building, reception block, extension to staff and hall facilities, and additional car parking. St Mark's CofE Primary School, Ramslye Road, Tunbridge Wells - TW/13/2659 (KCC/TW/0278/2013)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 24 January 2014.

Application by St Mark's C of E Primary School and Kent County Council Education for a new single storey 4 classroom block including a nurture room and an intervention room, a new reception block, extension to staff and hall facilities, provision of an additional netball court and hard play area, and 11 additional car parking spaces. St Mark's CofE Primary School, Ramslye Road, Tunbridge Wells (Ref: TW/13/2659 and KCC/TW/0278/2013).

Recommendation: The application be referred to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and subject to his decision planning permission to be granted, subject to conditions.

Local Members: Mr J Scholes

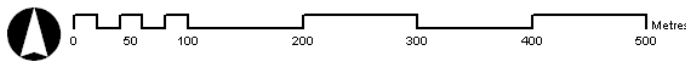
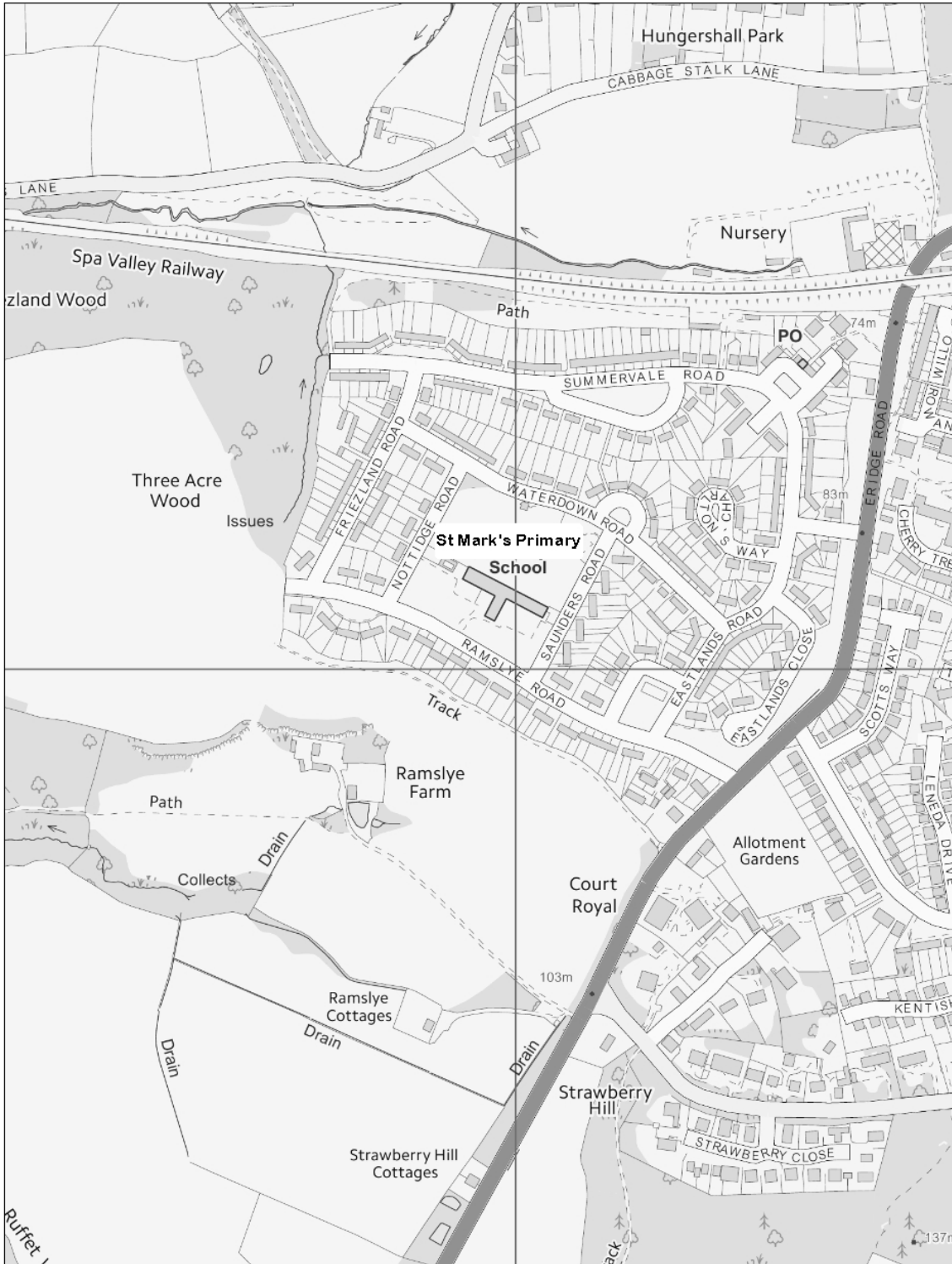
Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. St Mark's Church of England Primary School is located on Ramslye Road in the Broadwater Ward of Tunbridge Wells. It is situated in a residential estate in southern Tunbridge Wells. The school is bordered on all sides by roads serving residential properties, which are a mixture of two storey rows of terraced properties and semi-detached dwellings. The main vehicular and pedestrian entrance to the school site is from Ramslye Road to the south, with further pedestrian access available from Saunders Road to the east and Nottidge Road to the west. Waterdown Road forms the northern boundary and provides access for emergency vehicles to the rear of the site via the sports pitch. The site is accessed from the A26 Eridge Road via two estate roads, Ramslye Road and Summervale Road. The housing estate is effectively self contained and the estate roads form a big cul-de-sac, with no through roads. A site location plan is attached.
2. The main school building is a single storey, masonry construction with a north/south aspect. The building is primarily linear in form running east to west along its length, with the school hall and kitchen projecting out from the spine of the building towards Ramslye Road. To the front (south) of the building is located the hard play area, games court and an 11 space staff car park. To the rear (north) of the school building the site is entirely comprised of the sports pitch, which the School uses for track events, rounders and football. To the north east of the site, but outside the school's boundary there is a basketball court. This land was donated by the School to Kent County Council to provide a community sports area with agreed shared use. However the School has not yet used this space as it is difficult to police and is not considered secure. Topographically the site falls from Ramslye Road down towards Waterdown Road. The sport pitch runs down the hill towards Waterdown Road with two predominantly level areas which can be utilised for sport. The school site currently measures roughly 23,640sqm and approximately 30% of the site comprises of built development, with the other 70% representing open playing fields, informal hard and soft play surfaces and general soft landscaping zones.

New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

SITE LOCATION PLAN



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New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

Existing Site Plan



New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

Proposed Site Plan



New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

Proposed Site Elevations

Architectural drawings showing the proposed site elevations for St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells. The drawings include four elevation views: North Elevation, East Elevation, South Elevation, and West Elevation. Each elevation shows the building's profile and is annotated with specific block names in red text boxes:

- North Elevation:** Labeled with 'Proposed Classroom Block' at the bottom and 'Proposed Staff Extension' further up the side.
- East Elevation:** Labeled with 'Proposed Reception Block' at the bottom and 'Proposed Classroom Block' further up.
- South Elevation:** Labeled with 'Proposed Reception Block' at the bottom and 'Proposed Hall Extension' further up.
- West Elevation:** Labeled with 'Proposed Classroom Block' at the bottom and 'Proposed Reception Block' further up.

At the bottom right of the drawings is a detailed information box:

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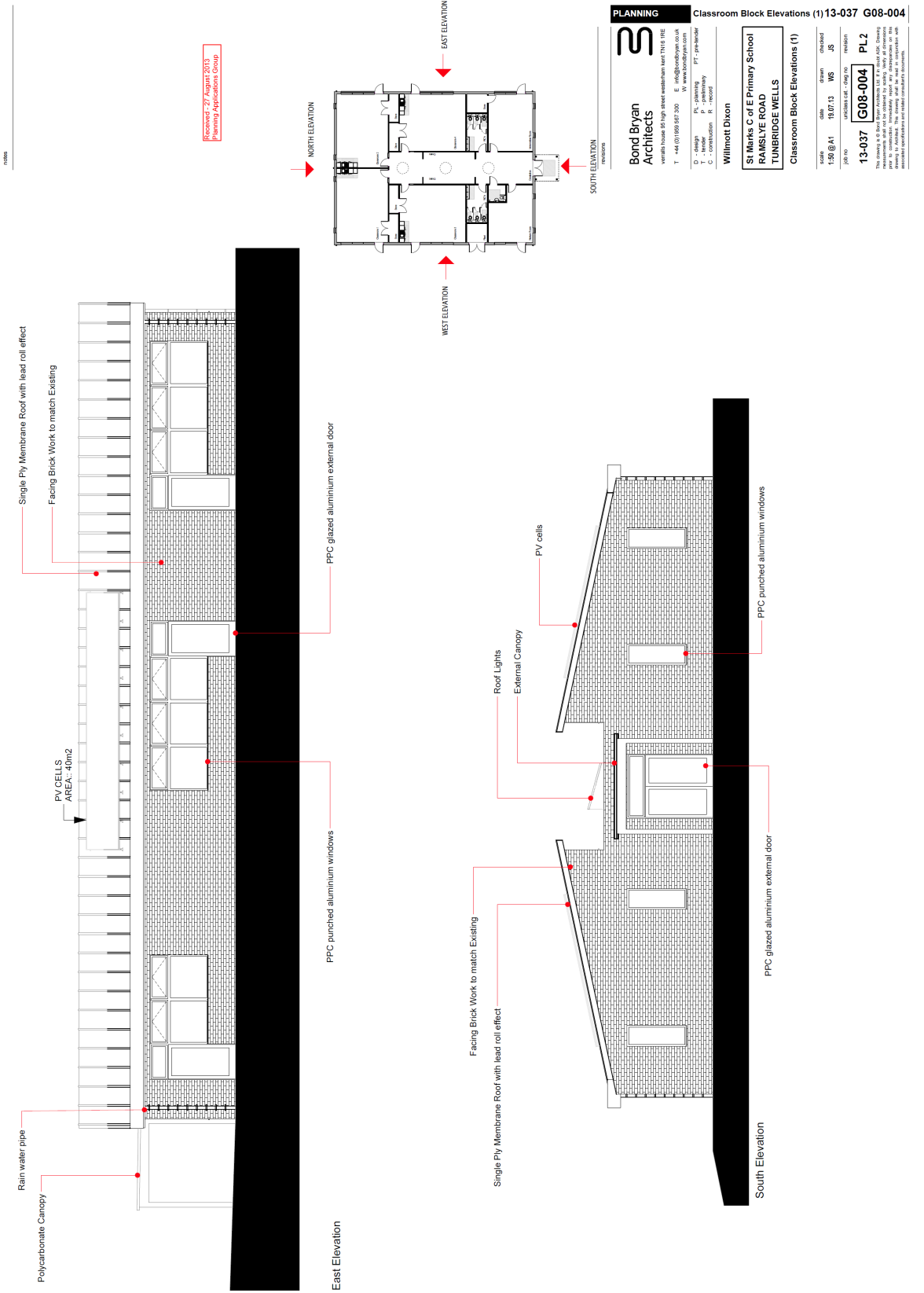
St Mark's CofE Primary School
RANSLEY ROAD
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
 Proposed Site Elevations

PLANNING NUMBER: 13-037 G08-001
 13-037 G08-001 | PL2
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Approved: 27 August 2013
 Planning Application Group

New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

Proposed Classroom Block Elevations 1



New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

Proposed Classroom Block Elevations 2

West Elevation

Single Ply Membrane Roof with lead roll effect
Facing Brick Work to match Existing
PV CELLS AREA: 40m²
External Canopy
Rain water pipe
PPC glazed aluminium external door
PPC punched aluminium windows
External Steel door

North Elevation

PV cells
Roof Lights
Facing Brick Work to match Existing
Single Ply Membrane Roof with lead roll effect
PPC punched aluminium windows
Rain water pipe

Floor Plan

NORTH ELEVATION
WEST ELEVATION
EAST ELEVATION
SOUTH ELEVATION

Received 27 August 2013
Planning Applications Group

PLANNING Classroom Block Elevations (2) 13-037 G08-005

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St Marks C of E Primary School
RAMSLYE ROAD
TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Classroom Block Elevations (2)

scale	date	drawn	checked
1:50 @ A1	15/07/13	WS	JS

job no 13-037 G08-005 PL2

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New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

Proposed Reception Block Elevations 1

Notes

East Elevation

- Rain water pipe
- PPC clerestory aluminium windows
- Single Ply Membrane Roof with lead roll effect
- Facing Brick Work to match Existing
- PPC punched aluminium windows
- External steel door
- PPC glazed aluminium external door

South Elevation

- External Canopy
- PPC aluminium windows
- Single Ply Membrane Roof with lead roll effect
- Facing Brick Work to match Existing
- External steel door

PLANNING Reception Block Elevations (1) 13-037 G08-002

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St Marks C of E Primary School
 RAMSLYE ROAD
 TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Reception Block Elevations (1)

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job no	project code - client no	revision	
13-037	G08-002	PL2	

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Proposed Reception Block Elevations 2

West Elevation

- PPC rain water pipe
- Poly Carbonate Canopy
- Single Ply Membrane Roof with lead roll effect
- Facing Brick Work to match Existing
- PPC punched aluminium windows
- PPC glazed aluminium external door

North Elevation

- PPC punched aluminium windows
- Facing Brick Work to match Existing
- Single Ply Membrane Roof with lead roll effect
- Poly Carbonate Canopy

Site Plan

- NORTH ELEVATION
- WEST ELEVATION
- EAST ELEVATION
- SOUTH ELEVATION

PLANNING Reception Block Elevations (2) 13-037 G08-003

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 RAMSLYE ROAD
 TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Reception Block Elevations (2)

scale	date	drawn	checked
1:50 @ A1	15/07/13	MS	JS
job no	project code - client no	revision	
	13-037 / G08-003	PL2	

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New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

Proposed Admin/Hall Elevations 1

PLANNING Admin/Hall Proposed Elevations 13-037 G08-006

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Willemott Dixon
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 RAMSLYE ROAD
 TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Admin/Hall Proposed Elevations (1)

PL3 Amendment to Hall stone to show parapet wall, life safety doors to be widened to east elevation widened.

MS 16.10.13

drawn	checked
JS	MS

13-037 G08-006 PL3

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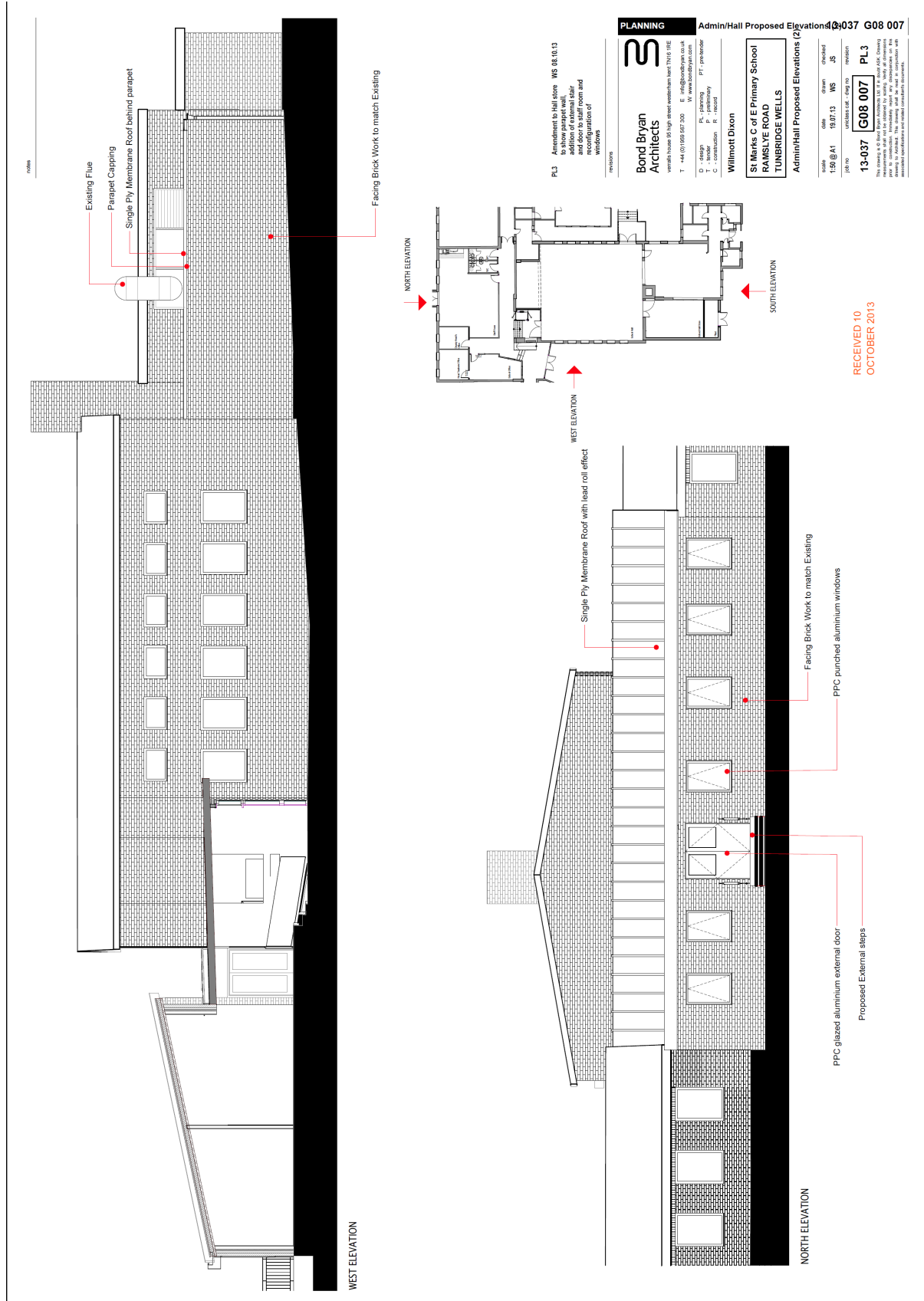
Aluminium Glazed Door
 Existing opening widened to receive new door

PPC punched aluminium windows to match existing
 Single Ply Membrane Roof with lead roll effect

Facing Brick Work to match Existing

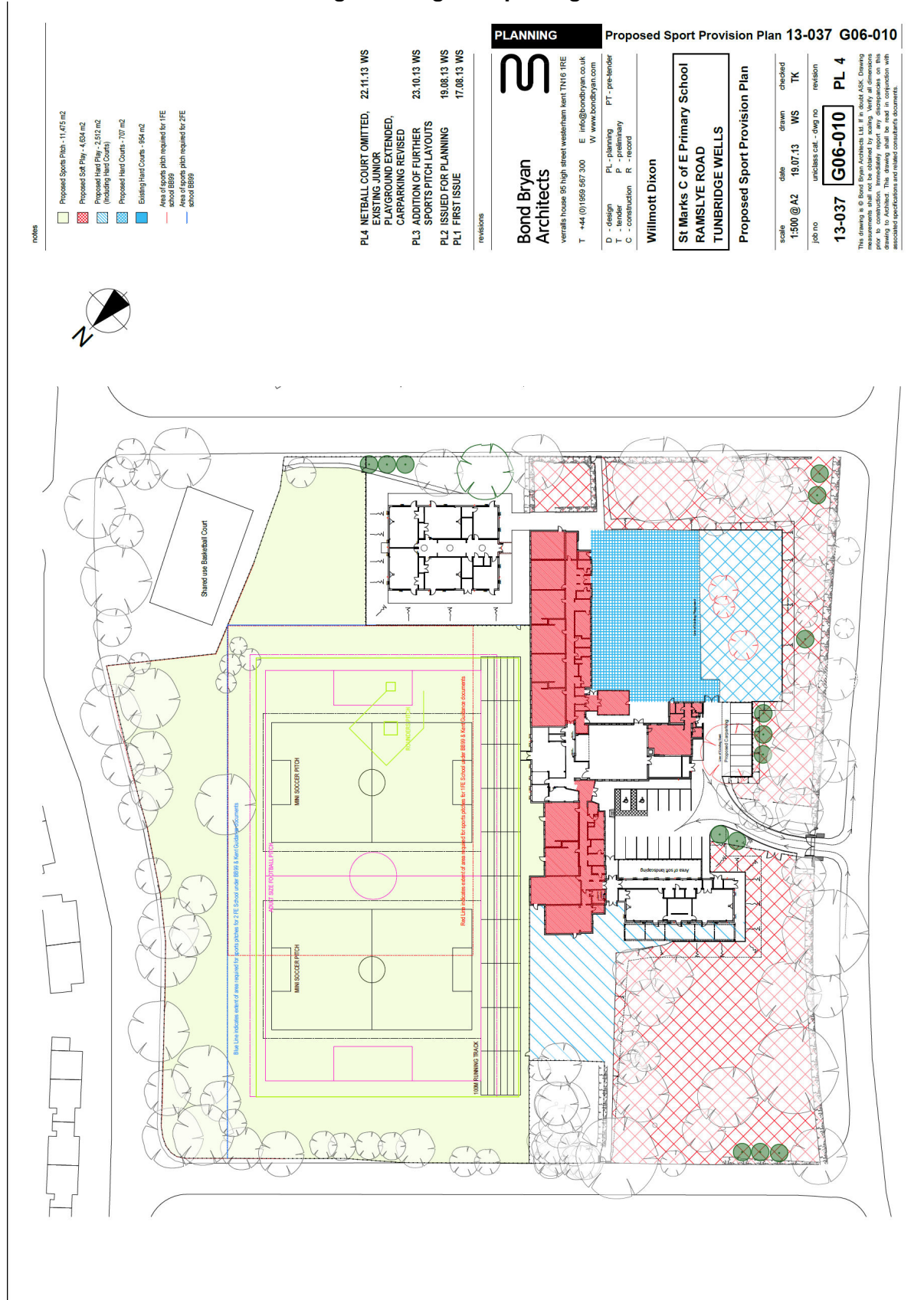
New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

Proposed Admin/Hall Elevations 2



New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

Drawing showing the sporting facilities



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Background and relevant planning history

3. St Mark's C of E Primary School is currently designated as a 1 form entry (FE) school. Due to the location of the school and its association with St Mark's Church (the school's local church) it has a broad catchment area. Due to the increase in population of the surrounding locality and its catchment area, a need has arisen to increase the number of places at the school. The proposed development is part of the County Council's current Basic Need programme for the expansion of school places across the county. Royal Tunbridge Wells and the neighbouring villages have seen a number of small scale and medium scale housing developments over the last few years. In addition there has been inward migration from London and other parts of Kent which has been a contributory factor to the indigenous growth. This growth and migration is bringing new families to the area requiring enhancements to the infrastructure in order to meet the future needs of the town and its residents. That has ultimately created the need for several Kent based primary schools to increase their capacity, and this has created a demand that requires the school to be changed from a 1FE to a 2FE. Furthermore the deficit of places will be further exacerbated by limited options for alternative expansions within the Tunbridge Wells area. The County Council as Education Authority has a statutory duty to provide school places for these children.
4. 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. The school currently has 210 pupils and with effect from September 2013 it has begun an expansion programme to become a 2 form entry with the pupil admission numbers increasing from 30 to 60 pupils. By September 2019, after the 7 year expansion programme, it is expected that the school will have a roll of 420 pupils. By the time it is running at full capacity 29 full time equivalent members of staff will be employed. The Kent Commissioning Plan 2012-2017, produced by the Education Authority and setting out how it is intended to meet the demand for school places, forecasts Reception Year pupil numbers to continue to increase and to outstrip the actual number of available places.
5. The School currently employs 20 full time equivalent (FTE) staff positions who are at the school site on a daily basis. The proposal will lead to an increase of 9FTE additional staff members, which will equate to 7 additional full time members of staff and 5 additional part time members of staff. Therefore the total number of staff at the school will be 29FTE in total following the development. The current parking arrangement is limited on the school site with currently only 11 parking spaces being provided at the school, two of which are designated as disabled car parking spaces. The school does not have any parking spaces for visitors or deliveries. The school kitchen provides meals for two other local primary schools so there are a significant number of deliveries in and out of the school site related to catering as well as school related deliveries. Historically non-teaching staff park in the surrounding roads as there is insufficient parking spaces available on the site. It is also proposed to retain the existing vehicular and pedestrian access points to the school but to reconfigure and improve the car parking layout by providing an additional 11 parking spaces. There would therefore be a total of 22 car parking spaces which would also include 2 disabled parking spaces. Whilst there would still be a shortfall of 7 parking spaces in reality (which is an improvement on the current shortfall of 9 spaces) it has been assessed as adequate bearing in mind the proposed measures within the School Travel Plan, the number of part time members of staff and the catchment area of the site. Furthermore

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the revised car parking layout would also allow a 7.5T box van, the largest type of vehicle to enter the site, to turn around within the school grounds and therefore to leave the site driving in a forward gear.

6. The school day starts at 8.55am and finishes at 3.05pm for infants and 3.15pm for juniors. There is also a breakfast club starting at 7.45am and after school clubs, most of which finish at 4.30pm. Occasionally the school hall is used in the evenings for a zumba class which finishes at 8.30pm and on a couple of other evening a karate club and boxing club use the hall but are finished by 7.00pm.
7. The most recent planning application for this site was made in 2009 for a replacement perimeter fence and gates. The application was granted planning permission and the works have been subsequently implemented.

Proposal

8. The proposed planning application comprises of a new standalone single storey building which will include 4 classrooms; a Nurture Room; an Intervention Room; washrooms and cloak storage and ancillary areas. This building is planned to be located behind the main school building on the existing playing field and the dimensions are 25.3m in length, 19.3m in width and 4.9m in height. It would therefore have a footprint of just under 500sqm. It is also proposed to have a monopitch roof design and the proposed external materials would consist of brickwork that would match the existing school buildings. Due to the proposed location of this building, this would result in the overall loss of 8.8% of the total existing playing field provision.
9. Additionally a new Reception Block is proposed to the front of the school which would be adjacent to the existing car parking area. It is proposed to contain 2 Reception classrooms; cloak and washrooms and an external informal classroom area and ancillary areas including storage areas. The building would be linked into the existing school buildings. The dimensions are 29.5m in length, 9.8m in width and 4.7m in height. It would therefore have a footprint of just under 300sqm. The proposed external materials would again consist of brickwork that would match the existing school buildings.
10. The application also proposes modifications to the existing school hall which would provide a new school hall store and plant room (53sqm), and a single storey extension (71sqm) to the northern elevation would provide an enlarged staff room, head teacher's office, school office and create a new deputy head's office. It is also proposed to reconfigure and enlarge the car park at the front of the school by providing an additional 11 car parking spaces, which includes 2 disabled parking spaces and therefore creating a 22 space car park. Finally a new netball court is proposed next to the existing netball court and an extension to hard play area which reflects the additional demand for sporting facilities and play area from an expanded school.

Planning Policy

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

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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.

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.

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

(iii) **Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan (2006)**

Policy EN1 - Seeks all proposals to be compatible in nature and intensity with neighbouring uses and not cause significant harm to character and amenities of the area in terms of daylight, sunlight, privacy, noise or excessive traffic generation. Seeks the design of the proposal to respect the context of the site and not cause significant harm to residential amenities.

Policy TP1 – Requires a transport assessment and travel plan to accompany proposals for new or significantly expanded schools. These documents may also be required in support of development which would otherwise be unacceptable due to the level of traffic that would be generated.

Policy TP5 - Vehicle parking in connection with development proposals will be restricted to the maximum necessary having regard to local highway conditions. Kent County Council's Vehicle Parking Standards, adopted by the Council, will be applied to such development proposals.

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(iv) Tunbridge Wells Core Strategy (July 2010):

Core Policy 3 – Promotes sustainable modes of transport, and requires development proposals which would have significant transport implications to be accompanied by a transport assessment and travel plan showing how car based travel can be minimised.

Core Policy 4 – The Borough Council's built and natural environments will be conserved and enhanced.

Core Policy 5 – The Borough Council will apply and encourage sustainable design and construction principles and best practice.

Consultations**12. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:** Raises no objection.

Kent County Council Highways and Transportation: Raised no overall objection in principle but had a number of issues which require further consideration, which are outlined below:

"The school lies within a residential area with its main access from Ramslye Road with additional pedestrian access points on Saunders Road and Nottidge Road. The site currently has a small car park with approximately 11 spaces. The Transport Assessment (TA) is not specific about future staff numbers but anticipates about 70 staff in the extended school with up to 47 staff on site at any one time. Only 11 additional parking spaces are proposed, 7 of which will not have independent access. Therefore additional staff demand is unlikely to be met on site. The Highway Authority recommend additional parking in a more standard layout be provided so as to minimise overspill of longer term staff parking to the surrounding roads.

Currently parents make use of kerb side space near to the school and with expansion it is anticipated that this usage will spread. However given the local catchment area of the school, the submission has identified a relatively high dependence on car trips and therefore scope for improving the numbers that walk to school. An updated and revitalised Travel Plan should help offset additional parking demand in the area and this can be covered by condition.

The kitchen prepares meals for this and other schools but no details of the levels of deliveries or space within the car park to accommodate the standing and turning of these vehicles has been made. There are also no details of proposed cycle and scooter parking facilities. These issues must be addressed."

Upon receipt of the amended car parking and vehicle turning movement details Kent County Council Highways and Transportation raised the following comments:

"The additional information received from the school regarding the size and number of large vehicles accessing the site, this confirms that servicing arrangements will not change at the school as a result of the expansion and that the revised arrangements continue to accommodate the existing vehicles. The staff numbers have also been clarified and the revised car parking layout provides additional parking in a much improved layout. I would recommend conditions to secure parking and turning provision

New school buildings at St Mark's CofE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells (TW/13/2659)

as shown and details of the side gate access (to have additional areas of hard standing added rather than kerb build-outs being provided). Also details of cycle and scooter parking to be submitted for approval and also a revised School Travel Plan, to be in keeping with the expectations of KCC's School Travel Planning Officer."

Kent County Council School Travel Planner Officer: Is satisfied that the updated version of the School Travel Plan meets KCC criteria but would suggest that an agreed timescale for monitoring the plan is mentioned to make sure the School carry this out.

Kent County Council Landscape Officer: Supports the planning application but has raised the following concerns:

"The proposed school extension is supported but I have significant concerns regarding the location of the netball court. Landscape has been briefly considered in terms of trees but does not appear to have informed site design or layout. In many ways the school's location is all the more important for it to act as a successful link between the countryside and the built area of Tunbridge Wells itself. The opportunities this development can bring to ensure the school site remains an integral part of the landscape i.e. one that supports and enhances its character, could be better recognised.

The mitigation, strictly in terms of ameliorating the impact caused by the development, in this instance is not sufficient. The loss of boundary trees to make way for the new netball court will impact both on the character of the site as well as the visual amenity of neighbouring properties. The mitigation proposed, does not go far enough, especially given the size of the site and the possibilities it offers in terms of landscape and ecological enhancements. I am concerned that there will be no possibility of the lost boundary trees being replaced without undermining the new court, leaving the site open and reducing amenity for the facing properties. I suggest that the location of the proposed netball court is reconsidered."

Upon receipt of the amended details showing the netball court now adjoining the existing netball court, Kent County Council's Landscape Officer supported the proposal, subject to the following comments:

"I support the revised scheme as it is better from both a landscape and tree viewpoint. Given that the trees are still going to receive the biggest impact, I will require further information about a Tree Protection Plan; species list for the new planting; an Arboricultural Method Statement; any long term implications upon the existing trees, and an indication of the proposed slope around the new netball court."

Kent County Council Biodiversity Officer: Has raised no objection, subject to the following comments:

"I am satisfied with the results of the ecological survey which has been submitted and require no additional information to be provided prior to determination. Conditions covering roosting, foraging and commuting bats; lighting to be designed to have minimal impact on bats and replacement trees planted to replace the trees lost as a result of this development, to be added to any planning permission. Consideration should be given to creating additional habitat features around the northern and western site boundaries where there is reported to be some wildlife-suitable habitat. The creation of log piles along the boundaries, using the trees that are proposed for

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removal, would provide habitat for reptiles, amphibians, small mammals and invertebrates.”

Sport England: Raised objection to the planning application submitted. The comments are as follows:

“It is understood that the site forms part of, or constitutes a playing field as defined in The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010 (Statutory Instrument 2010 No. 2184), in that it is on land that has been used as a playing field within the last five years, and the field encompasses at least one playing pitch of 0.2ha or more, or that it is on land that allocated for the use as a playing field in a development plan or in proposals for such a plan or its alterations or replacement.

Sport England objects to development which would lead to the loss of all or part of a playing field, or which would prejudice its use, should not normally be permitted because it would permanently reduce the opportunities for participation in sporting activities. Government planning policy and the policies of Sport England have recognised the importance of such activities to the social and economic well-being of the country. The proposed classroom block would appear to be sited on an existing area of playing field, currently marked out for a pitch. Although the existing pitch is proposed to be relocated, locating the proposed development towards the south eastern side of the existing playing field would prejudice the playing field and prevent a further large playing pitch from being marked out in response to the school's potential needs in the future e.g. if pupil numbers increase and additional pitches are therefore required. In the light of this, Sport England objects to the proposal because it is not considered to accord with any of the exceptions on Sport England's playing field policy.

The proposed reception block, revised car parking layout, new netball court, extended playground and other internal and external alterations to the existing school buildings would appear to be sited on areas incapable of accommodating a playing pitch or part thereof. Sport England is therefore satisfied that these aspects of the proposed development would meet exception E3 of Sport England's policy, in that these aspects of the development would only affect land incapable of forming a playing pitch or part thereof and would not adversely affect existing pitch provision on the site.”

Upon receipt of a detailed response from the applicant to Sport England's objection to the proposed classroom block, Sport England maintains its objection to this planning application, for the following reasons;

“Unfortunately Sport England is of the view that no new information has been provided and that all the considerations set out in the documents recently provided were taken into account with Sport England's previous formal response. Furthermore, the information provided does not constitute a robust assessment of need and therefore does not meet E1 of Sport England's playing field policy (in line with the NPPF). Sport England therefore maintains its objection to this planning application. Should Kent County Council be minded to grant planning permission for the development then in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009, and the DCLG letter of 10 March 2011, the application should be referred to the National Planning Casework Unit.”

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Environment Agency: Have no comment to make as the application is deemed as having a low environmental risk.

Local Members

13. The local County Member, Mr James Scholes was notified of the application on 13 September 2013.

Publicity

14. The planning application was publicised by the posting of a number of site notices and the notification of 265 neighbouring residential properties.

Representations

15. 11 letters of representation have been received from local residents. The main points of objection can be summarised as follows:
- Over the years have witnessed a variety of incidents relating to the inadequacies of the school entrance.
 - The nature of the design and construction of the school entrance makes it difficult for vehicles to gain access to the school.
 - Coaches park across the school entrance and block the road.
 - The existing problem will be exacerbated with the enlargement of the school, with the inevitability of more vehicular usage.
 - Concerned that there is no drop off area for children.
 - Roads will be partially blocked due to the new footway build-outs, which will increase the school parking in both Ramslye Road and Waterdown Road.
 - Do not feel that the additional 11 parking spaces is adequate and that more of the land behind the school should be used.
 - Additional traffic burden will cause all sorts of problems for local residents.
 - Do not object to the expansion of the school but have serious concerns on the number of parking spaces which is woefully short compared to the size of the expansion.
 - Ramslye Road is very busy with a bus service and learner drivers.
 - Roads that border the school only have parking on one side of the road which is already fully taken by residents and parking is already becoming an issue for homes without driveways.
 - Failure to tackle the parking situation will result in chaos and create problems for the future.
 - The school appears to have plenty of land available to create additional parking, drop off area and entrances without having to block Norridge Road and Saunders road with new footway build-outs.
 - Parking is already at a premium and with the expansion of the school will only get worse.
 - Morning and afternoon traffic already results in chaos and the quality of life for current residents will be under more pressure with massive increase in car traffic over the next few years.
 - Proposed footway build-outs would mean the loss of parking spaces precious to residents.
 - Hope that the school at 420 places will not be too large.

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- Footway build-outs seem completely unnecessary and would impede the traffic flow.
- Appear to be trying to double the size of the school and the only modifications to the local traffic network is to partially block two side roads with build-outs next to the current entrances.
- The Transport Assessment notes that a development of this size should include 77 parking spaces inside the school area but the same report promptly recommends that this should be ignored.
- At the very least expect the School should use some of its own land to help manage the significant increase in traffic that the residents will suffer as a result of this development.
- Need to improve goods vehicle access to front of the school.
- Provide pick up drop off zone to the side entrances that do not restrict the current traffic flow.
- All the build-outs would achieve is to create bottlenecks which in themselves could cause a safety issue by backing up traffic at peak times.
- A step to improve the crossing from the side gates would be to cut back the bushes and shrubs to give a clearer visibility from the school grounds before reaching the road.
- With an increase in school staff and insufficient parking provision in the school grounds this will make the parking for residents even harder.
- Expansion of the school will mean a large increase in traffic and parked cars not only in the mornings and afternoons but also during the school opening hours as it appears there will be inadequate parking in the school grounds to cover the staff and visitors.
- There is plenty of land available at the rear of the school which could be used for additional parking and perhaps drop off areas which would take some of the pressure off Ramslye Road.
- Have major concerns about the increased traffic during construction.
- Main gates should be used by vehicles only and side gates by pupils and pedestrians.

Discussion

16. In considering this proposal regard must be had to Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 11 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.
17. This application has been reported for determination by the Planning Applications Committee following the receipt of an objection from Sport England and local representations. The main issues relating to this application are the need for the proposal; Sport England's objection, tree loss and landscaping issues, and transport issues.

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Need

18. In this case the key determining factors, in my view, are the impact upon the local highway network, landscaping 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, design 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. Planning Authorities should give full and thorough consideration to the importance of enabling such development, attaching significant weight to the need to establish and develop state funded schools, and making full use of their planning powers to support such development, only imposing conditions that are absolutely necessary and that meet the tests set out in Circular 11/95.

Playing Field Issues

- 19 Sport England objects to development which would lead to the loss of all or part of a playing field, or which would prejudice its use, should not normally be permitted because it would permanently reduce the opportunities for participation in sporting activities. The proposed classroom block would appear to be sited on an existing area of playing field, currently marked out for a pitch. Although the existing pitch is proposed to be relocated, locating the proposed development towards the south eastern side of the existing playing field would prejudice the playing field and prevent a further large playing pitch from being marked out in response to the school's potential needs in the future e.g. if pupil numbers increase and additional pitches are therefore required.
20. Please note that Sport England raises objection to the classroom block which is proposed to be located on the playing field to the rear of the site. It does not raise objection to the proposed reception block, revised car parking layout, new netball court, extended playground and other internal and external alterations which are all proposed to the front of the school as they are proposed on land that would be incapable of accommodating a playing pitch or part thereof. In response to the objection the applicant has provided the following response which had been sent to Sport England for its further consideration:

"Sport England has confirmed that the only aspect of the proposal its objects to is the siting of the proposed classroom block to the rear of the school, because of the resultant loss of part of the playing field. All other aspects of the proposal are deemed to meet Exception E3 of its planning policy on playing fields.

The proposed classroom block would be located on an area currently used as a playing field. This will result in the loss of 1,117sqm of playing field area. The total area of the playing field area is 12,592sqm. Accordingly the proposal would lead to an 8.8% decrease in playing field provision on the site. The proposal is deliberately sited in the corner of the playing field to enable continuing effective use of the overall part of the playing field. Furthermore the playing fields are used only by the school and indeed they are maintained by the school and are not accessible, either formally or informally to the general public both during and after school hours.

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The enclosed drawing (reproduced on page 12 in black and white – a colour version will be available at Committee) demonstrates the sizes and space available to meet the School's outdoor sports requirements before and after its expansion. The red and blue lines outline the minimum area required for outdoor sport under Building Bulletin 99 and associated KCC guidance based on 1FE (red line) and the proposed 2FE (blue line) school sizes. The area of the blue line, for the proposed 2FE school equates to around 8,400m². The key purpose of these non-statutory documents is to set out simple, realistic, area guidelines for primary school proposals.

That means, even if the development was to be implemented, based on these (non-statutory guideline) standards there would be surplus of 3,075m² of playing field area. The drawing demonstrates that there would be a significant surplus amount of playing field area serving this site with and without the proposed rear classroom block being implemented. Indeed, the classroom block is sited in such a location, in the corner of the playing field, to minimise impact on the ability to make effective use of the overall playing field.

The School has confirmed that the amount of playing field that would remain following development, which is 11,475m², exceeds the school's (2FE) basic school curriculum needs.

In addition, the enclosed drawing shows that the existing pitch markings can be adequately relocated within the playing field area that is unaffected by the proposals. Indeed, there would even be sufficient space to accommodate further pitches (and alternative sports) within this unaffected area should the School wish to adapt its physical education curriculum in the future. The enclosed plan demonstrates that there would be sufficient space available within the unaffected part of the playing field to accommodate the following sports:

100m running track

2 mini soccer pitches

1 x adult size football pitch (shown in cyan)

1 x full size rounder's pitch (shown in green)

All of the dimensions shown for the above pitch layout markings on the attached plan conform to Sport England guidance.

The School is content with the amount of playing field unaffected by the proposal and has confirmed its adequacy for continuing outdoor sport education based on a 2FE school. The School has also confirmed that it would continue to be the only user of the playing field, i.e. there are no plans to make the playing fields accessible for general public use.

Linked to this, it is considered that a wider assessment of playing pitches in the area based on local population catchment demands would be wholly inappropriate to justify the loss of some playing field.

Accordingly, the loss of 8.8% of a playing field, which is and would continue to be inaccessible to the general public, has no impact on the wider community's ability to access existing playing pitches within the wider locality. Nor would the proposal lead to a reduction in the level of playing fields accessible to the open public. Nor would the

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proposal impact on the School's ability to meet its outdoor sporting requirements following its expansion to a 2FE school as demonstrated by the accompanying plan.

To summarise, it has also been demonstrated that there is a sufficient amount of unaffected playing field to meet the outdoor sports requirements of a 2FE and, if necessary, enable the accommodation of alternative sports pitches. It has also been demonstrated that there is no suitable, viable, and available alternative location to accommodate the required classroom block. Lastly, it has been demonstrated, based on planning policy, that the loss of a small part of the playing field (8.8%) together with the above points should be assessed against the 'educational need' for the school expansion which is clearly identified in the submitted Planning Statement although it is recognised that this matter is not within Sport England's assessment remit.

Taking the above into account, the applicant sees no reason why the application should be refused on grounds relating to loss of part of the playing field."

21. A response to the above comments has been received from Sport England, which continues to maintain its objection to the application, as it is of the view that no new information has been provided and that all the considerations set out in the documents recently provided have been taken into account. Furthermore Sport England is of the opinion that the information provided does not constitute a robust assessment of need and therefore does not meet E1 of Sport England's playing field policy (in line with the NPPF). If Members are minded to grant planning permission, the application would need to be referred to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for his consideration
22. Sport England assesses all applications that affect playing field against its Planning Policy Statement: 'A Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England'. This document sets out Sport England's policy to oppose any planning application which will result in the loss of playing field land, unless it is satisfied that the application meets with one of five specific exceptions. The five exceptions can be summarised as follows: excess of provision; development ancillary to use of the playing field; land incapable of forming part of a pitch; replacement playing field to be provided; or that the development is for a sports facilities.
23. Policy Exception E1 of Sport England's Playing Field Policy – 'A Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England' reads as follows;

'A comprehensive assessment of playing pitches, completed and adopted or updated in the last three years, using Sport England's methodology (or an alternative methodology acceptable to Sport England), taking into account the quantity, quality and accessibility of playing pitches, and of current and future community needs has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of Sport England, that there is an excess of playing field provision in the catchment and the site has no significance to the interest of sport'.

Bearing in mind the above policy statement and the case submitted in favour of the proposed classroom block being located on playing field, I am of the opinion that this is a relatively minor encroachment onto the usable part of the playing field that has to be balanced against the need for the development and wider benefits to the community of this education facility. Most of the playing field would remain unaffected by the development as the amount of playing field that would remain following development,

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would be 11,475m², which exceeds the school's (2FE) basic school curriculum needs. In my view, the use of the playing field would not be adversely affected either for formal sports or indeed more informal recreation. The proposed classroom block would only result in the overall loss of 8.8% of the existing playing field. Importantly, nor would the proposal impact upon the School's ability to meet its outdoor sporting requirements following its expansion to a 2FE school. I do not therefore consider there is any basis for a planning objection on the grounds that the development would lead to unacceptable loss of playing field land or would affect the ability of the School to use the playing field. Whilst I understand Sport England's objection in principle to the net loss of any playing field land, it is important to view that in the wider context of needs other than just sport, and I am satisfied that adequate attention has been given to minimising playing field loss and the marginal reduction in space is greatly outweighed by the more pressing need to provide internal accommodation for curricular activities.

Tree Loss and Landscaping Issues

24. The application proposes the removal of fifteen trees to accommodate the proposed development. Three trees are a Category A (most worthy of retention), two trees are a Category B and the remainder classified as a Category C or below, are proposed to be removed. None of the trees are covered by a Tree Preservation Order. Nevertheless, there is a good level and range of trees within the site, mainly situated along the site boundaries and thus affording a high level of natural screening between the school and its surrounding land uses. In order to accommodate the proposed new reception block, extended playground and new netball court, the proposal does result in the proposed removal of some trees situated centrally within the site.
25. The County's Landscape Officer has concluded that the proposed removal of these ten trees located centrally within the site is acceptable under the circumstances. However concern has been raised about the loss of boundary trees to make way for the new netball court, which will impact both on the character of the site as well as the visual amenity of neighbouring properties. Potentially there are five trees, which include 3 Category A and 2 Category C trees that could be lost within the south west boundary as a result of the proposed location of the netball court. The Landscape Officer has concluded that the mitigation proposed does not go far enough, especially given the size of the site and the possibilities it offers in terms of landscape and ecological enhancements. Further concern has been raised about the possibility of the lost boundary trees being replaced with new trees which could undermine the new netball court, leaving the site open and reducing amenity for the facing properties. Due to run-off distance required by Sport England around the proposed netball court, only a very small slither of land would remain between the court and the site boundary. There would not be enough land to plant replacement boundary trees that would be able to grow and to provide a decent landscape boundary treatment.
26. The location of the original netball court was proposed as it could be located on the grass band behind the south western boundary and it would not require any excavation to build it. However following discussions with the applicant regarding the objections about the potential tree loss along the south western boundary due to the location of the netball court, the applicant has agreed to move this netball court away from this boundary. It is proposed to be joined up with the existing netball court but would require some excavation as the site slopes downwards towards the school buildings. However this proposal should enable for the five boundary trees to be retained, subject to the careful hand digging of the bank to create the netball court.

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27. In mitigation for the loss of trees on the site, no details of the proposed landscaping scheme, in terms of species or location, have been provided. I would recommend that should the application be granted planning permission then a landscaping scheme, dealing the proposed species and their location be submitted and approved by the County Planning Authority, be made a condition of any decision. I would further recommend that the completion of the proposed landscape scheme to be carried out within the first planting season following occupation of the development, be made a condition of any decision. I would therefore not raise any objection to the application on landscape grounds, subject to conditions covering amongst other matters, a Tree Protection Plan; species list for the new planting; an Arboricultural Method Statement; any long term implications upon the existing trees, and an indication of the proposed slope around the new netball and replacement planting should there be any failures within the scheme and tree protection measures during construction for the remaining trees on site.

Transport Issues

28. On the basis that the application proposes to allow the expansion of the school to a 2FE, careful consideration needs to be given to the potential highway implications from any increase in use of the site and any associated increase in vehicle movements. The School currently has 210 pupils and with effect from September 2013 it has began an expansion programme to become a 2FE with the pupil admission numbers increasing from 30 to 60 pupils. By September 2019, after the 7 year expansion programme, it is expected that the School will have a roll of 420 pupils. The proposal will also lead to an increase of 9FTE additional staff members, which will equate to 7 additional full time members of staff and 5 additional part time members of staff.
29. Car parking on the school site is currently provided in one location situated awkwardly towards the centre of the site, outside of the main reception area. In total there are 11 existing spaces, which include 2 disabled parking spaces. The proposal makes provision for 11 additional parking spaces equating to a total of 22 spaces, which still includes the retained 2 disabled parking spaces, thus doubling the level of onsite parking. According to Kent County Council's maximum car parking standards, the school should currently have 20 parking spaces compared to the 11 parking spaces it actually has and which are based on the existing Full Time Equivalent staff numbers. That means that there is currently a shortfall of 9 parking spaces. The planning application is proposing to provide double the current level of parking and ensuring that there is adequate parking to cater for the proposed increase of new staff numbers. It will not make up the current shortfall of parking spaces based on existing staff numbers.
30. It has not been possible to identify a suitable location within the proposed layout for any additional parking spaces on top of what is already proposed nor was it possible to relocate the existing vehicular access point to the school. In particular, forcing additional parking spaces within the layout could result in the loss of an even greater amount playing field, the loss of more trees, jeopardising safety and visibility standards and generally leading to cramped conditions within the school site. It was indicated early on that any significant increase in parking provision which took up space designated for sport, recreation or educational use would not be acceptable. The applicant undertook site observations during the school day and concluded that there was adequate on-street parking provision available to cater for any anticipated overspill parking, particularly to the rear of the school where it would not adversely impact residents. It was also felt that restricted parking provision would encourage staff

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members to adopt more sustainable form of transport, which is in line with the School's Travel Plan recommendations. Similarly a new access from Waterdown Road, for example, where a rear gate to the playing field already exists, would have significant implications upon the playing field and the surrounding landscape and would be likely to attract planning objections from Sport England regarding a larger amount of playing field lost to development.

31. Please note that the accompanying Transport Statement made a worst case scenario, which assumed that the staff numbers at the school would actually double and thus the level of parking which would be required at the school, would be 77 parking spaces. The Transport Statement also concluded that this level of parking could not be accommodated on the site without significant loss of playing field. As mentioned above it is proposed to increase staff numbers only by a total of 9FTE members of staff, which would bring staffing levels up to 29FTE members of staff. Please note also that not all of these additional members of staff would be at the school at the same time as some of the posts would be part time. Members will note that this requirement to provide this number of parking spaces was picked up in a number of representatives that was received from local residents, however this number of 77 parking spaces was actually based on a higher level of staff numbers that would actually be employed as a result of this application.
32. Concern was also raised by Kent County Council's Highways and Transportations officer regarding the type of service vehicles being able to enter the site and their ability to turn around within the site. Additional information was received from the School which confirmed that servicing arrangements would not change at the school as a result of the expansion and that the revised arrangements continue to accommodate the existing vehicles. The School also confirmed that the largest type of service vehicle that would continue to access the site was a 7.5T box van and that the turning circles provided, was based on this site of vehicle. The tracking diagram provided, demonstrated that the proposed layout was sufficient to accommodate the largest school service vehicle and for it to be able to enter, turn and leave the site in a forward gear.
33. Further concern was raised by both by Highways and Transportation officer and a number of local residents about the recommendation within the Transport Statement to provide additional areas of hard standing at the side gates to the school in the form of kerb build-outs. Those were proposed to improve the road safety of school pupils in crossing these roads by narrowing the width of the carriageway down to a single vehicle width. Residents were primarily concerned about the potential loss of parking in the vicinity of the proposed kerb build-outs and the bottle necks they may create by narrowing the carriageway down to a single vehicle width. It was therefore considered that the safety concern about school children crossing these roads to enter the school via the side gates could be satisfactorily addressed within the curtilage of the site by widening and recessing the pedestrian gates together with the extension of the hard standing area into the grassed verge area by these gates.
34. The proposal to expand the school from a 1FE school to a 2FE school will inevitably in time eventually double the current amount of pupils at the school and lead to additional vehicle trips. The proposed increase is a year on year increase of 30 pupils, so the likely additional traffic increase will be incremental over the projected 7 year expansion programme and so the increase in traffic movements would be spread over this time period. It is also inevitable that there would be additional traffic movements at the

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school as the school's catchment area expands and there will be more deliveries associated with running a larger school. The School is aware of these issues and so to ensure that the impact of these changes does not have a negative impact upon residents living next to the school, the School is working through their updated School Travel Plan to increase staff and pupil awareness of travel patterns to and from school and to highlight the good practices that the School has already achieved. The School will also be encouraging the pupils to walk or cycle to school and ask those parents that have to drive to the school to be considerate when they park. It should be noted that the Highways and Transportation officer did not raise any comments about the proposed increase in traffic that would normally be associated with a school doubling its current pupil intake.

35. Overall I am satisfied that the School has made efforts to provide additional car parking within the school site without affecting teaching space or the playing field. It is proposed to provide enough parking spaces to cater for the proposed additional members of staff that would be employed as a result of this planning application. It would also allow the largest size of vehicle that needs to enter the site, to be able to turn around within the site and leave the school travelling in a forward gear. The applicant has also taken on board residents' concerns about the potential loss of on-street car parking if the proposed kerb build-outs were to be provided. It is now proposed not to proceed with the kerb build-outs but to look into the possibility of providing an area of hard standing around the two side gates, which could be provided using the highway verge which is currently a grassed area. I would therefore not raise any objection to the application on highway grounds, subject to conditions covering amongst other matters such as the provision of the additional car parking spaces; turning provision for service vehicles, and providing an area of hard standing around the side gates which did not encroach upon the public highway.

Conclusion

36. In summary, I consider that, subject to the imposition of appropriate planning conditions, this proposed development constitutes sustainable development, with an appropriate standard of design and layout, which would not have significantly detrimental effects on the sporting facilities at the school, landscaping, residential amenity or upon the local highway. In my view, the development would not give rise to any significant material harm and is in accordance with the general aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies, as well as the National Planning Policy Framework. I am aware of no material planning considerations that indicate that the conclusion should be made otherwise.
37. However I recommend that various conditions be placed on any planning permission, including those outlined below. However, given the Sport England objection, should Members support my views expressed in paragraphs 16 to 20 above and decide against refusal of this application, the County Planning Authority is required to consult the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government at the National Planning Casework Unit and not grant planning permission until the Secretary of State has first had opportunity to consider the application. The Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009, requires that the Authority may only proceed to determine an application once the Secretary Of State has had an opportunity to consider whether or not to call in the application for his own determination.

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Recommendation

38. I RECOMMEND that the application BE REFERRED to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and SUBJECT TO his decision, PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO the imposition of conditions covering (amongst other matters) the following:

- The standard time limit for commencing the proposed development;
- The development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
- The submission of details of all construction materials to be used externally;
- The submission of a scheme of landscaping, including details of species, source, location of saplings to be planted as well as mitigation and visual impact information be provided, and hard surfacing, its implementation and maintenance;
- A Tree Protection Plan and an Arboricultural Method Statement to be submitted;
- Planting replacement trees for the ones lost as a result of the development;
- The submission of measures to protect those trees that are to be retained;
- Details of the slope around the new netball court to be submitted;
- The submission of mitigation measures for potentially roosting, foraging and commuting bats;
- External lighting to be designed to have minimal impact on any bats;
- Investigation of the creation of additional habitat features around the northern and western site boundaries;
- The proposed development to accord with the recommendations of the ecology survey;
- No tree removal to take place during the bird breeding season;
- Parking and turning provision to be provided as shown on the submitted drawings;
- Details of hard standing areas around the side gates to be submitted;
- Details of cycle and scooter parking to be submitted;
- A revised School Travel Plan to be submitted;
- Hours of working during construction to be restricted to 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;
- Measures to be taken to prevent mud and debris being taken onto the public highway;
- The submission of a Construction Management Plan, including access, parking and circulation within the site for contractors and other vehicles related to construction operations.

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