

**Two classroom extension, Lower Halstow Primary School
SW/14/0400 (KCC/SW/0092/2014)**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 14 May 2014.

Application by Lower Halstow Primary School for the construction of a 2 classroom extension and internal alterations at Lower Halstow Primary School, School Lane, Lower Halstow – SW/14/0400 (KCC/SW/0092/2014).

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Members: Mr R. Truelove and Mr L. Burgess

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

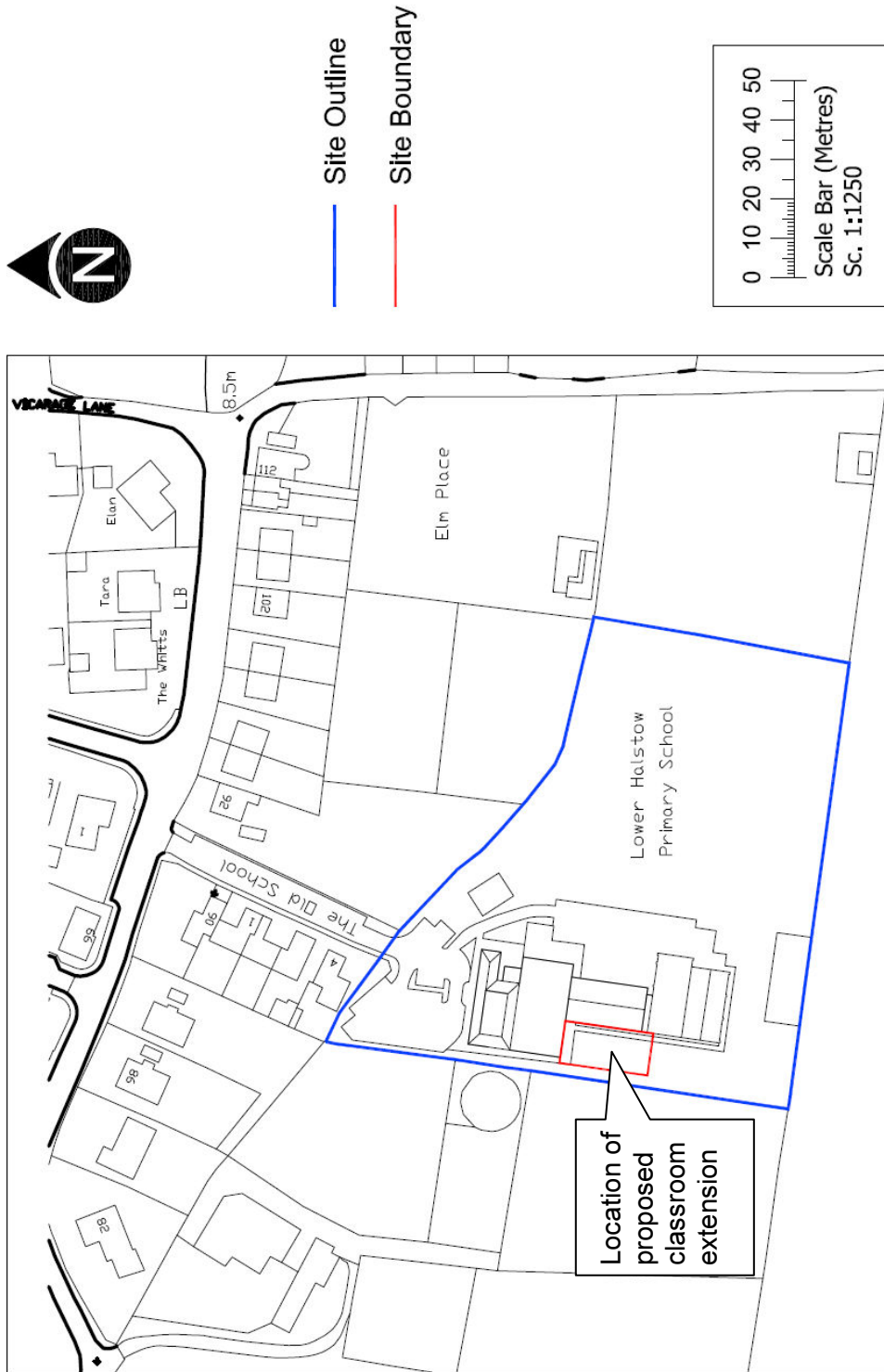
1. Lower Halstow Primary School is located on the southern edge of the village of Lower Halstow, and is accessed from a small spur road off School Lane. The old school buildings along this spur road have been converted to residential dwellings and further residential properties lie to the north of the school site along School Lane. To the south, east and west of the site are agricultural fields. The boundaries of the site are clearly marked with hedging and trees and the front entrance to the site from School Lane is enclosed with railings, which have vehicular and pedestrian gated entrances. The school buildings sit along the western side of the site, with the hard and soft play areas located to the east.
2. The school is a low key building, predominantly single storey in nature, with taller buildings to the south (rear) of the site where the school and sports hall is located. The buildings are generally constructed of yellow bricks with white windows and doors, and either tiled roofs or standing seam metal sheets. Parking is currently located at the front of the site by the access gates, and provides 18 spaces.

Background and Proposal

3. Lower Halstow School has recently attained academy status, but has been designated for expansion to a 1 form entry school under the County Council's Basic Need Programme. At present the school has a published admission number of 20 which means that the school teaches in 5 classes of mixed ages. Expanding the school to a 1 form entry primary school and increasing the admission number to 30 would allow the School to teach in single year group classes so children can move through the school with their peers. This application seeks to achieve this aim.
4. The application proposes two new classrooms, provided in a single unit which would be located along the western boundary of the site, tucked behind the existing school buildings. The classrooms would be attached to the main school by a small link which would open into a lobby providing access to both classrooms. A small care suite would also be provided in the extension with storage and cloakroom facilities. Toilet facilities for the classes would be located in the main school building. The classroom extension would be constructed with a brick plinth with weatherboard cladding above, and have a simple pitched roof with fibre cement slate tiles.

Two classroom extension, at Lower Halstow Primary School

General Location Plan

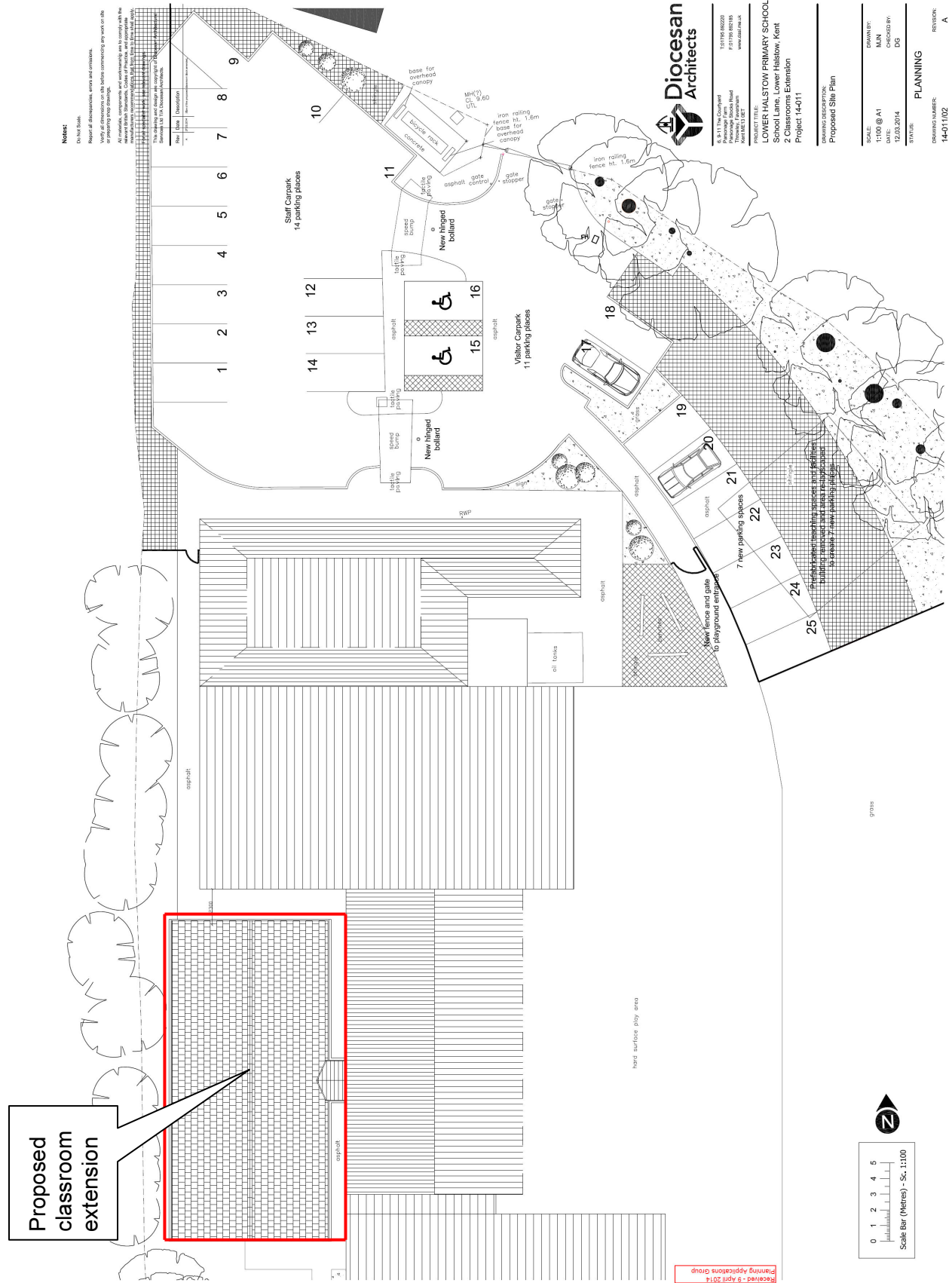


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Site Location Plan. Scale 1:1250

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Site Plan



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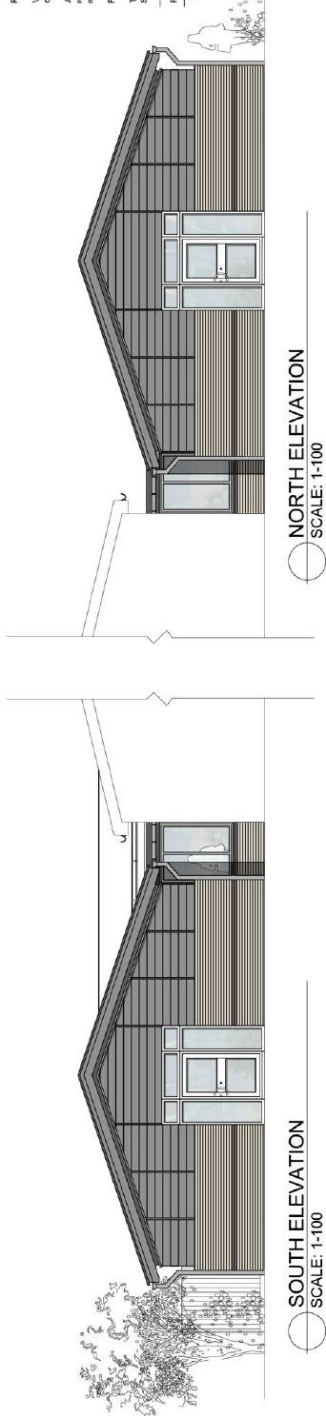
Proposed Elevations

Received - 9 April 2014
Planning Applications Group

Notes:

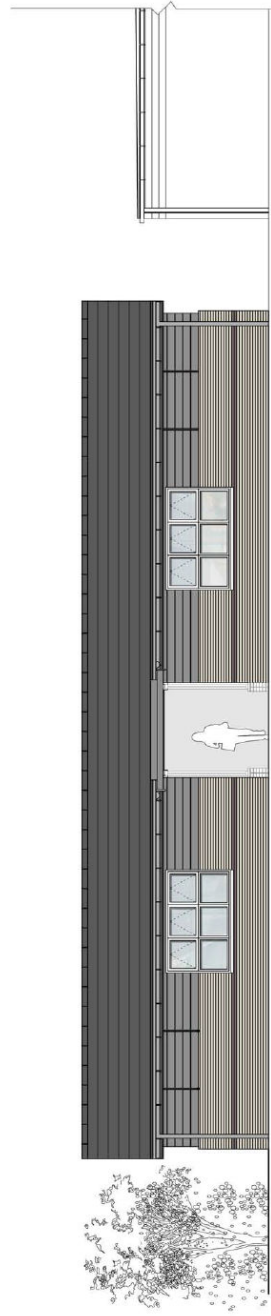
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| Rev | Date | Description |
|-----|----------|--------------------------------|
| A | 17/03/14 | Issue for planning application |

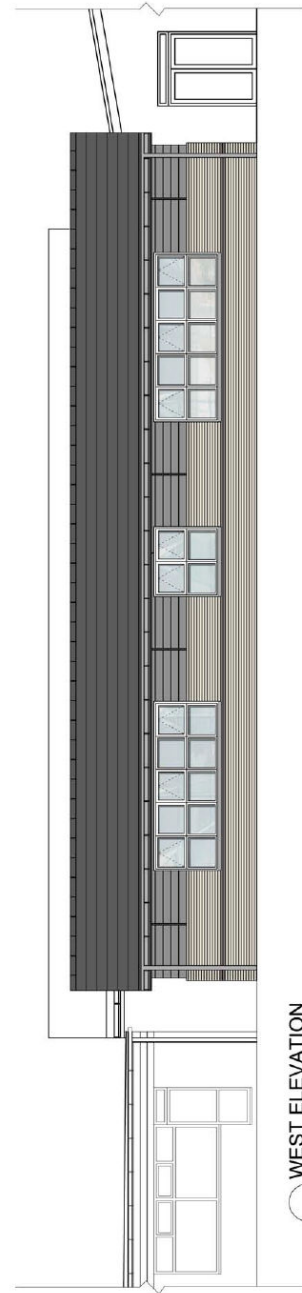


○ SOUTH ELEVATION
SCALE: 1-100

○ NORTH ELEVATION
SCALE: 1-100



○ EAST ELEVATION
SCALE: 1-100



○ WEST ELEVATION
SCALE: 1-100



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PROJECT TITLE
LOWER HALSTOW PRIMARY SCHOOL
School Lane, Lower Halstow, Kent
2 Classrooms Extension
Project 14-011

DRAWING DESCRIPTION
Proposed Elevations

SCALE: 1:100 @ A3
DATE: 17/03/2014
DRAWN BY: M/JN
CHECKED BY: DG

STATUS: **PLANNING**
DRAWING NUMBER: 14-011/04
REVISION: A

Two classroom extension, at Lower Halstow Primary School

5. To the north of the site an existing mobile classroom would be demolished which would enable a further 7 parking spaces to be provided within the site. These would be provided along the northern boundary, to the rear of 92 School Lane. The car park would then be subdivided with hinged bollards creating a staff car park of 14 spaces, and a visitor car park of 11 parking spaces, 2 of which would be disabled compliant.
6. Amended plans were submitted by the applicant soon after the application was received, which increased the size of each classroom from 57sqm to 65sqm, simplified the cladding design and colour use, and altered the window design.

Recent Site History

7. The recent planning history for the site dates back to 2002, when permission was given for the sports hall and two new classrooms. Temporary classrooms were permitted in 2005 to allow the building work to be undertaken, and then permission for a new dining hall was granted in 2009. In 2011 a canopy for the outside play area was also permitted.

Planning Policy

8. 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 applications 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) which sets out the Government's commitment to support the development of state-funded schools and their delivery through the planning system.
 - (iii) **Swale Borough Local Plan 2008:**

Two classroom extension, at Lower Halstow Primary School

- Policy SP1 Sustainable Development:** Proposals should accord with principles of sustainable development that increase local self-sufficiency, satisfy human needs, and provide a robust, adaptable and enhanced environment.
- Policy C1 Existing and New Community Services and Facilities**
The Borough Council will grant planning permission for new or improved community services and facilities, and particularly those that include provision for wider public use.
- Policy E1 General Development Criteria:** Proposals should cause no demonstrable harm to residential amenity and other sensitive uses or areas; reflect positively characteristics and features of the site surroundings; and protect and enhance the natural and built environments.
- Policy E19 Achieving High Quality Design and Distinctiveness:** Development proposals should be of a high quality design and respond positively to design criteria.
- Policy E21 Sustainable Design and Build:** Proposals should incorporate sustainable design and build measures into the detailed design of new development in its use of siting, design, materials and landscaping.
- Policy T1 Providing Safe Access to New Development:** Proposals which cause unacceptable impacts of the capacity of the highway network or on highway safety will not be granted planning permission.
- Policy T3 Vehicle Parking for New Development:** Requires appropriate vehicle parking for new development in accordance with the adopted Kent County Council parking standards.
- Policy T4 Cyclists and pedestrians:** Requires cycle parking facilities for new development in accordance with the Kent County Council cycle parking standards.
- (iv) The draft **Swale Borough Local Plan ('Bearing Fruits')** (August 2013) also contains broadly similar policies on transport, parking, design and general development criteria, but these policies currently carry very little weight, given their draft status.

Consultations

9. **Swale Borough Council:** No comments received to date.

Lower Halstow Parish Council object to the proposal on three grounds. They state: "Lower Halstow is a rural village accessed by narrow and sometimes single carriageway country lanes. An increase in the size of the school PAN (over 40% on current numbers) will mean a significant increase in traffic on these routes as all additional children attending the school will have to come from outside of the village; there is no requirement for an increase in admissions numbers for existing residents and there are no plans for any significant increase in residential accommodation in the village. The additional traffic will make the approach roads to the village more congested and dangerous. Additionally there is an AQMA zone in Newington and traffic accessing the village via this route will add to the pollution already above EU recommended limits.

Two classroom extension, at Lower Halstow Primary School

There is no parking facility in the school for parents cars and the additional 50 or 60 cars will have a significant impact on residential roads around the school at drop off and pick up time. Parents currently park on bends, across residential drives and irresponsibly, making a chaotic and sometimes dangerous situation. This increase in the size of the school will only exacerbate the situation.

The Council are concerned that the existing sewage facilities will not cope with a 40% increase in usage from the school and would have to be upgraded if permission is granted.

If granted the size of the classrooms should be increased from 50sqm to 60sqm. In the current proposals the classroom sizes do not allow children to move freely around, and it is shortsighted to not allow sufficient space for any future curriculum requirements.”

Kent County Council’s Highways and Transportation raises no objection subject to the imposition of conditions covering the following aspects:

- Precautions being taken to prevent the despoit of mud on the public highway
- Provision being made on site during construction for the loading, off loading and turning of operatives and construction vehicles
- Details of on-site parking areas for site personnel, operatives and visitors to be agreed prior to the commencement of development, and retained throughout construction
- Permanent retention of vehicle parking spaces shown within the application prior to the occupation of the building
- The submission of a revised School Travel Plan prior to the development being bought into use.

Local Member

10. The local County Members, Mr Lee Burgess and Mr Roger Truelove were notified of the application on 26 March 2014.

Publicity

11. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice at the entrance to the school, and the individual notification of 11 residential properties.

Representations

12. In response to the publicity, 2 letters of representation have been received. The key points raised can be summarised as follows:
 - No issue with the expansion itself
 - Concern over state of roads into and out of village which will worsen with increasing traffic
 - New pupil places would likely come from outside the village
 - Considerable traffic congestion at start and end of each day
 - If village being asked to accept new pupil places and increased traffic the road surfaces should be improved
 - Negative impact on residents of School Lane as insufficient parking at the moment
 - Parking around school would be difficult and disruptive to residents

Two classroom extension, at Lower Halstow Primary School

- Narrow lanes would suffer increased congestion
- Should look at alternative school sites for additional classrooms
- Or should improve access and parking facilities at Lower Halstow

Discussion

13. 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.
14. This application is being reported for determination by Members of the Planning Applications Committee following the objections of neighbouring residents and the Parish Council. In my view the main issues to consider are whether the design and layout are acceptable, any residential amenity concerns and the traffic and parking impacts arising from the proposal.

Design and Layout

15. The proposed building is of a simple design which would compliment the existing school buildings to which it would be attached. The choice of materials (yellow brick, timber cladding and grey tiles) would be in keeping with the style of the existing school, and the fenestration, as amended, would also match. The building would be sited along the western boundary of the site and would have a limited visual impact due to this location. From within the school grounds the new classrooms would be screened from wider views by the existing school. From the surrounding countryside to the west, the proposed classroom would be viewed against the backdrop of the existing school, and despite the removal of some small self-seeded trees along this boundary it is considered that there would be no adverse visual impact.
16. It is therefore considered that the design and appearance of the extension would be acceptable, and there would not be any adverse visual impact as a result of the scheme. It would therefore accord with Policies E1 and E19 of the Swale Borough Local Plan.
17. The removal of the existing mobile classroom from within the site would also have a positive impact on the overall appearance of the school site. There are no neighbouring residential properties in close proximity to the building itself, therefore the structure would not result in any loss of amenity as a result of its form.

Highway and Parking Issues

18. The proposed classrooms would allow the school to become a 1 form entry school, admitting 30 pupils per year instead of 20 as at present. The overall capacity of the school would therefore increase by 60 pupils (there being 7 classes of 30 children instead of the current 5 classes).
19. The September 2014 intake (provided by the school) demonstrates that 63% of the new Reception Year will live within 1.5 miles of the school, and the vast majority of them will live within the immediate locality where it is reasonable not to have to travel by car. The remaining pupils live anywhere between 1.5 and 3.5 miles of the school, which although may not be within walking distance, is still generally serving the

Two classroom extension, at Lower Halstow Primary School

- needs of the local community, where they may otherwise have to travel further distances to other schools.
20. Additionally 30% of the intake would be siblings of existing pupils, which would suggest that some of the additional pupil journeys to the school will be travelling in vehicles that would already be making the same journey anyway, so would not be adding to the network traffic.
 21. The roads leading in and out of Lower Halstow are already well used by motorists travelling between parts of Swale and the Medway Towns, and what additional traffic may be generated along these routes by additional pupils outside of the built-up envelope of the village, are unlikely to have any material impact on these routes.
 22. The school at present provides 18 parking spaces on site, which would be increased by 7 spaces under the current proposal. As set out at the beginning of the report, 14 of the spaces would be for staff use only and would be separated by hinged bollards from the remainder of the car park. The intention would be that the staff would be on site before drop off time and leave after collection time, therefore this area would not be accessible at times when children are walking through the car park to enter/leave school, thus improving overall safety within the site. The remainder of the car park, 11 spaces, would be allocated for visitors, and covered cycle racks are also provided within the school grounds.
 23. It is acknowledged that there will be additional parking demand as a consequence of the increased numbers, but the impact of this will be away from the main through routes, and will be limited to a short period in the morning and each afternoon during term time. I do not consider that the increase in on-street parking demand from the 2 classrooms would significantly harm highway safety. Whilst this may be inconvenient for nearby residents, from an amenity point of view, it is a general inevitability of the presence of a school, and local people often tailor their movements around this to avoid the busy periods. The amenity impacts are not such to warrant withholding planning permission in this case and need to be considered against the Government Policy Support for state funded schools.
 24. The scheme does include more on-site parking that has the ability to remove some of the staff vehicles that may currently park on the street, so this will provide some mitigation to an extent by freeing up some spaces for parents.
 25. It should be borne in mind that all schools generate traffic and often some parking on the public highway, but unless that constitutes a severe risk to road safety then it is not a reason to withhold planning consent, and it should be noted that the Highways Officer has raised no objection to the scheme in this case.
 26. The submission of a School Travel Plan is recommended as a condition attached to any consent, through which improvements to travel patterns can be targeted to promote alternative means of travelling to and from school other than the car, and to educate parents to park in a responsible manner. It is therefore considered that the scheme is acceptable from a transport perspective and would accord with Policies T1, T3 and T4 of the Swale Borough Local Plan.

Landscaping

Two classroom extension, at Lower Halstow Primary School

27. In order to ensure the long term survival of the trees along the northern boundary in the location of the new parking spaces, I would recommend that conditions be imposed on any consent to ensure that the roots are not damaged during construction and that the materials used are appropriate.

Construction Matters

28. Given that there are neighbouring residential properties, if planning permission is granted it is considered appropriate to impose a condition restricting hours of construction to protect residential amenity (Monday to Friday between 0800 and 1800; Saturday 0900 to 1300; and no operations on Sundays or public holidays). It is also considered 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.
29. Should permission be granted a condition requiring the submission of a full Construction Management Strategy prior to commencement of development is considered appropriate. That should include details of how the site access would be managed to avoid peak school times, details of the methods and hours of working, location of site compounds and operative/visitor parking, details of site security and safety measures, lorry waiting and wheel washing facilities and details of any construction access.
30. In addition to the above, should permission be granted, a further condition to ensure that dust and mud are not deposited on the highway would also be considered appropriate, to minimise disruption to local residents.

Other Matters

31. The Parish Council has raised concerns regarding the size of the classrooms being too small, however the amended plans have addressed this concern by increasing the size of the classrooms to 65sqm each.
32. There have also been concerns raised over the ability of the sewage facilities to cope with the increased demand which would result from the increase in class numbers. The applicant has stated that the construction would be connected to the mains sewer and existing drainage system. The local drainage authority would be responsible for ensuring that the system is able to cope with the increased demand, and I am unaware of any reason why this should not be accommodated here.
33. Finally, comment has been made that the increase in traffic generated by the scheme could further affect the air quality in Newington (some 2 miles away) and add to pollution in that area. The Air Quality Management Area is monitored and addressed at a District level. At this stage it is not possible to know where the additional pupils would be travelling from to get to Lower Halstow and whether such traffic generation would affect the Air Quality Management Area in Newington or not. Furthermore travel patterns for pupils coming into the school could change year on year and therefore any impact that might arise would not necessarily be a long term issue. Under the circumstances, I do not consider this objection to be proportional to the proposed development, bearing in mind that the extra school traffic would be negligible to the higher traffic flows on the A2 passing through Newington.

Conclusion

Two classroom extension, at Lower Halstow Primary School

34. The application has been considered on its own merits and in the light of the NPPF, the Planning for Schools Development Policy Statement and the Development Plan, and comments received raising concerns about the scheme. The proposed development is considered to be in keeping with the existing school and its surroundings from a design point of view, and is of a scale, and sited in such a position, that it would have little visual impact on the surrounding area. In addition it is considered that the proposed development would not be of such a scale that it would 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.
35. Therefore, subject to the imposition of conditions, I consider that the 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, the Planning Statement and the guidance contained in the NPPF, and that permission should therefore be granted.

Recommendation

36. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO the imposition of conditions covering (amongst other matters) the following:
- the standard time limit
 - the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details
 - the submission of details of all construction materials to be used externally
 - a Tree Protection Plan and an Arboricultural Method Statement to be submitted
 - the submission of measures to protect those trees that are to be retained
 - 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 or Bank Holidays
 - measures to be taken to prevent mud and debris being deposited on the public highway
 - the submission of a Construction Management Plan, providing details of access, parking and circulation within the site for contractors, site personnel and other operatives & management of the site access to avoid peak school times
 - the provision before occupation, and the retention of, areas shown for parking and turning on site
 - submission of an updated School Travel Plan prior to occupation, its implementation and on-going review.
37. I FURTHER RECOMMEND that the following INFORMATIVE be added:
- that the applicants be advised that the Travel Plan should be registered on-line with Kent County Council's School Travel Plan site 'Jambusters' by accessing the following link www.jambusterstpms.co.uk, to assist with the updating, monitoring and future review of the Travel Plan.

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| Case Officer: Helen Edwards | Tel. no: 01622 221052 |
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| Background Documents: see section heading |
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