

Temporary two classroom modular building at Oakfield Lane Primary School, Dartford - DA/14/00811 (KCC/DA/0197/2014)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 10 September 2014

Application by Kent County Council Property & Infrastructure Support for the siting of a temporary two classroom modular building at Oakfield Primary School, Oakfield Lane, Dartford (Ref:KCC/DA/0197/2014 and DA/14/00811)

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

Local Member: Mrs Ann Allen

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Oakfield Lane Primary School is located to the south of Dartford town centre and to the west of Wilmington. The Primary School is 2 form of entry (FE) at present, with built accommodation largely located to the north of the site, although a newly built nursery is located to the south east of the main school building (see paragraph 3 for planning history). The 2.33 hectare (5.75 acres) school site is bounded to the north by Oakfield Lane, with facing residential properties opposite the site, to the east by the A225 with a Sure Start Children's Centre, Public House (The Orange Tree) and residential properties backing onto the site, to the south by Church Hill, with facing residential properties, and to the west by properties in Oakfield Park Road/Carsington Gardens which back onto the site. To the north west of the application site, a property to the south of Oakfield Lane (number 2 Oakfield Lane) is adjacent to school site boundary.
2. The school site is accessed from Oakfield Lane, with car parking (30 spaces for school staff, 4 disabled spaces and 3 spaces allocated to the Sure Start Centre) to the north east of the school building. To the north/north west of the application site the school building is separated from Oakfield Lane by a playground which is limited in its northern extent by former air raid shelters. The playground is at a lower level than Oakfield Lane, with an embankment rising up from the playground to the site boundary. The air raid shelters are at the base of the embankment, which is unused and overgrown with trees and vegetation. To the south of the application site lies a small car park and separate controlled access from Church Hill for use by staff associated with the Nursery only. Please see site location plan for the proposed location of the modular building.

Background/Recent Site History

3. Oakfield Primary School was previously split into two schools, Oakfield Junior and Oakfield Infant Schools, both of which had their own buildings on the site. Application reference DA/08/209 proposed the demolition of the existing Infant School buildings, and the construction of a 2FE Primary School including partial refurbishment of the existing Junior School buildings. That application was granted permission under delegated powers in April 2008, and was subsequently implemented. Subsequent to that, planning permission has been granted under delegated powers for the following on the site:

Modular building at Oakfield Primary School, Dartford - DA/14/00811

- a. DA/08/842 – renewal of planning application for mobile units;
 - b. DA/10/252 – retention of construction access on Church Hill for maintenance access;
 - c. DA/12/625 – new temporary modular building;
 - d. DA/12/762 – single storey nursery building and 5 car parking spaces accessed via Church Hill;
 - e. DA/13/457 – renewal of temporary permission DA/12/625; and
 - f. DA/13/1676 – renewal of temporary permission DA/08/842;
4. This application proposes to provide temporary accommodation required to cater for a previously agreed expansion of Oakfield Lane Primary School from 2FE to 3FE. The applicant advises that due to changing demographics in the area, with an increasing birth rate and in-migration, Oakfield Lane Primary School has expanded from 2FE to 3FE, with foundation stage classes already at 3FE with teaching accommodation provided in temporary modular accommodation. The modular double classroom teaching block is required for a temporary period due to the delay in the determination for the erection of a new five classroom block extension to accommodate the additional class to be admitted in the next academic year. The application for a five classroom extension, new hall, and provision of drop-off facility, reference KCC/DA/0326/2013, is on the papers for this Planning Applications Committee Meeting under Item D1.

Proposal

5. Kent County Council Property & Infrastructure Support is applying for planning permission for a two classroom temporary modular building at Oakfield Primary School. The applicant states that the mobile classrooms are required to ensure the availability of adequate teaching space for 60 key stage two pupils. The mobile unit would require planning permission for a period of seven months while Kent County Council is seeking planning permission for the erection of a new five classroom block extension (Ref: KCC/DA/0326/2013). Until planning permission is obtained and construction is completed of the new five classroom block it is considered necessary for the installation of a temporary modular unit to allow the school to run effectively in the interim. It is hoped that the new five classroom block would open in approximately March 2015 and therefore this planning application is for temporary planning permission until such a time that the new five classroom block is complete.
6. The site of the proposed building is an area of grass and concrete between an existing brick building and part of the wider open space/playground area. The proposed modular building will be a single storey unit with a shallow felted flat roof, and double glazed UPVC windows. The appearance of the building would be a 'buttermilk' colour, finished in a low maintenance plastisol-coated galvanised steel cladding. The proposed modular building would not be higher than the existing buildings surrounding the site.

Site Location Plan



Planning Policy

6. The most relevant Government Guidance and Development Plan Policies summarised below are pertinent to the consideration of this application:

(i) **National Planning Policy and Guidance** – the most relevant National Planning Policies are set out in:

The National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) and the National Planning Policy Guidance (March 2014) set out the Government's planning policy and guidance for England, and is a material consideration for the determination of planning applications. It does not change the statutory status of the development plan which remains the starting point for decision making. The NPPF and its guidance replace the majority of former Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG's) and Planning Policy Statements (PPS's). However the weight given to development plan policies will depend on their consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the development plan are to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

The NPPF states that in determining applications, 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:

- Promoting sustainable transport;
- Achieving the requirement for high quality design and a good standard of amenity;
- The promotion of health communities;
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment, including protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.

In addition, Paragraph 72 states that: *The Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local Planning Authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should give great weight to the need to create, expand and alter schools, and work with school promoters to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.*

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

(ii) **The adopted 1995 Dartford Borough Council Local Plan (Saved Policies):**

Policy B1 Development proposals should be appropriate for the location and should not have a detrimental amenity impact on the local area. A high standard of design should be implemented in proposals with

layout, materials, adequate infrastructure, access and parking taken into consideration.

Policy B12 Archaeological sites will be preserved and protected.

Policy S6 Development proposals should conserve and improve the existing built environment and a high quality and standard of design shall be achieved in new development.

Policy T19 Development proposals should be appropriately related to the highway network and not generate volumes of traffic in excess of the capacity of the highway network.

Policy T23 Development proposals should include adequate off-street parking facilities.

Policy T27 Development proposals shall make adequate provision for pedestrians.

(iii) **Dartford Borough Core Strategy (2011)**

Policy CS15 Managing Transport Demand: Development proposals which generate additional traffic should use measures to encourage sustainable patterns of travel including travel plans and Car Parking Supplementary Planning Document.

Policy CS21 Community Services: Seeks to ensure the effective provision of community services.

Policy CS23 Minimising Carbon Emissions: Development proposals shall ensure reductions in energy use through design and layout of development

Policy CS25 Water Management: Development proposals shall ensure that the quality of surface and groundwater's is protected and enhanced.

Consultations

8. **Dartford Borough Council** – No objection subject to a restriction on the duration for the siting period.

Environment Agency (Kent Area) – No comments.

Kent County Council Highways and Transportation - Although the provision of additional on-site car parking would be preferred, an objection would not be warranted as the impacts of the proposal on the local highway network would not be severe without the provision of additional on-site car parking. It is recommended that the applicants seriously consider making parking available to school staff in the car park off Church Hill (Nursery car park).

Wilmington Parish Council - No objection.

Local Member

9. The local County Member, Mrs Ann Allen was notified of the application on 4th August and has stated support for the application and welcomes the extra facilities at the school.

Publicity

10. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the notification of 19 neighbours.

Representations

11. In response to the publicity, 1 letter of representation has been received objecting to the proposal. The key points raised can be summarised as follows:
 - Concern over the increased roll of the school resulting in increased traffic movements on Oakfield Lane from parents during the school drop off and pick up periods.

Discussion

12. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 8 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 my opinion, the key material planning considerations in this particular case can be summarised by the following headings:
 - Siting and Design
 - Need
 - Potential impact on Highways and Transportation
13. This application has been reported for determination by the Planning Applications Committee following the receipt of a representation from a local resident. Objection has been raised on the grounds of the extensive parking on Oakfield Lane in the vicinity of the school. The resident is concerned that the increased school roll could further impact on the local highway in the vicinity of the school.

Siting and Design

14. The site of the proposed building is an area of grass and concrete between an existing building and part of the wider open space/playground area. A number of temporary mobile units of varying sizes have been placed at the school with one unit adjoining the proposed location of this application.
15. With regard to development of this location, the grassed area does not form part of any playing area but the proposal would encroach onto the playground. However, as this application is only for a temporary solution pending the erection of a new five classroom block extension referred to in paragraph (5) above. I would not therefore

raise an objection on the basis of a temporary loss of open space or playing area land.

16. Given the appearance of the classroom buildings would be of low visual quality it could be argued that it does not meet all the planning policy objectives for a high standard of design. The appearance of the classroom buildings would be of lower visual quality to the high quality detailing and materials used in the recently built adjacent buildings. However, given the short term need and as it is intended to be temporary I do not consider an objection on these grounds would be justified in this particular case.

Need

17. The purpose of this application is to provide classroom accommodation for additional pupils at the school. The proposal would provide teaching facilities for 60 key stage two pupils. If permission is granted the applicant proposes that the mobile classrooms would be used from September 2014. The proposed mobile unit would require planning permission for a period of seven months until the construction of a new five classroom block is in operation anticipated in March 2015, and therefore this planning application is for temporary planning permission until such a time that the new five classroom block is complete. The applicant is proposing that once the new permanent classroom units are operational the proposed two classroom modular unit would be removed from the site, so the development is genuinely temporary.
18. The NPPF considers that a key fact of delivering sustainable development is promoting healthy communities and as part of this attaches great importance to ensuring sufficient choice of school places to meet demand. It advises that local planning authorities should give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools and to work with schools promoters to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted. The Government's planning statement "Planning for Schools Development" (August 2011) also concerns the sufficient provision to meet growing demand for school places, increased choice and opportunity and raising educational standards. There is strong planning policy support for the improvement of school facilities and for local planning authorities to take a positive approach when dealing with such proposals. That includes the adaptation and improvement of existing school facilities.
19. I am therefore persuaded that the School has a genuine need for this proposal given the information provided within the application.

Highways and traffic

20. Vehicle access to the school is via Oakfield Lane which is a residential street as well as a through road. The road is single carriageway with adequate room for two vehicles to pass safely, however this is restricted when vehicles are parked in the road.
21. Highways & Transportation raises no objections to the mobile building on the basis of it being for a temporary period only, and whilst they would prefer to see additional on-site car parking be provided they do not consider the impacts of the proposal to be unacceptable without such increased parking provision. The suggestion of making greater use of the on-site car park accessed via Church Hill however is not as straight forward as it might seem. First, that car park is for use by staff associated

with the on-site standalone Nursery unit only, and is subject to conditions of consent which limit its use to the Nursery. Secondly, increased use of Church Hill as a school access has previously been presumed against because of the poor ability of the Church Hill junction with the A225 to accommodate significant extra traffic movements. Thirdly, the car park might need to be extended to enable any additional use to occur, and is likely to impact on playing field land, and would nevertheless require further consultation as part of a further planning application. Under the circumstances, I have some doubts over the deliverability of that option, but would recommend that the use of that car park be re-investigated as part of the School Travel Plan work to be required pursuant to the application for the permanent new classroom development (DA/14/19).

22. A local resident has objected to the application on the grounds of unacceptable impact on the local highway on Oakfield Lane due to parents setting down and picking up children. Given that the proposal is for temporary planning permission and a planning application has been submitted indicating a clear intention to develop a more permanent solution to address any potential adverse highway impact from the school by providing on-site drop-off and pick-up provision and increased parking provision for part-time/lunch time staff (within the drop-off/pick-up area). I am confident that the measures promoted within application Ref KCC/DA/0326/2013 will mitigate the temporary adverse highway impact on Oakfield Lane on implementation, and the potential impact from the increased school roll does not outweigh the importance placed by the NPPF on ensuring sufficient school places are available. Therefore, I do not consider that there is any significant basis on which to raise a material highway objection in this particular case.

Conclusion

23. The application has been considered on its own merits and in the light of the NPPF, the Planning for Schools Development Policy Statement, the Development Plan and the material considerations including comments received about the scheme. Whilst the proposal does not fully accord with Development Plan Policies or the NPPF in respect of design, given the importance the NPPF places on ensuring sufficient school places are available to meet demand, that the proposal would be temporary, and a planning application has been submitted indicating a clear intention to develop a more permanent solution to the school's accommodation needs, I therefore do not consider that an objection would be warranted in this particular case, subject to the imposition of conditions.

Recommendation

24. I RECOMMEND that TEMPORARY PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO the following conditions:
- The units to be removed from the site by the end of July 2015 and that the site to be satisfactorily restored;
 - That the development be carried out in accordance with submitted details;
 - Restriction of construction hours to between 0800 and 1800 Monday to Friday, 0900 and 1300 Saturday with no operations on Sundays and Bank Holidays;
 - Restriction of construction vehicles delivering materials between the hours of 08:00 to 09:00 and 14:45 to 15:45 Monday to Friday.

Modular building at Oakfield Primary School, Dartford - DA/14/00811

I FURTHER RECOMMEND THAT the School and the Nursery work together to ensure the optimum use of the Nursery car park accessed off Church Hill.

Case Officer: Adam Reynolds

Tel. no: 03000 413446

Background Documents: see section heading