

Extension at Five Acre Wood School Boughton Lane, Maidstone – KCC/MA/0319/2014 (MA/14/504946)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 8th April 2015

Application by Kent County Council Property and Infrastructure Support for refurbishment of existing school and construction of a new two storey extension to existing school, extension to the dining hall, relocation of the existing car parking facilities and additional car parking with improved vehicular access and drop-off circulation within the site, and provision of a new fenced multi-use games area and associated landscaping at Five Acre Wood School, Boughton Lane, Maidstone, Kent, ME15 9QF

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr B Clark

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Five Acre Wood School is a District Special School for children and young people aged between four and nineteen with profound, severe and complex learning difficulties including Autistic Spectrum disorder. It is located south of Maidstone town centre to the south east of the Maidstone South Ward.
2. The School is located to the north of the New Line Learning Complex in Boughton Lane, off Loose Road. Access to the school site is from Boughton Lane, which connects onto Loose Road, one of the main routes into Maidstone from the South. The proposed development site is bordered in the east by Public Right of Way KB26.
3. The school is inside the Maidstone Urban Area and within the North Loose Neighbourhood Area. There are residential properties located to the west of the site, a cemetery to the north and north east, the New Line Learning Academy to the south and the Mangravet play area to the east. The New Line Learning Complex contains the New Line Learning Academy, the Tiger Primary School, a private nursery, a gym, the Loose Baptist Church.

Background

4. The application is made within the context of increasing pressure and demand for school places in the Maidstone District and in particular for school places for children and young people with profound, severe and complex learning difficulties. Increasing the capacity at the Five Acre Wood School by 50 places by September 2015 would take the number of places at the school to from 210 to 260. The refurbishment of the existing buildings and works required for expansion to accommodate the increase are designed to secure the County Council's ambition to "ensure that every child will go to a good school where they make good progress and can have fair access to school places".

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Recent Site History

5. There has been a number of recent planning applications at the Five Acre Wood School. Permission references MA/11/32; MA/09/2048; MA/07/1265; MA/05/1118; MA/05/160 and MA/04/263 all relate to the provision and retention of mobile classrooms at the site. This latest proposal would result in removal of the mobile classrooms at the site. Other more recent applications related to the provision of water storage (MA/12/763) and a hydrotherapy pool (MA/03/748).
6. Elsewhere on the New Line Learning Complex, in 2008, permission was granted by Kent County Council for the demolition of old school buildings (known as *Oldborough Manor School*) and erection of a new Academy (known as the *New Line Learning Academy*) including sports hall, indicative footprint of a vocational centre, playing pitches, MUGA, car parking and circulation access. Since the school became an Academy planning applications including MA/14/343 for a temporary classroom for 12 months (during construction works allowed by permission MA/08/2098); MA/12/1989 for outline permission for a new primary school; MA/12/13 for retention of temporary buildings at New Line Learning Academy and MA/12/1994 for a new studio school have been made to Maidstone Borough Council.
7. There has also been a planning application by Kent County Council, Future Schools Trust and BDW Trading Ltd to Maidstone Borough Council for housing and new playing fields for New Line Learning Academy (MA/13/2197) on land to the south of the New Line Learning Complex. This was refused by the Borough Council and an appeal is in progress.
8. A new application (reference KCC/MA/0385/2014) has also been received by Kent County Council on land within the New Line Learning Complex for the erection of a modular classroom block with 2 classrooms, an office and toilets, along with a small agricultural style barn with 2 store rooms and use of land as school farm including creation of paddocks and horticultural teaching area. This application has not yet been determined.

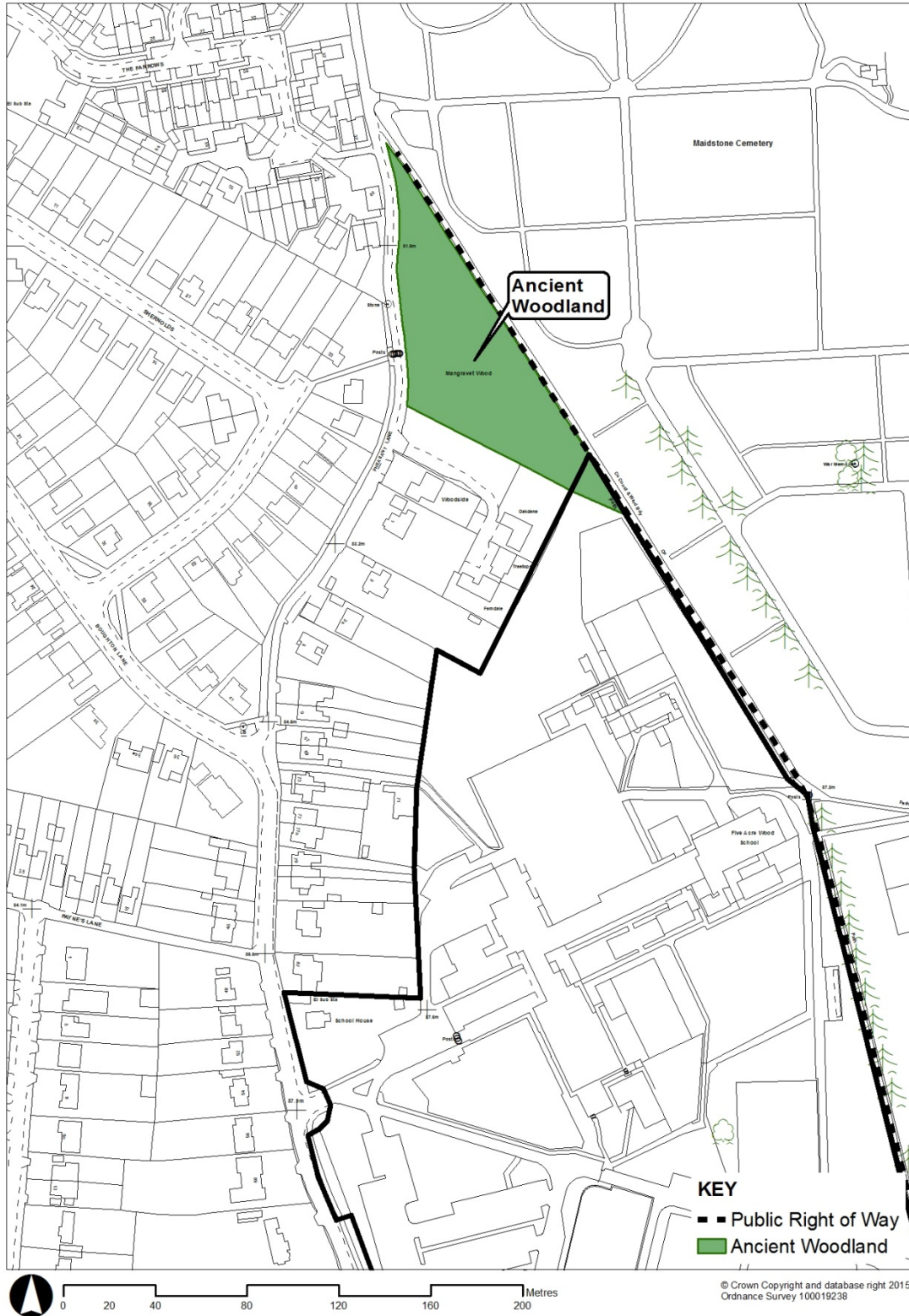
Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Location Plan



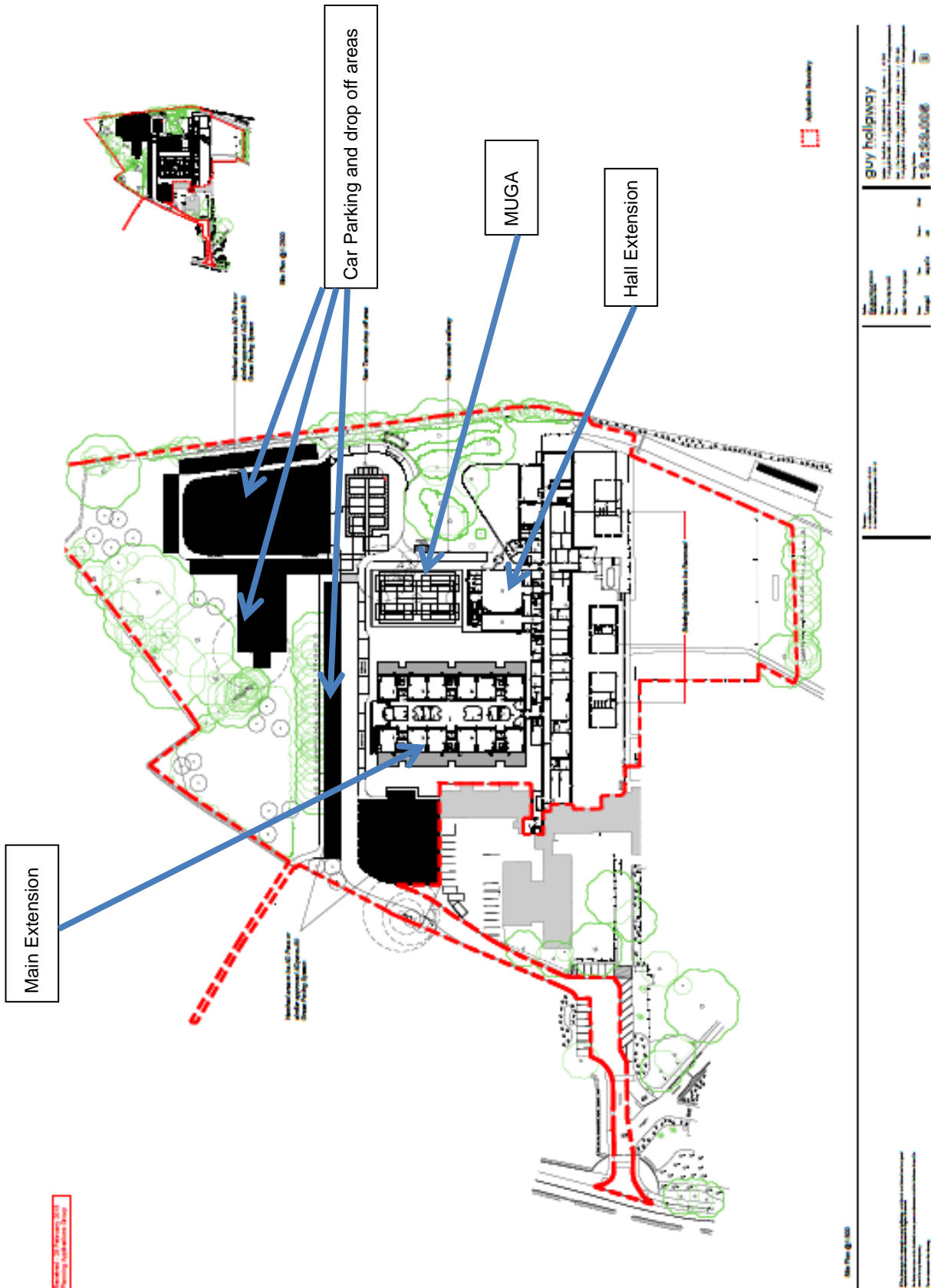
Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Ancient Woodland



Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Proposed site layout



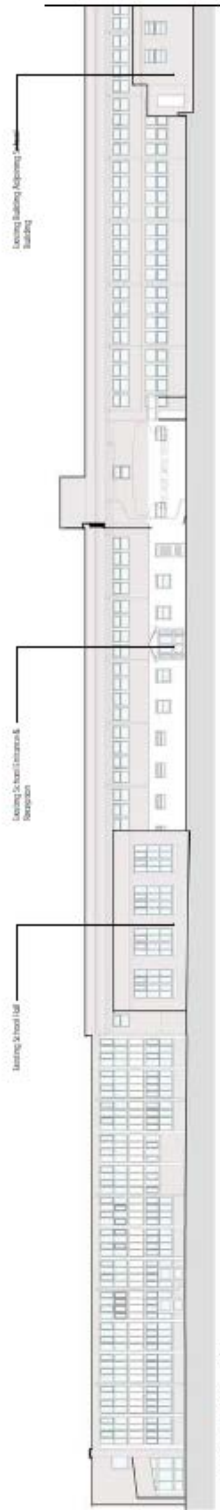
Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Proposed landscaping

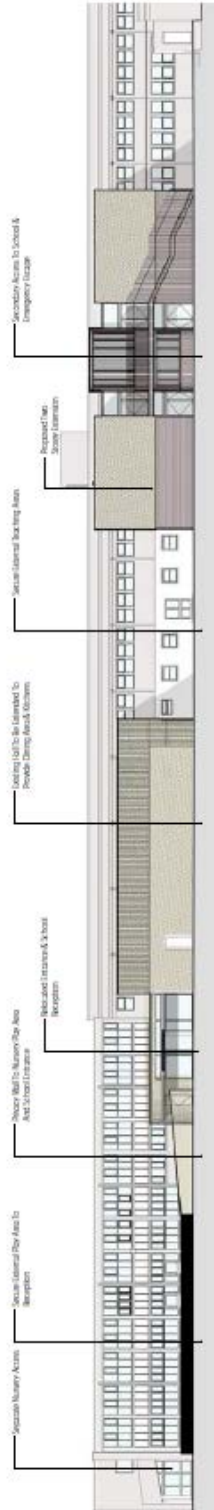


Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

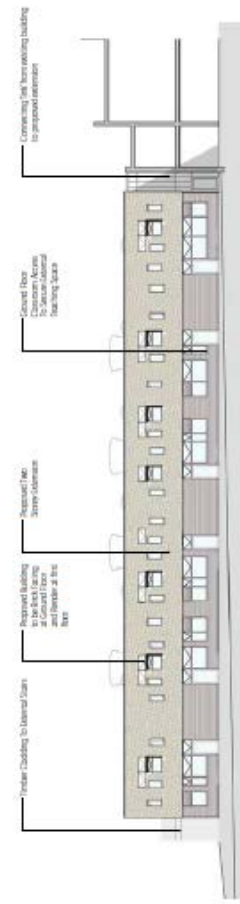
Proposed Elevations



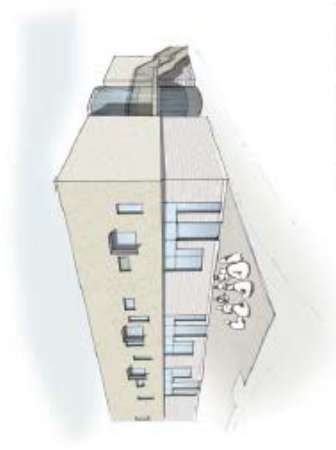
Existing North Elevation



Proposed North Elevation



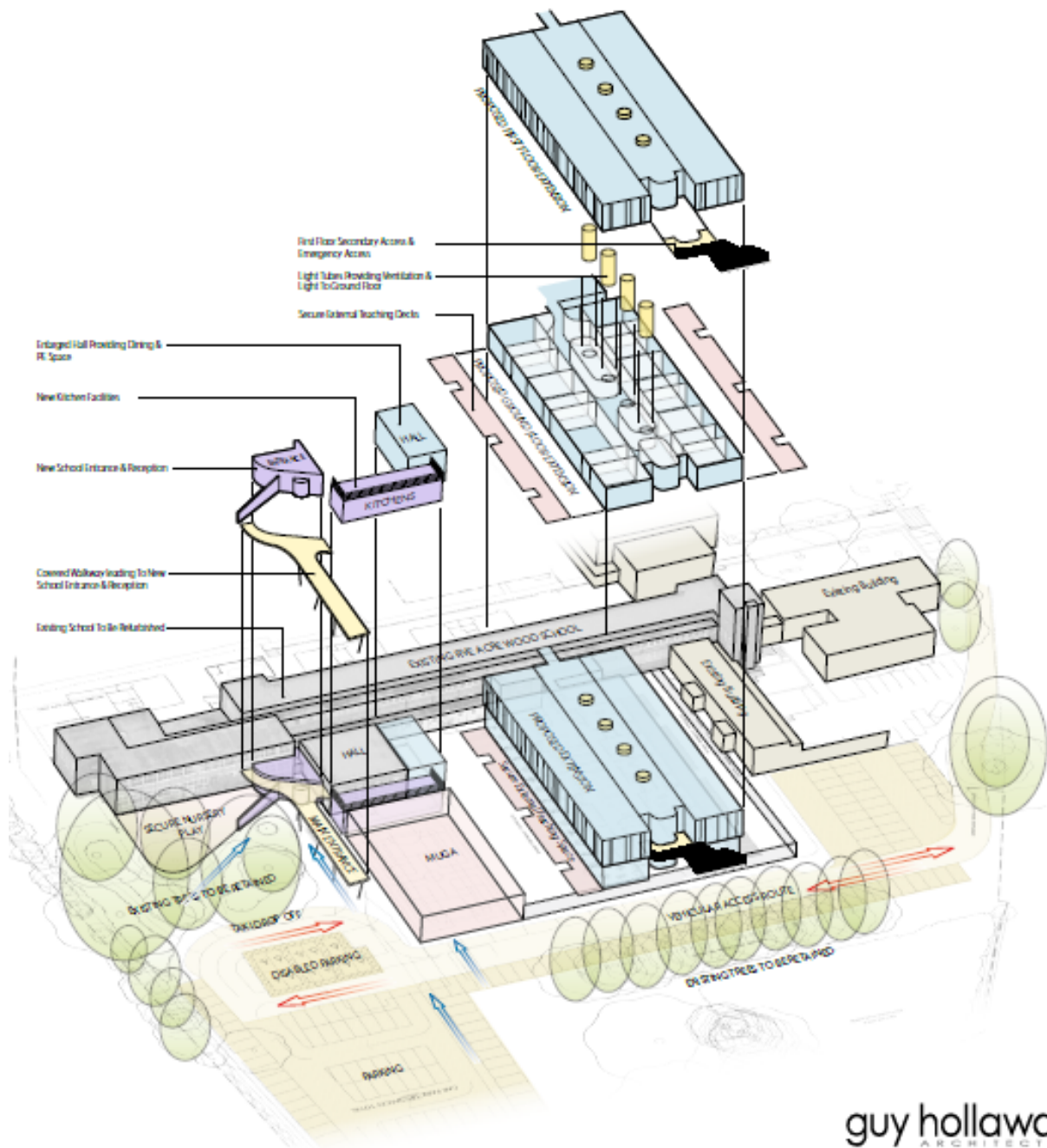
Proposed West Elevation



guy hollaway
ARCHITECTS

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Sections



Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Proposal

9. The proposal is for refurbishment (with minor and non structural internal alterations) of the existing school buildings and construction of a new two storey extension to the north of the existing building on an area of the site currently used for car parking. The proposed extension would create 24 additional classrooms across two storeys along with associated hygiene and toilet facilities, ICT, library, sensory areas and soft play facilities.
10. It is proposed to extend the hall and add kitchen facilities to separate the eating areas from the PE areas. It is also proposed to relocate the entrance to the school building from the existing location to the northern elevation to a new location to the eastern end of the northern elevation to the east of an enlarged hall and to have a new covered walkway between the drop off area and the relocated school entrance.
11. It is proposed to relocate the existing car parking facilities at the site to allow these works to happen. The applicant proposes to relocate the car parking to the north east of the site onto land which is currently used for the New Line Learning Academy Farm. The applicant states that the farm facility is proposed to stay within the school complex and that it is hoped to relocate it to new land should that become available, with no change to the size of the farm. A planning application has recently been received for the proposed relocation of the school farm to land to the south east of the New Line Learning Academy as referred to in paragraph (8) above.
12. Additional parking is also proposed to the spaces currently available at the school and an improved on site vehicular access and drop-off circulation within the Five Acre Wood school site. This includes a new drop off area to the east of the site, new staff parking areas and a new mini bus parking area. The original proposal included provision for 168 parking spaces on the site with 121 designated for staff, 7 mini bus spaces and 40 drop off/pick up spaces, and 35 drop off bays. However, as a result of amendments to the proposal to accommodate tree protection arrangements, the parking and drop off/pick up layout proposed was reconfigured and the revised proposal would result in 4 fewer drop off bays. There would be no change to the access arrangements from the highway into the site from the wider New Line Learning complex off Boughton Lane or leaving the school. However, the access routes within the Five Acre Wood site would be amended to the proposed new parking and drop off areas within the site.
13. A new 4m (13.1ft) high fenced multi-use games area is proposed to the north of the extended hall. The proposal also includes associated landscaping and removal of existing mobile classrooms to the south of the Five Acre School site.
14. The applicant states in its Planning Statement that the design strategy is to create a larger school which provides flexible and functional spaces to learn and which provides for the needs of all users whilst creating an innovative and inspiring environment. The design aspiration is to achieve a durable, low maintenance building which is modern in form, function and aesthetics. The ground floor of the main extension is proposed to be brick facing with powder coated (or similar) aluminium windows) and at first floor a mixture of sand-cement render system. The applicant proposes use of hit and miss vertical timber cladding for solar shading and screening. The extension to the hall and proposed new reception is proposed with a sand-cement render system which will be used to overclad the existing building to create a single appearance. Hit and miss timber cladding would be used to screen kitchen

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

plant. The applicant aims to achieve a layout that makes good use of space within the site, minimises the impact on the operation of the school during the proposed construction phases and to have no impact on the sites surrounding context.

15. The application form details the proposed hours for the facility as being between 0730 and 2200 hours Monday to Friday and 0900 and 2200 hours at weekends and bank holidays. The proposal includes an intention for community use in the future although there are no current plans included within the proposal.

Planning Policy

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

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) March 2012, and the 2014 guidance 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 promotion of healthy communities, including that great weight that the Government attaches to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities, and that great weight should be given to the need to create, expand or alter schools;

and that there is opportunity for sport and recreation and that existing open space, sport and recreation land including playing fields are protected; and

conserving and enhancing the natural environment, including valued landscapes and minimising the effects on biodiversity.

Planning Statement on Planning for Schools Development - where there is commitment for planning to work in a positive manner when dealing with proposals for the creation, expansion and alteration of state-funded schools and that there should be a presumption in favour of the sustainable development of state-funded schools as expressed in the NPPF.

Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2000 Saved Policies:

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

- ENV6 Seeks to incorporate the retention of existing trees, woodland, hedgerows, natural and man-made features which contribute to the landscape character or quality of the area and requires provision of a new scheme of planting.
- ENV21 Seeks new development to be accessible with good access to existing public transport points, making provision for cyclists and pedestrians.
- ENV22 Seeks to protect open areas within urban areas and village settlements and the visual contribution to the urban or village landscape and the need to uphold and improve the appearance of the locality and to conserve wildlife habitats.
- ENV26 Seeks to protect Public Rights of Way.
- ENV32 Seeks to protect the rural settlements surrounding Maidstone from coalescing with the urban area and with each other. Development which significantly extends the urban area or the built up extent of any settlement, or which, as a result of infilling, consolidates existing areas of development within the Southern Anti-coalescence belt is resisted.
- ENV49 Seeks to control external lighting to ensure that it is the minimum required and to minimise light spillage.
- T3 Requires adequate provision for public transport and pedestrian access routes and for disabled access within development proposals.
- T13 Seeks compliance with adopted parking standards.
- T23 Requires the impact of development proposals on the transport system and on the environment to be considered and seeks to ensure that new developments are adequately serviced by the Transport Network.
- CF3 Requires provision of acceptable replacement community facilities where proposals for development would lead to significant loss of community facilities.
- CF9 Seeks to encourage the dual use of educational facilities where appropriate.

Emerging Maidstone Borough Local Plan Policies 2014 (Consultation)

- DM2 Sets sustainable design standards for non residential development of 1000m2 (gross) and above to meet BREEAM Very Good rating where feasible.
- DM4 Concerns the quality of design of proposals and seeks design criteria which takes account of accessibility, permeability and linkages to the surrounding area; the natural and historic character of the area; design materials; the amenities of occupiers of neighbouring properties and users and by ensuring that development does not result in excessive noise, vibration, odour, air pollution, activity or vehicular movements, overlooking or visual intrusion and that the built form would not result in unacceptable loss of privacy or light; incorporate natural feature worthy of retention within the site; consider sustainability, biodiversity within the design; safely accommodate vehicular and pedestrian movement generated by the proposal on the local highway

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

network and through the site access; create a safe and secure environment ; provides for adequate vehicular and cycle parking and incorporates waste storage facilities and is flexible towards future adaptation in response to changing life needs.

- DM6 Requires external lighting to be only the minimum necessary to achieve the required purpose and to not be visually detrimental to the immediate or wider setting.
- DM10 Concerns the protection and enhancement of the historic and natural environment including the protection of positive historic and landscape character, areas of ancient woodland, veteran trees, trees with significant amenity value, important hedgerows, features of biological interest and the existing public rights of way network from inappropriate development and to ensure that these assets do not suffer any adverse impacts as a result of development. DM10 also seeks to control pollution to protect water resources and to enhance, extend and connect designated sites of importance for biodiversity, priority habitats and fragmented ancient woodland and enhance and connect habitats. The policy seeks to protect and enhance the character, distinctiveness, diversity and quality of Maidstone's landscape and townscape by careful, sensitive management and design of development.
- DM11 Concerns the impact of proposals on open areas within the urban area and the contribution of the existing site in relation to the character, amenity and biodiversity of the area.
- DM12 Concerns the adequate provision of community facilities including education facilities and the provision of replacement facilities where proposals would lead to loss of facilities, unless demand no longer exists in the locality. Also encourages the dual use of facilities.
- DM13 Concerns the highways impact of proposals and demonstration of the impact of trips generated to and from the development and the impacts on air quality.
- DM16 Concerns the impact of development proposals on air quality.
- SS1 The focus of development would be within the Maidstone urban area with best use being made of available sites within the urban area.
- SP2 Seeks to make Maidstone a good place to live and work by development and redevelopment or infilling of appropriate urban sites in a way that contributes positively to the locality's distinctive character; ensuring that development positively contributes to the setting, accessibility, biodiversity and amenity value of the town's green spaces and the River Medway and the River Len; supporting development that improves the social, environmental and employment well-being of those living in identified named areas of deprivation.

Note that emerging Policies within the Local Plan Policies are not formally adopted and should have less weight in the decision making process than adopted policies.

Emerging North Loose Neighbourhood Plan (2014) Policies:

The North Loose Neighbourhood Plan has been submitted to Maidstone Borough

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Council and there has recently been a period of public consultation. Emerging policies within the North Loose Neighbourhood Plan are not part of the Development Plan until they are formally adopted and they should therefore have less weight in the decision making process than adopted policies.

HWTA Policy 2 concerns contribution toward improvement of air quality in North Loose.

HWTA Policy 3 concerns cumulative impacts to transport capacity and requirements to be taken account of at local junctions and for existing congestion problems not to be made worse.

HWTA Policy 4 concerns convenient, safe and direct pedestrian and cyclist links to local facilities and Maidstone Town Centre.

HWTA Policy 7 seeks to preserve green wedges to maintain and improve quality of life, manage air quality, biodiversity and encourage recreation with health and sport. *Green Wedges are identified as ancient woodlands, school farm, Mangravet recreation fields, the cemetery and the New Line Learning playing field.*

GSSR Policy 2 seeks to protect and improve open space and ancient woodland, and seeks to ensure a buffer zone of a minimum of 15m around ancient woodland.

SD Policy 2 seeks preference to the use of durable, attractive and locally available or reclaimed materials.

SD Policy 3 there is a presumption in favour of development incorporating the use of solar panels and other energy generation technologies for new and existing buildings and for surface water run off to be managed using sustainable drainage techniques.

SD Policy 4 seeks to manage the use of lighting.

Consultations

Maidstone Borough Council

Has no objection to the original proposal. No comments have been received with regard to the revised proposal.

Environment Agency

Has no objection to the original and revised proposal subject to a standard condition concerning the potential for unexpected contamination to be identified during groundworks.

Kent County Council Highways and Transportation

Has no objection to the original proposal or the revised proposal, which results in changes to configuration in order to accommodate tree protection issues. States that there are significant build ups of queues at school times, especially between 3pm and 4.15pm. States that the New Line Learning Complex, which includes the Five Acre Wood School, benefits from having a separate entrance and exit which leads to good internal circulation of traffic, minimising conflicts and congestion. Comments that the parking and traffic management aspects of the proposal offers a proportional increase in parking

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

numbers and considers that the opportunities for rotating picking up and drop off arrangements have been well designed. States that the proposals would lead to an increase in pupil numbers of 43 and staff numbers by 49, which would result in vehicle trip attractions of 38 arrivals in the morning peak period between 8 and 9am and 31 departures between 3 and 4pm.

States that it is evident that at school times queue lengths/congestion on Boughton Lane towards the A229 and Cripple Street are significant and from the configuration of the surrounding road network this proposal can only contribute to the congestion observed as there is little opportunity for alternative routes. However, states that the scale of additional trip generations is not considered in the context of the NPPF to constitute a severe residual impact. Comments that the crash records on Boughton Lane is very low and that periods of congestion experienced have probably assisted in keeping injury crashes down. Comments that there are further development pressures on Boughton Lane and that the lack of vehicular connectivity and permeability in the area off/onto Boughton Lane is a feature that needs to be carefully looked at, although there is not an obvious or straight forward improvement that can be made to the capacity of the junction at Boughton Lane with Loose Road. Concludes that in terms of the scale of the development proposal it is not considered that an objection on highway grounds could be sustained and confirms that the Highways Authority has no objection to the proposal.

Kent County Council School Travel Planner

Has no comments on the application although confirms that the applicant will need to update the existing travel plan as detailed in the application.

Kent County Council PROW

States that the proposal does not directly affect a PROW and has no objection and suggest informatives on any decision. No additional comments have been received with regard to the revised proposal.

Heritage Conservation Group

Has no objection to the proposal subject to a condition requiring implementation of a watching brief. No additional comments have been received with regard to the revised proposal.

Kent County Council Landscape Officer

Requested additional information in relation to tree protection measures and landscape planting which resulted in amendments to the scheme to which there is no objection.

Kent County Council Biodiversity Officer

Raises no objection to the amended proposal and advises that if planning permission is granted details of a precautionary approach to fell one tree (T53) is submitted as a condition of planning permission; that due to the location of the proposed development it is likely that bats are foraging and commuting within the site. Advises that lighting can be detrimental to roosting, foraging and commuting bats and therefore the lighting must be designed to have minimal impact on bats. Recommends that the Bat Conservation Trust's "Bats and Lighting in the UK" guidance is adhered to in the lighting design. Recommends that if planning permission is granted a management and enhancement plan for the woodland and meadow area be required by a condition of planning

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

permission, which clearly demonstrates where the additional planting would be located and how it would be carried out. Recommends that vegetation clearance and works to buildings should be carried out outside of the breeding bird season (March – August) or if that is not possible an ecologist must examine the site prior to works starting. States that the landscape plan indicates that there is opportunity to incorporate enhancements in to the site and the ecological survey has made recommendations for enhancements which can be incorporated in to the site.

North Loose Residents Association/Neighbourhood Planning Forum (NLRA/NPF)

In relation to the original proposal has no formal objection in principle but has two areas of concern. Lighting in the car parking section should be designed to ensure there is no detrimental effect on the adjoining designated ancient woodland, and should be low level lantern style as opposed to overhead lighting. Also would like to see school traffic to be staggered in order to mitigate against the problems that traffic using the Academy and Tiger School create at the present, since the proposal will in their opinion inevitably create even more traffic on an already congested and “at capacity” lane. The NLRA/NPF would be pleased to be involved in any discussions that which could ease the issues of traffic congestion in the area. No comments have been received with regard to the revised proposal.

Sustainable Urban Drainage

Has no objection to the proposal subject to an appropriately worded condition concerning the site specific infiltration rates to be taken into account when the detailed drainage design for the proposal is submitted. No comments have been received with regard to the revised proposal.

Local Member

17. The local County Member, Mr B Clark was notified of the application on 22nd October 2014 and 2nd March 2015.
18. In response to the original proposal, Mr Clark comments that expansion from 210 students to 260 students will be of benefit to the additional pupils that will be admitted, and supports expansion in principle. Mr Clark does however have serious concern about additional traffic in a lane, considered by KCC Highways, to be "at capacity" (especially as there is significant further housing and a new school development proposed at this joint KCC Five Acre Wood School / Future Schools Trust Academy site) and would wish that this issue be given full consideration at the planning stage. Furthermore Mr Clark has some outstanding concerns relating to the County Council land and estate management matters within the Five Acre Wood/Future Schools Trust Academy site, which are matters that have been drawn to the attention of Kent County Council Property and Infrastructure as these are not material to the determination of the planning application. Mr Clark also notes that a large part of the site under consideration for development is designated “Deciduous Woodland BAP Priority Habitat (England)” and is adjacent to a registered Ancient Woodland. Mr Clark also advises that he is a local resident to this proposal.
19. In response to the amended proposal, Mr Clark welcomes the modifications made to the parking scheme in order to protect ancient woodland and requests that his earlier comments still be considered.

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Publicity

20. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice(s), an advertisement in a local newspaper, and the individual notification of 55 residential properties in response to the original proposal and additional information including amendments to the proposal.

Representations

21. In response to the publicity regarding the original proposal, 1 letter of representation has been received raising concern. No additional responses have been received as a result of the neighbour notification of the amended proposal. The key points raised are summarised as concerns about the number of planning applications off Boughton Lane; the increase in traffic over the last year; inconsiderate parking making access difficult for residents to their drives and about speeding. There are also suggestions for strict restrictions on traffic, noise, night time activities, floodlighting; an access from Mangravet Road and for greater and better road infrastructure to be in place first.

Discussion

22. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (16) 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 in relation to the need for the proposal, the location and impacts of the proposal.

Need Considerations

23. The Government commitment to supporting the delivery of schools and ensuring that there is sufficient provision to meet growing demand for school places, choice and opportunity and raising educational standards is set out in the Planning Statement on Planning for Schools development. The Statement indicates that the planning system should operate in a positive manner and that there should be a presumption in favour of the sustainable development of schools.
24. The context of this proposal is identified by the applicant as one of ensuring that there are sufficient school places of high quality for all learners; avoiding long travelling distances to school for vulnerable young children and a need to refurbish existing buildings in order to secure the most appropriate quantity and standard of educational facility to cater for special educational needs in Maidstone. The proposal is required in order to increase the number of places for children and young people with special educational needs and who are disabled and for pupils with autism and behavioural needs. In the context of the pressure on places for children with profound, severe and complex learning needs and given the improvements to the quality of the existing learning environment that refurbishment and extension would bring, I am satisfied of the need for sufficient provision of places and the need for refurbishment and extension along with associated works in relation to this proposal.

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Location of the proposal

25. The proposal is located within the boundary of Maidstone urban area and within the southern anti-coalescence belt. This policy seeks to resist development which significantly extends the urban area or the built up extent of any settlement or which as a result of infilling consolidates existing areas of development within the southern anti-coalescence belt.
26. The proposal is situated within the confines of an existing school site within the urban area and therefore in principle the location is acceptable for educational facilities. In my opinion it does not significantly extend the urban area although would result in infilling within the existing car park area and extension of car parking within the site and therefore result in some marginal consolidation within the Five Acre Wood grounds. However, that needs to be seen in context since there would be some reduction in that consolidation as a result of the removal of the mobile classrooms and covered walkways to the south of the school, thereby reducing the spread of buildings. Whilst those have temporary permissions requiring removal of the building and reinstatement of the land once the permissions run out, the additional accommodation that they provide has been relied upon for a number of years with a number of applications for renewal. The most recent permission requires removal by 31st March 2016 (Mobile 3). In my opinion, the permanent removal of the mobile classrooms and covered walkways as a result of the proposal with the provision of permanent development elsewhere within the site is appropriate in this location. In considering the proposed additional built development in this location, and the views of Maidstone Borough Council which does not raise objection to the application, the proposal in itself would not in my view significantly contribute to coalescence in this urban location.
27. The proposed classroom and hall extensions would be located on land which is currently used as car parking space and therefore is already developed. However, the relocation of the car parking to land at the north east is on land used as a school farm within the school grounds. That is an educational use in connection with the New Line Learning Academy. This current proposal would require the existing school farm to be relocated somewhere in order for the land to be used. However the proposed site for relocation of the school farm is not a consideration in determining of this application, but would be a matter for the applicants to address if the parking elements of the proposal are to be implemented as currently hoped. There is currently a planning application for the relocation of the school farm to a new site to the south east of the New Line Learning Complex. The two applications are independent of each other and both will therefore need to be considered on their own planning merits.
28. The emerging North Loose Neighbourhood Plan policies (which have less weight than the adopted saved Local Plan policies) seek to protect Green Wedges within the Plan area including the school farm land. The North Loose Residents Association/Neighbourhood Planning Forum do not raise objection to this aspect of the proposal, and given also the response from Maidstone Borough Council I consider that the weight given to protection of the current location of the school farm needs to be balanced against the need for school development and the significance that is attached in National Planning policy to the need for school creation, expansion and alteration of schools and the presumption in favour of sustainable development as expressed in the NPPF. Given the current status of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, in my opinion the balance is in favour of the need for new school development.

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

29. I therefore consider that the location of this proposal which is accessible and well connected within the Maidstone urban area, is appropriate given the need for the development. However, the impacts of the proposal need to be further considered. This is discussed below.

Highway and transport impacts

30. Planning policy requires consideration of the impact of the proposal on the local transport system with adequate servicing by the network (Local Plan saved policy T23). The school is accessed via Boughton Lane which like many lanes on the fringe of an urban area is a busy route, and at school opening and closing times there is some localised congestion. The current proposal is likely to add to that, but there are also other development pressures in the area which may add to congestion, other than at school times. The Highways Authority states that there is not an obvious or straight forward improvement that can be made to the capacity of the junction off Boughton Lane with Loose Road, where traffic signals have recently been introduced to better manage traffic flows, and there is a lack of vehicular connectivity and permeability in the area off/onto Boughton Lane.
31. NPPF policy is that developments generating significant amounts of traffic should be supported by a Transport Statement or Assessment, and that decisions should be based on consideration of the opportunities for sustainable transport modes dependent on the nature and location of the site, safe and suitable access to the site for all people and improvements within the transport network that cost effectively limit the significant impacts of the development. The NPPF states that development should only be refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe, and it is important to bear in mind that all roads on the fringe of urban areas, typically serving a mix of uses (homes, schools, shops, businesses, recreation facilities, etc.) suffer from some congestion through competition for road space. However, unless there are serious risks to road safety or severe traffic congestion, it is not reasonable to presume against development proposals in principle on transport grounds, especially if the additional traffic is a small proportion and the congestion would be of limited time duration.
32. Nevertheless, the proposal has attracted a neighbour representation with concern about the increase in traffic and the number of planning applications off Boughton Lane. In addition, the NLRA/NPF express concern in relation to school traffic and would like to see traffic staggered in order to mitigate against the problems that traffic using the Academy and Tiger School create at the present time. They consider that the proposal would inevitably create more traffic and add to congestion. The local County Member, who is also a local resident, also expresses serious concern about the additional traffic and requests that the issue be given full consideration.
33. A Transport Statement has been provided with this application and at the Highway Officer's request, additional information with regard to queue lengths at Boughton Lane and traffic survey data for the A229 Loose Road, Cripple Street and Boughton Lane signal junction has also been provided by the applicant. The Transport Statement also includes consideration of other new development proposals in the vicinity of the proposal.
34. The Transport Statement states that being a SEN school the majority (currently 83%) of the pupils are dropped off and picked up from the school by Local Authority funded transport, and that all pick up and drop off activities take place on-site. There is a choice of sustainable transport modes available in the vicinity of the school, however

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

given the use of Local Authority transport and the SEN status of the school, opportunities for taking up more sustainable transport modes are limited to staff and visitors.

35. The proposal makes use of the existing complex access and seeks to improve the on site flow of traffic within the Five Acre Wood School in order to improve accessibility and address safety concerns. There are currently 95 parking spaces including 88 spaces for staff use) at the site and 7 minibus spaces. The amended proposal would provide 121 designated parking spaces for staff, 7 mini bus spaces and 40 drop off/pick up spaces, and 31 drop off bays.
36. The Highways advice is that the scale of the proposal is such that an objection to the proposal on highways grounds could not be sustained and therefore there is no objection to the proposal. Given that Maidstone Borough Council also does not object to the proposal, and the planning policy which states that development proposals should only be refused where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe, I consider that the highway impacts alone would not warrant refusal since the highways impacts cannot be considered in the context of the NPPF to be severe.
37. The proposal is well located in terms of existing public transport and pedestrian access and the impact on the transport network has been assessed by the applicant. Given that neither the Highways Authority or Maidstone Borough Council object to the proposal I consider that the current planning policy context T3, T13 and T23 has been accommodated.
38. The NLRA/NPF in their response to the application state that they would be pleased to be involved in any discussions which would ease the issues of traffic congestion in the area and that they are members of the South Maidstone Action for Roads and Transport (SMART) Group which is holding discussions with other schools in the area regarding school day timings. The school day at Five Acre Wood is 0900 to 15:30 hours. Opportunities to stagger school time traffic from the Five Acre Wood Site are referred to within the Transport Statement in relation to the SMILE (Supporting Multi-Professional Inclusive Learning and Education Facilities) between the hours of 10:00 and 15:00 service arrangements outside of peak times; part time staff that arrive and leave the site outside peak hours and the existence of after school activities extending the school day to 16:30 hours. In my opinion, given the Highways advice, the decision as to whether to grant this proposal is not dependent on the mitigation of any problems associated with traffic that the Academy and Tiger School create, although clearly it would be helpful for all occupants at the wider New Line Learning complex to work together in this regard.
39. The Special School intends to update their School Travel Plan in the future via the Jambusters online resource. The School already have an up to date School Travel Plan (June 2014) and I am satisfied that the further update and submission of the travel plan could be required by planning condition. I intend to advise the applicant to work with the neighbouring schools on the New Line Learning Complex with regard to the School Travel Plan and good neighbour issues via an Informative, should Members decide to grant permission.
40. The neighbour comment indicates concern about the number of additional planning applications in the area off Boughton Lane. As detailed in the relevant site history, there has been a number of planning applications in recent years on the New Line Learning Complex, and there is also a current appeal with regard to a decision by

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

Maidstone Borough Council to refuse permission for a residential development on land to the south of the New Line Learning Complex. The transport impacts of any planning proposal are required to be considered as part of the planning process in relation to each proposal. The Highways Authority and Maidstone Borough Council are statutory consultees, and given that this proposal has not attracted objection from these respective bodies, who take into account other development pressures within their own assessments, I could not recommend refusal of this proposal on Highways grounds, since the impacts of this proposal are not considered to be severe. Given also the increasing pressure and demand for school places, in particular for school places for children with profound, severe and complex learning difficulties, and the apparent need for expansion, I also cannot recommend refusal of this proposal on Highways grounds as a result of other existing and forthcoming development pressures in the area.

41. Whilst the proposal is likely to increase traffic, the Highways Advice is that the level of increase would not be sufficient to attract objection. Construction impacts would be temporary and the applicant proposes to submit construction traffic routing plans with control over construction traffic and delivery movement times to avoid peak traffic times. I am satisfied that this could be required by use of a planning condition should Members decide to grant permission.
42. There is also neighbour concern about inconsiderate parking making access to drives difficult for neighbours and about speeding. These are good neighbour issues and also matters for consideration by the Police. However, suggestions for restrictions on traffic can be relevant to the planning process. In this case the likely increase to traffic movement has been considered as discussed above. Additional community use has been set out in the application in terms of proposed hours and has not drawn objection from the Highways Authority, Maidstone Borough Council or NLRA or in any other responses. The dual use of community facilities is encouraged within planning policy CF9. I am satisfied that a condition can be used to control the hours of community use to those being applied for, should Members decide to grant permission.
43. There has also been a neighbour suggestion for a vehicle access from Mangravet Road. There is an existing pedestrian access to the New Line Learning Complex from Mangravet Road via the community play area where there is an existing PROW, although there is not provision for vehicular access to the site via the play area and across the PROW, at this point. Given that the SEN status of the school and that the majority of pupils are picked up and dropped off at the school by Local Authority transport arrangements, in my view it is appropriate for drop off to continue to occur within the school grounds. Amendments to access arrangements from Mangravet Road have not been proposed within this planning application and the applicant states that there are no plans to change the existing access to the school which is considered to be suitable in design and safety terms. Whilst there is neighbour suggestion for greater and better road infrastructure to be in place first, the planning process does not provide for a decision on this proposal to be delayed indefinitely and a decision on the application is required based on the circumstances at this point in time.
44. I therefore conclude that that the impacts of this proposal off site in terms of highways and transport matters should be balanced against the need for increased places for special education need provision in Maidstone. In the context of the current planning policy, the balance is in my view in favour of this proposal for special educational needs provision.

Biodiversity Impacts

45. Planning policy guidance is that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and by minimising impacts on biodiversity with protection commensurate with status and appropriate weight to the importance and contribution to wider ecological networks. Saved policy ENV6 seeks to retain existing planting and require provision of new planting where appropriate. Emerging local plan policy DM10 also seeks to protect ancient woodland and trees with significant value. Emerging Neighbourhood Plan policy HWT A7 also has the same objective and emerging policy GSSR 2 seeks to protect and manage Ancient Woodland and seeks a buffer zone of 15m (49.2ft) around ancient woodlands.
46. In response to the original proposal the NLRA/NPF would wish to ensure that there is no detrimental effect to the adjoining ancient woodland as a result of the proposal with regard to proposed lighting and the local Member draws attention to the designation as “Deciduous Woodland BAP Priority Habitat (England)” and the nearby registered Ancient Woodland.
47. To the north of the site, Mangravet Wood is Ancient Woodland, and there is a small area of land adjoining the woodland area that has been identified as deciduous woodland BAP priority habitat, within the site to the south east of the properties Oakdene, Treetops and Ferndale. The woodland to the north of the site has been identified within the Ancient Woodland Inventory as Other Long Established Woodland (OLEW).
48. The applicant has made amendments to the original proposal in response to comments received from our Biodiversity Officer and to ensure that biodiversity interests are sufficiently protected within the site in relation to tree, root and bat protection measures by the rearrangement of the parking site layout so that it is further from the root protection zones and ancient woodland areas. The amended parking layout provides a 26m (85ft) separation zone from the woodland to the north of the site thus achieving a greater zone than would be required by the emerging North Loose Neighbourhood Plan GSSR Policy 2.
49. The Ancient Woodland is largely outside of the application area, and the applicant has confirmed that the woodland to the north within the site would be retained, and is unaffected by the proposed development. However within the site, the proposal would require the removal of a number of trees in order for the proposed development to proceed. 5 individual trees and 3 groups of trees are identified for removal, the majority of which are categorised as of low quality and value. One individual tree and one group of moderate quality and value trees would need removal. The applicant has also identified some trees within the site as requiring removal or surgery for safety/short life span grounds and that this would be the case whether or not the development occurs.
50. With regard to protection of trees which are retained within the site, it is proposed that the parking bays would be constructed with a porous paving system and that conflict with root protection areas (RPAs) would be minimal, with excavation by hand tools only within the RPA of any trees. Protective fencing would also be used and the applicant has provided a tree protection plan with regard to additional precautions. An arboriculture method statement has also been provided with the application which identifies proposed works that would be supervised by an arboricultural consultant.

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

The applicant has also submitted findings from a bat scoping and tree climbing survey and our Biodiversity Officer is satisfied that the applicant has considered the potential for roosting bats to be present within the site. It is however likely that the proposed location is used by bats foraging and commuting within the site and our Biodiversity Officer advises that lighting should be designed to have minimal impact on bats. The applicant proposes low level lighting to the primary circulation areas, access ways and car park area and lighting around the school site which would be the minimum necessary to allow safe access in the evenings. Wall mounted LED lighting is proposed to the buildings. No floodlighting is proposed for the MUGA. The applicant proposes to submit a detailed lighting specification should permission be granted and I am satisfied that this can be required by condition should Members decide to grant permission.

51. The applicant also proposes new planting at the site and has submitted a landscaping plan which seeks to achieve screening, softening of security fencing through native planting and increased coverage of parkland trees, connectivity and mitigation. I am satisfied that further details of planting, together with the further details of any proposed fencing amendments at the site can also be required by condition should Members decide to grant permission
52. Taking into account the advice received from the Biodiversity and Landscape Officers, I am satisfied that the proposal does not significantly impact upon biodiversity interests, including ancient woodland and older long established woodland and protected species and that the landscaping proposed is appropriate within the site location. I am satisfied that the proposal accords with saved policies ENV6 and ENV49 and emerging planning policy. I am also satisfied that a condition can be used with regard to lighting, planting specification and mitigation and enhancement should Members decide to grant permission.

Design and Visual Impacts

53. Achieving the requirement for high quality design and a good standard of amenity is a core planning principle. The main element of the proposal is a two storey 24 classroom extension which would be located to the north elevation of the existing school building and would be sited on existing car parking. An extension to the hall and kitchen is also proposed and amendments to the access points to the building. The applicant aims to achieve a high quality contemporary architectural design which delivers a durable low maintenance building.
54. I consider that the design and the materials used within this proposal are appropriate for this location, subject to submission of further details and samples of external materials and colours which can be required by planning condition.
55. The redesign of vehicular access within the site and the proposed new school entrance would aid vehicular circulation and drop off and pick up arrangements within the site. The provision of the MUGA responds to the promotion of healthy communities and provision of opportunity for sport and recreation, and the proposed landscaping of the site would allow opportunity for links to outdoor education.
56. Within the constraints of the basic needs funding the applicant has sought to address sustainable design and low carbon emissions. Insulation, lighting and heating and water conservation measures have been considered within the design. The applicant has focussed on a design that provides natural ventilation and cooling and has adopted the Adaptive Thermal Comfort Standard, in order to provide a comfortable

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

educational environment without more energy intensive mechanical systems. The design considers the use of daylight within spaces in order to reduce use of artificial lighting and therefore associated carbon emission.

57. The nearest residential properties to the proposal are those to the west of the site in Boughton Lane and Pheasant Lane. The nearest property is no 71 Boughton Lane which is to the west of the footpath within the site boundary and leading between Boughton Lane and the site. The property would have views from the first floor across the site towards the proposed extension. Current views towards the school buildings are screened by a tree belt of tall overgrown and dense mature western red cedar (G69) which have been assessed as of low quality and value and which would be removed as a result of the proposal in order to provide staff parking. Car parking would be located approximately 8.2m (26.9ft) south east of this property. Properties 79 – 75 Boughton Lane might also have differing views to that existing as a result of removal of these trees, although the new accent semi-mature tree planting proposed would provide some visual amenity screening for views towards the proposed new two storey building. Additional planting is also proposed to the north and north-west of the proposed car parking areas which would also assist in screening of the proposed new development.
58. There have been no comments as a result of the publicity from the statutory consultees, or objections from local residents, with regard to the proposed design or in relation to visual amenity concerns. In my view the design is appropriate to the site context and location and given the landscaping proposed in mitigation of the proposal, I consider that the proposal meets the planning policy requirements for a good standard of design and amenity and that the proposal would function well and optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development needs. I therefore conclude that the proposal is acceptable in terms of design and impact on visual amenity.

Other Impacts

59. In respect of archaeological matters, I am advised that the site lies within an area of potential associated with Iron Age and Roman activity, although following further assessment by the applicant no significant archaeology was located. On this basis, no further detailed archaeological work is required and I am satisfied that a condition can be used to require the implementation of a watching brief to be undertaken by an archaeologist, so that the excavation is observed and any items of interest and finds are recorded, should Members decide to grant permission.
60. I am also satisfied that Environment Agency requirements with regard to the standard condition relating to the potential for unexpected contamination identified during groundwork, can be required by a planning condition. In respect of comments received in relation to sustainable urban drainage, the applicant is intending to use a permeable surface on the parking area, and use of an infiltration trench. I am satisfied that a condition can be attached to any permission requiring a detailed drainage design to be submitted.
61. Given the comments received from our PROW Officer, I am also satisfied that the proposal does not directly affect the PROW outside of and to the east of the site (ref KB26).
62. The neighbour response received in relation to the original proposal indicated a desire for strict restrictions on noise, night time activities and floodlighting. The school

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

building design incorporates Building Bulletin 93 requirements with regard to the acoustic design of schools. The nearest noise sensitive receptors are residential property to the north west of the proposed extension building. The application includes provision for screening and/or acoustic attenuators in order to meet noise emission limits should it be required, and I am satisfied that a condition could be used to require compliance with the details submitted within the application with regard to noise, if Members decide to grant permission.

63. The shared use of community buildings is encouraged by the NPPF which seeks to achieve healthy inclusive communities and by saved planning policy CF9 which seeks to encourage the dual use of educational facilities where appropriate. Whilst the proposal includes an intention for community use in the future with provision with the proposed hours for use to be between 0730 and 2200 Monday to Friday and 0900 to 2200 hours at the weekends and bank holidays there are no current plans to do so within the proposal. However, given there is already community use of facilities within the wider New Line Learning Complex, I do not consider that permission should be refused for community use at this location given the hours of use proposed. Given also that the applicant states that they have no current plans for community use, should Members decide to grant permission for the proposal, I consider that a condition could be used to require further details of the uses and management arrangements to be submitted prior to the uses commencing.
64. I also consider that the control over construction noise during the temporary construction period can be achieved by use of the standard condition governing hours of work, and that further details can be required prior to the development commencing in relation to the appropriate location of construction compound and parking on site during the construction period. Given that construction impacts are of a temporary nature, and can be controlled by use of appropriate conditions, I do not consider the likely amenity impacts arising from construction work to be unacceptable.
65. The provision of lighting has been discussed above in relation to biodiversity impacts. In relation to amenity impacts, there are no proposals for the provision of floodlighting within the proposed MUGA and I consider that a condition can be used to exclude the provision of floodlighting from the MUGA proposal if Members decide to grant permission. I am also satisfied that a condition can be used should Members decide to grant permission in order to require submission of a detailed lighting specification to include the external environment of the school buildings and the car parking and access areas within the site boundary having consideration to neighbouring property and biodiversity issues (including bats).
66. I therefore consider that there can be adequate controls over noise, lighting and hours in relation to this proposal using planning conditions as suggested.

Conclusion

67. This proposal seeks to provide school places for children and young people with profound, severe and complex learning difficulties. It is within an existing school site and set within the context of a larger complex, all providing education and community facilities. It is acknowledged that the proposed expansion would result in some additional highways impacts. However, given the advice received from Highways and Transportation, I am satisfied that the 'severity' of the additional impacts has been proportionally assessed and does not warrant refusal of the proposal on highways

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

grounds, and accords with the NPPF and local planning policy. In addition, given that the proposal includes the provision of additional onsite car parking and drop off arrangements, and that most of the pupil dropping off occurs within the school site, I am satisfied that the applicant has made adequate provision for transport matters within the proposal and that the highways impacts of the proposal have been properly weighed against the need for adequate provision of school places. Given the significant weight for schools related development as expressed in the Planning Statement on Planning for Schools Development, in my view the balance is weighed in favour of the provision of schools places in this case.

68. Whilst the revised proposal would result in the removal of some trees at the site, I am satisfied that the older woodland within the site would be retained and that the Ancient Woodland beyond the site is unaffected. The proposal includes measures for tree and root protection, and also in respect of bats and includes landscaping proposals, and I conclude that the impacts to the landscape and to long established woodland and biodiversity would be acceptable and within the planning policy requirements that apply to this site. The applicant has made a number of amendments to the proposal in order to accommodate biodiversity and landscaping requirements, which in my opinion have shaped the development in order to appropriately respond to the site context and location. I therefore conclude that the proposal is acceptable in terms of need, design, location and in terms of highway and amenity impacts as discussed above and is sustainable development.

Recommendation

69. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE SUBJECT TO the imposition of conditions covering (amongst other matters) the following:

- The standard 5 year time limit for implementation;
- Development to be in accordance with the details submitted;
- A remediation strategy to be submitted should contamination not previously identified be found;
- Submission of an updated school travel plan;
- Submission of a detailed lighting strategy;
- Implementation of an archaeological watching brief;
- Details to be submitted of detailed drainage design to incorporate site specific infiltration rates;
- Submission of a mitigation and enhancement plan for woodland and meadow areas;
- Submission of landscaping, fencing and planting details.
- That there be no floodlighting to the MUGA area;
- Restoration of site surfaces following removal of the existing mobiles at the site;
- Submission of details of a precautionary approach to felling tree T53;
- Control over hours of use to between 0730 and 2200 Monday to Friday and 0900 to 2200 at weekends for community use;
- Provision of further information concerning management and parking arrangements in advance of any community use;
- Control over hours of construction to between 0800 and 1800 Monday to Friday and 0800 to 1300 Saturday with no work on Sundays and Public Holidays;
- Provision of details of construction traffic routing, the location of the construction compound and parking arrangements during construction work;
- Provision of wheel washing facilities prior to commencement of work on site for the duration of construction works;

Extension at Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone

- Submission of details and samples of external building materials prior to commencement;

I FURTHER RECOMMEND THAT the applicant BE ADVISED of:

- In relation to PROW advice regarding works near to footpaths and ecology advice regarding bats and lighting.
- The opportunity of working with the NLRA/NPF with regard to traffic issues and with the neighbouring schools on the New Line Learning Complex with regard to the School Travel Plan and good neighbour issues.

Case Officer: Hazel Mallett

Tel. no: 03000 413411

Background Documents: see section heading
