

SECTION D
DEVELOPMENT TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Background Documents: the deposited documents; views and representations received as referred to in the reports and included in the development proposals dossier for each case; and other documents as might be additionally indicated.

Item D1

Refurbishment of original Portal House and the construction of a new three storey teaching block and gymnasium at Portal House School, St Margaret's at Cliffe - DOV/15/01079 (KCC/DO/0348/2015)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 10th February 2016.

Application by KCC Property and Infrastructure Support for the refurbishment of original Portal House building alongside demolition of later extensions and existing teaching buildings. Construction of a new three storey teaching block and gymnasium with associated hard and soft landscaping at Portal House School, Sea Street, St Margaret's at Cliffe, Kent – DOV/15/01079 (KCC/DO/0348/2015)

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr Steve Manion

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Portal House School is a Special Educational Needs (SEN) school for children who experience Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD), situated in the village of St Margaret's at Cliffe, near Dover.
2. The school is located on the north-eastern side of Sea Street, this being a central road linking the village centre with the bay and the coastline to the south. St Margaret's at Cliffe Primary School and St Margaret's at Cliffe Nursery are both located 'behind' Portal House, to the north-east.
3. Portal House School currently comprises a number of buildings on the 0.78 hectare (1.92 acre) site, which is roughly rectangular in shape. The main building is a predominantly three storey structure (with some sections at two storey height) which was originally a Victorian former residence built in 1792, but which has had a variety of previous uses and has been extended over time to its current form. This building is finished in white render which has been detailed to represent stone coursing. Stone cornices, porticos, cills and string courses around windows and door openings provide architectural decoration and soften its appearance. Other elements of the building are faced with yellow stock brickwork, with red feature courses. Given its former uses, the internal layout of the building comprises a lot of small rooms which are now unsuitable for teaching purposes, and therefore large parts of the building are currently unused, and in a state of disrepair.

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4. Also on site is a single storey 'teaching block' constructed in the 1980's/1990's, which sits centrally within the site and to the south-east of the main building. In addition there are five mobile classrooms located on the site, three along the Sea Street road frontage, and the other two behind the teaching block, plus three small storage buildings. In the northern corner of the site (adjacent to Chapel Lane) is a two-storey administration block, which was originally constructed in the 1980's as the head teacher's accommodation, but which is now used for the school office.
5. The site has a change in levels across it, with the main building being at the highest point and the land falling away towards the south. There is a fall in levels of approximately 3.5m (11ft) along the length of the school site, running north-west to south-east. In addition there is a change in levels from one side of Sea Street to the other, with the school on the northern side of Sea Street being approximately 1m (3ft) higher than the residential properties on the southern side of Sea Street. These residential properties are a mixture of terraced housing, semi-detached and detached properties. The property Curfew Cottage amongst these dwellings is the listed building in closest proximity to the school.
6. Existing vehicular access into the site is from the north-western corner of the site, with vehicles driving round the main school building to enter the school playground which is used as a drop off area for the students. Vehicles then exit back onto Sea Street by using the access road running along the southern boundary of the site, which is a shared access road for St Margaret's at Cliffe Primary School, the Nursery and Portal House. There is a hard surfaced playground on site but no playing fields - the school shares these with the neighbouring primary school.
7. The Sea Street boundary is marked by a brick wall of approximately 1m (3ft) in height, with landscaping behind (hedges and trees), which runs along most of this boundary line, giving some screening to the site. The remainder of the site is bounded by a mixture of brick walls, chain link and steel sentry fencing.
8. The school sits on the periphery of the village, with the village lying in general to the north and west of the site. The central part of the village is designated as a Conservation Area. This designation extends only as far as Chapel Lane, therefore the Portal House school site is located outside of, but adjacent to the Conservation Area where the Administration block adjoins Chapel Lane. On the southern side of the shared access road with the primary school is a large area of grassed open space, which extends down the hill and up the other side in the approach to the bay area and coastline. The village and the coastline are separated by this open space and in a wider context by agricultural land.

Recent Site History

9. Portal House School has a chequered history, having been used historically as a private residence; a ladies' boarding school; convalescent home; as an emergency hospital for the military; once again as a convalescent home; and then an old people's home. Kent County Council converted the building to be used as a residential special school in 1977. In September 2004 the school was re-designed as an 11-16 day provision school for 60 pupils, and this forms the basis of the current use of the building. Efforts to secure an alternative site for Portal House have been considered since 2004 with

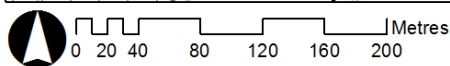
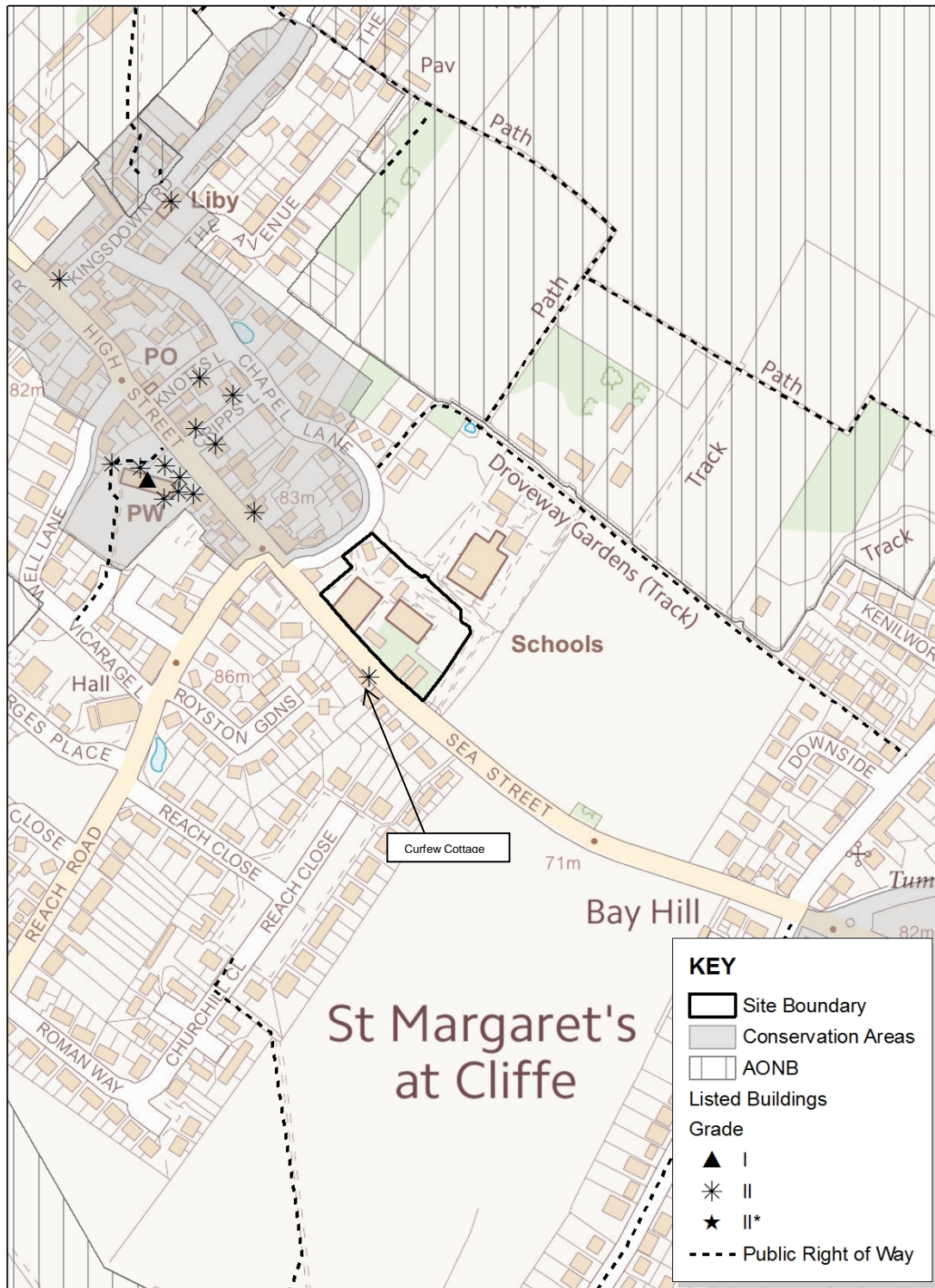
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various sites being proposed, but none having ever been progressed due to either local opposition, planning land use constraints, or the lack of funding.

10. The recent planning history relates to the provision and retention of mobile classrooms on the site (2007-2012), with earlier applications relating to minor extensions, temporary classrooms and the staff block. The planning application submitted in November 2014 proposed to demolish all of the buildings on site including the original Portal House and replace them with a purpose built 3 storey building to accommodate 80 day pupils. In response to local objections, that application was withdrawn by the applicants following concerns regarding the design of the new school and the loss of the original Portal House. A further application was submitted in June 2015, for the siting of one new mobile classroom and the relocation of an existing mobile on the site, and these were approved in August 2015.

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General Location Plan



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Site Location Plan



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Proposed Elevations



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Proposal

11. The proposed development combines the restoration of the original Portal House and the construction of a three storey teaching block and gymnasium extension. The original Portal House building is the three storey element which sits prominently along the Sea Street frontage. The later additions that extend the building within the site would be demolished, as would the existing two storey Administration block which lies towards the Chapel Lane boundary, the single storey Teaching block which sits centrally within the site, and the various temporary mobile classrooms on the site.
12. The demolition would be carried out in phases to allow the school to continue operating from the site whilst the redevelopment takes place. Initially the school would occupy the southern part of the site (teaching block and 5 mobile classrooms) whilst the administration block and extensions to Portal House were demolished. During this phase construction traffic would use the northern entry road, and school traffic would use the shared southern access road with the primary school. The school and contractors would then swap once the classroom extension had been constructed to allow the remainder of the temporary buildings to be removed and the gymnasium extension to be constructed.
13. The teaching block extension would be three storey in height, connected to the retained Portal House building by an off white rendered flat roof link for the upper floors and a single storey brick link at ground floor. The 3 storey extension would be constructed with a textured light cream brick at ground floor level and then have vertically arranged rainscreen cladding to the upper two floors. The extension would have a pitched roof of slate grey tiles, which would have a hipped design at the Portal House end, pitching away from the retained Portal House and reflecting the roof design of this building, but with a gable end feature to the north-east. It would be a dual pitched roof with a valley gutter in the middle, which would allow the ridge height of the roof on this extension to be 100mm lower than the ridge height of Portal House.
14. The first and second floors would over-sail the ground floor footprint, and at the front of the building this would be accentuated with smooth finished concrete columns. There would also be glazed curtain walling at ground floor level to the front elevation to give a focus to the proposed new main entrance to the school. The rain screen cladding to the upper floors would be punctuated by vertical inset panels of a darker brown colour, and double glazed windows set with a vertical pattern within dark grey frames. A similar arrangement of windows and inset panels would be used on the gable end feature, with the inset panels being slightly higher to give a proportionate detail to the increased ridge height.
15. The gymnasium extension would project out from the end of the new teaching block towards the south-east and would utilise the fall in levels across the site. It would extend out from the ground floor element, constructed in the same proposed light coloured brick, and have a flat roof with profiled flashing in dark grey to match the window and door details. The flat roof allows for the positioning of photovoltaic panels in this location. Windows would be provided on both long elevations of the gymnasium, providing natural light to the gym and breaking up the expanse of brickwork.
16. Externally the area between the teaching block extension and the gymnasium would be

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terraced and a footpath linking the pupil entrance to the hard surfaced playgrounds provided, whilst more natural grass levels would be left to the south, where the site meets Sea Street. The hard surfaced area would provide space for a 5-a-side football pitch and a basketball court, and would also double as the drop off and collection point for the taxis at the beginning and end of each day.

17. Access to the site would continue to use the same approach as the school currently use. The entrance for vehicles would be by the retained Portal House and vehicles would travel through the site and exit using the shared access road with the Primary School. This shared part of the road would be widened and straightened so that it would be just over 7m wide towards the Sea Street end, and this would allow better visibility splays to be provided.
18. The area adjacent to Chapel Lane (where the existing administration block is located) would be laid out for staff and visitor parking and further staff parking would be created along the northern side of the proposed gymnasium, in a shallow echelon pattern, to allow easy access and egress. In total 38 car spaces would be provided on site (this number includes 2 enlarged spaces and 2 for disabled motorists), plus an additional 4 spaces would be provided for minibus parking, which would be located towards the exit of the through road, by the playground. The access road through the site is wide enough to accommodate delivery vehicles and large fire tenders (demonstrated through swept path diagrams).
19. A secure fence line would be created around the on-site amenity space, linking the retained Portal House and the new gymnasium by running along the perimeter of Sea Street, the southern access road, and back along the hard playing courts. The existing fence would be retained and the areas where the secure line is currently incomplete fitted with new fencing. Along the Sea Street edge this would be a small section in length only.
20. In terms of facilities being provided, the gymnasium would have a main hall, a small fitness suite, two pupil changing rooms and a staff changing room, plus access for the stairwell and lift all at a lower ground floor level. The ground floor level accommodation would be used for the school reception, offices for the head teacher, finance staff, staff room, plant room, meeting rooms, and vocational training rooms all accommodated in the new build, whilst the retained Portal House would accommodate the dining hall and kitchens, Senco rooms and smaller time out/exclusion rooms. At first floor level Portal House would accommodate the art rooms and design and technology room, whilst the extension would provide 5 classrooms, a music room and the library. On the second floor there would be a further 5 classrooms, a science laboratory, and food technology room in the new extension and Portal House would be used for the 'Gold Room' (a room used by pupils as a reward for good behaviour), server room and exam office. Two staircases for access to the upper floors would be provided, one at each end of the building, and the lift access would be located at the gymnasium end.

Planning Policy

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

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- (i) **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** March 2012 and the **National Planning Policy Guidance** (March 2014), 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;
- To recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance, and put them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the historic environment
- That great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- 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.
- That access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation are important in their contribution to health and well-being, and therefore that existing open space, sports and recreation facilities should not be built on unless the loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality.

- (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.

- (ii) **Dover District Council Core Strategy (2010)**

Policy CP1 Settlement Hierarchy: The location and scale of development in the District must comply with the settlement hierarchy. The hierarchy should also be used by infrastructure providers to inform decisions about the provision of their services. Villages (St Margaret's is defined as one) provide a tertiary focus for development in the rural area;

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suitable for a scale of development that would reinforce its role as a provider of services to essentially its home community.

Policy CP5 Sustainable Construction Standards: New non-residential development over 1,000 square metres gross floorspace permitted after adoption of the strategy should meet BREEAM very good standards (or any future equivalent). Where it can be demonstrated that a development is unable to meet these standards, permission will only be granted if the applicant makes provision for compensatory energy and water savings elsewhere in the District. For developments of 1,000 square metres or less gross floorspace, the Council will encourage proposals to incorporate energy and water efficiency measures.

Policy DM11 Location of Development and Managing Travel Demand: Planning applications for development that would increase travel demand should be supported by a systematic assessment to quantify the amount and type of travel likely to be generated and include measures that satisfy demand to maximize walking, cycling and the use of public transport.

Policy DM13 Parking Provision: Provision for parking should be a design-led process based upon characteristics of the site, the locality, the nature of the proposed development and its design objectives. Provision for non-residential development should be informed by Kent County Council Guidance SPG4 (Kent Vehicle Parking Standards, July 2006 which allows for a maximum provision of 1 space per member of staff plus 10%), or any successor.

Policy DM16 Landscape Character: Development that would harm the character of the landscape, as identified through the process of landscape character assessment will only be permitted if (i) it is in accordance with allocations made in Development Plan Documents and incorporates any necessary avoidance and mitigation measures; or (ii) it can be sited to avoid to reduce the harm and/or incorporate design measures to mitigate the impacts to an acceptable level.

Policy DM17 Groundwater Source Protection: Within Groundwater Source Protection Zones the policy sets out what would and would not be allowed in order to safeguard against possible contamination.

Consultations

22. **Dover District Council** states that whilst the proposal is a significant improvement on the previous scheme, and the original part of Portal House is being retained, they consider the proposal to be unacceptable due to the design of the extension (in particular the roof design, cladding system, eaves detail and windows) which they consider fails to respect the design and significance of the non-designated heritage asset (Portal House), the setting of the adjacent Conservation Area and therefore wider views including those within and across the AONB. In addition they state that the

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security fence along Sea Street would detract from the character and appearance of Portal House, the openness of Sea Street and affect the setting of the nearby listed Curfew Cottage. However, they provide a list of conditions which they would wish to see imposed should KCC be minded to approve the application.

St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Parish Council raises no objection to the building but have concerns over the lack of parking for staff (34 spaces for 50 staff). They also comment that where the security fencing for the perimeter abuts both the Conservation Area and the AONB the design should be appropriate for a rural setting.

School Travel Planner notes that a draft Travel Plan has been submitted in support of the application, and that the school intend to use the Jambusters website to update their travel plan.

Biodiversity Officer has reviewed the ecological information submitted and states that there is limited potential for protected/notable species or habitats to be present within the proposed development site.

Conservation Officer advises that she is very pleased to see the original Portal House is to be kept and refurbished as part of the proposal. The assessment of the impact on the Conservation Area adequately reflects the situation and overall the concept and proportions are acceptable with the new modern building sitting alongside the classical Portal House. The footprint and fenestration pattern are acceptable, but suggests the ridge height of the extension should be slightly lower so that the extension appears subservient to Portal House and suggests the elevational treatment still appears a little 'industrial' against the classical Portal House. Repairs to the original Portal House should be 'like for like' as far as possible.

County Archaeological Officer raises no objection to the application subject to the imposition of a condition securing a programme of archaeological field evaluation work and one for a programme of building recording to ensure that any archaeological interest in the retained Portal House is appropriately preserved and where change is accepted, recorded.

Environment Agency (Kent Area) raises no objection subject to the imposition of a condition requiring details to be submitted for the flood resistance and resilience measures set out in the Flood Risk Assessment.

Landscape Officer supports the design of this scheme. New planting should be agreed through conditions and should be of local provenance, native and appropriate species. Trees to be retained should be properly protected during construction. Also comments that the Visual Impact Assessment provides a useful assessment of the impacts of the proposal and they are not concerned about the impacts upon the AONB or its setting.

Sustainable Drainage Team states that given the site overlies a relatively permeable geological formation and has historically drained via soakaway, they are satisfied with the applicants proposed means of surface water management. However they recommend the imposition of two conditions should permission be given which ensure that site-specific conditions and any unforeseen problems are fully considered at the detailed design stage.

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Highways and Transportation Officer raises no objection to the proposal subject to the imposition of conditions regarding the submission of a Construction Management Plan; provision of the improvements to the access prior to occupation; the provision and permanent retention of the vehicle parking spaces, cycle parking, and loading and turning facilities prior to occupation; and the availability of the on-site parking for community uses of the site.

Local Member

23. The local County Member, Mr Steve Manion, was notified of the application on 27th October 2015.

Publicity

24. The application was publicised by the posting of two site notices, an advertisement in a local newspaper (Dover Mercury) on 5th November 2015, and the individual notification of 85 residential properties. 52 of these letters were sent to notify objectors to the previous scheme that the old application was being withdrawn and this current one submitted, and a further 33 were sent to properties close to the site who had not previously commented.

Representations

25. In response to the publicity, two letters of representation have been received, one in support and one raising objections. The key points raised can be summarised as follows:

Support:

- The Council has responded well to comments raised following its previous application and the more recent public awareness displays and positively addressed these issues.
- The supporting information is most comprehensive.

Objection:

- Although an improvement in design it does not alter the fact that the access and egress are via the narrowest part of a busy road which has no pavements, and has houses along it which do not benefit from any defence from traffic.
- Children's parents parking at school drop off and collection times makes travelling through the village nearly impossible.
- Portal House was unsuitable as an old people's home and offers poor facilities for a school.
- Even with refurbishment the site is too small for the numbers to be admitted.
- The school would be better suited in an area closer to the homes of the children who attend to avoid long taxi rides to school.

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Discussion

26. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 21 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. This application is being reported for determination by Members of the Planning Applications Committee following the concerns raised by Dover District Council and the Parish Council and the one objection letter received. In my view the main issues to consider are the principle of demolishing the extensions to the original Portal House and the retention and refurbishment of the original part of the building; the size, design and appearance of the extension in relation to the retained Portal House; the impact of the extension on the adjoining Conservation Area and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the impact of the extension on the residential amenity of occupiers of nearby properties; and the highway and parking implications arising from the development and the school expansion. Other matters to consider relate to landscape, construction management, archaeology, drainage, flooding and sustainability.

Principle of retaining and refurbishing Portal House

27. Portal House is an imposing building occupying a prominent position in the village of St Margaret's at Cliffe, highly visible when travelling through the village on Sea Street. Strong objections were raised during the 2014 application when it was proposed to demolish the existing school completely and replace it with an entirely new building. Although not listed, the building is described as a 'non-designated heritage asset', of local significance and making a positive contribution to the setting of the adjoining Conservation Area. There were overwhelming concerns raised about its potential loss which the applicants have listened to and taken on board, and changed their approach to the redevelopment of the school on this site. The current scheme now proposes to remove only the later additions to the original building, and create a new extension which would provide purpose built facilities for the school to use.
28. The earlier application had proposed to demolish the whole school and replace it with a new build because the existing facilities are not fit for use as a school. The internal layout with lots of corridors and small rooms makes the existing Portal House unsuitable for use as an education facility and has meant that most of the teaching currently takes place in the mobile classrooms and single storey teaching block. As a result parts of the existing Portal House have become dilapidated and unusable. However, it is clear that there was strong objection to the loss of the original Portal House, so that the application was withdrawn and a redesign was undertaken. The applicants have spent a considerable time consulting with local residents, carrying out public meetings, presentations to the Parish Council, and open evenings at the school to display the proposed new designs. The submitted Statement of Community Involvement sets out all the work undertaken.
29. It is clear that the principle of retaining the original element of Portal House has been met favourably by all parties, and subject to the repairs being carried out in a

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sympathetic manner to preserve the heritage asset, as requested by the Conservation Officer, it is considered that this element of the proposal is acceptable. In particular, the only parts of Portal House now proposed to be lost would be the more recent and more unsightly extensions that currently detract from the original elevations.

Design, appearance and siting

30. The key to creating an acceptable overall development for this site has been determining the design of the extension to Portal House and the manner in which it is linked to the original building, so that it provides the school with the appropriate amount of accommodation and facilities they need as well as being of an acceptable design, in terms of its relationship to Portal House and its impact on the surrounding area and wider landscape designations.
31. The applicants have designed the extension in order to be sympathetic to and take its cues from the retained Portal House. The floor, window, ridge and eaves heights in the new extension would all be aligned with those in Portal House in order to ensure the extension complements the proportions of Portal House. Using these specific floor-to-ceiling heights rather than minimum ones, and designing this in conjunction with the floor plans has been an intrinsic part of the design process.
32. The roof has also been designed to reflect Portal House and at the end where the two buildings are linked the roof would have a hipped design, pitching away from Portal House, and mimicking its design. At the other end of the extension, where the building would be read more on its own, the end has been designed with a gabled feature to provide a focus for this elevation, and the window and inset panel details on this end wall are staggered to complement the rising height of the two ridge details. The extension would have a slightly lower ridge height to ensure the extension is 'subservient' to the original building it would sit alongside (this addressing the earlier concerns of the Conservation Officer). The Conservation Officer has noted that the concept and proportions of the new modern building would be acceptable alongside the classical Portal House.
33. The glazed walling along the front ground floor elevation would give a clear and legible focus for the new school entrance, and the off-white rendered link building would provide a subtle and unobtrusive means of linking the new and old. The use of the on-site topography to accommodate the gymnasium element would ensure that this part of the scheme would not overwhelm or compete with the retained Portal House or the new extension, and would not be seen from long range views.
34. Trying to replicate the ornate facades of Portal House would be inappropriate on a modern extension, therefore the design aims to interpret rather than copy the details. The vertical arrangement of the windows allows them to be repeated along the façade, and would assist in reducing the horizontal emphasis of the linear building. In addition to the windows, vertical recesses are proposed in the upper sections, which would add shadow and relief to the façade, reduce areas of blank wall, and would also be used as part of the natural ventilation system.
35. The eaves of the extension would not overhang in the same manner as Portal House, and would have a hidden guttering system, which removes the need for external

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drainpipes. This is a feature deliberately 'designed in' for a school such as this, where walls should not be easy to climb by pupils. The need for a secure area on site in the new development is paramount for the pupils, and something that the existing school site lacks. The school grounds would be enclosed by fencing running from the end of the gymnasium, round the perimeter of the grounds to the south-east and back along Sea Street to join up with the original Portal House. The front entrance of the proposed school would be the public space for visitors and staff. There is an existing steel sentry fence that runs along most of the perimeter with Sea Street, and in parts an existing brick wall. The security fence would need to be extended by approximately 2.5m in length along this boundary to then return into the site to meet Portal House. This return section would also include an access gate, as shown on this additional plan submitted by the applicants. Although Dover District Council have raised concerns about the height and location of the fence along this boundary and its possible impact on Curfew Cottage, it is my view that this small section would have no greater impact on the appearance of this part of Sea Street than the existing fence, which would be retained, and it would in part be obscured by the retained vegetation along here. A see-through weldmesh style fence is proposed, and would be appropriate, in my opinion, and provide the necessary security for pupils that are required. Dover District Council had requested a condition be imposed to secure the painting of the existing fence to an agreed colour, however as this is an existing fence which is not being altered by the application, it would be more appropriate to include this request as an advisory informative.

36. The materials proposed have been chosen to complement the stark white render of Portal House, and uses natural colours based on local materials found in the surrounding area. A light textured brick would be used at ground floor level, and the upper floors clad in light-brown timber effect rainscreen cladding, with darker brown recesses. Whilst the window frames are proposed in a dark grey throughout, the aluminium surrounds to the vertical recesses would be coloured blue to reflect the blue eaves of the existing Portal House. A slate grey tile is proposed for the roof, to match the appearance of Portal House.
37. The redevelopment of the site in this manner would allow all of the smaller mobile units and buildings on site to be removed, which would not only result in the site being less cluttered with structures, but provide an enhanced on-site environment for the pupils, providing external spaces for teaching and recreation which are currently lacking.
38. There have been objections raised by Dover District Council regarding the design of the extension and material choices, and indeed the Conservation Officer has also queried the 'industrial appearance' of the extension against the classical Portal House, suggesting that the materials may overpower the white render of Portal House, and that perhaps a rendered finish should be used for the proposed extension with coloured inset panels. Much discussion has taken place regarding both the design and materials since the first redevelopment application was submitted in 2014. At this time the proposed new school was shown as a three storey white rendered building, and setting aside the concerns over the loss of Portal House at that time, a large number of objections were also received in relation to the use of white render and the stark appearance it would have in this locality. The applicants have worked through various design options to achieve a solution which they consider would not detract from or overpower the setting and appearance of Portal House, as a non-designated heritage asset. They believe that by using alternative and complementary materials, the original building would be able to

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stand out on its own, and it is also considered that the lack of significant numbers of new objections to this current scheme suggests that the design is considered acceptable by many in the locality.

Visual Image of previously submitted scheme in 2014



Current application visual image



39. The design of a building can be a subjective matter and in this instance we differ in our view as to the acceptability of the scheme from Dover District Council. The development on this site has come a long way since the 2014 application, which sought to knock down all the buildings on the site and start again from scratch. With the cooperation of the applicants, and by listening to the concerns raised through objection letters previously received we are now in a position where the non-designated heritage asset of Portal House is being retained and refurbished, and combined with a modern extension on this established education site to provide the school with the appropriate facilities they need to educate the pupils who attend. It is my view therefore that the scheme would be acceptable and accord with the design guidance given in the NPPF, the guidance relating to the conservation of the historic environment and conserving and enhancing the natural environment in the NPPF, and the Planning for Schools Development Policy Statement.

Impact on wider landscape area

40. In support of this current application the applicants have undertaken a detailed analysis of the heritage assets of not only Portal House School, but also the nearby listed building of Curfew Cottage and the adjoining Conservation Area for St Margaret's at Cliffe. They have also submitted a Visual Impact Assessment following the guidelines published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.
41. Although outside the Conservation Area it is considered that the Portal House school site forms part of the wider setting of the Conservation Area, and in particular the southern most section of it along Chapel Lane and the bottom end of the High Street at the junction with Sea Street. Given that the proposed development would retain the most prominent and architecturally important part of Portal House along Sea Street, and that the extension would be set away from the road frontage and be of a similar height and scale to Portal House, it is considered that from the Sea Street vantage point the impact on the Conservation Area would be limited and acceptable.

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42. The new extension would be more visible from the Chapel Lane part of the Conservation Area, but again it would be located within the school site, constructed with sympathetic and unobtrusive materials, and would in part be screened by the existing landscaping. It is proposed to enhance this landscaping as part of the development, which would further protect the sensitive views. In addition the demolition of the unsightly administration block would help improve the setting of the Conservation Area in this location. In considering the application the Conservation Officer stated that in her view the assessment of the impact on the Conservation Area adequately reflects the situation.
43. It is also considered that the impact of the development on the nearby listed building Curfew Cottage would be negligible. The proposed three storey extension would be located behind the retained Portal House when viewed from this property and the gymnasium located well within the site, away from the Sea Street boundary. Furthermore the Sea Street boundary has an established tree and shrub boundary, which would be retained. The removal of the mobile classrooms currently sited along this boundary would help improve the outlook of the properties facing the site along Sea Street and would allow glimpsed views of the proposed landscaped grass area instead. It is considered that the proposed development would sustain and enhance the heritage asset of Portal House, providing it with a viable and practical use and making a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area, in accordance with the guidance contained in section 12 of the NPPF.
44. The Visual Impact Assessment started with a desktop analysis of the topography and landform of the surrounding area to pinpoint the most sensitive long distance views of the site, and 14 viewpoints were selected. The assessment considered the sensitivity of each view and the effects of the development upon its visual amenity, providing photographs of each view, and visualisations of the development in those instances where it was considered to be prominent. Viewpoints included the High Street, the entrance to the site, Curfew Cottage, Chapel Lane and vantage points within the AONB, from public footpaths. Ten of the 14 views were assessed as being 'impacted a negligible amount' by the development – negligible indicating that the resulting change would be indiscernible. This included one view from the AONB and also the view from Curfew Cottage. The view from the adjoining Primary School was considered minor, and those with major to moderate impacts were views from Chapel Lane, the entrance to the site, and from Downside. In the case of views from the entrance and Chapel Lane, the Visual Impact Assessment states that as detracting elements are removed (i.e. the existing extensions and ancillary buildings on site) and improvements can be made from a landscape perspective the 'impact' is reduced from major to moderate. From the vantage point of Downside, the site can be viewed across the intervening arable land and part of the upper storeys of the extension would be visible amongst the backdrop of trees on the horizon. Whilst the extension would be partially visible, it is considered that this would not in itself be harmful and future planting of trees along the primary school boundary would also help screen the proposal and help reduce its impact.
45. This assessment of the impact of the development from the most sensitive long range views, specifically including those from the AONB, was considered by the Kent County Council's Landscape Officer who advised that they had no concerns about the impact the development would have on the AONB or its setting. Although the resulting impact of the design of the extension on views within and across the AONB was raised as part

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of the objections received from Dover District Council, it is considered that the Visual Impact Assessment demonstrates that such an impact would be almost indiscernible. It is considered that the submitted scheme has given significant weight to ensuring the landscape of the AONB is adequately protected in accordance with the guidance stated in section 11 of the NPPF.

Impact on residential amenity

46. The Portal House site has residential development to both the south-west and north of the site. The properties on Sea Street (facing the school site) front directly onto the road and include the listed building 'Curfew Cottage'. From this orientation the proposed extension would be located away from the neighbouring properties, with the three storey extension projecting to the north behind the retained Portal House. The gymnasium extension would be sited centrally within the school grounds, and due to the way it uses the change in levels across the site and the flat roof design, would have little impact on the Sea Street properties, especially given the existing level of screening along the road boundary which would be retained. The removal of the older mobile units which are currently sited along this Sea Street boundary would further improve the outlook of residents in these properties as it is considered the site would be less cluttered with temporary buildings.
47. The residential properties to the north are sited around Chapel Lane and views into the site across the proposed staff car park towards the extension would be possible. Currently the two storey administration building is in this location and it is considered that the removal of this building right on the boundary of the site would improve the outlook of the properties on the northern side of Chapel Lane. The three storey extension would be sited well within the site and would not be in a position where it would be considered in any way overbearing or in a position where it would cause overshadowing to the neighbouring properties.
48. Given that it is considered the design of the extension is acceptable and would not be detrimental to either the retained Portal House or the wider landscape area, it is also considered that the extension would not result in any overriding harm to the outlook of properties in this part of the village. It would simply provide a different outlook to that which they currently have.

Parking and transport related issues

49. The application was supported by the submission of a Transport Assessment, and has been considered by the County Council's Highways and Transportation Officer. The requirement for additional Special Educational Needs (SEN) school places was set out in the Kent Education Commissioning Plan 2015-2019. The plan identified an increase in demand specifically for pupils with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Needs (BESN), and specified that Portal House would need to increase its capacity by 20 places in order to accommodate this increased need. The pupil numbers would therefore increase from 60 pupils to a maximum of 80, and staff numbers increased in line with pupil numbers from 36 to as many as 50.
50. The Highways Officer has stated that the number of additional vehicle movements anticipated would be 10 in the morning peak hour and 14 in the school afternoon peak

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hour, which he considers would be unlikely to have a significant impact on the highway. It is considered that the movements associated with the staff are likely to take place before and after the busiest times when children are being dropped off and picked up at both Portal House and the adjacent Primary School. Furthermore the start and finish times of the two schools are also different and this again means that the movements associated with taxis dropping off and collecting children at Portal House would generally take place outside the busiest times for the adjacent primary school.

51. The existing system for dropping off and picking up pupils within the school would be maintained – this being that taxis would enter the site at the main entrance, drive round the school and enter the playground to drop off the children, then exiting the site by using the shared access road with the primary school – and this system is considered to be acceptable. There would be parking provided on site for both staff and visitors. In total there would be 42 parking spaces, which would include 2 spaces for 'blue badge' mobility impaired drivers, 4 minibus spaces, 2 enlarged bays with no designation, 3 visitor spaces and 31 staff spaces. The parking provision proposed has been evaluated against the Kent Vehicle Parking Standards 2006. There is no specific requirement stipulated for a special needs school, therefore the standards for primary and secondary schools have been applied, and the proposed parking would meet these requirements. The on-site parking provision would need to be made available for the community use of the facilities outside of school hours (should this materialise), and this could be secured by a suitably worded condition.
52. Two cycle stores are proposed on site. The existing one located by the proposed car park alongside Chapel Lane stores school owned bicycles which are used for supervised lessons. As none of the students cycle to school there is no requirement for them to have access to this store. A new secure locker for cycles is proposed alongside the main entrance to the site, and this would provide space for 5 bikes for staff and visitors to use, a number which is in line with existing and forecast demand for cycle parking.
53. The road that is shared with the primary school would be widened and straightened at the end where it meets Sea Street to just over 7m wide, compared to the existing 5m at the narrowest point. This would improve the flow of two cars passing each other along here, and appropriate visibility splays would be provided.
54. The one letter of objection received raised concerns about traffic through the village and the impact this proposal would have. Given that the children at Portal House are brought to school by taxis, which enter the site to drop the children off, it is unlikely that the 'parents parking' the objector refers to relates to children attending this school, but more likely to the neighbouring primary school. Should the application be approved, the agent has confirmed that during construction all staff parking would be accommodated at an external location and the staff transported to and from their vehicles by school minibus at the start and end of each day, and that this would continue through all stages of construction or until sufficient parking is available on site. The taxi drop off for pupils would continue throughout the construction process.
55. The Highways and Transportation Officer has asked for conditions to be imposed on any consent given to ensure the improvements to the existing access are completed prior to occupation; the on-site vehicle and cycle parking and pupil drop off/pick-up area

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is provided prior to occupation and permanently retained; and the provision and permanent retention of the vehicle loading/unloading and turning facilities. In addition a condition requiring the school to update their School Travel Plan should be imposed via the Jambusters system to encourage travel to the school by alternative means, in particular aimed at staff given that children are brought to school by taxi. Subject to these conditions, no objection to the scheme has been raised based on the impact of the development on the highway and likely traffic generated, and the scheme is therefore considered to accord with Policies DM11 and DM13 of the Dover District Council Core Strategy.

Other Matters

Landscape

56. An Arboricultural Method Statement was submitted, alongside a Tree Protection Plan, which indicates which trees would need to be removed to facilitate the development and the new parking area, areas requiring root protection barriers, trunk protection or temporary ground protection. In total 14 trees would be removed from the site, the most noticeable being the Scots Pine from alongside the existing Portal House extensions and the Birch in front of the current administration building. These 2 are required to be removed to accommodate the new development, whilst the remaining ones would be removed due to their 'U' category (defined as trees with any existing value that would be lost within 10 years). In mitigation for the removal of these trees and to maintain the landscape character on site, 24 new trees are proposed to be planted, mainly around the boundary of the proposed car park by Chapel Lane/the primary school and by the entrance to the school alongside Portal House. The Landscape Officer considers a condition should be imposed to ensure these are of local provenance, native and locally appropriate species, but otherwise no objection is raised to the trees works proposed.
57. The general landscaping of the site would include the grassed terracing alongside the proposed gymnasium and the natural grassed area to the south of Portal House along Sea Street. The landscape plan also indicates hard surfacing materials for the areas surrounding the school and a separate lighting plan has been submitted showing the proposed location of new lights and those already on site which would be retained. It is considered that conditions could be imposed to secure the finer details of both the landscape and lighting schemes to ensure the finished development was acceptable.

Construction Management

58. 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).
59. A condition requiring the submission of a Demolition/Construction Management Plan, prior to commencement of development is considered appropriate, to include the routing of delivery/construction vehicles between the site and the A258, and within the site; the timing of deliveries (restricted to avoid peak school times); the details of off-site temporary staff parking and associated transfer arrangements; details of pupil drop off and pick up arrangements; parking and turning for delivery vehicles and site personnel;

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and wheel cleaning facilities.

Archaeology

60. A Heritage Statement, prepared by Canterbury Archaeological Trust, was submitted in support of the planning application, which considered the different heritage assets that may be affected by the proposed development, including archaeological interest. The Portal House site lies in an area that is rich in archaeological remains, particularly of later prehistoric and Anglo-Saxon date. Kent County Council's Archaeological Officer agrees with the findings of the statement that the site lies in a busy prehistoric landscape and that there is a 'moderate to high' potential for prehistoric remains, and the sites potential for early medieval remains is 'moderate'. In order to inform the need for any archaeological safeguarding or mitigation measures that might be appropriate a condition is proposed to secure a programme of archaeological evaluation.
61. Furthermore the Archaeological Officer suggests that a condition should also be imposed for a programme of building recording so that any archaeological interest found in Portal House itself can be appropriately preserved, or where change is accepted, recorded.

Drainage and flooding

62. Given the site's size a full Flood Risk Assessment was not required, and the site has been shown to be in an area not liable to flooding. Drainage layout plans were submitted illustrating the proposed drainage strategy for the site, which would include a number of soakaways to deal with surface water run-off. The Council's Flood Risk Project Officer has considered the details submitted and confirmed that given this site overlies a relatively permeable geological formation and has historically drained via soakaway, that they are satisfied with the proposed means of surface water management. They suggest the inclusion of two conditions, however, to ensure that any site specific conditions and any unforeseen problems are fully considered at the detailed design stage.

Contamination

63. The application was supported by the submission of a ground investigation desk study assessing the historic and current potential sources of contamination on site. The report found the site to be low risk, but recommended further site investigation to determine the risks of any potential contamination that may have occurred due to the presence of an historical oil tank on site and a petrol station, garages and substation in the surrounding 250m. Conditions are proposed to address this which would meet with the request of Dover District Council that further investigation work, and any remediation found to be necessary, be secured by condition.
64. The Environment Agency was consulted on the application, and commented that they would classify this site as low risk and wouldn't normally comment. However, they did provide a detailed response to the submission in November 2014 and confirmed that this advice could be used to inform our decision making. This suggested the need for a condition to ensure that if contamination not previously identified was found, a remediation strategy be agreed with the County Council, and a further condition

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ensuring that no infiltration of the surface water drainage into the ground be permitted other than with the express consent of the county planning Authority.

65. Subject to these conditions the scheme would be considered acceptable and in accordance with the guidance in the NPPF and Policy DM17 of the Dover Core Strategy.

Sustainability

66. The NPPF places a presumption in favour of development that is sustainable and at the local level Dover District Council planning policies support the incorporation of sustainability measures. Furthermore St Margaret's at Cliffe is committed to becoming a carbon-neutral village. The Planning Statement (section 6.7) states that the scheme aims to significantly improve the sustainability performance by minimising energy consumption through passive design - maximising daylight whilst minimising unwanted solar gain, employing high efficiency plant and distribution services to cut carbon emission, and through water conservation. However they state that the proposed development is limited in achieving carbon-neutral status by the retention of the original Portal House building.
67. Policy CP5 of the Dover Core Strategy states that the new floorspace should meet BREEAM Very Good standard, and Dover District Council have stated in their consultee response that if KCC are minded to grant the application a condition should be imposed requiring the applicants to demonstrate that this level has been achieved. The agent has stated that Kent County Council does not undertake BREEAM assessments, but that they do work within the 'spirit' of BREEAM by working to the same environmental standards but without diverting funds away from the end development itself, to the costly assessment rating process. This is a Basic Need project with a limited source of funding from central Government, and the applicants state that the impact of having to demonstrate BREEAM would divert funds away from and undermine the main objective of providing much needed SEN school places. Furthermore it should be noted that other Basic Need projects approved recently, have met the BREEAM Very Good standard without the formal assessment.
68. Although no renewable energy provision is required to meet the current regulations, some photovoltaic panels are proposed to be included on the gymnasium roof (in recognition of the need to think about the future) and these could provide some additional renewable energy directly for the running of the school
69. Therefore, whilst the scheme would not meet the specific criteria of Policy CP5 of the Dover Core Strategy it is considered to comply with the aims of it and in this instance is considered to be wholly acceptable. On this basis it would not be sensible to impose the condition suggested by Dover District Council as it would be unnecessary and strictly unworkable.

Ecology

70. The applicants submitted an Ecological Survey in support of the application which considered matters of biodiversity on site and the implications of the proposed development on protected species and habitats. The Council's Biodiversity Officer has

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considered the plans and supporting information and concludes that she is satisfied that there is limited potential for protected/notable species or habitats to be present within the proposed development site. Although the site has limited potential to be used by roosting bats, it is likely that it will be used by foraging and commuting bats. Lighting can be detrimental to these bats, therefore the lighting plan should be designed to be sensitive towards bats and therefore an informative is suggested that directs the applicants to the Bat Conservation Trust's guidance for lighting and bats in the UK.

71. The ecological survey also made recommendations for enhancing the biodiversity on the site. They include the creation of wild meadow grassland strips to benefit honey bees and other insects and the inclusion of bat and bird boxes in trees across the site. It is recommended that these are secured via condition.

Noise Impact

72. A Noise Impact Assessment has been produced on behalf of the applicants to assess the acoustic impact of the proposed development on nearby residential properties. Existing day time noise levels were measured to provide a baseline and the noise from fixed plant and equipment assessed against the criteria used on other education schemes. The noise from playgrounds and traffic were also assessed. Limits for noise emitted from fixed plant and equipment are proposed so that appropriate levels of noise are achieved when assessed against the British Standard (BS 4142:2014). Noise from breakout teaching activities, playground noise and additional cars are all shown to be insignificant and less than 3dB. An increase in 3dB is normally taken to be the smallest audible increase detectable by the human ear. Given this, it is considered that the development would not have a detrimental impact on the closest residential properties with regard to noise. In light of this it would not seem appropriate to impose a noise mitigation condition, as suggested by Dover District Council.

Conclusion

73. In my view the key determining factors for this proposal are the appropriateness of the design and site layout for the extension to the retained Portal House; the suitability of the highway network to accommodate the additional school traffic; the likelihood of adverse impacts on neighbouring residential amenity; and the likelihood of any impact on the wider landscape designations and Conservation Area.
74. There is strong Government support in the NPPF for the development of new schools to ensure that there is sufficient provision to meet growing demand, increased choice and raised educational standards, subject to being satisfied on local amenity and all other material considerations, such as highway matters, design, noise, flooding and surface drainage. In my view the proposed development would not give rise to any significant and demonstrable harm in any of these respects, as far as planning, environmental and amenity aspects are concerned. The scheme allows for the retention and refurbishment of a currently dilapidated heritage building which would bring it back into meaningful use, whilst extending it in a manner I consider appropriate in both scale and design in order to achieve a much improved educational facility.
75. It is considered that subject to the imposition of appropriate planning conditions, the proposal would not have any significantly detrimental effects on the local highway

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network, the amenities of local residents or the wider landscape and heritage setting. In my view the development is sustainable and there are no material planning considerations that indicate that the conclusion should be made otherwise. However, I recommend that various conditions be placed on any planning permission, including those outlined below.

Recommendation

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

- the standard 5 year time limit;
- the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
- the submission and written approval of details of all construction materials to be used externally
- the submission and written approval of details of materials, replacement windows and alterations involved in the refurbishment of Portal House to ensure it retains its special character and appearance
- the submission of a School Travel Plan within 6 months of occupation of the new school and its ongoing review;
- 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;
- the submission of a Construction Management Plan, to include amongst other things the details of routing of delivery/construction vehicles between the site and the A258, and within the site, the timing of deliveries to avoid school peak times, details of off-site temporary staff parking and associated transfer arrangements, details of pupil drop off/pick-up arrangements, parking and turning areas for delivery vehicles;
- The completion of the proposed access improvements prior to the occupation of the school;
- The provision of the on-site parking areas prior to occupation of the school and their retention thereafter;
- the provision of cycle parking prior to the occupation of the school, and their retention thereafter;
- the provision and permanent retention of the vehicle loading/unloading and turning facilities prior to occupation;
- use of the on-site parking facilities for any future community use outside of school hours;
- the submission of a detailed external lighting design strategy to be approved in writing prior to occupation of the school
- no floodlighting to be erected at the site without the written consent of the County Planning Authority;
- the submission of a scheme and its approval in writing covering a preliminary risk assessment of the nature and extent of any contamination and whether it originates from the site and an assessment of the potential risk to human health, property, adjoining land, ground water, surface water, ecological systems and an appraisal of remedial option; any remediation deemed necessary and the submission of a verification report
- if contamination found on site that was not previously identified, that development be

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- stopped until a remediation strategy agreed and implemented;
- no infiltration of surface water drainage into the ground be permitted other than with the express written permission of the County Planning Authority;
 - the submission of a fully detailed sustainable surface water drainage scheme for the site and the written approval of such a scheme and its ongoing maintenance;
 - the implementation of archaeological field evaluation work in accordance with a specification and written timetable to be approved by the County Planning Authority, and the preservation in situ of important archaeological remains;
 - the implementation of a programme of building recording in accordance with a specification and written timetable to be approved by the County Planning Authority;
 - the recommendations for ecological enhancements detailed in chapter 8 of the Extended Phase 1 Ecological Habitat Survey report be implemented
 - the submission of a native species landscape scheme, including tree planting (species and location) and details of a maintenance scheme for such landscaping
 - should any of the retained or new planting die, be removed or become damaged or diseased within 5 years of planting, that it be replaced with plants of a similar size and species;
 - the development shall be carried out to avoid damage to existing trees to be retained, and these shall be protected in accordance with the measures set out in the Arboricultural Method Statement.

77. I FURTHER RECOMMEND that the following INFORMATIVES be added:

- The registering with Kent County Council of the School Travel Plan through the "Jambusters" website following the link <http://www.jambusterstpms.co.uk>;
- That the applicant ensures that all necessary highway approvals and consents are obtained.
- That the applicant is aware that separate approval is required for any works in the highway
- To ensure that works to trees are carried out outside of the breeding bird season and if this is not possible that an ecologist examine the site prior to works commencing
- That the applicant adheres to the Bat Conservation Trust's *Bats and Lighting in the UK* guidance
- That the applicant be advised it would be preferable for the existing fence along Sea Street be painted to enhance its appearance.

Case Officer: Helen Edwards	Tel. no: 03000 413366
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Background Documents: see section heading
