

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 13th July 2016.

Application by Kent County Council Property & Infrastructure Support for a two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE and the remodelling of the car park area at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent, ME15 6TL – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Members: Dan Daley and Robert Bird

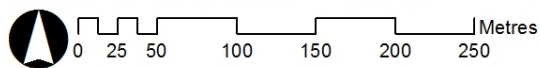
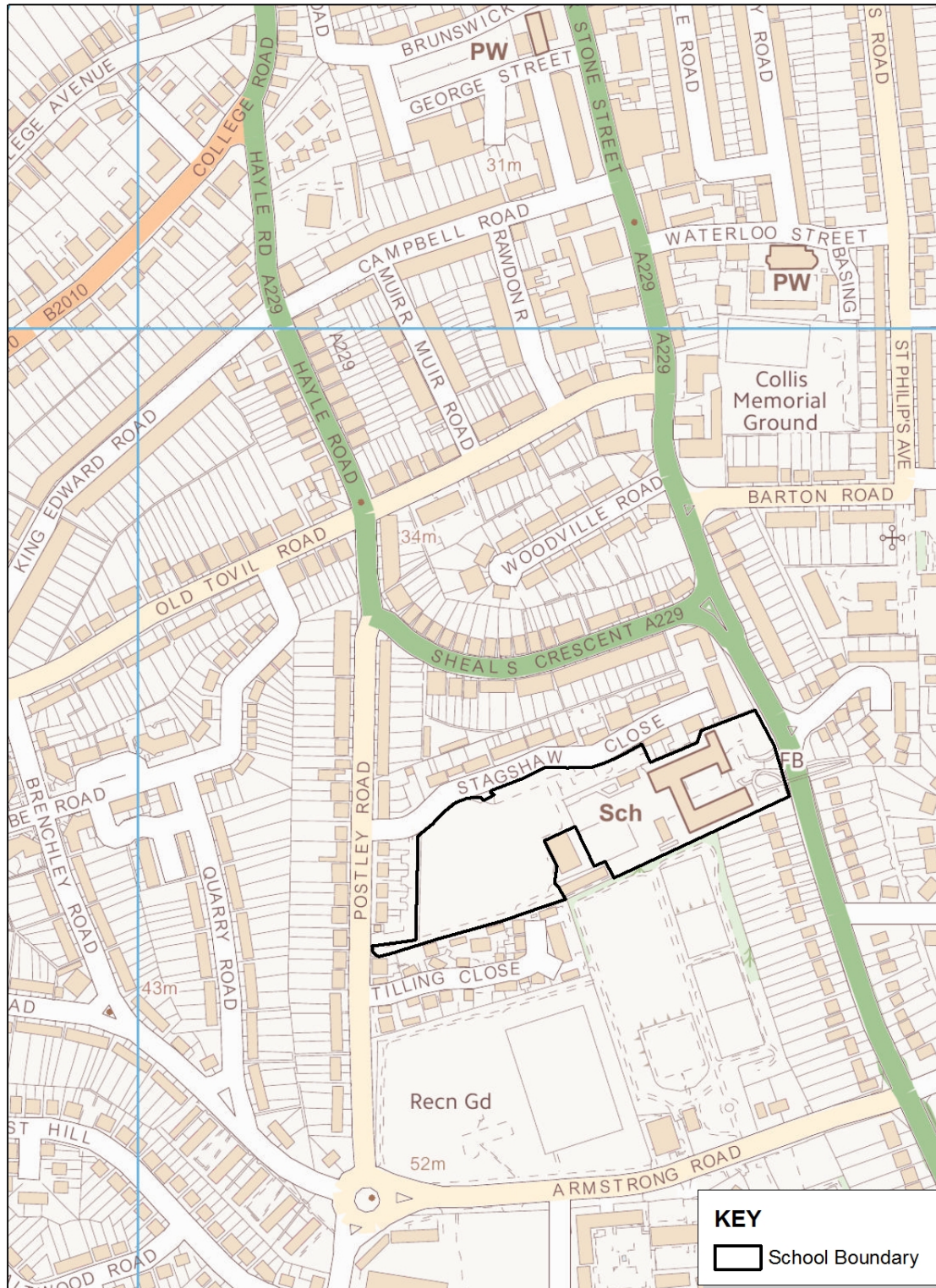
Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. South Borough Primary School is located within the urban area of Maidstone and lies approximately 1km south of the main central area. The school sits within a predominantly residential area and is located on the southern side of Stagshaw Close, which is a cul-de-sac accessed off Postley Road to the west. Stagshaw Close serves both the school and a mixture of residential properties including two storey housing and three storey flats located at the eastern end. A further access to the school used to be provided from the eastern end of the site off the A229 Loose Road, but vehicular access from this direction has been closed and access now is for pedestrians only. There is a pedestrian footbridge over the A229 in this location.
2. The school itself is a brick built structure with a tiled roof, set back from the road, and in part located behind residential properties. There is a separate 'Little Stars' pre-school building and a further separate nursery which share the same site. The hard surfaced playgrounds lie to the west of the school buildings and the school grass playing fields lie beyond this extending up to the boundary with the residential properties which front onto Postley Road.
3. There are three vehicular access points for the school from Stagshaw Close. The first is by the school buildings, which is controlled by a barrier and provides access for staff only. The second access is approximately half way along the school frontage and provides an access 'in only' for staff and visitor parking for the nursery, linking to a loop road within the site to an 'exit only' point for nursery traffic located by the playing fields. There are currently 24 on-site parking spaces for staff at the site, plus an additional area of parking for the nursery.
4. There is a mixture of fencing surrounding the site including green and silver palisade fencing, wire mesh fencing surrounding the car park, and wooden fencing enclosing bin stores. There are areas of zigzag markings outside the vehicle entrance points and speed humps within Stagshaw Close, which has a speed limit of 30mph. Double yellow lines are currently only provided at the Postley Road end of the close.

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent - 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

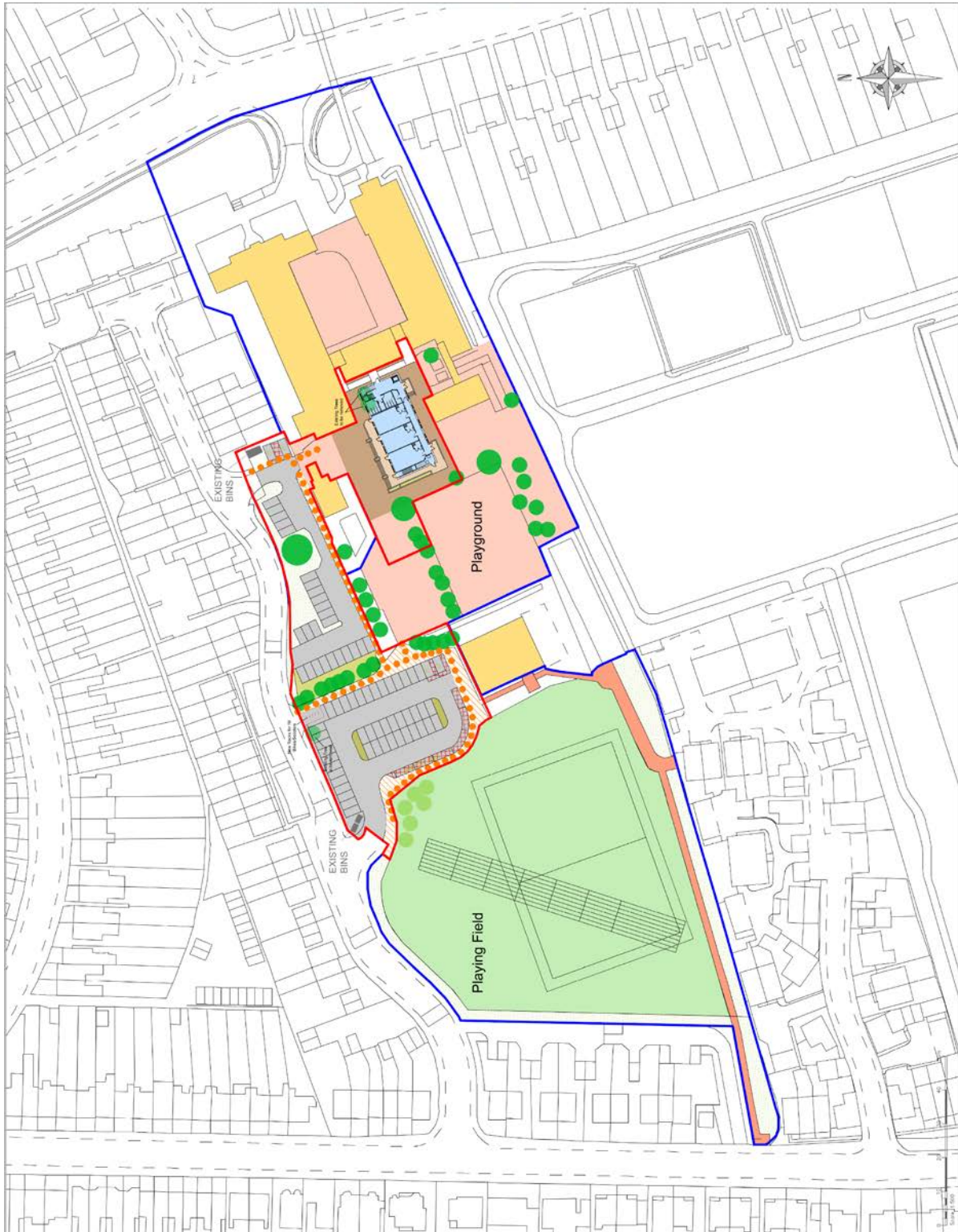
General Location Plan



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Ordnance Survey 100019238

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent - 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

Site Layout Plan



Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

Background

5. Kent County Council as the Local Education Authority has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places are available. The County Council's Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2015-2019 is a five year rolling plan which is updated annually, and which sets out the future plans for all types and phases of education in Kent. The identified housing need for Maidstone Borough is 18,560 dwellings for the period 2011-2031 and a number of significant development sites have been granted consent in the past year. As a result a deficit of primary school places has been forecast in the Maidstone Area.
6. A consultation regarding the possible expansion of South Borough Primary School was undertaken in January/February 2016, and was also discussed at the Education and Young People's Cabinet Committee in January 2016. The Cabinet Committee endorsed the recommendation to allocate monies to fund the expansion of the school, subject to planning permission being granted.

Recent Site History

7. The school has had various applications over the past 15 years, a number which relate to the provision of replacement fencing, plus applications for the refurbishment of old classrooms for use as a children's centre, the replacement of temporary surface car parking with a permanent area, the provision of a modular building for use as a nursery, and the closing of the access onto Loose Road.

Proposal

8. The application seeks approval for a two storey extension which would provide three classrooms and boys and girls toilets at ground floor level, and a further three classrooms plus toilets and a breakout group room at first floor level (6 new classrooms in total). Stairs would be provided at either end of the building and a lift in one corner. The extension would be of brick construction to match the design of the existing buildings, with a tiled roof. Three rooflights would be positioned in the roof plane facing to the south – away from Stagshaw Close.
9. The extension would facilitate an expansion of the school from a 1FE to a 2FE. The school roll as a 1FE was for 210 children, but the school accepted a bulge year in September 2015 so currently has 237 pupils on roll with 34 pupils in the nursery. It is intended that the school would grow gradually by admitting an additional reception class each year until it reached its capacity of 420 pupils.
10. The proposals also include a re-modelling of the car park. The middle access point would be closed to vehicles and only used for pedestrians. Vehicular access to the site would therefore be restricted to the two existing access points at each end of the site. The barrier controlled access would be retained and this parking area rationalised to provide 27 parking spaces (an increase of 3 spaces). The existing exit-only access by the playing fields would be altered to a two-way access point, with a circular access loop providing access to 47 parking spaces and 6 drop off spaces. In total there would be 84 parking spaces, four of which would be for disabled drivers. Racks for 10 bikes/scooters would be provided by the middle access point which would serve pedestrians only.

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

Planning Policy

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

- (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;
- 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) **Maidstone Borough Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) February 2016:**

Policy SP1 Sets out the development to be achieved in Maidstone urban area, as the largest and most sustainable location in the Borough, including specific reference to the provision of a new form of entry at South Borough Primary School.

Policy DM1 Covers the principles of good design which proposed development

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

should accord with, including reference to permeable layouts; responding to local natural or historic character and incorporating a high quality, modern design approach; high quality public realm; respecting the amenities of occupiers of neighbouring properties; respecting natural features such as trees and hedges; high quality design which responds to surrounding areas; maximising opportunities for sustainable development; protecting on-site biodiversity; safely accommodating vehicle and pedestrian movements; incorporating security measures to design out crime; avoiding areas at risk of flooding; incorporating adequate storage of waste and recycling; and providing adequate vehicle and cycle parking; and being flexible towards future adaptation in response to changing life needs.

Policy DM2 Where technically feasible and viable, non-residential developments should meet BREEAM very good standards addressing maximum water efficiencies under the mandatory water credits.

Policy DM3 Sets out how development should avoid damage to and protect and enhance the historic and natural environment, including surface water protection, biodiversity habitats, landscape character and maintenance, mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change, and contributing to natural green spaces. To protect and enhance the character of Maidstone's landscape and townscape through careful design, and provide appropriate appraisals in support of development proposals.

Policy DM22 Provides details for open space and recreation provision within the Borough. In particular at point 7 it states that development that would result in the net loss of open space or sport and recreation facilities will not be permitted unless there is a proven overriding need for the development. In addition, that development will only be permitted if there is no resulting deficiency in provision in the locality or an alternative provision determined to be of an equivalent community benefit can be provided to replace the loss.

Policy DM24 With regard to sustainable transport development proposals must demonstrate the impact of trips generated to and from the development are remedied or mitigated, and that a satisfactory Transport Assessment is provided.

Policy DM27 Sets out car parking and cycle standards that should be adhered to for new development, taking into account the accessibility of the development and availability of public transport.

Consultations

12. **Maidstone Borough Council** raises no objection.

KCC Landscape Officer raises no objection but suggests additional tree and landscape planting would help enhance the view for residents and the wider area.

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

KCC School Travel Planner has provided guidance for updating the submitted School Travel Plan through the Jambusters website, which is currently incomplete.

KCC Biodiversity Officer raises no objection subject to the imposition of conditions regarding the protection of breeding birds and securing ecological enhancements.

KCC Archaeological Officer raises no objection subject to the imposition of a condition regarding archaeological field evaluation.

Sport England raises no objection to the application.

KCC Highways and Transportation Officer raises no objection subject to the imposition of conditions covering the provision and permanent retention of the vehicle parking spaces and cycle parking spaces shown on the plans; and the provision of wheel washing facilities for the duration of the construction period.

Local Member

13. The local County Members Dan Daley and Robert Bird were notified of the application on 14th April 2016. In response to this notification Mr Daley submitted the following comments:

- No objection to the premise that the school needs to expand to accommodate the growing child population's need for primary school places; however, would like it noted that County colleagues are concerned about the increase of road traffic that this extension is bound to generate in Stagshaw Close at least twice a day;
- The Close is already overburdened with parking problems – yellow line protection and zigzag markings at the school entrances do not deter illegal parking to the danger of many, particularly the children involved in the pick-up/set down vehicular movements.
- Residents' home driveway entrances in Stagshaw Close are also blocked;
- Some mitigation to speed has been gained by applying a 20mph speed limit and interactive traffic signs in Postley Road, however the problems in this area are severe;
- Currently fighting to get pedestrian crossing facilities in the area near the school to assist in foot passage from the surrounding area to negotiate a safe route from the Sheals Crescent/Postley Road area.

Publicity

14. The application was publicised by the posting of two site notices (one in Stagshaw Close and one by the entrance from Loose Road), and the individual notification of 90 residential properties.

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

Representations

15. In response to the publicity, 1 letter of representation has been received. The key points raised can be summarised as follows:
- School located in a residential area where there is insufficient residential parking, meaning residents have to park on the road;
 - This road also used by people working in the town centre who wish to avoid parking in the town car parks;
 - Residents of Stagshaw Close are blighted by the movement of school traffic, and the disrespect parents display to where they park at drop off/pick up times, including using private parking bays;
 - Postley Road is restricted to 20mph yet Stagshaw Close is still 30mph;
 - Parking should be restricted to residents only;
 - The intended implementation of the TRO for Stagshaw Close is objected to.

Discussion

16. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 11 above. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore 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.
17. This application is being reported for determination by the Planning Applications Committee due to the neighbour representation received and the comments from the local County Member. In my opinion, the key material planning considerations in this particular case are the compatibility with Development Plan policies, together with the siting and design of the proposed extension in terms of its built form; the highway and traffic implications of the school expansion on the surrounding roads; and the subsequent amenity impacts of this for neighbouring residents.

Siting and Design of the Extension

18. The proposed extension has been designed to replicate the form of the existing school buildings, and would be constructed from brick and tiles to match. Although the existing school is single storey the extension would be located adjacent to the school halls which are double height, and therefore the scale and height of the proposed extension would be comparable to the immediately adjoining buildings. The school is set back from the road frontage in Stagshaw Close and therefore the location of the extension would be in such a position where it would not cause any loss of light or overshadowing for residents of the closest properties, and would very much be seen in the context of the existing school buildings. In this regard it is considered that the extension would be in keeping with the existing school, and the wider residential area, and would accord with the aims of Policy DM1 in relation to high quality design.
19. The position of the new extension would require a slight reconfiguration of the playgrounds, but sufficient hard surfaced playground space would still be provided for

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

the children at the school. Of more significance would be the reconfiguration of the school parking areas, as this would enable a better on site layout to be achieved, a greater number of parking spaces to be provided, and the removal of one of the existing access points onto Stagshaw Close, thus simplifying movement in and out of the school. The issues regarding parking and access are covered below, but with regard to siting, the rearrangement of the parking area has a slight impact on the playing field provision.

20. In order to provide the access loop and drop off area within the larger part of the car park a small section of the playing field would be utilised, and hence lost as open space and recreational area. Given that, Sport England's views were sought on the planning application in relation to Sport England's Policy which is to oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or prejudice the use of, all or any part of a playing field, unless one of five exceptions are met. With regard to the two storey extension they stated that they had no objection to the development as it would fall on land incapable of forming, or forming part of, a playing pitch. With regard to the car parking element they stated that there would not appear to be any physical constraints that would prevent this area from being used to form part of a playing pitch, and as such it would technically form a breach of their policy. However, in this instance Sport England have borne in mind the fact that the existing pitches would not be affected by the proposed car park development, and that the modest reduction in the size of the playing field associated with this aspect of the proposed development would be unlikely to have an impact on the School's ability to meet PE curricular needs or compromise any community use of the playing field. Under the circumstances have stated that they would not wish to raise any objection to this aspect of the application.
21. The proposed on-site layout, in terms of the slight loss of a piece of playing field, and the siting and location of the proposed extension, are therefore considered to be appropriate and would meet the aims of Policy DM22 of the Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19), along with the guidance contained within the NPPF.

Highway and Traffic Implications of the School Expansion

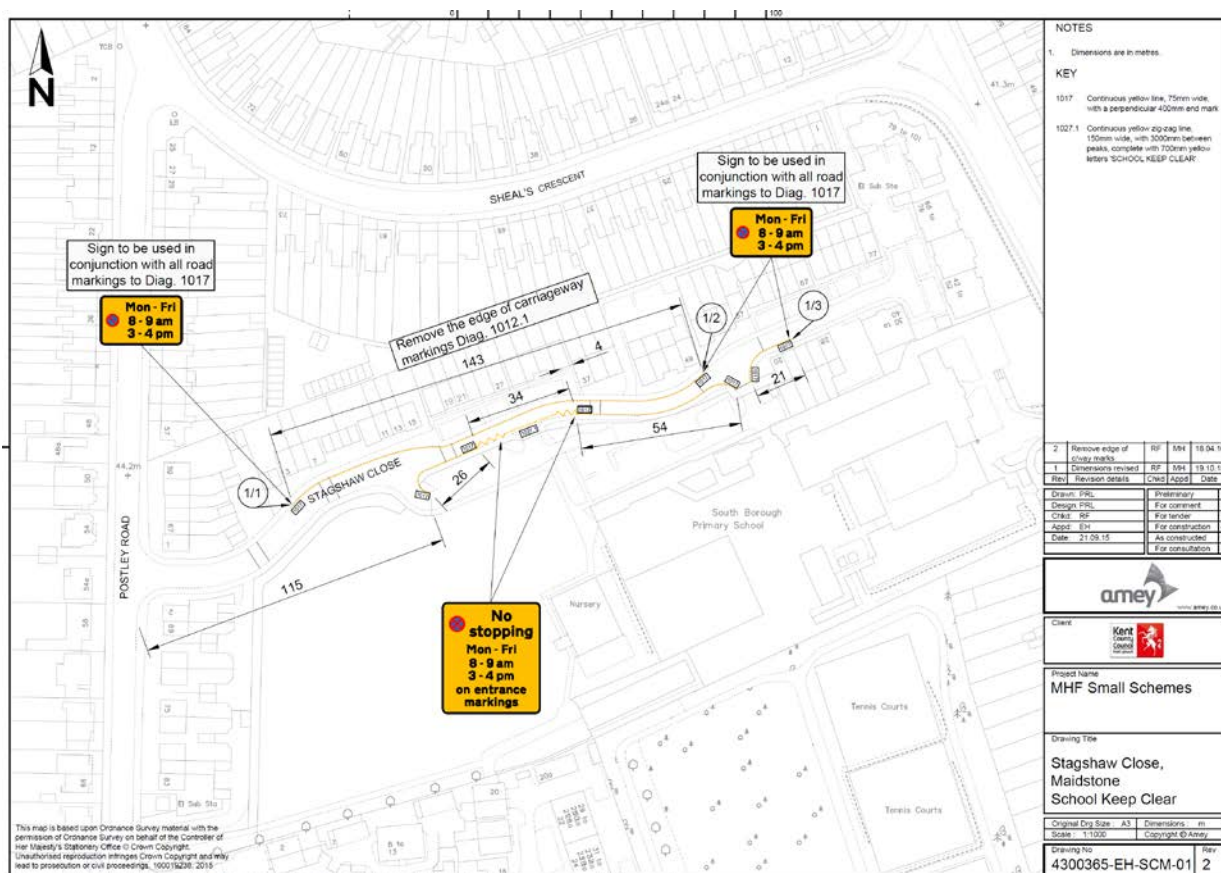
22. Historic maps show that the site of South Borough Primary School was originally both a primary (infants and juniors) and secondary school, accessed only from the A229 Loose Road. Over time the layout of the school has changed significantly, allowing a new road to be formed off Postley Road, namely Stagshaw Close, and permitting the residential development along this road that can be seen today, along with the closing up of the original access. As a result, the school shares Stagshaw Close for its access with the residents of the houses and flats there. The planning application has been supported by the submission of a Transport Statement and this assesses the current parking issues surrounding Stagshaw Close, the existing parking and access situation, the proposed on-site alterations to the parking provision and access and the implications of additional traffic both accessing the school and in the wider location as a result of the increase in pupil numbers.
23. In summary the Transport Statement indicates that there are widespread incidences of slow moving traffic through the main roads leading to the town centre due to the volume of traffic; traffic being hindered at peak times along Postley Road due to the presence of cars parked on both sides of the road, thus reducing the width to effectively a single carriageway; and poor traffic conditions in Stagshaw Close itself, which they suggest is

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

down to the extent and nature of on-street parking which affects the free flow of traffic through the close. The representations received reflect this view and point out the existing parking and access problems experienced along Stagshaw Close.

24. At present staff for the school access the car park through the barrier entrance, where there are 24 spaces available. Overflow parking for staff occurs in a number of locations, including the nursery car park, along Stagshaw Close and Postley Road. Visitors to the site at school drop off times were found to enter the site through both the 'in' and 'exit only' entrances close to the nursery causing confusion and congestion. In addition there were instances noted of parents parking on the pavements, and contravening the marked school entrance parking restrictions (zigzag lines). The parking area in front of the nursery lacks any formal layout, therefore this area is often underused and could accommodate more parked vehicles.
25. The proposed remodelling of the car park seeks to improve this situation in a number of ways. The staff parking area (barrier controlled) would be reconfigured slightly to make better use of the area and take advantage of the closing of the middle access to vehicles. The revised layout in this area would provide 27 spaces – 3 more than at present. The middle access point, as mentioned, would be closed to vehicles, but still provide pedestrian access. The western most access would be altered to an 'in and out' access with an internal loop road providing access to 47 parking spaces, and a further drop off zone which could accommodate 6 cars at any one time. This would represent an increase in parking spaces but an exact figure cannot be given as the current car park is used informally, with no marked layout.
26. By providing a formalised and efficient drop off zone for parents within the school site, it is expected that some of the congestion currently experienced in Stagshaw Close would be removed. From a safety point of view an on-site facility would be much safer than the current dropping off that takes place on the road and amongst parked cars. It should be noted that the County Council, acting as the Local Highway Authority, has sought to improve the on-street parking situation by applying in December 2015 for a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), which would authorise the introduction of stopping restrictions along Stagshaw Close.
27. The TRO seeks to make stopping on the length of the 'School Keep Clear' zigzag markings during the times of 8-9am and 3-4pm Monday to Friday an infringement that could be dealt with by the issue of a penalty charge. The TRO was approved and sealed as a legal document in January 2016 and the associated lining and signing is to be undertaken during the school holidays. This additional 'keep clear' lining would, if adhered to, also improve the on-street parking caused as a result of the school traffic at peak times. The extent of the new lining is shown in the diagram below.

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)



28. Further to these physical alterations to the on-street 'keep clear' lining and on-site car parking, the School would need to provide an updated School Travel Plan to encourage more sustainable travel patterns for both staff and pupils. A Travel Plan was submitted as part of the planning application but needs to be updated in line with comments from the County's School Travel Planner. The School has been requested to do that, and it is considered appropriate that this updated version, with achievable targets and actions, should be agreed prior to occupation of the extension, should permission be given, to ensure that the measures can be implemented straight away.
29. The County's Highway and Transportation Officer has reviewed the information submitted, and considers that the proposal, incorporating better parking management for pupils and staff, together with the forthcoming signage and lining, to be acceptable in highway terms. They would therefore raise no objection to the proposals subject to conditions being imposed to ensure the proposed parking is set out and available prior to occupation of the extension, along with the proposed cycle/scooter parking. On this basis it is considered that the proposals would accord with Policy DM1 and DM27 of the Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19).

Other Matters

Ecology

30. The application was supported by the submission of an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Assessment Report and Bat Scoping Survey which considered the likely presence of a

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

variety of protected species on the school site. This was followed up by a more detailed consideration of the effect the proposed building might have on any roosting bats (if present) and their ability to emerge from the adjacent buildings. The additional ecological report demonstrated that the new building would not restrict any bats entering or leaving the roost and the County's Biodiversity Officer has confirmed that this is correct.

31. The submitted reports showed that there was suitable habitat on site for breeding birds and therefore it has been recommended that works should be carried out outside the breeding bird season, and that if this is not possible that a qualified ecologist should examine the site prior to works commencing. This advice can be covered through the imposition of an informative.
32. Recommendations for ecological enhancements at the school have also been proposed in the report under section 7, which include measures to enhance the site for stag beetles, house sparrows and bugs. The report also suggests the removal of the invasive plant species, cotoneaster. These recommendations can be secured through a suitably worded condition should permission be granted. The development would therefore accord Policy DM3 of the Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) in relation to protecting on-site biodiversity.

Landscape

33. There are a number of mature and established trees on the school site and a Tree Survey report was submitted detailing the quality of the trees on site and their individual and collective value to the overall appearance of the site. The majority of the trees on site would be retained, with two silver birch being removed to enable the construction of the classroom, plus one plane tree in the location of the revised car park layout. The proposed layout plans indicate the location for some new tree planting alongside the edge of the playing field and the access to the revised car park.
34. The Landscape Officer has suggested that the site could benefit from some additional landscape planting and tree planting, particularly along the edges of the site by the car park, and this could be secured by condition should permission be given.

Construction

35. Given that there are neighbouring residential properties, if planning permission is granted it is considered appropriate to impose a condition restricting hours of construction to protect residential amenity (Monday to Friday between 0800 and 1800; Saturday 0900 to 1300; and no operations on Sundays or public holidays). It is also considered appropriate to impose a condition restricting the timing of deliveries to the site to avoid school peak times.
36. The submission documents included details of the proposed location for the site compound and contractor's access, and the location of the secure Heras fence to enclose the development area from the rest of the school. The Highways and Transportation Officer has considered these details to be acceptable. The requirement for a condition to submit a Construction Management Plan therefore would not be necessary in this instance.

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

Sustainability

37. The application proposal includes a raft of sustainable features, including triple glazing, natural ventilation system, LED lighting, underfloor heating and water saving measures to name a few. The scheme incorporates the principles of passive solar design to utilise the sun's rays, to collect store and distribute solar energy as heat. PV panels could in theory be provided on the southern roof slope (an indicative position for these has been shown) however providing them on a pitched roof slope rather than a flat roof would create ongoing maintenance and safety issues (feasibility of accessing them to clean them, to make sure they run efficiently), therefore is not favoured by the School.

Archaeology

38. The application has been considered by the County's Archaeological Officer, who has advised that the school also lies at a strategically important site for WWII defence systems. There is an anti-tank ditch to the south, running through South Park and stopping just before the school grounds; and there are some anti-tank blocks just the other side of the Loose Road. On the school grounds themselves, there are indications from a 1946 aerial photograph of some possible air raid shelters. In view of the potential for buried 20th century structures associated with WWII, it would be appropriate for some archaeological fieldwork. There may be voids associated with partially backfilled air raid shelters or anti-tank structures. Any structures associated with WWII would be of local heritage interest and if any of the air raid shelters survive, they would need to be archaeologically recorded and hopefully either preserved or fully recorded prior to removal. Should approval be given for the proposed extension, a condition is recommended for such field work to be carried out.

Conclusion

39. In my view the key determining factors for this proposal are the appropriateness of the extension in terms of its siting and design and the suitability of the highway network to accommodate school traffic in this location. There is strong Government support in the NPPF for the development of schools to ensure that there is sufficient provision to meet growing demand, increased choice and raised educational standards, subject to being satisfied on local amenity and all other material considerations, such as highway matters, design, ecology, archaeology, landscape and sustainability. 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, as demonstrated in the discussion above.
40. It is considered that subject to the imposition of appropriate planning conditions, the proposal would not have any significant detrimental effects on the local highway network, the amenities of local residents or the natural environment. 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.

Two storey extension to facilitate the expansion of the school from 1FE to 2FE at South Borough School, Stagshaw Close, Maidstone, Kent – 16/503410/County (KCC/MA/0084/2016)

Recommendation

41. 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 approval of details of all construction materials to be used externally;
- 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;
- deliveries for construction to be undertaken outside of school peak times;
- the provision of wheel washing facilities for the duration of the construction period;
- that the recommendations set out in the Ecological Appraisal be implemented;
- the submission of archaeological field evaluation works;
- the provision and permanent retention of the vehicle, cycle and scooter parking facilities prior to the occupation of the school;
- the submission of an updated School Travel Plan prior to the occupation of the extension hereby approved and its ongoing review for a period of 5 years;
- the submission of a native species landscape scheme and details of a maintenance scheme for such landscaping.

42. 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;
- To ensure that works on site are carried out outside of the breeding bird season and if this is not possible that an ecologist examines the site prior to works commencing.

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