

Dining Hall and playground extension at Lower Halstow Primary School, Lower Halstow – SW/09/513

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 18 August 2009.

Application by Lower Halstow Primary School for new detached single storey timber clad dining hall with ramped access, playground extension and pond at Lower Halstow Primary School, School Lane, Lower Halstow, Sittingbourne

Recommendation: Planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr. M. Whiting & Mr A. Willicombe

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

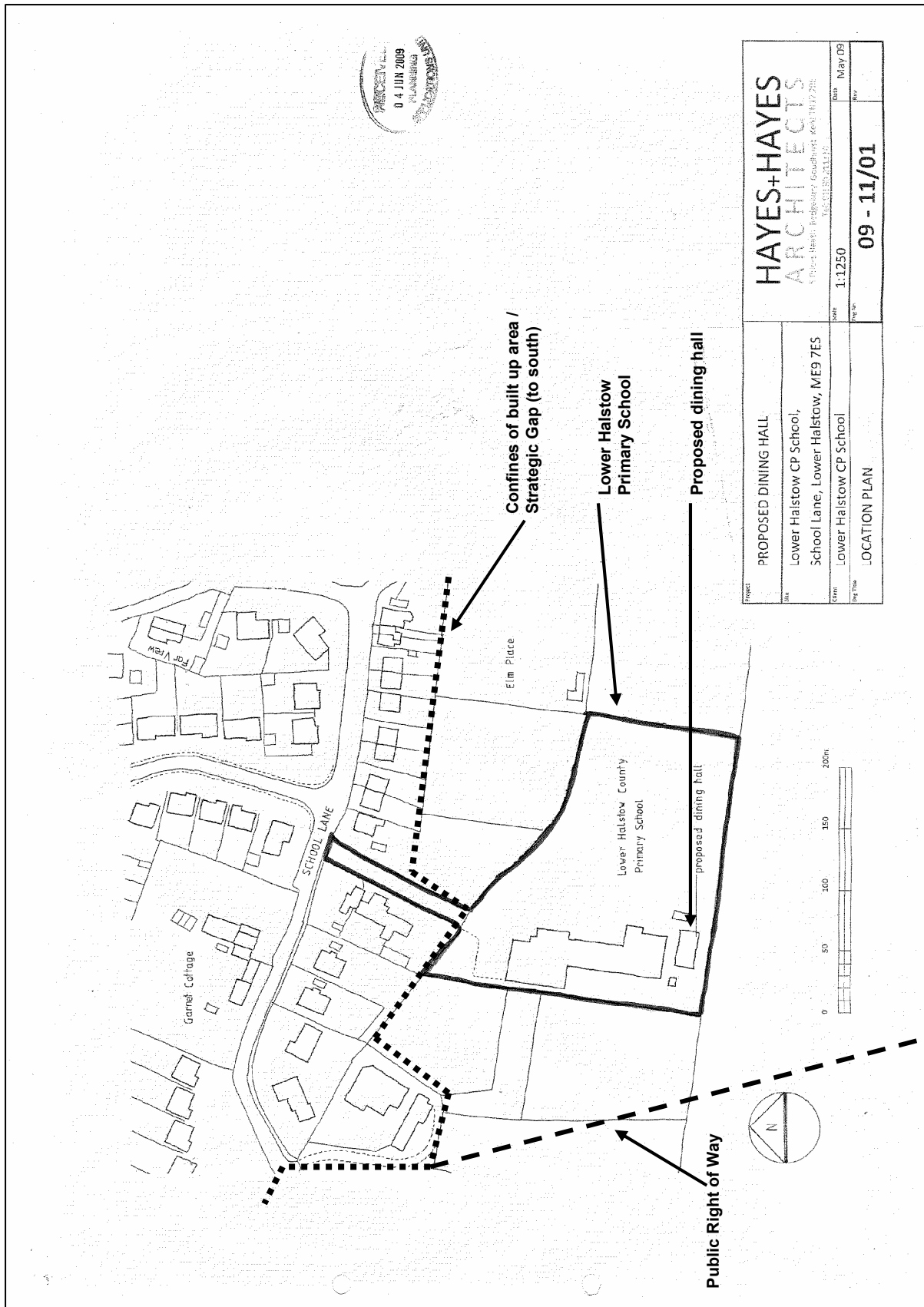
1. Lower Halstow Primary School is situated off School Lane on the southern edge of the village of Lower Halstow; approximately 3.5km north-west of Sittingbourne. The School comprises a relatively modern single storey building with a mix of flat and pitched roofs, which runs along the western boundary of the school grounds. A double height sports hall is located to the south of the main building. The schools playing field is located to the east, with open countryside / farmland surrounding the school to the south, east and west. The grounds are enclosed by mature / semi mature trees planted along the respective boundaries. The application site forms a small area approximately 0.015ha of the overall school site and is located between the sports hall and the southern boundary. The nearest residential properties to the application site are approximately 90m to the north. A Public Right of Way passes through the field to the south-west of the school grounds - *a site location plan is included over the page.*
2. The entire school grounds are outside of the village confines as designated in the Swale Borough Local Plan within the wider countryside, and a designated as part of the Strategic Gap, north of the A2 separating Sittingbourne from the Medway Towns. There are no other site specific land use designations in the adopted Local Plan, although general policies are set out in paragraph (9).

Background

3. Lower Halstow Primary School underwent a major redevelopment to provide new facilities in 2005. This project was funded by the disposal of the original post-war school building adjacent to the main entrance to the school site; this building originally accommodated a multi purpose sports hall and dining facility. The extensions to the school (under planning reference SW/02/1372) included new teaching accommodation to provide two classrooms, a sports hall with changing and storage facilities, and the remodelling / extension of the existing buildings. The sports hall was funded through a grant awarded by Sport England. The School hoped that the sports hall would double up as a school hall and dining facility, however, a condition of the funding restricted the facilities to sports use only.
4. The school currently has no dining or kitchen facilities, hot meals are provided by outside caterers and pupils eat their lunch in various locations including a mobile classroom and a store room which has no windows or ventilation. Neither location has adequate facilities to provide for the School's needs, presenting logistical difficulties and potential health and safety concerns.

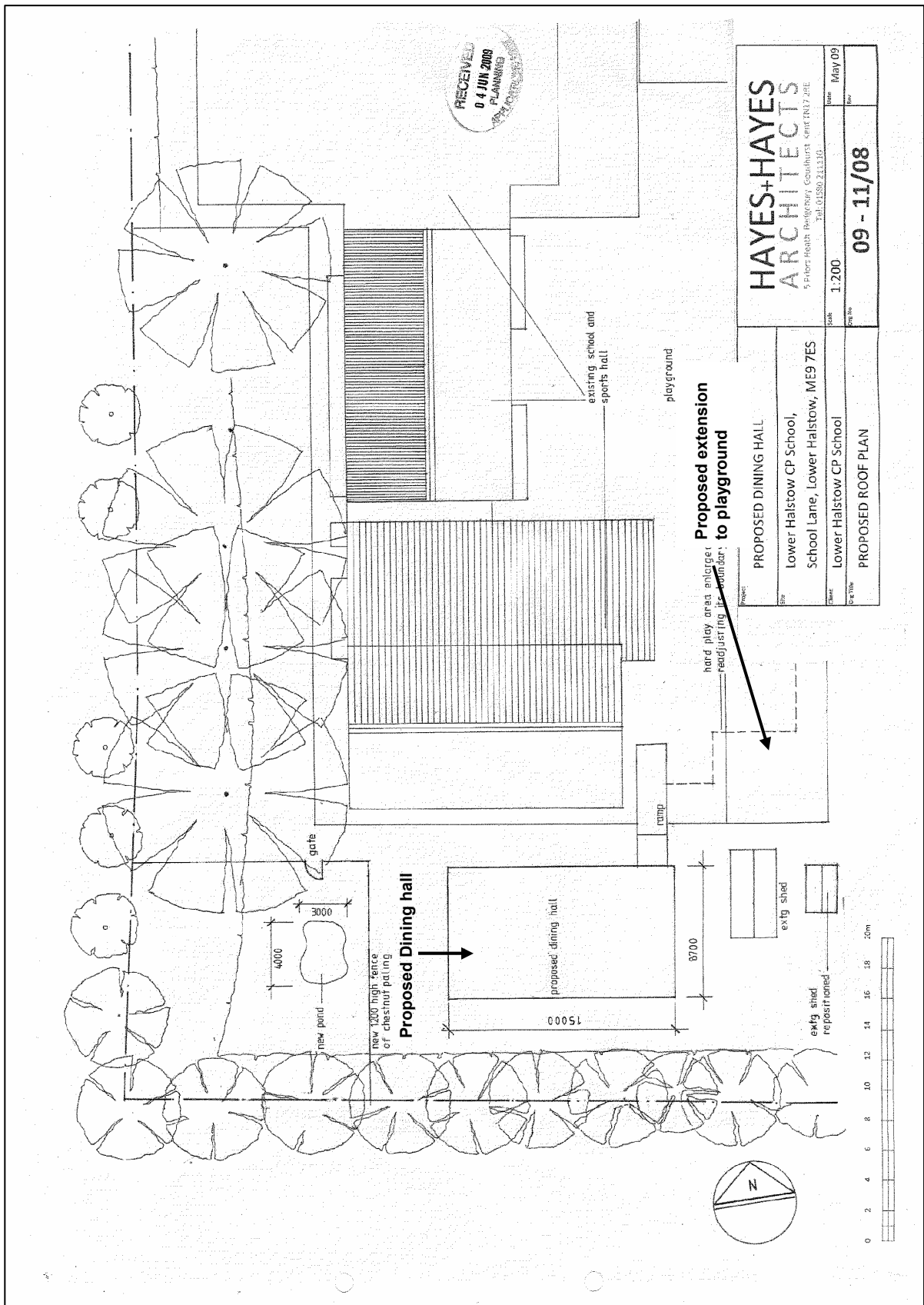
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Site Location Plan

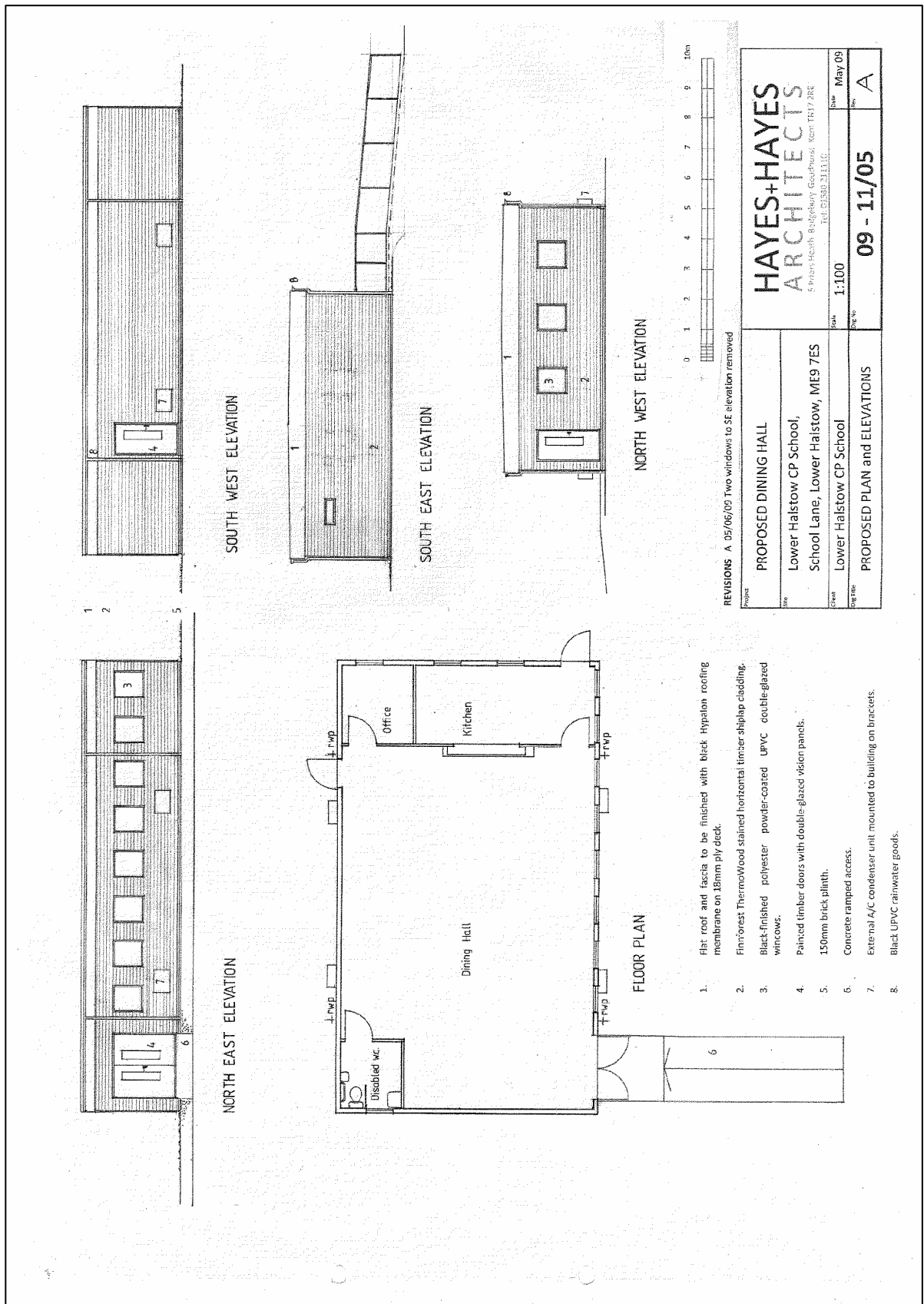


HAYES+HAYES ARCHITECTS		DATE	May 09
PROJECT: PROPOSED DINING HALL		SCALE	1:1250
SITE: Lower Halstow CP School, School Lane, Lower Halstow, ME9 7ES		PROJECT NO.	09 - 11/01
CLIENT: Lower Halstow CP School		LOCATION PLAN	

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proposed dining hall

NORTH WEST ELEVATION

proposed dining hall SOUTH EAST ELEVATION

1. Flat roof and fascia to be finished with black Hypalon roofing membrane on .8mm ply deck.
2. Fimforest ThermoWood stained horizontal timber cladding.
3. Black-finished polyester powder-coated UPVC double-glazed windows.
4. Painted timber doors with double-glazed vision panels.
5. 150mm brick plinth.
6. Concrete ramped access.
7. External A/C condenser unit mounted to building on brackets.
8. Black UPVC rainwater goods.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10m

REVISIONS A 05/06/09 Two windows to SE elevation removed

HAYES+HAYES ARCHITECTS 5 Pipers Road, Beegonsay, Renfrew, West 1117 79G Tel: 01236 23110		Date: MAY 09
Scale: 1:100	Date: 09 - 11/06	Rev: A
Project: PROPOSED DINING HALL		
Site: Lower Halstow CP School, School Lane, Lower Halstow, M15 7ES		
Client: Lower Halstow CP School		
Drawing: PROPOSED SITE ELEVATIONS		

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Proposed building viewed from the north

NORTH EAST ELEVATION

proposed dining hall

SCOUTH WEST ELEVATION

1. Flat roof and fascia to be finished with black Hypalon roofing membrane on 18mm ply deck.
2. Finforest ThermoWood stained horizontal timber shiplap cladding.
3. Black-finished polyester powder-coated UPVC double-glazed windows.
4. Painted timber doors with double-glazed vision panels.
5. 150mm brick plinth.
6. Concrete ramped access.
7. External A/C condenser unit mounted to building on brackets.
8. Black UPVC rainwater goods.

HAYES+HAYES ARCHITECTS 5 Priory Heath Beckwith Goudburns Farm T167 2JH Tel: 01536 211110		Date: May 09 By:
Project: PROPOSED DINING HALL Client: Lower Halstow CP School, School Lane, Lower Halstow, ME9 7ES Scale: 1:100	Date: 09 - 11/07 By:	Title: PROPOSED SITE ELEVATIONS

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Proposal

5. The application has been submitted on behalf of Lower Halstow Primary School and proposes the construction of a new separate dining hall. The dining hall would allow children to eat cooked and packed lunch together in one sitting which would improve health and safety of the children and staff, and facilitate supervision. The application site is located to the rear of the school grounds behind an existing sports hall. The proposed location is currently occupied in part by existing school sheds and forms part of a landscaped amenity space between the sports hall and the boundary of the school grounds.
6. The proposed development consists of a single storey timber clad modular building, that would measure approximately 15m by 8.7m by 3.3m in height, providing approximately 130m² of floor-space. The new floor-space would be divided between dining hall, kitchen, office and wc to support the existing facilities and school roll. The single storey modular construction would be finished to a high standard, including horizontal timber shiplap cladding, timber doors and black-finished powder coat UPVC windows. The building would be fully accessible and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant.
7. The application also includes a minor extension of the existing hard play area by 150 m², and the creation of a small ecological pond to the west of the proposed dining hall.

Additional information provided by the applicant

8. In support of the proposals the applicant provided a further statement. This document set out the background to the development, highlighting the lack of suitable dining facilities available to the School. The applicant's agent considers the proposed building to be a suitable, sustainable and deliverable approach to meeting the needs of the School in a practicable and affordable manner. The statement indicates that the quality of modular buildings has progressed inordinately in the past 20 years, with a level of finish matching or surpassing those found on conventional buildings. The design of the modular building has been selected to include traditional wood cladding for its superior qualities and sustainability. The applicant states that the timber cladding would reflect the vernacular of local traditional weather-boarded buildings in Kent.

Planning Policy

9. The key Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:

(i) The adopted 2009 **South East Plan**:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Policy CC1 | Seeks to achieve and maintain sustainable development in the region |
| Policy CC6 | Seeks sustainable and distinctive communities that respect the character of settlements and landscapes, and achieve a high quality built environment. |
| Policy C4 | Seeks to protect open countryside by ensuring all development respects and enhances local landscape character, securing appropriate mitigation where damage cannot be avoided. |

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Policy BE5 Seeks new development in rural communities to be subject to design and sustainability criteria so that the distinctive character of the village is not damaged; seeks to protect or extend key local services and protect landscape setting of the village

Policy KTG1 Amongst other matters, seeks to set high standards of design and sustainability, and avoid coalescence with adjoining settlements to the south, east and west of Medway and to the west of Sittingbourne.

Policy S3 Seeks to ensure the adequate provision of pre-school, school, and community learning facilities.

(ii) The adopted 2008 **Swale Borough Local Plan:**

Policy SP1 In meeting the development needs of the Borough, proposals should accord with principles of Sustainable Development, including minimising impact on the environment, ensuring provision of community infrastructure, supporting existing local services, and a high quality of design that respects local distinctiveness.

Policy SP5 Development proposals within the countryside and rural communities will seek to increase self sufficiency and satisfying local needs, whilst protecting, and where possible enhancing, the character of the wider countryside. Including demanding high design standards that respond positively to the character and form of the countryside and rural communities, protecting the countryside from unnecessary development, and permit innovative proposals that increase the viability of existing rural services.

Policy E1 Development proposals should, amongst others, respond positively by reflecting the positive characteristics of the features of the site and locality; protect and enhance the natural and built environments; be well sited and of a scale, design and appearance that is appropriate to its location; cause no demonstrable harm to residential amenity and other sensitive uses.

Policy E6 The quality, character and amenity value of the wider countryside of the Borough, will be protected and where possible enhanced. Development proposals will only be developed where it provides a service/ necessary community infrastructure to meet the essential needs of the local community.

Policy E7 Seeks to retain the individual character and setting of settlements within the strategic gap defined on the Proposals Map, within the gap development will not be permitted that result in merger of settlements, or results in erosion of land or its open character.

Policy E9 Seeks to protect the quality, character and amenity of the wider landscape, through development that is sympathetic to, and minimises impact on local landscape character.

Policy E19 Seeks development to be of high quality design that responds positively to creating safe, accessible, and attractive places; enriching

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the qualities of the existing environment by promoting local distinctiveness and strengthening the sense of place; appropriate to its context in respect of scale, height and massing; making best use of texture, colour, pattern and durability of materials; and achieving flexibility to respond to future changes in use, lifestyle and demography.

Policy C1 Supports proposals for new or improved community facilities.

Consultations

10. **Swale Borough Council** – raises objection to the proposal on the following grounds:-

‘The proposed development, would be poorly designed, and would harm the character and appearance of the countryside and the Strategic Gap. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies E1, E6, E7 and E19 of the Swale Borough Local Plan 2008, and C4 of the South East Plan.’

In response to additional information supporting received from the applicant the Borough Council maintains its objection to the proposal. Comments received read as follows:-

‘Whilst the Borough Council are happy with the external materials, the design, form and use of a flat roof give the proposed dining hall the appearance of a temporary, mobile classroom. As the site lies within both the countryside and a Strategic Gap, design and visual amenity are key factors in determining the application. It is recognised that the proposed building is to the rear of the school; however, there would be distant views of the site from Wardwell Lane, and from the footpaths across the field immediately to the south.

The Borough Council appreciates that KCC officers have discussed alternative designs with the applicants, and also the cost implications of such revisions. However, the current design is not considered to be of sufficient quality for a permanent building within the countryside...’

Lower Halstow Parish Council – raises no objection to the application, although comments that they would have preferred to see a slightly larger hall.

Divisional Transportation Manager – raises no objection to the application in respect of highways matters.

Local Members

11. Mr. M. Whiting and Mr A. Willcombe, the local County Members for Swale Central were notified of the application on the 11 June 2009. Written representation has been received from Mr Willicombe raising no objections, and Mr Whiting fully supporting the application.

Publicity

12. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice on School Lane. There are no residential properties within 90m of the application site.

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Representations

13. No letters of representation have been received from local residents; any views received prior to Committee meeting will be reported verbally.

Discussion

Introduction

14. This application seeks planning permission for the construction of a single storey enhanced modular building to provide a school dining hall. Existing accommodation within the main school building does not provide appropriate space for pupils to eat their lunch; at present the school uses an existing mobile classroom that accommodates an after school club, and a store room within the sports hall that has no windows or ventilation. The application is being reported to the Planning Applications Committee as a result of an objection raised by Swale Borough Council on the grounds that the design of the proposed building would harm the character and appearance of the countryside and Strategic Gap – *please see paragraph (10) above.*
15. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore the proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. In this particular case, I consider that the main determining considerations relate to the siting and design of the proposed building within the countryside.

Siting and design

16. The application site is located outside of the built confines of the village of Lower Halstow as defined in the Swale Borough Local Plan Proposals Map. This part of the countryside is within the Strategic Gap between Sittingbourne and Medway. As such any development proposal within the school grounds is subject to a number of Development Plan Policies that seek to protect the character of the countryside. The broad thrust of these policies presumes against development and seeks to preserve and/or enhance the countryside for its own sake, subject to a limited number of exceptional circumstances.
17. Swale Borough Local Plan Policies SP5, E7 and E9 seek to protect the countryside from unnecessary development and preserve the open character of the landscape, particularly within the defined Strategic Gap. Policies SP1, SP5, E6 and C1 seek to support the provision of new and enhanced community services that increase self sufficiency and support local needs, subject to a high standard of design that responds positively to local characteristics. Policy E6 seeks to protect the character of the countryside, setting out that development will only be permitted that enables rural communities to meet their essential needs or provides necessary community infrastructure. The South East Plan whilst no longer specifically referring to the need to protect the strategic gap has Policies CC6, C4, BE5 and KTG1 that seek to protect the open countryside by ensuring development respects the character of the settlement or local landscape and avoid coalescence of adjoining settlements.

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18. Swale Borough Council raise an objection to the application on grounds of poor design that would harm the character and appearance of the countryside and the Strategic Gap, contrary to the policies Development Plan Policies set out above. The Borough Council comment that the external materials proposed would be acceptable, however it is the design, form and use of a flat roof that give the appearance of a temporary, mobile classroom, and are not considered to be of sufficient quality for permanent retention. The Borough Planning Officer notes that the proposed building is to the rear of the school, however considers there would be distant views of the site from Wardwell Lane (over 160m to the south-east), and from public footpaths that cross the fields immediately to the south (approximately 50m away at the closest point).
19. The application states the single storey modular construction was chosen for its practicalities in meeting the Schools needs in a deliverable manner. The Planning Authority has been in negotiation with the applicant with a view to enhance the design, through potential improvements to the fenestration or the possible inclusion of a pitched roof. However, after further investigations the applicant has confirmed that additional enhancements to the design are not possible within the available budget and it has been requested that the application be determined as submitted.
20. The supporting statement received draws attention to the enhanced finish of the modular building, which includes timber cladding. The application states that the timber cladding was chosen to reflect the vernacular of local traditional weather-boarded building in Kent, and for its superior qualities and sustainability. The flat roof proposed would be finished with a black Hypalon roofing membrane which was chosen due to its long life quality and minimum maintenance requirements. The applicant comments that the single storey development would be subservient to the existing sports hall in terms of its scale and massing, and that the proposal would echo the form of the existing school buildings, which includes a single storey flat roofed element. The position of the building was chosen to compliment the existing linear form of the school by continuing the line of buildings along the west side of the site.
21. It is noted that the entire school grounds fall outside the confines of Lower Halstow. The site is directly adjacent to the village set back from the street scene. The school grounds form an established use in the countryside and are well screened in the landscape by mature scrub and tree planting to the boundaries. On this basis, I do not consider that a minor development, ancillary to the educational use of the site would be contrary to Local Plan Policy that seeks to preserve the strategic gap. The development proposed would not result in the merging of settlements or result in the erosion of land or significantly affect the open countryside.
22. The application site is to the rear of the main school building and would, in my opinion, be the most appropriate location within the grounds to improve the facilities available on site. The application site does not impact on the school's playing field provision, and is currently occupied by two school sheds that would be retained on site. The proposal would have no impacts on local amenities as it would not increase activity at the school, and the closest residential property is over 90m to the north on the far side of the school buildings.
23. The application also includes the provision of a minor extension to the school playground (approximately 150m² – *please see drawing 09-11/08 on page D6.3*) and provision on a new ecological pond (3m by 4m). In my opinion neither element of the application would result in any adverse environmental or amenity impacts.

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24. I consider that the main determining factor, in this instance, is the design of the building and its visual impact on the local and wider landscape. Due to the nature of its construction the building is small scale and unlikely to have a significant impact on long distance views. The location proposed is almost completely screened to the north by the school buildings –see *drawing 09-11/07 page D6.6*. To the south, west and east the location is screened from the open countryside by a bank of mature trees and scrub. In my opinion, during the summer months when the trees are in leaf, the location would be hardly visible from the nearby public right of way or from wider vantage points in the countryside. During the winter months the location may be slightly more visible; however any view of the proposal would be broken up by the trunks of the trees to be retained. The building would also be viewed against the back drop of the existing school buildings and would not substantially increase the built footprint. I therefore consider that the application site would not have a significant impact on the open character of the wider landscape. The building would only be visible at a local level from within the school grounds, primarily to the east. It is noted that the application proposes to re-site the existing wooden storage sheds immediately to the east of the proposed building partially obstructing this elevation.
25. I acknowledge that the design of the building due to its form would potentially create the impression of a more temporary structure; the fenestrations proposed do not help the building to depart from this image. However, on the basis of the additional information received from the applicant I am satisfied that the finish that would be achieved through the superior design, including horizontal shiplap timber cladding with black powder coated windows, would accomplish an acceptable visual appearance. In my opinion the use of timber cladding would work well with the yellow brick used in the construction of the main school building. The enhancements in the design would set the modular building apart from a traditional mobile classroom enabling it to be consider for permanent retention – *photographs demonstrating existing examples of the building proposed will be displayed at the Committee meeting*.
26. Taking the above details into consideration, I consider that whilst an enhanced design would be preferable in this location, this needs to be set against the likely visual impacts of the development as proposed and the benefits to the existing community use. I am satisfied that there is an established need for the proposed development and that the proposal would help to support a key local service. In this instance the benefits to the community, in my opinion, justifies the development of land within the countryside. Whilst the modular design has caused concern, I consider that the materials proposed would help to link the development into the landscape. I consider that the building as proposed would not appear out of place and would not have an unacceptable impact on the character of its surroundings. On balance, I would not raise a material-planning objection to the application on siting or design grounds, and consider that the development accords with the relevant Development Plan Policies in place.

Conclusion

27. I consider that the applicant has demonstrated circumstances that would allow the consideration of a new development in the wider countryside. The benefits of providing support to an existing community service would outweigh any detrimental impacts from developing the proposed location. The building is relatively small and would not be prominent in the wider landscape. I note the modular design has resulted in objections from the Borough Council, however I am satisfied that the materials proposed would serve to enhance the visual appearance sufficiently to be considered acceptable given the local environment. Therefore, subject to appropriate conditions including those set

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out below, I would not raise a planning objection and recommend that the application be granted permission.

Recommendation

28. I RECOMMEND THAT PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO the imposition of conditions, including:

- the standard time limit;
- the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
- the development to be constructed using the materials set out in the drawings received;

Case officer – James Bickle	01622 221068
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Background documents - See section heading
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