

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.

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**Item D1**

**Extra care apartments for older people, at Little Hill, St Michael's, Tenterden – AS/09/259.**

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A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 6 October 2009.

Outline application by the Kent Adult Social Services for extra care apartments for older people, including one-bed and two-bed apartments, residents' communal areas and staff facilities, at Little Hill, St Michael's, Tenterden (Ref: AS/09/259)

Recommendation: permission be granted subject to conditions

**Local Member(s):** Brigadier M. Hill

**Classification:** Unrestricted

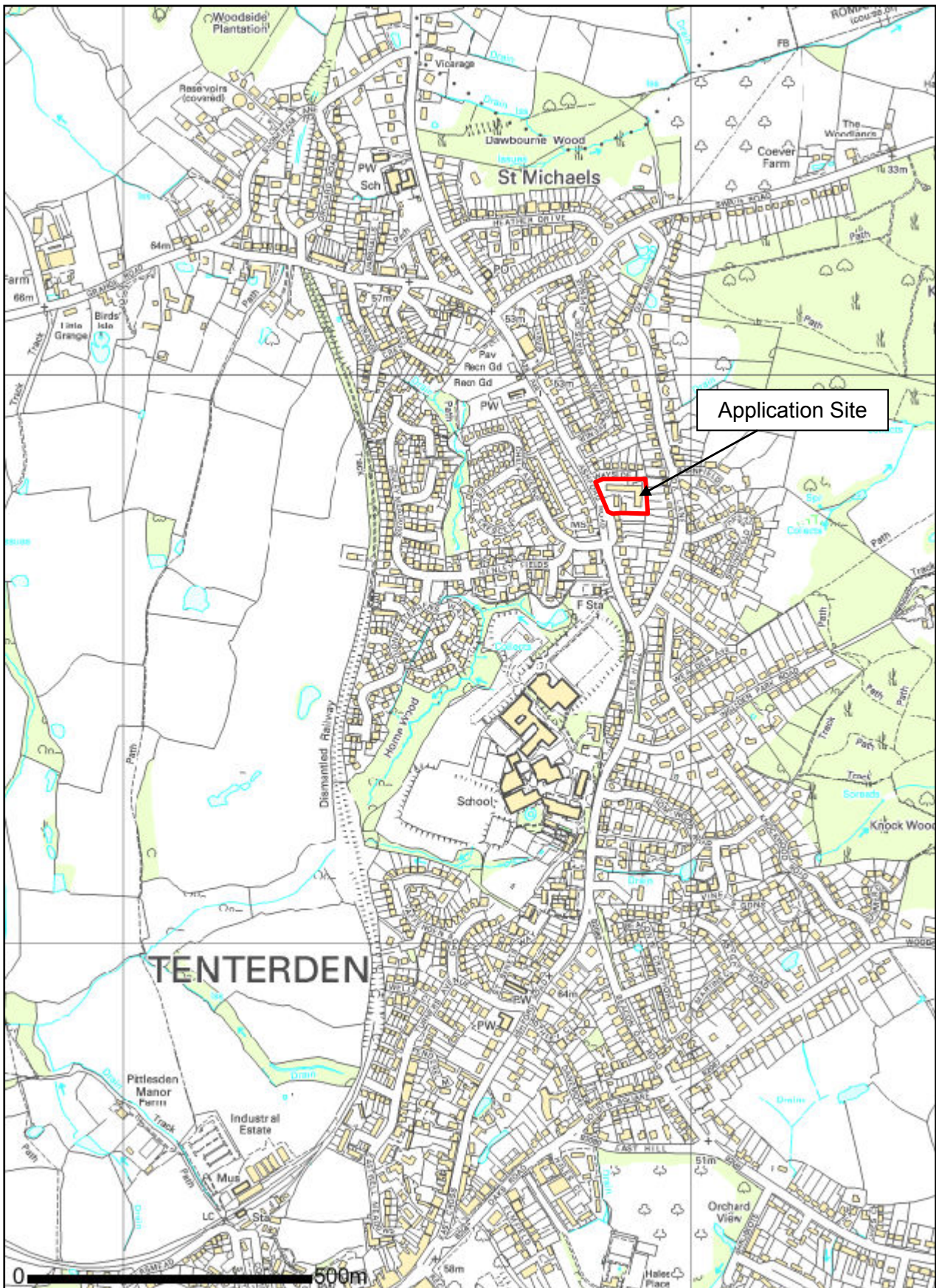
**Site**

1. The application site is an existing residential care development fronting Ashford Road in St. Michael's, Tenterden. The existing Little Hill development currently comprises one and two storey buildings providing residential accommodation for elderly people. The site is within a primarily residential area and the surrounding houses are a mix of one and two storey properties. The adjacent properties in Wayside are 1930s chalet style bungalows, with dormer windows with first floor in the roof spaces, and the adjacent properties in Ox Lane and along the Ashford Road to the south are largely two storey houses.
2. The site is about 0.5 hectares and largely in the ownership of Ashford Borough Council, and access to the site is currently via the Wayside cul-de-sac off Ashford Road. Vehicle parking for the site is currently on the northern border of the site, opposite the Wayside properties. A Public Footpath passes the north east corner of the site, but is not directly affected by the proposed re-development scheme.

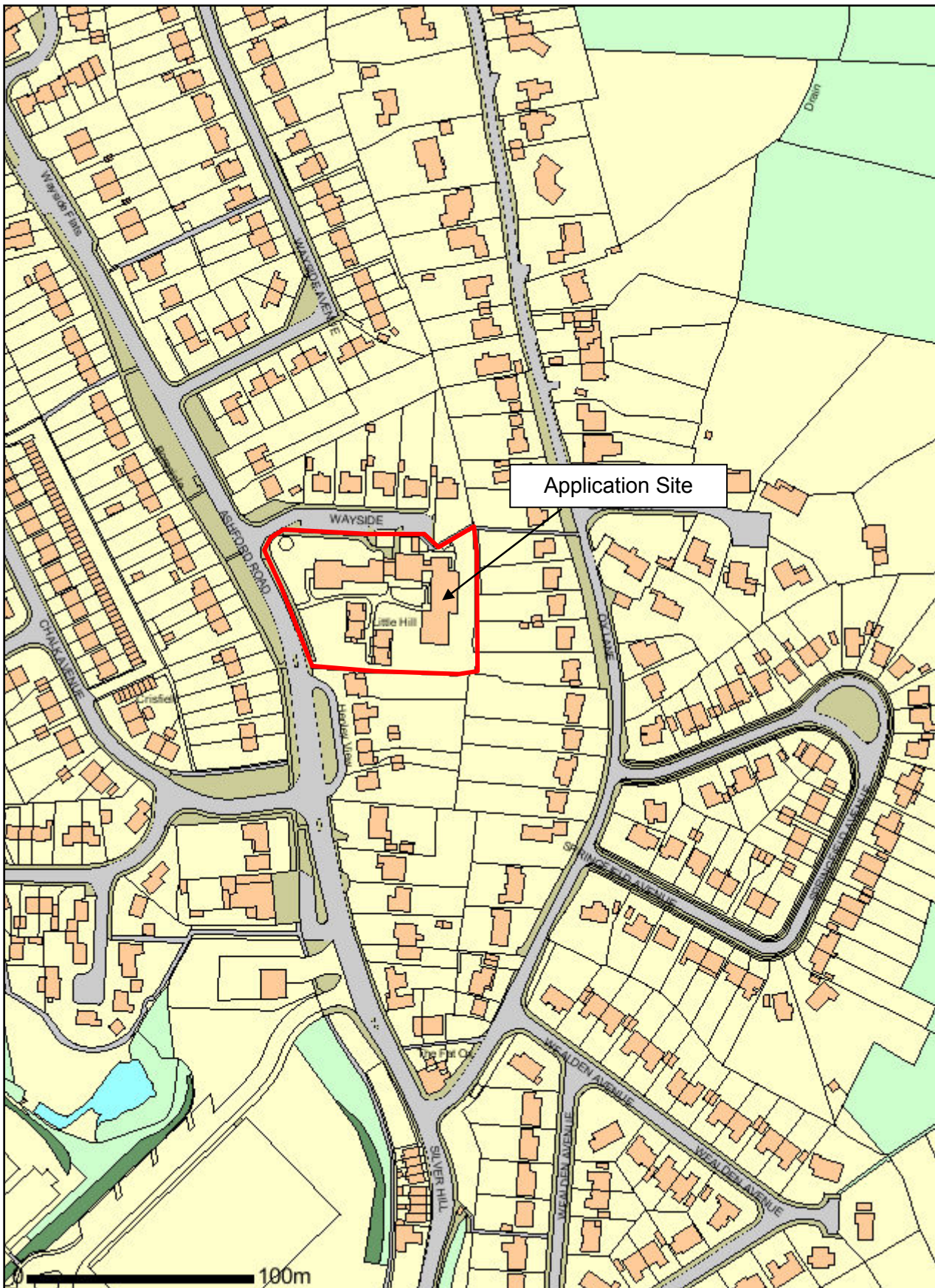
**Background**

3. This application is one in a series of applications for providing new and upgraded residential care accommodation across the county. Kent Adult Social Services is taking the lead in this countywide programme of Extra Care Housing, although it is very much in partnership with the Kent District Councils and a private sector provider, as yet to be identified. The first wave of Extra Care Housing is nearing completion, with new accommodation being provided on largely existing care home sites in Herne Bay, Hythe, Dover, Margate, Birchington, Broadstairs, Ashford, Maidstone and Dartford. Whilst these developments are being constructed and managed as part of a Private Finance Initiative, the sites are ones already in local authority ownership, either owned by the County Council or the local District Council. Planning applications for these developments were considered by the County Planning Authority in 2006-7.
4. The latest wave of planning applications are made in outline only, with full details of appearance, scale and landscaping reserved for consideration as part of later planning applications if outline consent is achieved. In this particular case, the proposed site is already in use as providing accommodation for the elderly, so the principle of the use of the site is already well established and not an issue for consideration. However, in order

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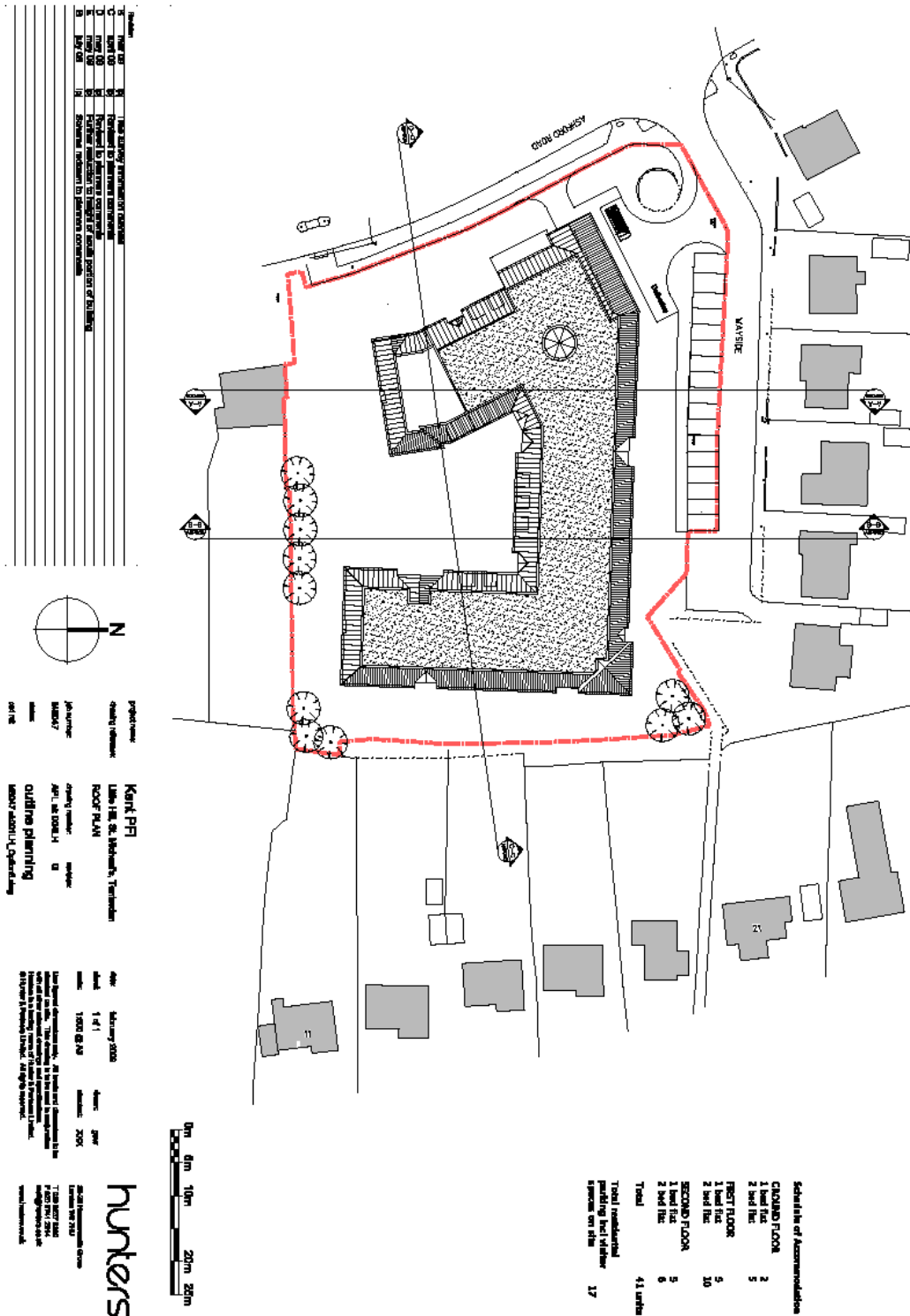
**Site Location Plan – Little Hill, St. Michael's - Scale 1:10,000 (North to top of page)**



**Site Plan – Little Hill, St. Michael's - Scale 1:2500 (North to top of page)**

# Proposed Site Layout

(North to right of page)



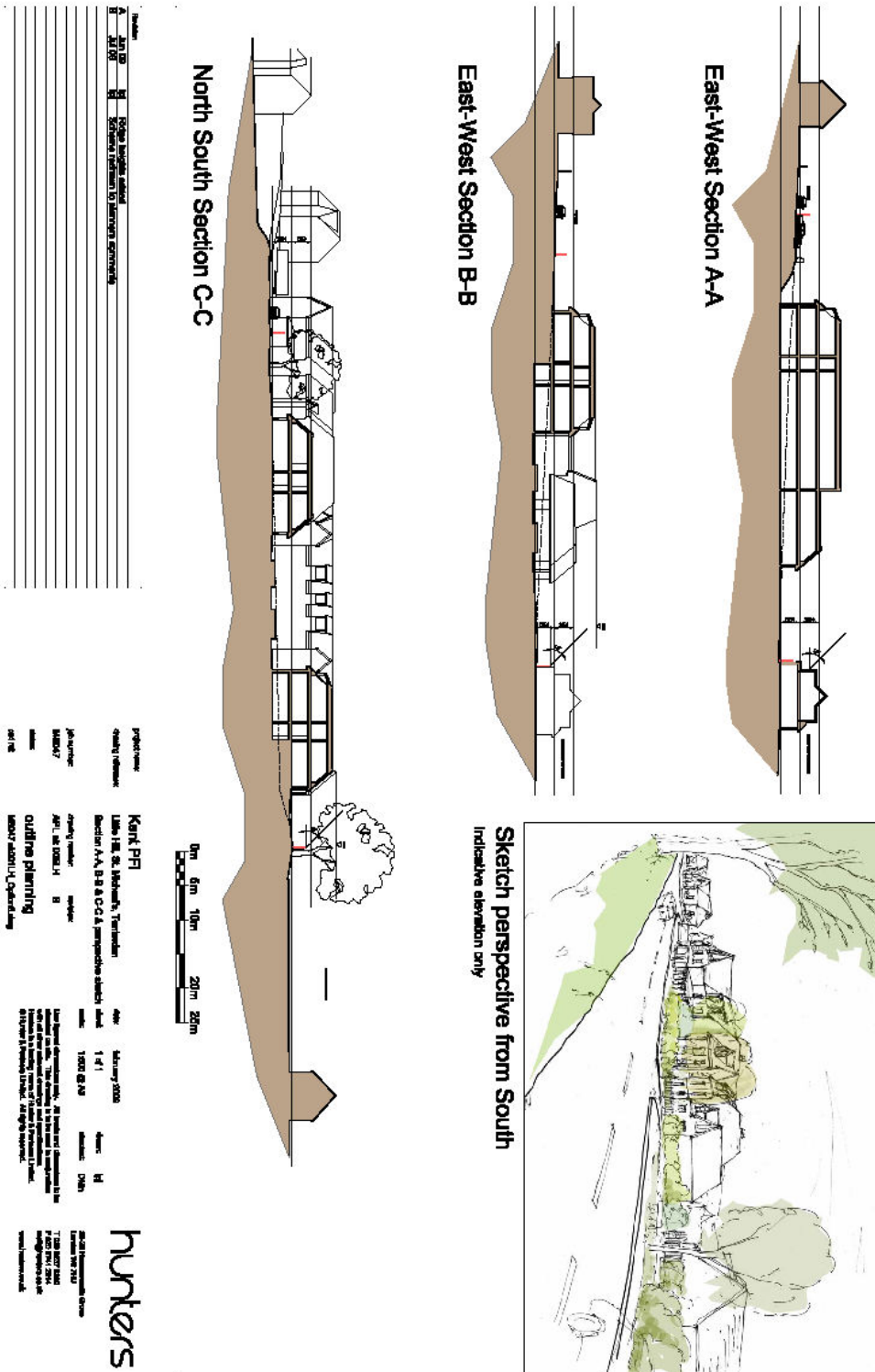
# Proposed First Floor Plan

*(North to right of page)*



# Site Cross Sections

*(North to right of page)*



to secure funding and a private sector partner for the whole programme of provision, there is a need to secure planning consents first, and to avoid potentially abortive detailed design work on unsuccessful sites there is some sense in following the two stage consent process with initial outline applications. On an existing site such as Little Hill, the nature of the proposed development and the type of activity associated with it would not involve any significant change, but the amount of development and the type of accommodation and its management would change as a result of these proposals, so these aspects do warrant exploration as part of this outline planning application.

## **Proposal**

5. The aim of the Excellent Homes for All programme is to provide improved and upgraded accommodation for those requiring an element of care in the county. In the main, this relates to elderly people but the degree of care needed varies greatly from those needing constant supervision to those who can largely live independently from care. The new accommodation being provided responds to these changing needs by providing a mix of living accommodation within the development, at the same time as providing a higher standard of accommodation and personal space and facilities than the conventional old peoples' home have hitherto provided. In particular, these developments provide a mix of individual apartments with modern amenities and to larger dimensions, rather than the earlier pattern of a series of bedrooms lining corridors with shared toilets and facilities. However, there would still be some communal spaces, as well as medical facilities, but these would be less of an institutional nature, including hairdressing salons, fitness suites, etc. for the residents.

6. Under the circumstances, the type of internal spaces being provided is quite different from what has traditionally been provided by local authorities, which is why these applications involve demolition and redevelopment, rather than refurbishment of the existing buildings. As well as improving the standards of the internal spaces and facilities, opportunity is also taken to improve the environmental performance of the buildings, especially in terms of energy efficiency and thermal insulation, which those sites developed in the 1960 and 1970s are now found to be very poor at.

7. The application proposes the demolition of the existing sheltered housing (26 beds, 4 on bed flats and 4 one bedroom bungalows) on the site and their replacement with originally 48 new apartments (24 one bed and 24 two bed) arranged over 2-3 storeys. The new buildings would also accommodate communal lounge, dining room, kitchen, laundry, gym and some accommodation for overnight staff. Externally, the grounds would accommodate vehicle parking and drop-off space, including for ambulances, as well as some garden amenity space. Although this is not a detailed application, a proposed layout of the site has been submitted to enable assessment of the impacts of the proposed redevelopment.

8. The application has twice been amended since its submission, in the light of objections from local residents and concerns from both Planning Authorities at the potential impacts of the development. The currently proposed scheme has reduced the number of apartments to 41 and sought to address local concerns by lowering the new buildings on the site, having the uppermost rooms within the roof space, and re-positioning the buildings to increase its distance from neighbouring properties. It is these amended proposals that will be assessed in this Report, although some of the consultee responses cited relate to the initial scheme. Local residents have been notified following each amendment and the reported representations refer to both the original scheme and the latest amendment.

**Planning Policy**

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

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

Policy CC1 The principle objective of the Plan is to achieve and maintain sustainable development in the region.

Policy CC4 The design and construction of all new development, and the redevelopment and refurbishment of existing building stock, will be expected to adopt and incorporate sustainable construction standards and techniques

Policy CC6 Actions and decisions associated with the development and use of land will actively promote the creation of sustainable and distinctive communities.

Policy T4 Local development documents should adopt restraint-based maximum levels of parking provision for non-residential development, reducing provision in locations with good public transport, and ensure the provision of sufficient cycle parking at new developments.

Policy H4 Local authorities should identify the whole range of housing needs required in their areas working with adjoining local authorities where appropriate. Groups with particular housing needs include older and disabled people and others with specialist requirements.

Policy H6 Local authorities should assess the existing housing stock in their areas and implement measures to reduce the number of vacant, unfit and unsatisfactory dwellings.

Policy S6 The mixed use of community facilities should be encouraged by local authorities, public agencies and other providers, through local development documents and other measures in order to make effective use of resources.

(ii) **Ashford Borough Local Plan 2000**:

Policy GP10 Seeks to conserve and enhance the special character of Tenterden.

(iii) Adopted **Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2008**:

Policy CS1 Promotes sustainable development and high quality design, including buildings that contain a mixture of uses and adaptable building types, respect the site context and create a positive and distinctive character, make the best use of previously development land and buildings, and the timely provision of community services and other local and strategic infrastructure.



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Policy CS9 Requires development proposals to be of a high quality design.

Policy CS13 Seeks to maintain and extend the range of dwellings to respond to emerging needs and to promote sustainable communities.

**Consultations**

10. **Ashford Borough Council:** raises objection to the proposal on the grounds that the proposed development would be contrary to Policy CC1 of the South East Plan 2009, Policy GP10 of the Ashford Borough Local Plan 2000, Policies CS1 and CS9 of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2008, and advice contained in PPS1 and PPS3 and would therefore be contrary to interests of acknowledged planning importance for the following reasons:

The level of development on the site within the prescribed height parameters would result in a building of a bulk, scale, massing and design that would poorly relate to the existing character of the site. The development would as a result harm the visual amenity of the locality.

**Tenterden Town Council:** objects on the grounds that:

- the proposed parking provision is inadequate in respect of the need for parking for staff, visitors, carers and in particular residents and their partners, bearing in mind the two bedroom apartments would increase the likelihood of parking
- no provision has been made for the storage or security of mobility scooters
- the height and scale of the proposal is still too large, particularly with a third floor incorporated
- the loss of amenity, particularly light, to the adjacent bungalow to the south is significant
- the loss of amenity to surrounding neighbouring properties
- the impact on the existing residents that would have to be removed which could be detrimental to their welfare.

**Divisional Transportation Manager:** notes the reduction in the number of units and the number of parking spaces and raises no highway objection to the proposal.

**The Environment Agency:** raises no objection, but offers some standard safeguarding advice relating to any unsuspected ground contamination, fuel or chemical storage on the site and the maintenance of site drainage.

**EDF Energy:** raises no objection provided their access rights are maintained.

**Local Member**

11. The local Member, Brigadier M Hill, has been notified of the application and at the time of writing has submitted no written views on the application.

**Publicity**

12. The application was publicised by the posting of site notices, an advertisement in the local press and the individual notification of 57 nearby properties. Neighbour notification was repeated in the light of the two subsequent amendments to the initial proposals.

**Representations**

13. In response to the first neighbour notification exercise 52 letters of representation were received, including from two Residents' Associations, and including 32 identical petition letters and several repeat or similar letters from the same address. The first set of amendments prompted a further 41 letters, of which 31 are petition letters from individual addresses. The second set of amendments prompted a further 38 letters, of which 32 are petition letters. All these correspondents object to the proposed development and the main grounds for objection can be summarised as follows:

Design and scale

- The proposal and especially the three storey flat block would result in a cramped form of development of excessive density, out of character with its surroundings to the detriment of the visual amenity of the area.
- Plans for 72 bedrooms on the site, with possible accommodation for 100 plus residents, would be too much for such a small area.
- Problems with drainage and sewage problems in the area have not been taken into account.
- Concerns over the proximity of the new building to A28 and the houses on Boresisle, the size of the structure at three floors and its length running parallel to A28.

Character of the area

- The extra apartments would swamp what is a small site and will not be in keeping with the local environment of spacious single dwellings.
- The new building would be out of character in the area, unlike the existing buildings, and seems to be built to maximise on space/profit.
- The development would stand out like a sore thumb from any approach and have a drastic negative impact on the character of St Michael's village.
- No other buildings in the St Michael's area are three storey and the proposed building would be significantly higher, even double the height of the existing height.

Amenity

- The addition of a third floor would increase the overlooking of the rear of the Ox Lane properties and their gardens, the current hedging on the boundary is not tall enough to screen the existing care homes, and it would be even worse if the building was 3 storey
- How much green space would there be around the new site as opposed to the existing? There does not seem to be enough outside recreational space for the elderly people and no protection of existing green areas, thus urbanising this part of the village.
- The new building would significantly block daylight into the properties in surrounding area on the north and east.
- The five bungalows with dormer windows on Wayside would be overlooked, including Roseneath, where the garden is within a few metres of the proposed building. Currently there are no windows on the elevation facing that house, but could that change?

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- Disappointed by the fact that no one talked to the six Henley View properties considering the immediate neighbourhood.
- The construction noise and inconvenience would be immense with intrusion into their privacy. Would like to be visited by KCC staff to explain the implications of the works.
- There would be an unacceptable increase in noise if the development went ahead.
- There would be unacceptable loss or damage to existing trees on the site, including the loss of the tree screen to the electricity substation.
- No boundary landscaping is proposed on the eastern boundary with Ox Lane properties.
- There would be unacceptable cooking odours from the kitchen ventilation.

Traffic

- Concern has been raised that the current bus stop at Wayside Avenue is undersized and the nearby paths are too narrow in the area to cope with the increase in pedestrian flows.
- There would be a vast increase of traffic volume to the site and there is insufficient parking for the number of residents and their visitors. The 100 people leaving the building is likely to mean 50 cars and visitors and staff but plans show only 16 spaces.
- There would be inadequate access and parking for emergency vehicles and old people's mobility scooters.
- Currently children play and cycle on the cul-de-sac road outside their homes, which would be impossible if the development goes ahead.
- Parents use the alleyway to have access to the local schools.
- Ashford Road is already grid locked during school opening/closing times.
- The new drawings do not show a footway on south side of Wayside. What will happen to the pedestrian traffic on Wayside?

Adequacy of information provided to assess the impacts

- No elevations have been provided to compare with the current height of the buildings.
- Lack of information about finished floor levels.
- No reference to existing problems with sewers and drainage.
- Where would be the motor for the lifts? Would it be within the pitched roof?

Need

- Why are 2 bed apartments needed? How does the Council define 'elderly'? Would there be a planning condition restricting the occupancy to people over certain age?
- It is not justified to build two bedroom apartments for the elderly unless it was designed for the open rental or social housing remits. Instead, allowance should be made for one bed apartments with larger bedrooms which would give scope for twin beds per room.
- Should the permission be granted, a planning condition should be imposed restricting occupancy to the elderly (eg over 50s-60s) and for meeting the wider community rental / social housing needs.
- Existing elderly residents in Little Hill are unhappy about the redevelopment of the site and are happy with the accommodation they already have.
- The buildings are 37 years old and there were some recent improvements to the facilities, so why is it not more cost effective to the taxpayer to upgrade Little Hill and maintain the present village environment?
- There would appear to be a hidden agenda behind the development of two-bed apartments.

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- The development would set a precedent for flats development, thereby urbanising the village.

Other comments

- Minimal time allowed for residents to comments on proposed plans.
- What is the timescale of the development and what is the likelihood that the Council would change the use of the building overtime to a commercial apartments?
- Would the substation need to be upgraded to deal with the increased demand? Concern about the proximity of the development to the electric substation and increased risk of cancer.

Some residents welcome a redevelopment of the site for older people who need care, but want the needs of local people taken into account too and any development to be sympathetic to the neighbouring properties and locality.

**Discussion**

14. The application is required to be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan policies, unless other material considerations are of overriding importance. Therefore, the proposal needs to be considered in the context of the South East Plan and the Local Development Framework and other material considerations, including those arising from consultation and neighbour notification responses. In this particular case, the determining issues would therefore include relevant planning policies, transportation aspects, design considerations, residential amenity aspects and need considerations.

Policy Context

15. Policies in the South East Plan generally promote sustainable development, sustainable design and construction and sustainable communities, as well as seeking to upgrade existing housing and restrain parking provisions. The whole programme of providing new sites or redeveloping existing ones to extend and improve accommodation for the elderly where there are local needs is entirely consistent with the objectives of Policies CC1, CC6, H4 and H6, given that the proposals do aim to upgrade the existing housing stock, to meet local community needs and to meet the specialist needs of those in the community not otherwise catered for by the open market. Additionally, the proposed development would make best use of previously developed land by upgrading an existing site rather than seeking fresh land and releasing the current site to some alternative development use. Since this application is not a detailed one, it is not possible to fully assess the sustainability credentials of the proposed new buildings at this stage, but the applicants would be expected to achieve a Very Good BREEAM standard in terms of environmental performance in order to satisfy funding requirements. The application also broadly complies with the policy objective to ensure an appropriate level of on-site parking, to avoid attracting indiscriminate use of personal transport, bearing in mind access to public transport routes and cycle parking facilities (*See Transport sub-section below*).
16. The Local Development Framework Policies similarly promote sustainable development and high design quality, including the best use of previously developed land, as well as sustainable communities. Additionally, there is saved Local Plan policy which seeks to conserve and enhance the special character of Tenterden, given that it is a historic town with two Conservation Areas and surrounded by an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The site in question is not included within or adjacent to the St. Michael's Conservation, and it is well within the built confines of the town, although the Policy does seek to maintain the town's overall special character and its setting in assessing any redevelopment proposals, and this is discussed below.

17. Overall, I do not consider that the proposed redevelopment of this site fundamentally conflicts with any of the relevant Development Plan Policies, given that it clearly accords in principle with the general thrust of most of the policy objectives. Moreover, the planning application is in outline only at this stage, and since the site has already been in residential institutional use for many years, the principle of the proposed use is well established.

#### Design Aspects

18. Whilst the application has reserved out details of building appearance, scale and landscaping for later consideration, it is necessary to consider the submitted details relating to the layout of the proposals and the access arrangements. Most of the objections raised to this application relate to the proposed design of the new buildings, although at present there are only details of the layout of the development which can inform that consideration. The proposed new buildings are to be designed to accommodate 20 one bed flats, 21 two bed flats and a range of communal rooms, which has been reduced from 24 two bed and 24 one bed flats, following concerns about the ability of the site to accommodate the implied size/density of the development. Spreading the proposed layout of the new buildings across the site would have significant implications for visual amenity in the street scene, neighbouring residential amenity and the amenity of the residents themselves because of lack of outdoor space. The applicants have therefore proposed a combination of two and three storey development to reduce the building footprint, increase the distances from neighbouring properties and provide a reasonable area of garden space and tree retention around the site borders. Notwithstanding the wider amenity issues discussed further below, I consider that the latest amended site layout is a satisfactory design solution.
19. However, the implied height of the proposed buildings has provoked widespread objections on the basis of being out of character with the surroundings and potentially detrimental to neighbouring properties. Local objectors seem to have an aversion in principle to the notion of 3 storey developments, presumably on the basis of the visual appearance and the overall height. In terms of visual appearance, the houses surrounding the site are currently a mixture of bungalows and two storey houses, although most of the bungalows are also two storey with rooms in the roof spaces. In the wider context, three or more storey development is actually not uncommon in Tenterden, with many of the historic buildings in the Conservation Areas being of 3 storeys. Additionally, many buildings accommodate an upper floor in the roof spaces. However, the older buildings tend to be more closely arranged so the perception of height tends to be rather different and more characteristic of town and village centres. The application site is unrelated to the central areas, so arguably the immediate local context is more important in this case.
20. Whilst compatibility with neighbouring properties is an important consideration, it is the comparative height of the buildings which largely determines whether a juxtaposition of varying storeys would be acceptable. Part of the amended proposals is the re-contouring of the site to lower the ground floor level of the building and therefore the overall height of the new buildings. The applicants have demonstrated that it would be possible to design a part two-part three storey development where the roof heights would be no

higher than the adjacent properties. To achieve that, the buildings would only be two storeys in height flanking properties on the south (Henley View) side of the site and facing the properties on the east (Ox Lane) side of the site. On the northern (Wayside) side of the site, the proposed development would be three storeys in height, but the ground floor would be largely concealed by the lowered site level, whilst the second floor would be accommodated in the roofspace (*See site cross-sections*). If this arrangement of floors could be achieved, then it is difficult to argue that the proposed new buildings would be incompatible with neighbouring properties. However, if consent was to be given, I consider that it would be essential to ensure that the suggested re-grading of the site was pursued as part of any later detailed design proposals, and accordingly built into any outline planning permission for this development.

21. Concern has been raised that the proposed redevelopment would result in a loss of townscape character, and be contrary to Local Plan policy seeking to protect the town's special character. The townscape of Tenterden has a strong historic character, largely stemming from the form of its older buildings and the distinctive materials employed, but the application site is remote from the historic parts of the town and is actually surrounded by relatively modern development which does not itself contribute to that special historic character. Whilst that is not itself an excuse for allowing more development that might be unsympathetic to the local character, refusal of the application on the grounds of its detriment to townscape character could only be justified if was clearly of an inharmonious design or use of materials. Notwithstanding my comments on massing and scale above, the application is at present in outline only with the design details of the proposed buildings reserved for later consideration, so it is not possible at this stage to judge that the design is out of character with the local townscape. Not only is the immediate townscape of a modern and generally undistinguished character, with no significant unifying features, but there is no reason to assume that the design of the building could not blend in with that prevailing character and use similar or vernacular building materials.
22. Concern has also been voiced that the development might set a precedent for the further development of apartments in the town. There are now well established planning policy initiatives to promote a wider range and size of accommodation to meet the needs of all members of local communities, and these currently lie behind policies in the South East Plan (Policy H4) , the Borough Local Plan (Policy HG15) and the Local Development Framework (Policy CS13). Under the circumstances, any such precedent is already set by planning policy rather than individual planning applications. The current application is to provide one and two bedroom apartments for elderly people, and any further planning applications for similar apartment developments in the locality would have to be considered on their own merits and in the context of the relevant Development Plan policies. Government planning policy guidance not only promotes the provision of housing for all household sizes, but also a greater mix of accommodation to avoid homogeneity of townscape, and I consider that the proposed development would accord with both these objectives.

#### Amenity Issues

23. This planning application has attracted a relatively large number of objections from neighbouring residents concerned over the redevelopment of the site and the potential impacts on their amenity and the wider impacts on the locality. Chief issues for concern in planning terms include overshadowing, loss of privacy, noise, odour and visual intrusion, and impacts on local roads. The applicants have amended their proposals twice in response to such concerns and it is important to assess the scheme as now

amended to judge whether any of these issues are sufficient to warrant refusal of planning consent.

24. The proposed layout of the site and the positioning of buildings has the potential to affect several issues, including overshadowing noise/visual intrusion and privacy aspects. As first submitted the proposed layout would have been close to the side wall of properties on the south side of the site (Henley View), with the potential for both visual intrusion and loss of privacy by overlooking. The adjustment to the position of the building has overcome those issues by increasing the physical separation (from 7 to 14 metres) and reducing the height of the buildings overall (by 4 metres). In particular, the intention is now to re-contour the site so that the ground floor level would be sunk into the site and the two storeys of development at this part would then be no higher than the Henley View properties themselves. Properties on the north side (Wayside) front face the site, where window to window distances are normally expected to be greater to address privacy concerns. As a result of the amendments, the distance from the nearest property would be 21 metres (previously 18.5m), and because of the site re-contouring the ground floor of the new buildings would be indiscernible from this aspect. Whilst there would be three storeys at this point, the overall roof height would be no higher than those of the Wayside properties. Residents in Ox Lane to the east of the site have also raised concerns about overlooking and visual intrusion, but the distances from the new building to the rear of those houses would be in excess of 35 metres and generally no different to the physical separation from the existing buildings.
25. Under the circumstances, I do not consider that there is likely to be any significant detriment to neighbouring properties as a result of visual intrusion, loss of light or invasion of privacy, given that the generally accepted standard design guide distances for the spacing of residential properties could be achieved with the amended layout. Similarly the nature of the premises and their inhabitants, together with the design standards for the new building, are such that noise nuisance is unlikely to be a significant issue. Clearly the possibility of some noise disturbance during the construction period could not be ruled out, but that could normally be addressed by planning conditions governing the hours of working and if necessary stipulations controlling the use of powered machinery. Concern has also been raised over the prevalence of cooking odours from the proposed kitchens, but there is no reason to assume that this would be significantly any different from the current operation of the site. In particular, the new premises would have a more efficient ventilation system than at present, the distances from neighbouring properties are sufficient to avoid any undue nuisance and any discernible cooking odours are far more likely to be from neighbouring houses with uncontrolled outdoor barbecues, etc.
26. The impact on the local road network is a matter for consideration by the Divisional Transport Manager, who takes account of existing traffic conditions when assessing the introduction of a new development, or as in this case the redevelopment of existing site and the re-positioning of an existing access point. The site is not a significant generator of traffic and the extra accommodation to be provided would not significantly add to that, so no highway objection has been raised to the application. Whilst there have been concerns expressed about existing congestion on Ashford Road, that relates to peak time traffic competition for road space, and is not in itself a reason to presume against the redevelopment of the Little Hill site, given that that would not significantly contribute to the peak hour movements, nor those caused by school related traffic.
27. Concern has been raised about drainage aspects and this has been investigated in liaison with the Environment Agency and also through a geo-environmental site survey. The Agency has confirmed that there are no flooding or land drainage issues that would presume against the proposed redevelopment, subject to the standard drainage and

protection from pollution/contamination requirements. The site survey has identified some evidence of localised standing water on parts of the site, especially at the south east corner, where two willow trees were previously planted to assist water absorption.

The currently proposed scheme intends to retain those trees in recognition of that, and if the redevelopment of the site were to proceed, a thorough assessment and re-provision of all on-site drainage would be undertaken. Given that the drainage aspects of the site, including surface run-off, would be improved as part of the redevelopment of the site, I do not consider that an objection on the basis of poor drainage could be sustained in this particular case.

28. There has also been concern on behalf of the existing residents at Little Hill that they would be removed from the site and relocated outside the Borough/County if this development went ahead. That is pure conjecture because there is no intention to uproot existing residents and it is quite likely that most would be re-housed on this site if the development proceeded, together with others who are already local to the area. However, I understand that it is quite likely that there would be a need to decant the residents into some alternative accommodation whilst the redevelopment proceeded, which I would expect to be for several months whilst new accommodation was being completed. Although that would be unfortunate, it is likely to be unavoidable in order to achieve the improved provision on the site in the long run, and it is not in itself a reason to deny planning consent. The applicants have stated as follows in this regard:

*“Existing tenants of the facility would have the option to move into the new facility once it is built. This facility would be primarily for local people and applications would come through Ashford Borough Council's housing list. I have previously produced a paper (See Appendix 1) which explains the high levels of need in Tenterden for this type of scheme, and also in Ashford more broadly. People would only be put forward from other areas of Kent if no local tenants were in need of this accommodation, and in that instance we would look first to the surrounding Boroughs. Extra Care tenants are older people who have care needs and therefore require support to stay in their own accommodation.”*

#### Traffic Issues

29. Concerns have been raised over the provision of parking on the site and whether that would be adequate with the increased numbers of people living at, working at and visiting the site. The site currently has a rank of 12 parking spaces flanking Wayside which in the main are underused by the current Little Hill development, and there is a tendency for the vacant spaces to be used by other unauthorised users. The latest proposed scheme involves extending that rank across the existing site access to provide 17 parking spaces, with a further minibus/ambulance space, plus a turning space for delivery vehicles closer to the proposed buildings via a repositioned access off Wayside. Provision would also be made for cycle storage within the site.

30. The Divisional Transportation Manager has been consulted on the proposed provision and has raised no objection to the proposal, and has confirmed that it complies with Supplementary Planning Guidance 4 (Kent Vehicle Parking Standards). In particular, 62 bedrooms would require 10 spaces. On the understanding that there could be up to 9 staff on site at any one time (4 care staff, 2 catering staff, 1 manager, 1 district nurse and 1 maintenance operative) a further 5 spaces would be required. Since the proposals exceed the standard requirement (15 spaces) by 2 spaces, then no transportation objection could be sustained on this particular application. Whilst local



residents might contest this judgement, there is good evidence from other sites across the County where a similar provision of parking provision demonstrates that at many times of the day there are vacant spaces, because many staff do not drive to the site or share vehicles. The applicants have stated as follows in this regard:

*“We are expecting the tenants of the extra care scheme to have similar levels of need to those who would occupy a residential care facility. It is therefore not anticipated that many tenants of the facility will have their own cars or drive. However facility will need to be made for visiting friends or relatives. In terms of the staff accessing the site: There will be approximately 8 care staff accessing the site through our contract per day (4 rotas of 2 people within 24 hours - so they will not all be there at once). During the day there will also be a scheme manager (9 - 5) on site and probably two catering staff. There may be other professionals coming and going occasionally during the week - such as a district nurse, or maintenance person.”*

31. Concern has been raised about the lack of provision for mobility scooters in the proposed development, and although that has not been explicitly addressed by the applicants, the proposed layout would have to be to a design that would also accommodate their access and parking. The applicants have included provision for disabled parking spaces close to the proposed buildings and have confirmed that the development as a whole would be fully wheelchair compliant to accord with the current Legislation requiring equal access to public buildings, but the design of the buildings is not detailed at this outline stage and has been reserved for later consideration. Should outline planning consent be given, these detailed design aspects would be the subject of an appropriate planning condition.

#### Trees and Landscape

32. The site currently hosts some trees that are of visual amenity value to the site and the street scene, as well as softening views into and out from the site. The proposed site layout has been guided by a detailed Tree Survey and aims to retain the most valuable trees in this regard, including two willows on the Ashford Road frontage, an oak on the eastern boundary of the site and some of the leylandii screening of the electricity sub-station. There are other smaller trees of lesser value on the site – being cherry and ornamental species – which are capable of being replaced within any redevelopment of the site. Under the circumstances, I do not consider that there are grounds to presume against the proposed redevelopment of this site on the basis of the impact on trees. However, I would expect to impose conditions to protect the trees to be retained, together with the need for a detailed landscaping scheme for replacement trees in and around the site, should consent be given to this application.

33. Concern has also been raised about the loss of green space on the site as result of the proposed redevelopment. I would agree that the open space in and around the existing buildings is an important aspect, not just for the amenity of the residents to be accommodate there but to soften the appearance on any new buildings when viewed from outside the site. Whilst the initially submitted site layout indicated that most of the site would be occupied by buildings and/or vehicle parking/circulation areas, the latest amended layout provides a significant area of semi-enclosed (and south facing) garden area for the residents, as well as a reasonable landscape buffer zone around the proposed buildings. The existing open space on this site is rather disparate, comprising spaces in and between buildings, whilst the proposed redevelopment would arguably

provide a more cohesive arrangement and be no less effective than the existing arrangement. Under the circumstances, I do not consider that objection could be raised on the basis of inadequate or ineffective green space for this redevelopment.

#### Need and Other Issues

34. The need for the proposed development is not in itself a material planning consideration, but it has been raised by local residents in the context of why the development is required and whether the existing accommodation is adequate. The need for the development is explained by the applicants in Appendix 1, and stems from a joint County Council and Borough Council initiative to re-invest in the provision of residential accommodation for the elderly in the Ashford Borough. Not only is the intention to extend the range of accommodation, but also to improve the facilities and the standard of accommodation to meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century needs. It is also very clear that none of that can be achieved by simply refurbishing the existing accommodation because of the constrictive physical dimensions and arrangement of spaces, as well as the need for new spaces for communal facilities hitherto not provided on the site. By working with a private sector partner, the two Councils can also rationalise the cost of the proposed upgrading and achieve a higher standard of accommodation than would be likely under more conventional local government funding streams. In this regard the applicants have stated as follows:

*"I cannot comment on the state of the existing buildings as they belong to Ashford Borough Council, however for our Outline Business Case for the project an extensive options appraisal was undertaken which compared the costs of refurbishing sheltered accommodation to provide extra care to the cost of new build. Refurbishment is actually much more expensive than new build because it would require totally reconfiguring the apartments on the site - extra care accommodation is a much higher specification than ordinary sheltered accommodation of the type which is on the site at present (for instance all of the apartments are bigger to accommodate disability standards, and 50% are two bed - it is not possible to expand all of the apartments to create this extra space). A total refurbishment would also involve as much disruption for tenants as new build."*

35. It is unclear why neighbouring residents consider that there has been inadequate time for commenting on the proposals, given that those have been in the public arena since the application was first submitted in January 2009. The scope for varying the use of the proposed accommodation to cater for different clients or indeed open market clients is limited by the fact that any consent given to the current proposals would be strictly for the use of the named applicants, and not transferable to any other party without a further planning application for private use of the premises. There is no need to upgrade the existing electricity sub-station simply as a result of this development proceeding, and the electricity company has been consulted accordingly. Finally, Members will be aware that concerns expressed over loss of privately obtainable views from neighbouring properties, and the perceived loss of property values, are not material planning considerations.

#### **Conclusion**

36. Since the proposed use of the site is already well established, I see no objection to the principle of the proposed development and consider that it also accords with the general thrust of the relevant Development Plan Policies. Objections have been raised to the impacts of the proposed redevelopment on various aspects, including townscape

character, residential amenity and traffic/parking considerations, but having examined each of these aspects in detail I am of the view that none are of sufficient substance as to warrant refusal of the application. In particular, there would be inevitable changes to the local streetscape and residential environment if the development was to proceed but these are not in themselves reasons to withhold planning consent if there is unlikely to be any significant lasting harm to interests of acknowledged importance. Under the circumstances, I advise that the proposed development is in accordance with the general principles of the Development Plan Policies and, subject to appropriate conditions, I am of the opinion that the proposed development is unlikely to significantly compromise the amenity of local residents. Consequently I recommend that outline permission be granted.

**Recommendation**

37. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT to conditions, including conditions covering:

- the standard outline time limit;
- the standard outline planning conditions relating to the reserved matters of scale appearance and landscaping details;
- the submission of an amended remediation strategy should any unsuspected contamination be encountered;
- the protection of existing trees and vegetation during construction;
- controls over the hours and days of construction activity;
- the inclusion of provision for mobility scooters in the detailed design; and
- the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details.

38. I FURTHER RECOMMEND that the applicants BE ADVISED:

- that the reserved matters of the proposed development must accord with the proposed re-grading of the application site; and
- of the comments of the Environment Agency relating to the maintenance of drainage and sustainable urban drainage systems, together with measures to prevent ground contamination from fuels, oils and any other potentially contaminating materials.

Case Officer – Anna Michalska-Dober
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Background documents –See section heading
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**Appendix 1****Need for Extra Care Housing in Ashford and Tenterden**

Ashford, like the rest of Kent, has an ageing population. Over the next 20 years the population over the age of 65 in Ashford is predicted to rise by 78% and the population over the age of 85 in Ashford is predicted to rise by over 120%. This is compared to the rise in population of working age, which will only rise by 30% during the same period. \* Ashford is also due to experience significant growth under the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan over the next 15 years, and this will impact on number of older people and the pressure on services required to meet their needs.

Population forecasts for Tenterden show that the numbers of people aged over 65 will grow over the next 20 years. In 2006 there were 1,840 people aged over 65 living in Tenterden, this will have grown to nearly 2,000 people by 2011 and to nearly 2,300 by 2016.\*

Studies of the population distribution in Ashford also demonstrate that Tenterden North, Tenterden South and Charing all have a higher percentage of older people as part of their population than the average for the wards in Ashford. They also have a lower percentage of people under the age of 50. Tenterden North has highest percentage of its population between the ages of 75 and 90 and the ratio of older people as a part of the population in Tenterden is higher than that of the average for Ashford (nearly 10% higher than some other wards). \*

These demographic issues mean that there will be fewer people to provide the natural family support to the growing older population in future and that there will be increased pressure on existing health, social care and housing provision. For this reason both Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council are keen to ensure that appropriate facilities for older people are developed in Tenterden. Central to this is the need for the provision of appropriate housing and facilities that will support the independence of older people.

**Summary of Condition of Current Sheltered Housing Stock in Ashford**

There is currently only one scheme of social extra care housing in Ashford and that is in central Ashford. There are currently 20 ordinary sheltered housing schemes in Ashford, 13 of which are owned by the council, but these do not have the levels of support on site that extra care can offer to older people. Older people have increasing aspirations in terms of the type of home they would like and the services they might need to help them remain living there independently for as long as possible. Ashford Borough Council's Housing Needs Survey in 2005 identified the need for 678 units of sheltered housing for older people in the Borough, however there are currently only 543 units of sheltered housing available, plus 42 units of extra care accommodation. Some of the sheltered accommodation is already approaching forty years old and is not to the standard we would expect in the 21st century – therefore there is already a gap in provision.

**Housing Needs Survey and Demand for 2 Beds**

The configuration of one/two bed apartments at the Tenterden site is based on our understanding of what is expected in the current market for extra care housing. There are a number of reasons for including 50% two-bedroom apartments in the extra care schemes:

- Aspirations of older people are changing. Most older people who are moving out of family housing into extra care apartments prefer to have more than one bedroom.
- Two bedroom apartments enable couples to stay together rather than be separated when one person requires additional care.
- Two bedroom apartments are more flexible and assist in future-proofing the scheme

Ashford currently has 92 applicants over 50 years of age with a 2 bed housing need on their list, of these 79 have housing need points. 42 of these applicants are on the transfer list and so would be freeing up other Council-owned accommodation for those in need if appropriate accommodation was available for them to move into. There are also 22 applicants over the age of 50 with a 3 bed need and although their need could reduce it is likely to reduce to 2 bed initially at least.

**Extra care apartments for older people, St Michael's, Tenterden – AS/09/259**

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**Advantages of New Extra Care Sheltered Housing**

Extra care sheltered housing is an alternative to residential care. It provides older people with their own apartments within a scheme of accommodation in which there are communal facilities and care which is available 24 hours a day – as and when people need it.

Schemes will be built to high standards and will be designed to provide flexible supported accommodation to people with a range of needs and disability. The housing will not only provide much needed specialist accommodation, it will also contain facilities which will be open to both residents and to other people from the local community including:

- Laundry room.
- Restaurant
- Facilities for visiting therapists (e.g district nurses, chiropodists, hairdresser)
- Exercise room
- Small shop selling basic goods
- Internet facilities

Nominations to the new facility will come through Ashford Borough Council and nominations from local people with a need for this type of housing will be prioritised. Those people who are residents of the current scheme at Little Hill will also have the opportunity to move into the new facility if they would like to do so. The benefits for local people will be:

- A positive environment where older people can live independently in their own homes, preventing unnecessary moves to residential or nursing care and supporting speedy discharges from hospital.
- Housing which offers older people increased choice and the ability to remain in a community setting and fully participate in the life of the community, with their family and friends.
- Flexible care delivery based on individual need which can increase or decrease according to circumstances.
- New and improved community facilities and services available for the local community as well as for residents

***Head of Public Private Partnerships  
Kent Adult Social Services  
July 2009***

*\* Statistics from South East Plan November 2008, provided by Kent Adult Services Policy, Performance and Planning Unit.*