

Temporary placement of double mobile classroom at the Barn End Centre, Wilmington, Dartford – DA/09/895

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

Application by the Barn End Centre and Kent County Council Children, Families and Education for the placement of one, six bay mobile classroom unit, Barn End Centre, 189 High Road, Wilmington, Dartford, Kent DA2 7DP – DA/09/895

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to the mobile classroom being removed from the site no later than one year from the date of the permission.

Local Member: Mrs A Allen

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. The Barn End Centre at Wilmington, Dartford is a pupil referral unit providing education for pupils experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is located to the south side of High Road and to the east of the Barn End Lane and its junction. The Centre's buildings front onto High Road with a playground and car parking to the rear and garden/landscaped area to the west. Vehicular access is from Barn End Lane at the bottom corner of the site. Residential properties adjoin to the east and south and on the opposite side of the road to the north. There are residential properties opposite side of the road to the west and a shop on the corner of the road junction. The terraced properties, nos. 157 to 165 High Road, to the east are Grade II listed buildings. A site location plan is attached.

Background and Proposal

2. The proposal is to temporarily site a six bay mobile building, providing two classrooms, on the playground along the eastern boundary of the site adjoining the garden of 165 High Road. It arises as a result of the Phoenix Centre (also a pupil referral unit) previously based at the Woodview Campus Longfield joining the Barn End Centre. Both units have been re-registered under the new name of North West Kent Behaviour Service and will be moving to the Rowhill School once it has relocated to accommodation currently being refurbished and extended at the Woodview Campus Longfield, which should be completed in April 2010. The applicant advises that the phasing and completion of that work would be greatly assisted by the interim move of the Phoenix Centre to the Barn End Centre, as proposed. The mobile building is therefore needed to house 2 units of up to 9 pupils to provide general teaching facilities to deliver the national curriculum for pupils in years 10 and 11. The applicant indicates that it would be needed for no longer than a year.
3. The mobile classroom is 16.2 metres by 8.6 metres and about 3.5 metres in height. It would be timber frame construction, decorated externally in green colour render, have white single glazed windows, blue flush plywood doors and a black felt flat roof. The building would include a ramped main access to its front and two stepped fire exits at the back.

A copy of a drawing showing the floor plan and elevations, of the proposed building are attached over the page.

Temporary placement of double mobile classroom at the Barn End Centre, Wilmington, Dartford – DA/09/895

4. It is stated in the application details that the proposed siting is to allow the playground to be used as a drop off point to reduce traffic congestion. It is also stated that car share schemes have been introduced with pupils sharing taxi's and the year 10 and 11 pupils being encouraged to continue with their use of public transport allowing little or no congestion at peak times.

Planning Policy**5. (i) The 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 S3 States that local planning authorities, taking into account demographic projections, should work with partners to ensure adequate provision of pre-school, school, and community learning facilities.
Policy BE6 Gives support to proposals which protect, conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the historic environment and the contribution it makes to local and regional distinctiveness and sense of place.

(ii) The 1995 adopted Dartford Borough Local Plan:

- Policy CF3 Encourages and supports the provision of social, community, educational and cultural facilities and infrastructure to meet the current and future needs of the Borough. It also sets down the following factors to be taken into account in assessing proposals:
- (a) suitability of the site and location for the use proposed,
 - (b) effect on the amenity of nearby properties and the surrounding area,
 - (c) design of buildings and adequacy of landscaping,
 - (d) anticipated traffic generation and adequacy of access and local highway network,
 - (e) adequacy of car park provision, and
 - (f) compliance with other relevant policies of the Plan.
- Major residential developments are expected to make provision for new school facilities necessitated by the development.

(iii) The second deposit draft Dartford Borough Local Plan Review

- Policy DD11 Seeks a high standard of design and sets out certain criteria that need to be satisfied, including compatibility with neighbouring buildings and spaces, respect to site topography, retention of important landscape features, retention or enhancement of the privacy and amenity of the local area, retention of important buildings or spaces, retention of townscape features, ensures a satisfactory environment for future occupants, provides for adequate shade from sunlight, allows for a high degree of accessibility to a range of modes of travel other than the car, incorporates appropriate provision for the role of the car, meets parking standards, incorporation of landscaping proposals, protection and maintenance of trees, requirements of statutory undertakers and service providers being met, designed to optimise water and energy

Temporary placement of double mobile classroom at the Barn End Centre, Wilmington, Dartford – DA/09/895

- conservation and minimise pollution, and Kent Thameside's image to be enhanced.
- Policy BE8 Proposals for development will not be permitted if they would cause harm to the setting of a listed building.

Consultations

6. **Dartford Borough Council** raises no objection.

Wilmington Parish Council's raises no objection subject to the temporary unit being removed when the new school is relocated.

The Divisional Transportation Manager raises no objection.

Local Member

7. The local County Member, Mrs Ann Allen, was notified of the application on the 23 July 2009. Mrs Allen has no objection to temporary planning permission for the mobile classroom and understands that it would be removed once the move to the new site is completed.

Publicity

8. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the individual notification of 11 nearby residential properties. It was also subsequently advertised in a local newspaper and site notice posted with regard to the proposal affecting the setting of nearby listed buildings.

Representations

9. Representations to the application have been received from 5 nearby properties. I have also received copies of correspondence between the School and local residents about the proposal following prior consultation carried out by the School. This includes representations from 3 additional properties. The concerns and objections raised to the proposal include the following:
- Extra volume of traffic.
 - The entrance to the school is on a very dangerous corner position on Barn End Lane/High Road junction. Any further increase in traffic from the additional capacity at the school would be unacceptably dangerous.
 - As a result of six nearby schools, the traffic at peak times is horrendous.
 - The site is not suitable for increased capacity of pupils as it is in the middle of a residential area and is not secure.
 - Using up part of the playground area (which they already consider to be undersized) for the mobile classroom would result in an unacceptable decrease of outdoor recreation facilities for pupils as half of the area is already used as a car park.
 - Questions how temporary the mobile building would be and whether or not it would eventually be used for another purpose.
 - The close proximity to listed buildings and residential property.
 - Considers that it would be an eyesore clearly visible from their house and garden.
 - The mobile would project above the boundary fence.

Temporary placement of double mobile classroom at the Barn End Centre, Wilmington, Dartford – DA/09/895

- The spaces between the side and rear of the mobile and the boundary walls would provide hiding places for students.
 - The noise disturbance (and anti-social behaviour) would be even closer and as a result would interfere with the enjoyment of residents' gardens.
10. In addition to the above points, a number of objections have been raised relating to anti-social/unacceptable behaviour being experienced and/or observed (including the need for the police to be called on some occasions) and concern that this would be exacerbated by additional pupils on site. In view of this it is considered that the site is too small and that with young children and elderly people in close proximity, the location for this type of school is unsuitable.

DiscussionIntroduction

11. This proposal has arisen as the result of a short term need for additional accommodation arising from the amalgamation of the Barn End Centre with the Phoenix Centre and pending relocation to the Rowhill Special School site at Wilmington. I understand that the site has been used as a pupil referral unit for the last 30 years and therefore has a long established education use. However, there are issues relating to the siting and design of the mobile classroom, including its proximity to adjoining listed buildings and residential properties, the increase in the number of pupils on the site and associated additional traffic. These issues are also reflected in the representations that have been received, summarised in paragraph (9) above and need to be considered in the context of the relevant development plan policies outlined in paragraph (5) above. In summary the relevant parts of these policies, as well as supporting provision of educational facilities, seek a high standard of design, protection and conservation of the historic environment, regard for the amenity of nearby properties and the surrounding area, and require adequate access and parking.

Siting and design

12. The mobile classroom would be sited within a metre from the western boundary, about 6 metres from the existing school buildings to the north and 7 metres from the southern boundary, and 19 metres from the façade of the nearest residential property to the south. The corner of the mobile would be about 8 metres from the corner of the listed buildings to the northeast. As well as being in close proximity to the adjoining properties it would be viewed across the playground against the backdrop of the listed building and affect its setting, as can be seen from the photographs on page (D2.6). The utilitarian design and bulk of the mobile building means that it would not enhance the site or locality. There is also concern about increased noise disturbance due to the siting.
13. Whilst it could be argued that the building does not meet the development plan policy objectives for high quality design and would to some extent compromise the setting of the listed building, given the temporary period of time that the applicant advises the mobile would be needed, I do not consider an objection on these grounds would be justified. Furthermore, although the building would be visible and close to adjoining properties, there is some sense of enclosure and separation of the school site provided by the playground being enclosed by brick walling. On the eastern boundary

Item D2

Temporary placement of double mobile classroom at the Barn End Centre, Wilmington, Dartford – DA/09/895



1. View of application site and western boundary



2. View of part of application site and southern boundary



3. View of the application site and neighbouring Listed Building

Temporary placement of double mobile classroom at the Barn End Centre, Wilmington, Dartford – DA/09/895

it is approximately 1.5 metres in height with chain link fencing of 1.9 metres above. The school side of the wall is painted. On the neighbouring side of the wall a plywood screen of between 0.3 and 0.4 has been added to the height of the wall. On the southern boundary the wall varies between 1.5 metres and 1.9 metres in height with chain link of about 0.9 metres in height. On the neighbouring side of this boundary, some properties have timber fencing, seen behind the chain link, and trees or hedging. The ground levels are also higher. Therefore, given this context, I consider that the visual impact of the development would be mitigated to a reasonable level bearing in mind its temporary nature, even though it would not be completely screened and from most views at least partially visible.

14. In terms of noise disturbance, I accept that the siting of the classroom on the playground could bring an increased concentration of activity closer to residential properties than is currently the case. Classroom activity can be noisy and could at times be noticeable at neighbouring properties particular in the adjoining gardens when windows might be open. On the other hand, I am mindful that there is already playground activity in this area of the site, of the relatively short duration of the school day, the break in activities at the site during weekends and school holidays, and of the temporary nature of the development and use proposed. On this basis I do not consider that residential amenity would be adversely affected. I would however recommend that if permission is granted a condition be imposed to restrict the use of the mobile building to school hours and term time only.
15. Concerns have also been raised with regard to the reduction in playground area available for recreation as a result of the siting and the increase in the number of pupils. Whilst acknowledging that the site is small, the applicants consider that it is acceptable as a short-term solution and that they can manage the situation by, for example, staggering break times. I do not therefore consider that there is a basis for a planning objection to the reduction in playground area.
16. The issue of loss of privacy from overlooking also needs to be considered. Windows in the mobile would face east and west. There is, in my view no issue with the windows facing east but there would be the possibility of overlooking the garden to the east or at the very least the perception of being overlooked, as the windows would be above the 1.8 metre height of the boundary wall and screen. This could be mitigated by a translucent film being applied to the windows to obscure the glazing and if permission is granted could be conditioned. There are no windows in the north or south elevations and therefore the possibility of direct overlooking is not an issue.

Transport and access issues

17. A number of representations raise issues about the potential increase in traffic as there would be increase in pupils and staff. I am advised that the Barn End Centre had places for up to 40 pupils and with the amalgamation it would be up to 56 places. The roll varies day to day but at the time of writing it is 21. There is now a total of 31 permanent and 2 temporary staff, although some of these are peripatetic. This is an increase of about 8 over previous numbers. The applicants advise that existing pupils arrive by minibus (which currently has spare capacity) and taxi, and that most year 10 and 11 pupils would use public transport. They also advise that they have adequate on site parking for staff, and manage use of the playground for dropping off and picking up pupils by minibus and taxi, at the beginning and end of the school day. The Divisional Transportation Manager has not raised a highway objection to the proposed development or any issues with regard to the access, the current or future transport arrangements.

Temporary placement of double mobile classroom at the Barn End Centre, Wilmington, Dartford – DA/09/895

Pupil behaviour

18. The issues raised in representations about the behaviour of pupils referred to in paragraph (10) will be noted. The behaviour of individual pupils per se, is not material to the determination of the planning application and a matter for the School. However there is a community need for educational facilities for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and, in this particular case, additional accommodation required on a temporary basis at this long established pupil referral unit to cater for the amalgamation. Furthermore, the provision of adequate educational facilities is supported by South East Plan Policy S3 and Local Plan Policy CF3. The planning issues arising from the proposed accommodation are otherwise discussed above.

Conclusion

19. Whilst at first considering the proposed development would be contrary to development plan policies mainly due to its siting and design, given that the need for the accommodation is a short term one for a period of no more than one year, I do not consider that it would give rise to any material harm. On balance therefore, I recommend that planning permission be granted for a temporary period of one year from the date of the permission, and to conditions which restrict the use of the mobile building to school hours and term time only, and that require translucent film to be applied and maintained to the windows in the eastern elevation.

Recommendation

20. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to a condition requiring the mobile classroom to be removed from the site no later than one year from the date of the permission, and to conditions which restrict the use of the mobile building to school hours and term time only, and that require translucent film to be applied and maintained to the windows in the eastern elevation.

Case officer - Paul Hopkins	01622 221051
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Background documents - See section heading
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