

Change of use of former stationmaster's house to public library for up to 5 years, Station House, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887 (KCC/MA/0197/2017)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 11 October 2017.

Application by Kent County Council Property and Infrastructure Support for a change of use of the former stationmaster's house for use as a public library for a temporary period of up to 5 years– Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone, ME14 4PH (Ref: KCC/MA/0197/2015 and MA/17/503887).

Recommendation: Temporary planning permission to be granted, subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr P Carter

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Bearsted railway station is located within the village of Bearsted, on the eastern outskirts of Maidstone. The railway line lies to the north of the village and the station is located towards the north western side of The Green, and in close proximity to a parade of shops and a public house. Bearsted train station was designed by Arthur Stride and was opened on 1 July 1884. It was built for the Maidstone and Ashford Railway, which was constructed between 1880 and 1884 to give a direct connection between these two towns. At the same time a goods shed, weighbridge and cattle dock were constructed to the west of the station building. In 2011 the station and its associated infrastructure were afforded Grade II listed status. The site is also adjacent to the Bearsted Conservation Area which is located to the east of the railway station.
2. The building, to which the existing library is temporarily proposed to be relocated to, comprises the eastern portion of Bearsted railway station and was formerly used as the stationmaster's house. This part of the building has been vacant for the last 18 months. The western part of the building is currently used as the ticket office. Please refer to the Site Location Plan.

Background

3. Bearsted Library has since 1975 occupied a building fronting The Green at Bearsted. This building was constructed in 1839 and occupies a central position, close to other services and facilities of the village and is therefore widely accessible to the community that it serves. In April 2017 the library was closed to allow a condition survey of the fabric of the building to be undertaken. This survey revealed that the building required extensive restorative work to address various matters including dry rot and that it was unsuitable for public use. This has necessitated the temporary relocation of the library whilst the works are undertaken and consideration of alternative facilities as close as possible to the original.

Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

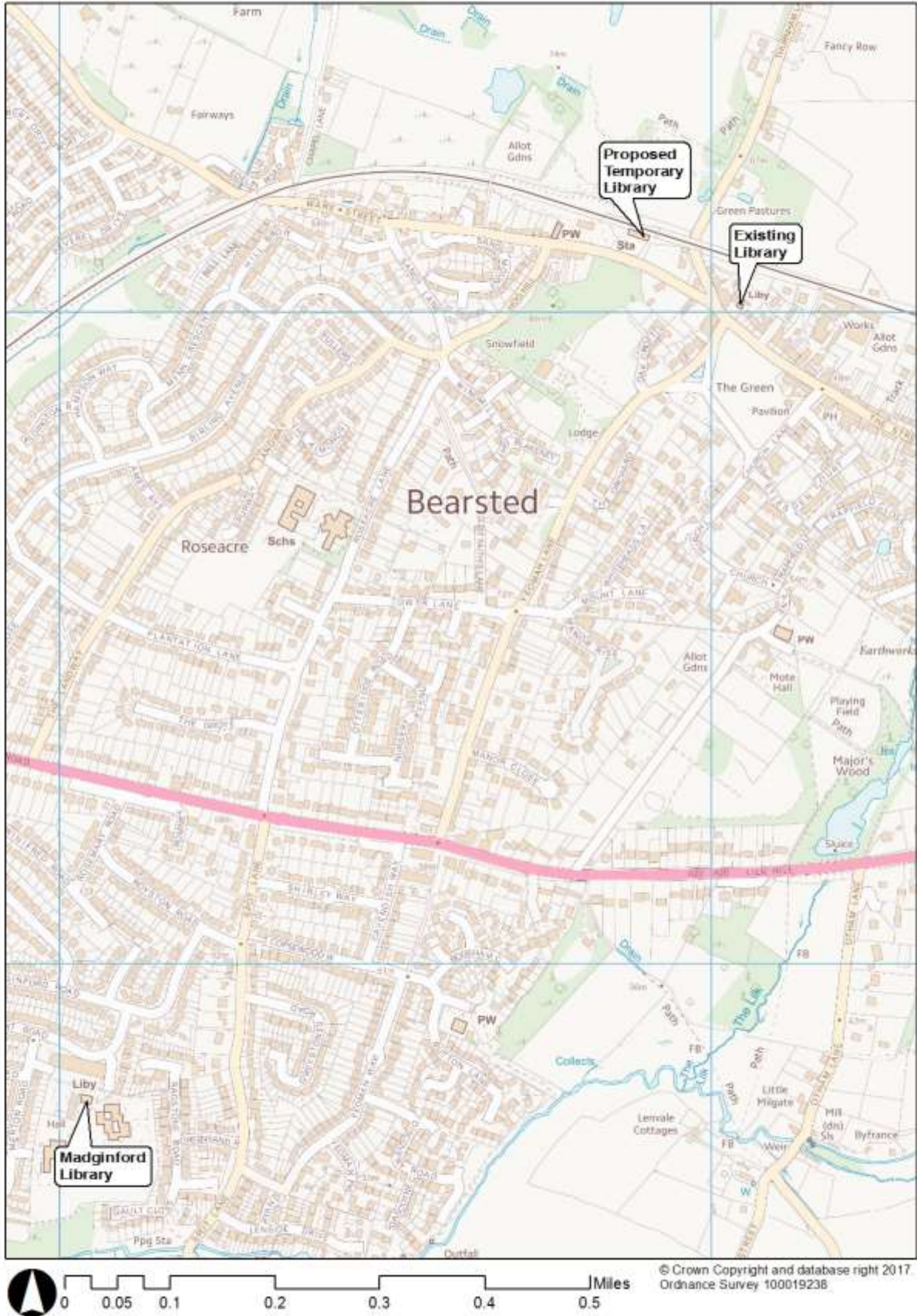
Site Location Plan



© Crown Copyright and database right 2017
Ordnance Survey 100019238

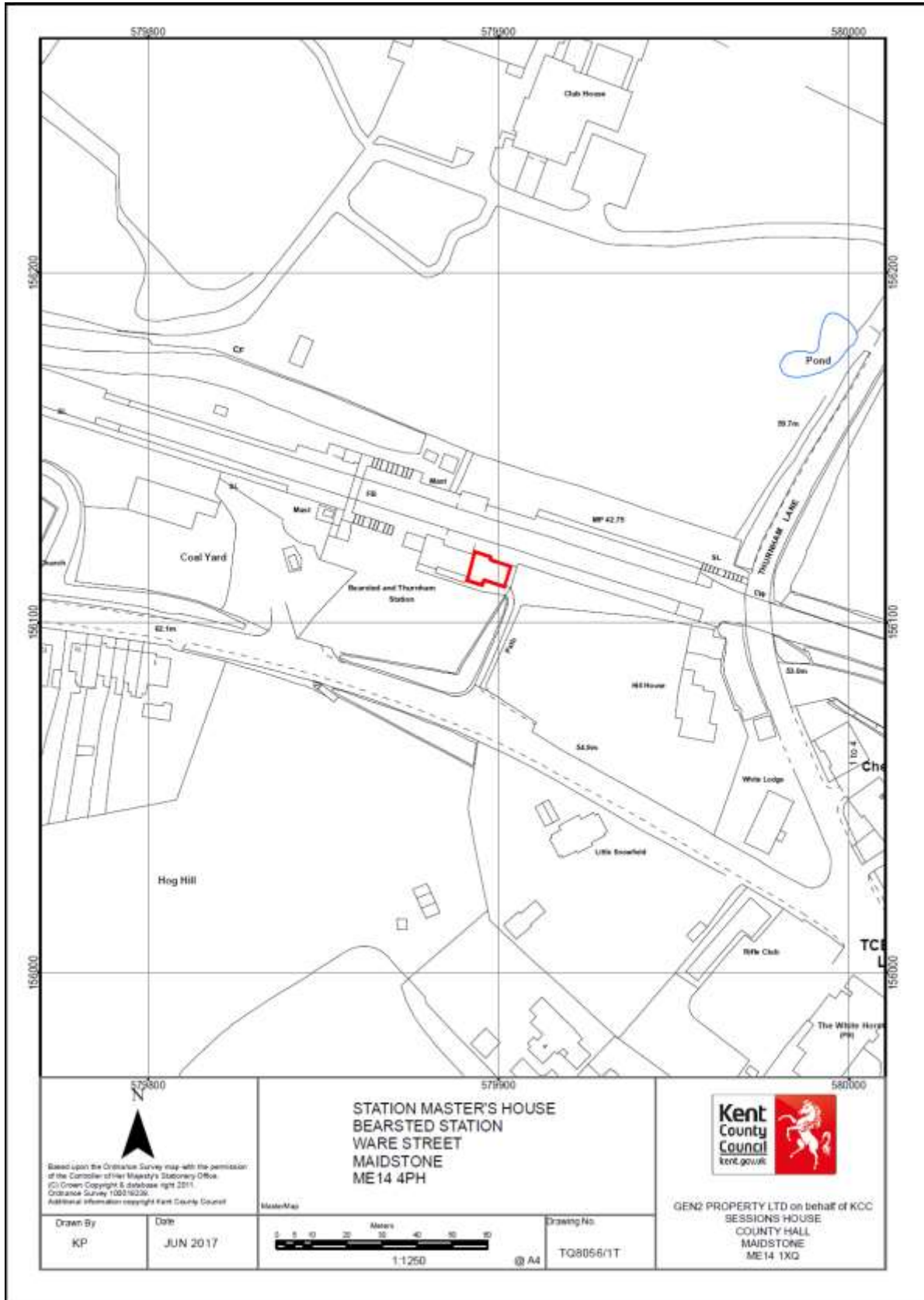
Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

Wider Location Plan



Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

Site Location Plan



Item D2

Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

Existing elevation



Proposed elevation



Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887



Bearsted Library which is now closed and is currently undergoing restorative works



Front elevation of application site

Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

4. At present the loss of the existing library in Bearsted is currently being accommodated by extended opening hours at the Madginford Library, which is located about 1.2 miles away to the south of Bearsted. This facility is not as easily accessible to the local community.
5. The existing Bearsted Library does not have any allocated parking spaces either within the curtilage of the library site or any dedicated on-street parking spaces. There are unrestricted on-street parking spaces in the vicinity of both the existing library as well as within the vicinity of the proposed relocated library. There are 46 parking spaces and 2 disabled parking spaces available in the station car park which can be used subject to a charge and availability. The existing library is located centrally and is served by public transport including bus and train services. The existing library is located about 200 metres to the east of the stationmaster's house and there is a footpath located on the southern side of Ware Street, which provides a footpath link between the two sites. There is also a public footpath which runs to the eastern side of the former stationmaster's house from Ware Street and extends along the frontage of this building, giving pedestrians a separate route away from the vehicular entrance to the train station car park.

Recent Planning History

6. There is no previous planning history for this site that has been determined by Kent County Council. However as the stationmaster's house is a Grade II Listed Building, there is a separate Listed Building Consent application currently submitted to Maidstone Borough Council, under reference MA/17/503612. Listed Building Consent is being sought for internal alterations, attachment of an external sign and the installation of push-button activation system for disabled access. At the time of writing this report, the application was still undetermined by Maidstone Borough Council. In order for the development to proceed both this and the Listed Building Consent applications will need to have planning consent

Proposal

7. The application has been submitted by Kent County Council Property and Infrastructure Support and seeks approval for a change of use of the existing stationmaster's house for use as a public library (Use Class D1) for a temporary period of up to 5 years. To accommodate the relocated library, internal changes are also required. These are not structural and simply involve the relocation of the existing ground-floor kitchen to the first floor, and the removal of the ground-floor toilet located within the single-storey eastern portion of the site. No alterations are proposed which would lead to the loss of internal or external features of heritage value, as identified within the building's listing description. A small external notice board and a push button for the front entrance door are proposed but these are planned to be fixed into the mortar joints within the brickwork, which can easily be made good once the sign and push button are removed. Please be aware that the proposed internal alterations, signage and push button are for Maidstone Borough Council to determine as part of the Listed Building Consent application that has been submitted for their determination and are not for this Committee to determine. The works required internally and externally are listed in this application as background information to show how the building would need to be adapted to accommodate the temporary library.

Change of use of stationmaster’s house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

8. The planning application seeks to maintain a library service to serve the local Bearsted community whilst the existing library is closed for essential maintenance work. It is currently proposed that the temporary library would operate the same public opening hours as the existing facility. The proposed days and hours of opening are listed below;

Sunday	Closed
Monday	Closed
Tuesday	9.30am – 1.00pm 2.00pm – 5.00pm
Wednesday	Closed
Thursday	2.00pm – 6.00pm
Friday	9.30am – 1.00pm 2.00pm – 5.00pm
Saturday	9.30am – 12.30pm

9. The library would continue to be staffed by one employee. As is the case at the existing library, there are no proposals to provide any dedicated parking spaces either for visitors or for the member of staff at the temporary library. The member of staff and visitors that used the library before it closed for repairs would either walk to the library, use public transport or park in available on-street parking bays/spaces surrounding the site. The same is envisaged to happen at the proposed relocated library.

Planning Policy Context

10. The most relevant Government Guidance and Development Plan Policies summarised below are appropriate to the consideration of this application:
- (i) National planning policies and policy guidance are set out in the **National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)** and the **National Planning Policy Guidance (March 2014)**. These set out the Government’s planning policy and guidance for England, and are a material consideration for the determination of planning applications. It does not change the statutory status of the development plan which remains the starting point for decision making. However the weight given to development plan policies will depend on their consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the development plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

In determining applications the NPPF states that local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible. In terms of delivering sustainable development in relation to this development proposal, the NPPF guidance and objectives covering the following matters are of particular relevance:

- Achieving the requirement for high quality design and a good standard of amenity.
- When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation.

Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

- The promotion of healthy communities.
- The retention of community facilities as a means of place making and promoting healthy communities.
- Development being located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised, and
- Safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people.

(ii) **Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000 (Saved Policies):**

Policy CF3 Seeks to ensure that where proposals would lead to a significant loss of community facilities then this would not be permitted unless a replacement facility is deemed acceptable.

(iii) **The Emerging Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2017.** The emerging plan, which is yet to be formally adopted, includes a similar policy covering community facilities, as well as policies covering heritage assets, sustainable transport and parking.

Consultations

11. **Maidstone Borough Council:** Raises no objection to the proposed temporary change of use.

Bearsted Parish Council: Recommends approval of this application.

Kent Highways: Raises no objection to the proposal. Kent Highways confirms that the crossing to the footpath serving the station and the main vehicular access to Bearsted station has a good/low injury crash record. It is considered that this proposal would not exacerbate or create an undue injury crash pattern above that exhibited from current activities associated with the station. Kent Highways therefore have no objection to the proposal. It is further considered that there are no specific conditions, relating to highway issues that need to be applied.

County Conservation Officer: Raises no objection to the proposal. The application is for a Change of Use for a limited period of time and no external structural alterations are proposed.

Local Member

12. The local County Member Mr Carter was notified of the application on 24 July 2017.

Publicity

13. The application was advertised by the posting of a site notice, the notification of 4 neighbours and an advertisement was placed in the local newspaper on 27 July 2017.

Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

Representations

14. One letter of representation has been received objecting to the application from a local resident. One letter of representation from The Bearsted & Thurnham Society has been received in support of the application. The main points raised in relation to this application can be summarised as follows:

Objection

- Raises objection due to concerns about where the staff and people wanting to drive are going to park. States that the station is full by 9am as is the on-street parking. Asks whether it is intended to open the old coal yard for parking. Considers that unless the coal yard is opened up for this purpose, the proposal is not viable and that there is no other parking.

Support

- While the Bearsted and Thurnham Society has certain reservations about pedestrian safety, car parking and the extent to which the limited space within the building can provide a broad range of library facilities, these concerns are outweighed by the advantages of having a library at this end of the village. Given the length of time the existing library is likely to be closed for essential repairs it is important that those who used Bearsted Green are provided with alternative lending facilities, computer terminals, a photocopying machine and, if possible, space for small meetings. Such facilities will be of advantage to all members of the community, but especially the more elderly and those who do not drive. For those reasons the Society support the current proposals.

Discussion

15. In considering this proposal regard must be had to Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (10) above. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, this proposal needs to be considered in the context of Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity.
16. This application is being reported for determination by the Planning Applications Committee due to the one neighbour representation received. The main issues relating to this application include need, location, heritage, and highway and parking considerations.

Need

17. As outlined in paragraph 10 of this report, the National Planning Policy Network (NPPF) supports the provision and retention of community facilities as a means of place making and promoting healthy communities. Paragraph 70 underlies the important social role of the planning system contributing to sustainable development and healthy communities. Decision should be made which guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day to day needs. It should also ensure that

Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

established facilities and services are able to develop and modernise in a way that is sustainable and retained for the benefit of the community.

18. The planning application received is for a temporary change of use of the stationmaster's house for up to a period of 5 years. This proposal is to enable the continued provision of a library service in Bearsted due to the existing library needing to close whilst extensive restorative works are undertaken. The length of time that the existing library needs to be shut is longer than originally planned due to the amount of work required. At present the loss of the existing library in Bearsted is currently being accommodated by extended opening hours at Madginford Library, which is located about 1.2 miles away to the south of Bearsted. However due to the distance of the replacement library facility from Bearsted and the length of time that the existing library requires to be shut, has necessitated in a temporary replacement facility to be identified.
19. As the applicant has identified a continued need to provide a library facility for the local community in Bearsted. It is in the interests of public safety and community amenity that an alternative location is sought and that it be as close as possible to the closed library. Support for established facilities and services that are sustainable and retained for the benefit of the community is embedded in the NPPF and local planning policy, and I consider that the need for the temporary library facility should be given significant weight in this instance. I also note the support of the Bearsted and Thurnham Society for a temporary solution for the Bearsted Green area.

Location

20. The circumstances surrounding the closure of the existing library to allow restorative works to the building have previously been explained and in terms of geographical location, the proposed temporary use of the former stationmaster's house provides a nearby alternative that would be equally accessible to the local community. The proposed use of the former stationmaster's house would allow a continuity of library services to serve Bearsted whilst the existing library is closed.
21. By virtue of its use as a former stationmaster's house, the site is well served by various modes of public transport and also has good pedestrian links. The proposed new temporary site lies only 200 metres away from the existing library. Consequently the proposed temporary library would be well related to the existing public transport networks which serve the area and would be accessible to the public.
22. A footpath extends along the southern edge of Ware Street, providing access from the existing library to the station. The former stationmaster's house can be accessed via the station's pedestrian access way, which forms a shallow sloping pathway leading from the northern edge of Ware Street to the eastern boundary of the site. The footpath continues across the full extent of the site to provide access to the main station, its forecourt and parking areas. Whilst this is not a level access, the absence of steps allows for wheelchair and pushchair access. Level access to the site can also be gained from the main vehicular access further to the west. The site can therefore be easily accessed by the public on foot or by bicycle.
23. Both the existing and proposed temporary library facilities do not enjoy allocated parking areas however there is parking available on the roads surrounding both locations which has restrictions to the length of time that a vehicle can be parked. The current library users use these roads to park and this is envisaged to continue. As

Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

both facilities are centrally located they are easily walkable as well as being well served by public transport.

24. The applicant has undertaken a comprehensive search for the temporary accommodation which would be located as close as possible to the current library facility. The former stationmaster's house was deemed the only suitable building available which would enable the continued provision of a library service in Bearsted. I consider that the proposed location is very close to the existing library and thus the pattern of how visitors access the library facility albeit by foot, cycle, public transport or by car, is unlikely to alter significantly during the period of time the relocated library would be open. The proposed location is only 200 metres away from the closed library and located in a sustainable location and I would therefore not raise a planning objection to the proposed temporary location.

Heritage Considerations

25. The planning application proposes to use for former stationmaster's house, which together with the other buildings at Bearsted railway station was afforded Grade II listed status in 2011. The site is also adjacent to the Bearsted Conservation Area which is located to the east of the railway station. For information, the closed library is actually located within this Conservation Area.
26. As part of this planning application there are no structural changes proposed that would materially harm or alter the fabric of the building. The only external changes proposed include the addition of an external sign and a push button for the front entrance door. These are proposed to be attached to the building via the mortar joints within the brickwork and be made good once the sign and push button are removed.
27. The application for Member's consideration is for the proposed change of use of the former stationmaster's house for a temporary period of up to 5 years. There is a separate Listed Building application lodged with Maidstone Borough Council, which will consider the proposed internal alterations, the attachment of the external sign and installation of the push-button activation system for disabled access. This application is currently undetermined.
28. The application would see the re-use of an empty Listed Building. I am satisfied that the proposed change of use of the former stationmaster's house would not have any implications upon the adjoining Conservation Area and I would not raise an objection to the proposed Change of Use of this Grade II listed building.

Highway Considerations

29. As outlined previously, both the existing and proposed temporary library facilities do not enjoy allocated parking areas, however there is parking available on the roads surrounding both locations which has restrictions to the length of time that a vehicle can be parked. The current library users use these roads to park and this is envisaged to continue.
30. Kent Highways have been consulted on this planning application and considered that as the proposed temporary library was only going to be relocated some 200 metres away from the existing library, travel patterns between the closed and proposed temporary library is unlikely to result in any significant change. Kent Highways were

Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

also satisfied that the pedestrian route and crossing points between the two library facilities were good.

31. Whilst there is no dedicated car parking being provided by Network Rail as part of the lease agreement to use the former stationmaster's house as a temporary library, there is a 46 space public car park including two disabled parking spaces, immediately in front of the former stationmaster's house. This car park is available for public use at a cost, on a first come, first served basis.
32. An objection has been received on the grounds of no parking being provided and that the goods yard should be opened to allow parking for the temporary library. However I understand that the goods yard is not available.
33. As the relocation of the library is proposed for a temporary period and is only relocating some 200m away from the current library, then visitors to the library are aware of the current parking restrictions and would more than likely access the proposed relocated library using the same travel methods as currently. The library site is located in a sustainable location and can be accessed by bus, train and by foot. Any under provision of parking should not be considered to outweigh the community benefits provided by the relocated library. It must also be noted that there is public parking available on the road network surrounding the site. Therefore it is a very much like-for-like arrangement and the status quo in terms of parking provision is being maintained. Under these circumstances, I would not raise a planning objection on highway grounds.

Conclusion

34. The application seeks a temporary change of use for the stationmaster's house to be used as a public library, whilst the existing library, fronting The Green, Bearsted, undergoes major restorative work. The proposed library lies some 200 metres to the west of the existing facility and would be sited adjacent to the village railway station. In my view, the development would not give rise to any significant material harm and is in accordance with the general aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies, as well as the National Planning Policy Framework. I consider that the proposed development to be acceptable in terms of its location and need. It is noted that a concern has been raised by a nearby resident on grounds of lack of parking provision. However the current library does not provide any dedicated parking spaces, and there are on-street parking available in the vicinity of both library sites. Both library sites are located in a sustainable location and served by public transport. The sites are also accessible on foot and cycle. I am of the opinion that any perceived under provision of parking should not be considered to outweigh the community benefits provided by the relocated library. In my view the development would be suitable in this location is sustainable and I would not raise a planning objection.

Recommendation

35. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED subject to the following condition covering the following:
 - The change of use of the building being for a 5 year temporary period, after which it shall revert to its current use class; and
 - The development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details.

Item D2

Change of use of stationmaster's house to a public library – Station House, Ware Street, Bearsted, Maidstone – MA/17/503887

Case officer – Lidia Cook	03000 413353
---------------------------	--------------

Background documents - See section heading
--