A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 8 December 2009

Application by St George's Church of England Primary School for planning permission to create a new Pre-School and Nursery Facility together with a School-run Extended Hours Club using three existing mobile classroom buildings at St Georges C of E Primary School, Chequers Road, Minster-On-Sea, Sheerness.

Recommendation: Temporary planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr. A. Crowther

Classification: Unrestricted

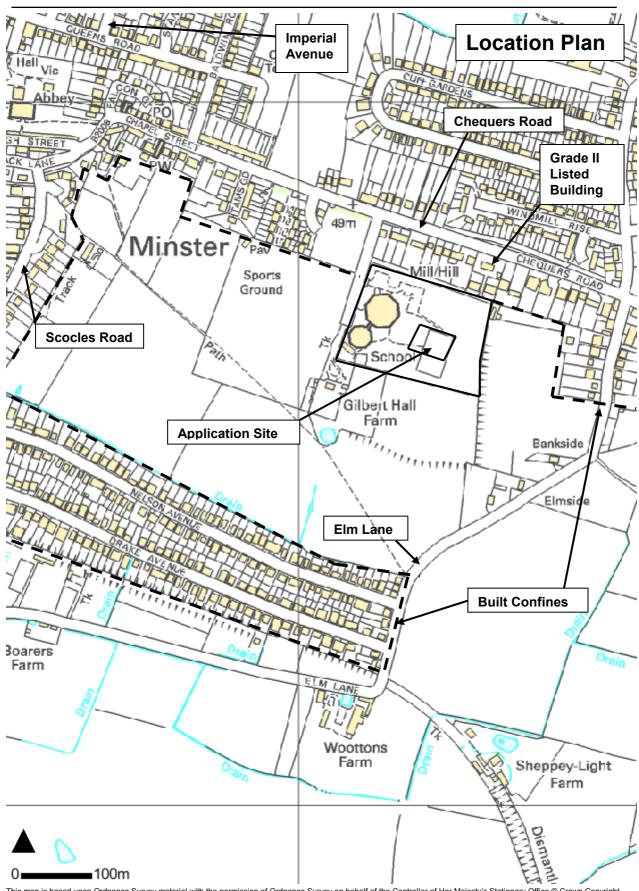
Site

- 1. St George's Church of England Primary School is located to the east of Minster-On-Sea, set back from Chequers Road (B2008). The school comprises a modern building which was opened in 1997 as a Middle School. Due to the recent changes to the education system on the Isle of Sheppey, from a three tier to a two tier system, the school is currently undergoing adaptations to modify the building to accommodate a 2 form entry Primary School. The alterations to the site were approved by the County Planning Authority in October 2008 under planning permission reference SW/08/930. The approved works included internal remodelling of the school buildings, a minor extension to a link between existing buildings, enlargement of playground space, alteration to car park, formation of a drop-off and pick-up zone, and the provision of temporary mobile buildings during works on site. The School has access to a total of 80 car parking spaces on site (55 spaces in the main car park and an additional 25 for visitors), along with an access drive off Chequers Road, which is shared with a small number of private properties.
- 2. Three mobile buildings were installed on site to make the re-development of the school building possible. These buildings are sited on a playground area to the east of the main school building, to the centre of the school grounds. The mobile buildings and adjacent land form the application site. The closest residential properties are located approximately 70m to the north on Chequers Road. Open farmland is to be found beyond the school playing field to the south and east. A site location plan showing the school grounds and application site is attached on the next page (D3.2).
- 3. The Swale Borough Local Plan (2008) Proposals Map identifies the school grounds as being located outside of the built confines of Minster within the wider countryside. There are no other site specific land use designations in the adopted Local Plan, although general policies are set out in paragraph (9).

Proposal

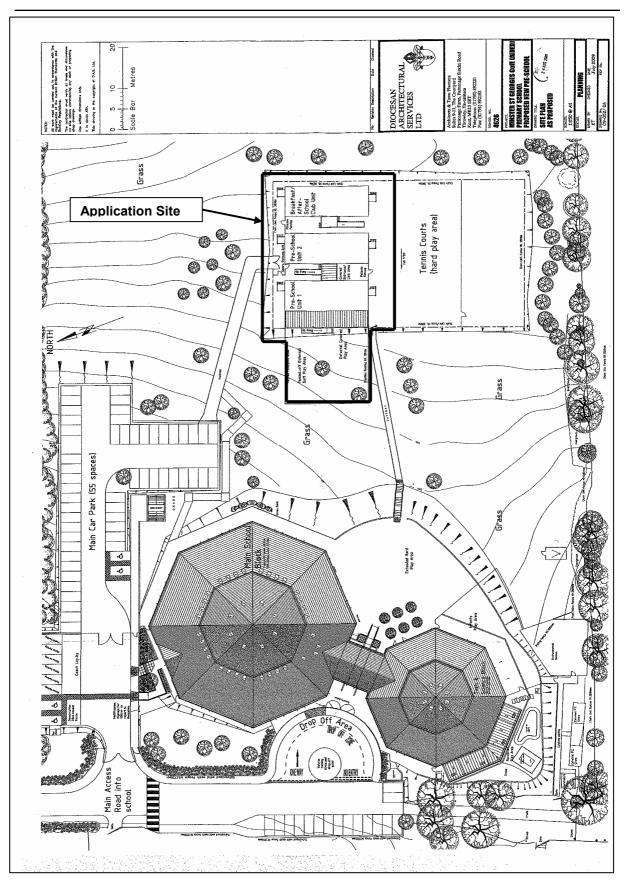
4. The planning application has been submitted on behalf of the Governors of Minster St George's Church of England Primary School, and Daisy Chain Nursery (a registered not for profit charity). The proposal is to create a Pre-School and Nursery within the school grounds, with a breakfast and after school club (Extended Hours Club). The proposed facilities would be accommodated within the three existing double mobile buildings on site.

Item D3
Pre-School, Nursery and Extended Hours Club at St George's
Primary School, Minster-On-Sea – SW/09/851



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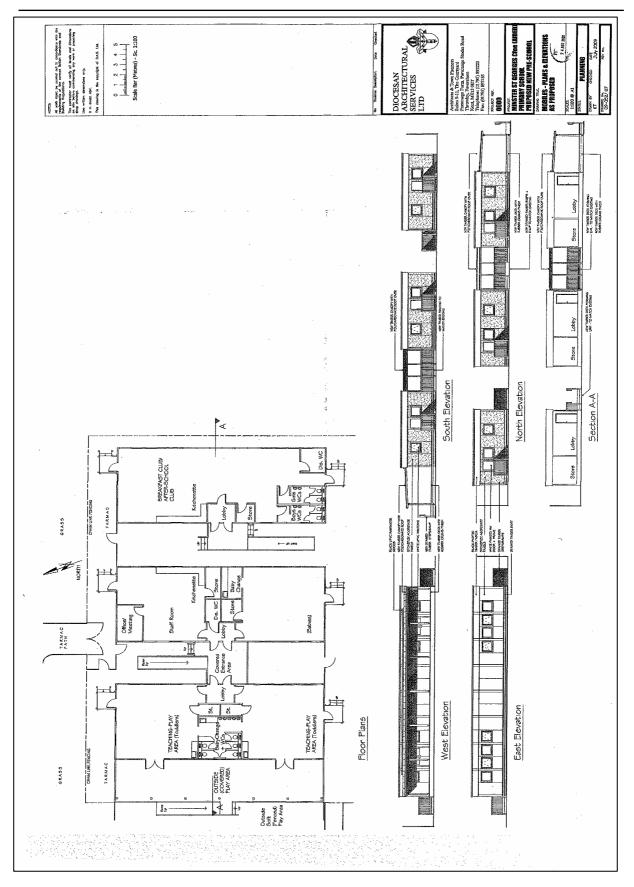
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The mobile buildings are currently being used on site as temporary classroom accommodation during remodelling work being completed within the main school buildings and are due to be removed on completion of this work.

- 5. The application proposes that two of the mobile buildings would be remodelled internally to provide appropriate care and learning facilities for babies and pre-school toddlers. The external changes would include covered play area(s), alterations to the access ramps, the erection of weldmesh and wooden palisade fencing to provide separation between different uses. The third mobile building would be remodelled internally to provide for the Extended Hours Club.
- 6. The proposed Nursery would offer full time care for 18-24 children and 6 babies between the hours of 0800 to 1800 hours. The Pre School would provide sessional care for 24 children with two sessions per day, 0900 to 1200 and 1200 to 1500 hours. Both facilities would be staffed by a total of 10 to15 members of staff. The Extended Hours Club would support the education provision on site, beginning at 0800 and running through to 1800 hours, with staff and pupils attending from the existing school roll. Car parking for the proposed uses would be made available within the existing school provision (80 spaces)
- 7. The proposed mobile classrooms are of a typical single storey design, finished in a rough-cast Sahara beige render with white UPVC double glazed windows and soft wood doors. The buildings would be fully accessible and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant with a series of external ramps and steps to ensure inclusive access to the buildings.

Additional information provided by the applicant

8. Following comments received from statutory consultees during the planning processes further supporting information has been received from the applicant as follows:

The proposed Pre-school and Nursery provision is currently based in the Scouts Hut on Imperial Avenue, Minster, within a residential area (approximately 0.5km to the north west of the school grounds). The existing Nursery takes 3 year olds and is registered to take up to 26 children. The current facility is supported and approved by KCC.

The County Council's Early Years team and the Primary School consider that having the Pre-school relocate at this school site would generate the opportunity for a combined learning experience, in that children attending the Pre-school facility could then move straight over to the main school. i.e. schooling from 3 – 11 can be achieved from one site. The applicant considers it would also be beneficial for families with younger siblings as they only need to attend a single site. The transition from Pre-School to Primary School would also be easier as the children would be familiar with the surroundings.

The applicant considers that the reuse of the three existing mobile buildings, opposed to moving them off site, would make economic sense. The mobiles are of an adequate size to provide the space required, and the school site is considered able to accommodate the facility without detrimental affect. Although a 'permanent' building would provide preferable, funds for such a building are not currently available. These would hopefully be made available in the future.

The applicant confirms that the main School will employ 35 full time teaching, office and ancillary staff when at full capacity. On the basis that the number of Pre-School Nursery staff would be a maximum of 15, should permission be granted the number of staff attending the site would total 50. Should every member of staff choose to drive to the site all staff vehicles could be accommodated within the 55 spaces in the main car park. Visitors to the school will then be able to use the visitors' car parking (25 spaces) and the drop-off facilities adjacent to the access driveway.

The School is aware that since its change from Middle to a Primary School there has been an increase in the amount of traffic around the school as parents of young children accompany them to and from the site. Although the School is encouraging the reduction in car use and will continue to do so, it is monitoring the situation with regard to possibly providing an additional car parking facility for use by the School, Minster Cricket Club and any community functions that use the playing field in the future, subject to funding.

The School currently provide a Lollipop Person along Chequers Road to allow easier crossing at the school opening and closing times. There is no other traffic control along Chequers Road to reduce the speed of vehicles or aid crossing. Pedestrian access to the school from Chequers Road is via a footpath along one side of the access road with a zebra crossing marked adjacent to the school's entrance to allow pedestrians to cross the access road to the footpath providing access to both the main entrance and the newly created 'drop off' entrance. Access to the pre-school facility for visitors would be on foot through the school via the existing and new access path which runs beside the main car park.

Planning Policy

- 9. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:
 - (i) The adopted 2009 **South East Plan**:
 - **Policy CC1** Seeks to achieve and maintain sustainable development in the region
 - **Policy CC6** Seeks sustainable and distinctive communities that respect the character of settlements and landscapes, and achieve a high quality built environment.
 - Policy C4 Seeks to protect open countryside by ensuring all development respects and enhances local landscape character, securing appropriate mitigation where damage cannot be avoided.
 - Policy BE5 Seeks new development in rural communities to be subject to design and sustainability criteria so that the distinctive character of the village is not damaged; seeks to protect or extend key local services and protect landscape setting of the village
 - **Policy KTG1** Amongst other matters, seeks to set high standards of design and sustainability, and avoid coalescence with adjoining settlements to the south, east and west of Medway and to the west of Sittingbourne.
 - **Policy S3** Seeks to ensure the adequate provision of pre-school, school, and community learning facilities.

(ii) The adopted 2008 Swale Borough Local Plan:

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

high quality of design that respects local distinctiveness.

Policy SP5 Development proposals within the countryside and rural communities

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

Policy E1 Development proposals should, amongst other matters, seek to reflect the positive characteristics of the locality; protect and enhance the natural and built environments; be well sited and of a scale,

design and appearance that is appropriate to its location; cause no demonstrable harm to residential amenity and other sensitive uses.

Policy E6 The quality, character and amenity value of the wider countryside of

the Borough, will be protected and where possible enhanced.

Development proposals will be developed where they provide a service/ necessary community infrastructure to meet the essential

needs of the local community.

Policy E9 Seeks to protect the quality, character and amenity of the wider landscape, through development that is sympathetic to, and

minimises impact on local landscape character.

Policy E19 Seeks development to be of high quality design that responds

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

demography.

Policy T1 Seeks to ensure new development proposals maintain highway

safety.

Policy T3 Seeks new proposals to provide appropriate vehicle parking.

Policy T5 Seeks new development to be well located in relation to public

transport links.

Policy C1 Supports proposals for new or improved community facilities.

Consultations

10. **Swale Borough Council:** raises no objection the application, subject to a condition restricting planning permission to a temporary period of 5 years.

Minster on Sea Parish Council: raises an objection to the application on highway grounds. The Parish Council is concerned about the lack of parking spaces for users, the control of traffic outside the school, pedestrian crossing and traffic access to the proposed buildings through the existing car park.

The Parish Council considers that there would be an increase in traffic associated with the site, including travelling via Elm Lane and Scocles Road, and considers that the increase in movements could increase the possibility of accidents on the public highway. Minster Parish Council asks that a study be carried out to ensure safety on the approach to and around the school site, and that should planning permission be granted that it is subject to a condition that requires the County Council to carry out footpath construction to allow proper access to link the school to other developments in the vicinity. The Council considers that if this were a private applicant rather than a Local Authority, the onus would be on the applicant to address highway safety considerations.

The Parish Council would not wish to see the long term retention of temporary buildings on site.

Divisional Transportation Manager: raises no objections to the proposal in respect of highway matters. The Transportation Manager notes that the school is well provided for in terms of existing car parking, which would be available to the Pre-School and Nursery facility. He considers that demand for car parking in association with the development proposed is likely to occur outside of the peak school times. The Transportation Manager recommends linking the proposal to the existing parking through an appropriately worded condition in order to protect the car parking provision. He also notes that, if approved, consideration should be given to updating the School Travel Plan to include the new facilities as part of the document.

Local Members

11. The Local County Member for Sheppey, Mr. A. Crowther was notified of the application on 8 September 2009.

Publicity

12. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the notification of 25 neighbouring properties.

Representations

- 13. Nine letters of representation in support of the application have been received. The main points raised can be summarised as follows:
 - Supports the proposal as it would enable her three children to attend the one site, rather than two separate locations;

- As a working mother, considers that the opportunity to place her children into the nursery for longer periods would help with child care problems;
- Considers that the existing Nursery (located on Imperial Avenue) experiences
 problems with parking at peak times, and that the unmade road it is currently located
 on is unsafe and dirty with no pedestrian footpath;
- Considers St George's School to be a safer site with proper parking and safe pedestrian access.
- Considers that the proposed buildings would provide better facilities and more room for equipment to help with the children's development;
- Considers that locating the Pre-School with the Primary School would benefit the children's education:
- Attends the St George's School site on a daily basis and has not experienced issues with parking, considers that the road into the school has parking and benefits from zebra crossings and drop-off points. Due to the works taking place at the school, notes the additional parking for parents and dedicated drop-off facility has not been available; considers that once this facility is open it will serve to help a situation that is already easily controlled.
- Notes that the start and finish times for the nursery differ from the School's arrangements.
- Considers there would be no increase in traffic using local roads as parents attending the existing facilities Daisy Chain Nursery already use similar routes.

Discussion

Introduction

- 14. The application seeks planning permission for the retention of three mobile classroom buildings to provide accommodation for a new Pre School, Nursery and an Extended Hours Club in connection with the Primary School. The application is being reported to the Planning Applications Committee as a result of the objections expressed by Minster-on-Sea Parish Council on highway grounds. The Parish Council is concerned about the increase in the number of people attending the site as a result of the proposal and the highway implications of this increase (please see paragraph 10)
- 15. In considering this application, regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (9) above. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore the proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. In this particular case, I consider that the key considerations are: -
 - location and design; and
 - highway considerations.

Location and design

16. The application proposes to retain and adapt three mobile buildings within the St Georges Primary School grounds. The school grounds, including the application site, are located outside of the built confines of the Minster-on-Sea, as defined in the Swale Borough Local Plan Proposals Map. Therefore any development proposal within the school grounds is subject to a number of Development Plan Policies that seek to protect the character of the countryside. The broad thrust of these policies presumes against

development and seeks to preserve and/or enhance the countryside for its own sake, subject to a limited number of exceptional circumstances.

- 17. Swale Borough Local Plan Policies SP5 and E9 seek to protect the countryside from unnecessary development and preserve the open character of the landscape. Policies SP1, SP5, E6 and C1 seek to support the provision of new and enhanced community services that increase self sufficiency and support local needs, subject to a high standard of design that responds positively to local characteristics. Policy E6 seeks to protect the character of the countryside, setting out that development will only be permitted that enables local communities to meet there essential needs or provides necessary community infrastructure. The South East Plan Policies CC6, C4, BE5 and KTG1 seek to protect the open countryside by ensuring development respects the character of the settlement or local landscape.
- 18. Whilst the mobile buildings already exist on site it is necessary to consider whether their continued retention would be acceptable in the context of the location and the Development Plan Polices. Swale Borough Council has raised no objection to the application subject to a condition limiting retention of the mobile buildings on site for a period of 5 years.
- 19. It is noted that the entire school grounds fall outside the built confines of Minster. The site is directly adjacent to the eastern edge of the built up area, set back from Chequers Road. The educational use of this land within the countryside, as a non-residential institution, is well established under planning reference SW/94/909. This permission granted approval for the redevelopment of the land to create a Middle School. On the basis that the use of the land for education is established, I do not consider that a minor development for a facility, which supports a local community service, would be contrary to Local Plan Policies that presumes against inappropriate development in the countryside. The development proposed would not result in the loss of additional greenfield land or have a significant impact on the open character of the countryside.
- 20. The application site would, in my opinion, be an appropriate location within the grounds. The proposed site is on an existing playground area that has subsequently been replaced under the most recent planning permission. The site does not impact on the school's playing field provision, and the proposal would have no material impacts on residential amenities in terms of its siting; the closest residential properties are located over 70m to the north.
- 21. The site, located on the flank slope of a hill, is relatively open and would be visible from nearby residential properties and the wider countryside. The school buildings shield the location from views to the west, and existing planting to the school boundary would assist in breaking up the visual impact of the development from outside the school grounds.
- 22. The design of the mobile buildings is similar to a number of units used across the County, being single storey timber framed units finished with sahara beige render, UPVC windows, wooden steps and ramps providing inclusive access. I note that due to the nature of the design, and usable lifespan, the buildings proposed would be unlikely to be considered as an acceptable permanent solution in this locality. The single storey, flat roof construction cannot be said to enhance the character of the surrounding landscape, nor the school buildings. However, due to the small scale and limited height, the buildings would sit into the hillside, with longer distance views of the structures set in the backdrop of the school buildings and residential properties to the north. The location is not visible in the street scene. It is noted that there is a Listed Building positioned,

approximately 100m, north of the site. However, the school grounds do not form part of setting of this Listed Building as there are two residential properties in between the plots. The applicant has indicated an aspiration to seek to provide a permanent solution for the proposed uses on site as soon as funding becomes available.

23. Whilst a permanent solution to provide for the proposed accommodation would be preferable, in my opinion the layout and design of the development would be acceptable in the proposed location for a further temporary period. Due to the location proposed within the school grounds any visual impact would be kept to a minimum and the layout would not detract from the amenities of nearby residents' properties. Taking into consideration that the proposed buildings would not be prominent in the street scene, it is my opinion that the structures would not detract from the character of the local physical or nature environment for a continued temporary period. I therefore consider that the development would be acceptable in the context of the Development Plan Polices in terms of its location and design.

Highway considerations

- 24. Minster-on-Sea Parish Council has raised objections in response to this application on highway grounds. The Parish Council is concerned about access, parking and general highway safety issues in the local area associated with travel to and from the school site. The Parish Council consider that the proposed development would increase traffic and have a detrimental effect on the highway safety.
- 25. The recent changes in the education system on the Isle of Sheppey resulted in the school being converted from a Middle School with approximately 430 pupils into a 2 form entry Primary School catering for 420 pupils. At present the school is not operating at full capacity and will continue to fill up over the next few years. The age range of the children attending the site as a result of the changes has also fallen and fewer pupils travel independently, as more parents choose to drive their children to school. That has and will continue to influence traffic on the public highway in the morning and afternoon and is not unlike issues experienced by many school sites across the County. The existing School Travel Plan identifies that congestion on Chequers Road, the school access road and surrounding streets as an issue that the School are aware of and are seeking to ease.
- 26. Due to the changes to the type of school, the building and site are in the process of being modernised to meet the needs of the new Primary School. As well as internal remodelling of the buildings, the proposed changes include improvements to the car parking facilities on site and the provisions available to parents dropping off and collecting their children. These facilities have yet to come into full effect as the construction operations on site are on going. However, on completion of the scheme the School would benefit from a dedicated drop off/ pick up facility at the far end of the access drive and a total of 80 formal vehicle parking spaces within the site, 25 of which would be made available to visitors.
- 27. Taking into consideration the number of full time staff and pupils that would attend the Primary School when running at full capacity (35 staff and 420 pupils), coupled with the total number of staff and children that would attend the proposed Pre School and Nursery at any one time (15 staff and 54 children), the recognised maximum vehicle parking standards for the combined use of the site would be approximately 60 spaces. On this basis it is clear that the school site at present has more than adequate car parking facilities to accommodate both the existing and proposed facilities and would still have additional space available to accommodate transient use by vehicles at peak travel

times. I note that whilst the proposed facilities would add to vehicle movements surrounding the site, due to the nature of the care facilities proposed movements associated with the Pre School, Nursery and Extended Hours Club would be spread out across the day, with the timings of these movements less likely to clash with the peak school movements. Therefore, in light of the new facilities already being brought forward on site it is my opinion that there is adequate vehicle access and car parking facilities to cater for the existing and proposed uses.

- 28. The Parish Council also raises concerns over the availability of footways on specific roads in the surrounding high network, along with concerns over the internal pedestrian access arrangements to the proposed Pre School. The plans received indicate that the Pre-School would have a dedicated footpath from the main entrance to the school that runs to the beside the main car park to the proposed buildings.
- 29. The Parish Council specifically notes Elm Lane and Scocles Road as being of concern in highway safety terms (*these routes are mark on the site location plan on page D3.2*). It is noted that neither Elm Lane nor the southern stretch of Scocles Road benefit from footways adjacent to the highway, with pedestrians forced to walk in the road. Both roads provide connections between Chequers Road and the east of Minster with Lower Road (B2231) to the south. The Parish Council considers that as part of this application a study into road safety on the approach to and around the school site should be completed, and that as part of any planning permission the County Council should carry out footpath construction to allow proper access to and from the school.
- 30. Where a financial contribution is sought in association with a proposed development it needs to be shown to be directly linked to the proposed development, such that a contribution is necessary to offset any impacts that would result from permission being granted. In this case the development would need to generate significant additional traffic on the local road network to warrant funding towards highway improvements in order to accommodate such movements, and would need to be reasonable and proportionate to the scale of development proposed.
- 31. The school site has good links into the existing footpath network via a zebra crossing and footway on the access road connecting to footpaths on Cheguers Road, which in turn allows pedestrian access to the wider area. Elm Lane and Scocles Road, whilst flanking the school site, do not form part of the direct access to the school from the larger Minster area. The stretches of road identified are narrow country lanes that do not serve a significant number of private properties, which limits the number of potential pedestrian movements. I note that there is a more recent residential development to the south that could use Scocles Road as the most direct access to Chequers Road. The funding of construction of new footways on these roads whilst aspirational, and something that Kent Highway Services may wish to bear in mind, would not be reasonable or proportionate to the development being proposed. In my opinion the additional movements that would be generated by this application do not justify a contribution in this case. The proposal (in part) is to relocate and improve a use that already exists in the local community (Daisy Chain Nursery, Imperial Avenue), on this basis a number of movements (both pedestrian and vehicle) associated with the use already travel on the local highway network.
- 32. The Divisional Transportation Manager has considered the scheme as proposed and raises no objections on highway grounds. He notes that the school is well provided for in terms of existing parking and that due to the nature of the proposed use the demand for parking is likely to be outside of the peak movements associated with the beginning and end of a school day. I note that he recommends a condition ensuring that the car

parking is made available for use by the Pre-School staff and visitors, and that the School Travel Plan be revised and updated to reflect the changes on site.

33. Whilst Kent Highway Services has a care of duty to maintain highway safety, not least surrounding school sites, this is a separate from the planning process, and a financial contribution towards further works on the local highway network could not be justified for a minor development. It is my opinion that the provision of the proposed facilities at the school would not generate an unacceptable increase in traffic movements so as to cause significant harm in highway terms. On the basis of the details set out above, I would not raise a planning objection to the proposals on highway grounds

Conclusion

34. I consider that the continued retention of the mobile buildings for a further temporary period would not have a significant detrimental impact on the character and/or appearance of the surrounding environment and landscape. Whilst the application would result in an increase in the number of people attending the site, I consider that, as a result of improvements to the car parking and circulation provisions within the school grounds, the site could accommodate the proposed use. The applicant has indicated the educational and practicable benefits of providing both Pre-School and Primary School facilities on the one site. Taking into account the provisions of the Development Plan and material considerations raised from consultees as outlined in paragraph (9), I recommend that planning permission for the proposed facilities be granted for a temporary period of 5 years at which point the situation could be reviewed.

Recommendation

- 35.I RECOMMEND that TEMPORARY PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO conditions, including the following:
 - temporary consent for period of 5 years from date of permission;
 - removal of the mobile buildings at the expiration of the 5 year period and the subsequent restoration of the site thereafter;
 - the development be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
 - the use of the mobile buildings be restricted to the use applied for.
 - The car parking facilities on site to be retained and kept available for use by the Pre School and Nursery,
 - Within 6 months of first occupation of the building the School Travel Plan be updated to include the Pre-School and Nursery.

Case officer – James Bickle 01622 221068

Background documents - See section heading