

Temporary mobile classroom at Amherst School, Witches Lane, Sevenoaks – SE/08/1067

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 24 June 2008.

Application by the Governors of Amherst Primary School and Kent County Council Children, Families, Health & Education for the provision of a temporary mobile classroom at Amherst Primary School, Witches Lane, Sevenoaks (SE/08/1067)

Recommendation: Planning permission be granted

Local Member(s): Mr. J. London & Mr. N. Chard

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

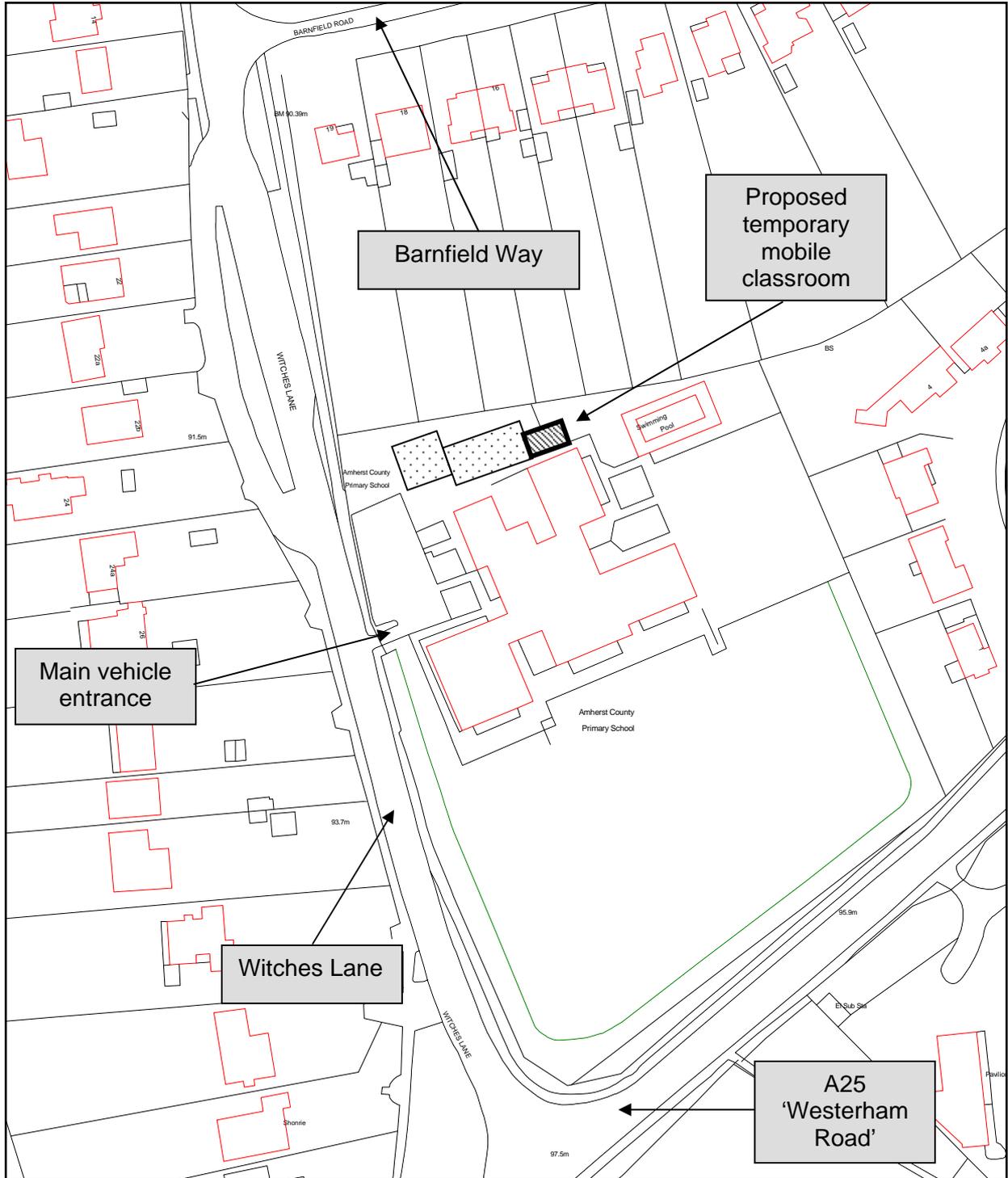
1. Amherst Primary School is located to the east of Witches Lane and adjacent to the A25 'Westerham Road'. The site is located opposite Riverview Infants School and between the main settlements of Chipstead and Riverview. The school is accessed by both pedestrians and vehicles from its main entrance off Witches Lane and is surrounded by residential properties to the north, east and west directions for which well-established tree and vegetation planting interrupts views into and out of the site. *A location plan is attached.*

Background and Proposal

2. The Ofsted inspection of 2007 highlighted that Amherst Primary School needed to improve and enhance its current teaching space within the school. The school is currently a popular school in the locality, and is oversubscribed and working to full capacity. Planning permission is therefore sought to add an additional temporary mobile classroom in the school grounds to accommodate a current shortfall in the amount of existing teaching space. It is noted that as part of the proposal, the school roll would not increase.
3. Within the school grounds there are currently three existing mobile classrooms located to the north of the main building, adjacent to the site chosen for the proposed mobile classroom. The School is currently in consultation with KCC Property Group, and is arranging for a feasibility study to be undertaken with a view to replacing all mobile classrooms with a permanent structure linked to the main building. At present, several architects have been selected and the School is awaiting fee proposals for the study from each of these. The proposed additional classroom is intended, therefore, as a temporary measure until the permanent development of the school can be undertaken.
4. The mobile classroom proposed would measure 7.4 x 6 metres, and would be finished externally in dark green to blend in with existing mobile buildings already on site. The location of the proposed mobile classroom is approximately 60 metres from the nearest residential property. *A plan showing the proposed mobile classroom can be found on page D4.3*

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Site Location Plan



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Key



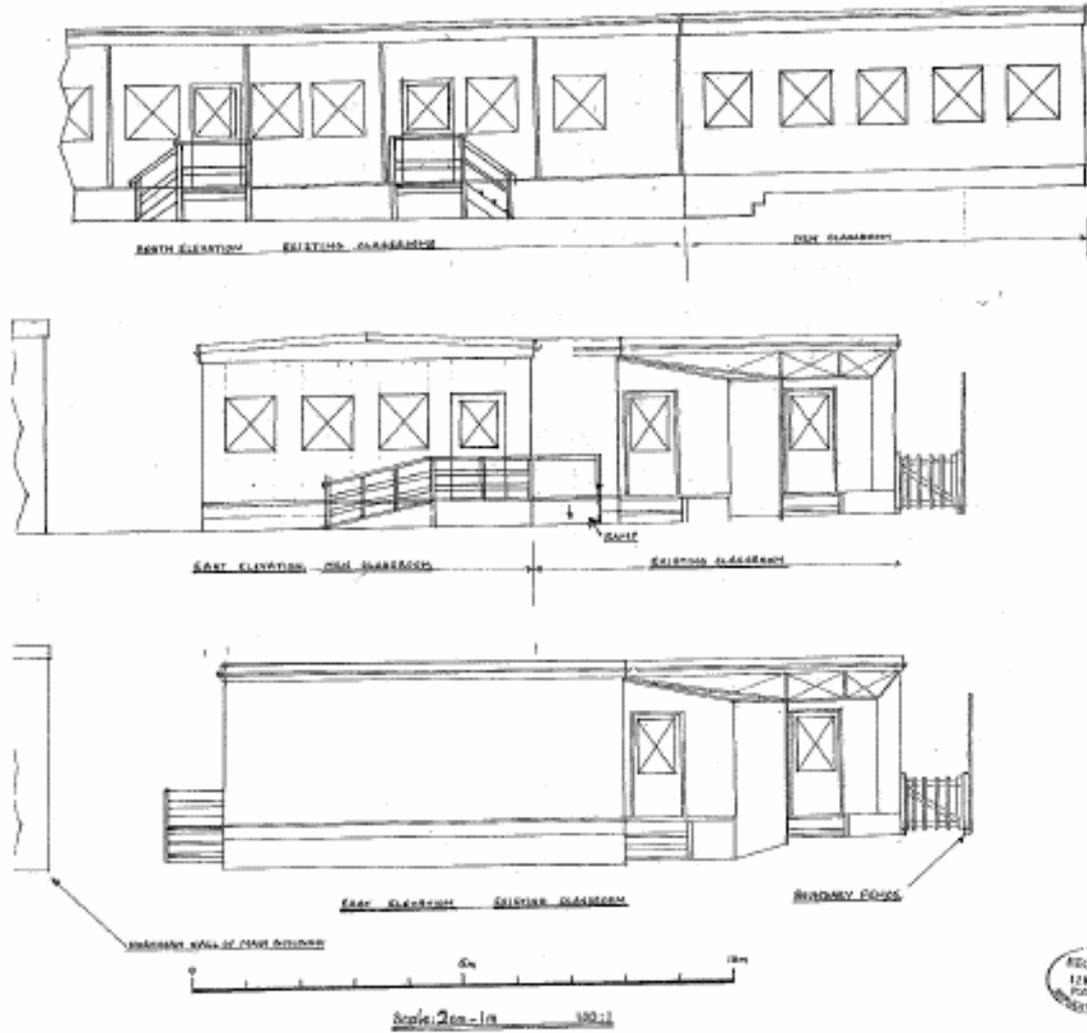
Existing mobile classrooms



Proposed mobile classroom

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Proposed Elevations



Planning History

5. Planning permission was granted for an extension to the school playground and the erection of a pagoda to be used as outdoor teaching space in June 2006, under reference SE/06/1110.

Planning Policy

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

(i) The adopted 2006 **Kent & Medway Structure Plan**:

Policy SP1 – The primary purpose of Kent’s development and environmental strategy will be to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern and form of development. This will be done principally by, amongst other matters:

- protecting the Kent countryside and its wildlife for future generations;
- protecting and enhancing features of importance in the natural and built environment;
- encouraging high quality development and innovative design that reflects Kent’s identity and local distinctiveness and promoting healthy, safe and secure living and working environments;

Policy QL1 – All development should be well designed and be of high quality. Developments, individually or taken together, should respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surroundings. Development which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, functioning and character of settlements or the countryside will not be permitted.

Policy QL11 – Provision will be made for the development and improvement of local services in existing residential areas and in town and district centres, particularly where services are deficient. Flexibility in the use of buildings for mixed community uses, and the concentration of sports facilities at schools, will be encouraged.

Policy TP3 – Local planning authorities should ensure that development sites are well served by public transport, walking and cycling.

(ii) The adopted 2000 **Sevenoaks District Council Local Plan**

Policy EN1 – Proposals for all forms of development and land use must comply with the Policies set out in the Plan, unless there are overriding material considerations. The following criteria will be applied, amongst other matters, in the consideration of planning applications:

- the form of the development should be compatible in terms of scale, height and use of appropriate materials;
- the proposed development does not have an adverse impact on the amenities of a locality by reason of form, scale and height;
- the design of new development incorporates measures to deter crime;

Policy EN9 – The local planning authority will safeguard important green space within built confines

Consultations

7. **Sevenoaks District Council:** has raised no objection to the provision of a temporary mobile classroom.

Riverhead Parish Council: No views received to date.

Divisional Transportation Manager: has no highway objection to this proposal.

Environment Agency: has no objection to the proposal.

Local Member

8. The local County Members, Mr. N. Chard and Mr. J. London were notified of the application on the 9 April 2008.

Publicity

9. The application was publicised by posting a site notice at the main school entrance with Witches Lane, and the individual notification of 7 neighbouring residential properties.

Representations

10. I have received three letters of objection from local residents to date in respect of this application. The main points of objection are summarised below:
- The roads around the school have, in the last few years, been subject to steadily increasing traffic flows and now intolerable levels of congestion with the associated inconsiderate parking;
 - The whole area is regularly gridlocked, particularly in the afternoons and often for an hour or so;
 - Access to residential properties has not been possible, and emergency vehicles would find passage impossible;
 - Even the smallest increase in pupil numbers will surely exacerbate this problem;
 - If temporary permission is granted, unless a removal date is accepted the temporary classroom could become permanent leading to the increasing capacity of the school. This would result in more cars, thereby exacerbating an already major traffic problem outside the school and surrounding roads;
 - A few years ago Councillor John London agreed to spend a major portion of his annual allowance to lay grasscrete and posts along Barnfield Road, the edge of which had become destroyed by cars from Riverhead and Amherst Schools parking. This was a short-term solution as the increasing number of cars parking along this stretch has grown and now the rest of the edge of the road is being destroyed;
 - If expansion is being considered, I would clearly hope that parking is taken into account and that a good proportion of the school's land is allocated to parking for pupils delivering and collecting pupils.

Discussion

Introduction

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11. The application seeks planning permission for a 44 sq. metre temporary mobile classroom to meet a short term need for extra teaching space within the school. The application is being reported for determination as a result of the objections received from local residents relating to traffic and highway issues.
12. In considering this proposal, regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (6) above. Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 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. Issues of particular relevance in this case include the potential impact on the local highway network as a result of this proposal, the temporary nature of the mobile accommodation and the visual appearance of the unit in the locality.

Impact on highway network

13. Members will note that several residential objections have been received relating to the problems with the existing highway network, and the adverse impact such proposed development could bring about. These residential objections have been outlined in paragraph (10) above.
14. The application proposes the provision of a temporary teaching space to meet the short-term educational needs of the school in terms of providing additional classroom space. As part of the proposal, the applicant is not proposing the increase in school roll, but is instead proposing the increase in school floorspace, in line with the recent Ofsted recommendations. As outlined above, the additional of the temporary mobile classroom is a short-term measure whilst a feasibility study is being undertaken to replace all mobile classrooms on site by permanent buildings.
15. It is therefore important to note that the proposal would not, in my opinion, result in an increase in the amount of traffic movements to or from the school on the basis that the school roll is not proposing to change. In addition, Members will note the views expressed by the Divisional Transportation Manager in paragraph (7) whereby he has raised no objection to the proposed addition of the temporary mobile classroom.
16. Whilst I recognise the concerns of local residents with regards to highway congestion at peak times, I consider this to be due to two schools (Amherst and Riverhead) being located in close proximity to each other, and in any case beyond the scope of the current application at Amherst School. In addition there are other traffic generating developments in the locality which fuelled the higher levels of congestion experienced in this locality in the last few years. Accordingly, I would not seek to raise an objection on highway grounds with regards to this current proposal.

Visual impact of proposed development

17. The proposed unit is of standard mobile classroom design found on many educational sites around the county and comprises of a roughcast finish. The applicant proposes the unit to be finished in dark green to match in with the existing mobile units on site.
18. I consider the external appearance of the mobile classroom proposed is acceptable in visual terms in accordance with Kent and Medway Structure Plan Policies SP1 and QL1. Accordingly, I would not seek to raise an objection to this application on visual grounds.

Alternative solutions

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19. In terms of alternative solutions, I note that whilst the use of a mobile classroom is less than an ideal solution, it has been demonstrated that this is a short-term solution to meet a recognised need until provisions can be made for the construction of permanent buildings at the school.
20. Accordingly, I am satisfied that this short-term measure is acceptable when weighting up the need for the development at this particular school against development plan policies and material planning objections received. I would however, recommend that planning permission be granted for the siting of the mobile on site for a temporary period of up to three years, or being removed before the expiration of this period should the construction of permanent buildings come forward.

Conclusion

21. Having regard to the Development Plan Policies, and the material planning considerations received, I consider that the addition of a temporary mobile classroom to meet a demonstrated short-term need is in general accordance with the Development Plan. Whilst I recognise the concerns of local residents with regards to highway issues, I consider any additional adverse impact to be outside of the scope of this application given that the application proposes no change in the current school roll. I consider that the visual appearance of the mobile to be acceptable in this particular location and that no other short-term alternative solution is reasonably practical. Accordingly, I recommend that temporary planning permission should be granted, subject to the following conditions as set out in paragraph (22) below:

Recommendation

22. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO conditions, including conditions to cover the following aspects:
 - the mobile classroom be permitted for a temporary period of 3 years from the date of permission, or be removed sooner upon the first occupation of a new classroom extension at the school to replace the mobile classroom accommodation on site;
 - the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
 - the mobile classroom be finished in dark green to match adjacent units.

Case officer – Julian Moat	01622 696978
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Background documents - See section heading
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