

Additional classroom at Bodsham C of E Primary School, School Hill, Bodsham – SH/08/502

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

Application by Bodsham C of E Primary School and KCC Children, Families, Health and Education for an additional classroom at Bodsham C of E Primary School, School Hill, Bodsham, Ashford (Ref: SH/08/502)

Recommendation: permission be granted subject to conditions

Local Member(s): Susan Carey

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Bodsham Primary School is a small school located in a remote rural area of Kent in Elmsted parish, approximately 10 miles east from Wye. The school is located near the top of School Hill, which descends south. To the south-east across the School Hill, there is the Old Vicarage, which is currently being used as a residential property. To the north, the School borders a public house, the Timber Batts Inn, which is a Grade II Listed Building. The space to the front of the pub is made available for use by parents during the drop off and pick up times. Additional car parking space is also made available to the north from the pub in front of the agricultural buildings. The site is within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A site plan is attached (see page D5.2).

Background

2. The oldest parts of the school buildings go back to 19th Century. There are various later additions to the school, including single storey flat roof extensions. The more recent extensions include a new classroom to the north of the Hall built in 2005, and a new free standing art workshop on the footprint of the old garage on the edge of the school site built in 2007. The latter is open to the wider local community to facilitate some activities with local artists (page D5.3).

Proposal

3. The proposal is to build a new 41m² classroom extension at the north-east of the school together with approximately 10m² enclosed corridor extension. The design intention is for the new extension to look and feel as if it had been built at the same time as the other classroom built in 2005/06 to which it would adjoin. The building would be single storey with a pitched roof, which matches the classroom built in 2005/6. Matching materials would be used including machine made red/brown plain tiles, stained weatherboard cladding and stained softwood windows and doors.
4. The School's governing body recognised that the school is within a sensitive area and therefore considered a number of alternatives to minimise the impact on the beauty of the landscape and character of the village. In particular, the case for making use of the roof space above the main hall was investigated. However, due to the need to comply with accessibility requirements, the current proposal has been chosen as the most suitable to meet school's needs.

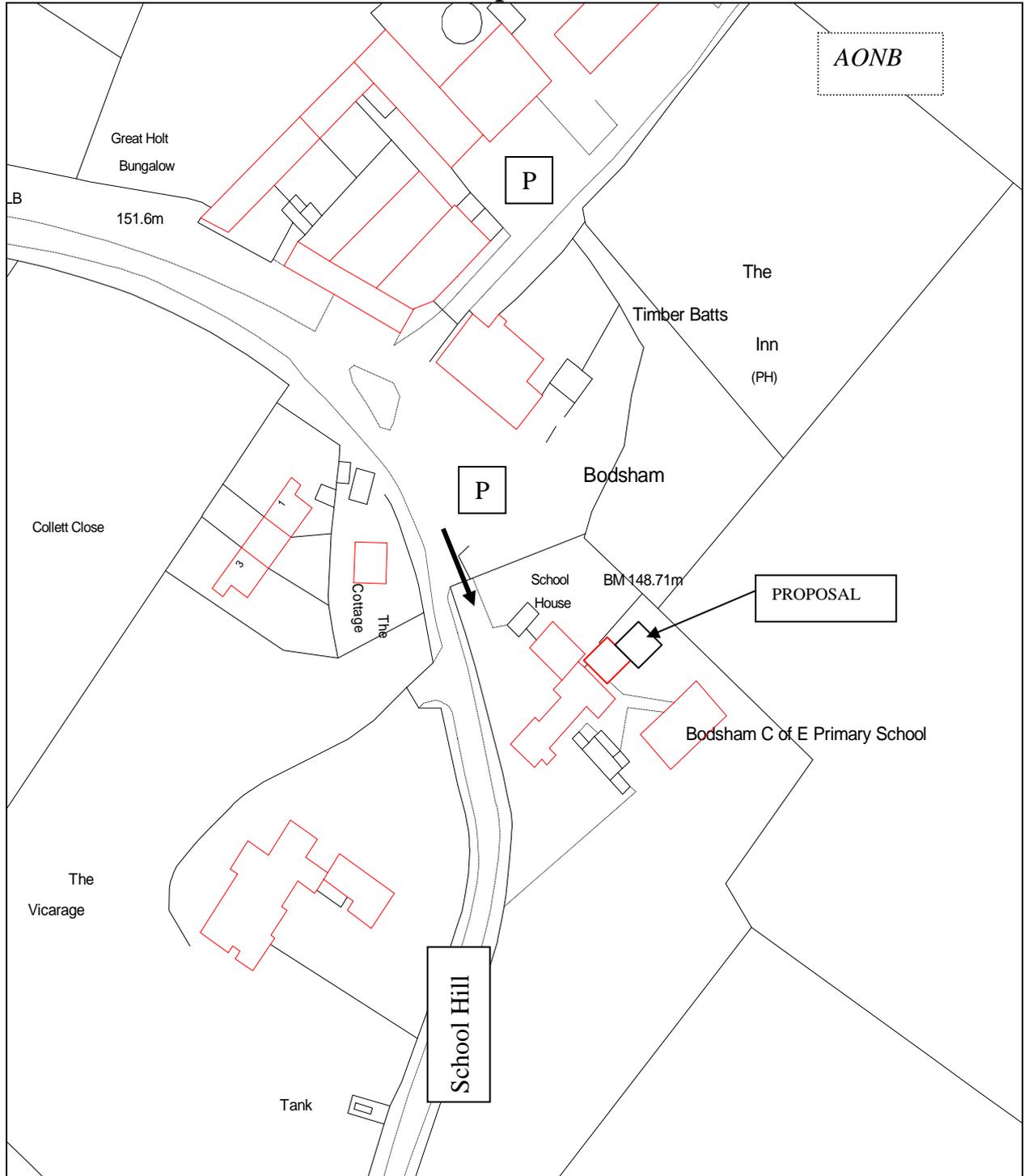
Need

5. The school has a vision to promote community cohesion and to facilitate the Parent Council in supporting often isolated parents in rural areas. In order for the school to

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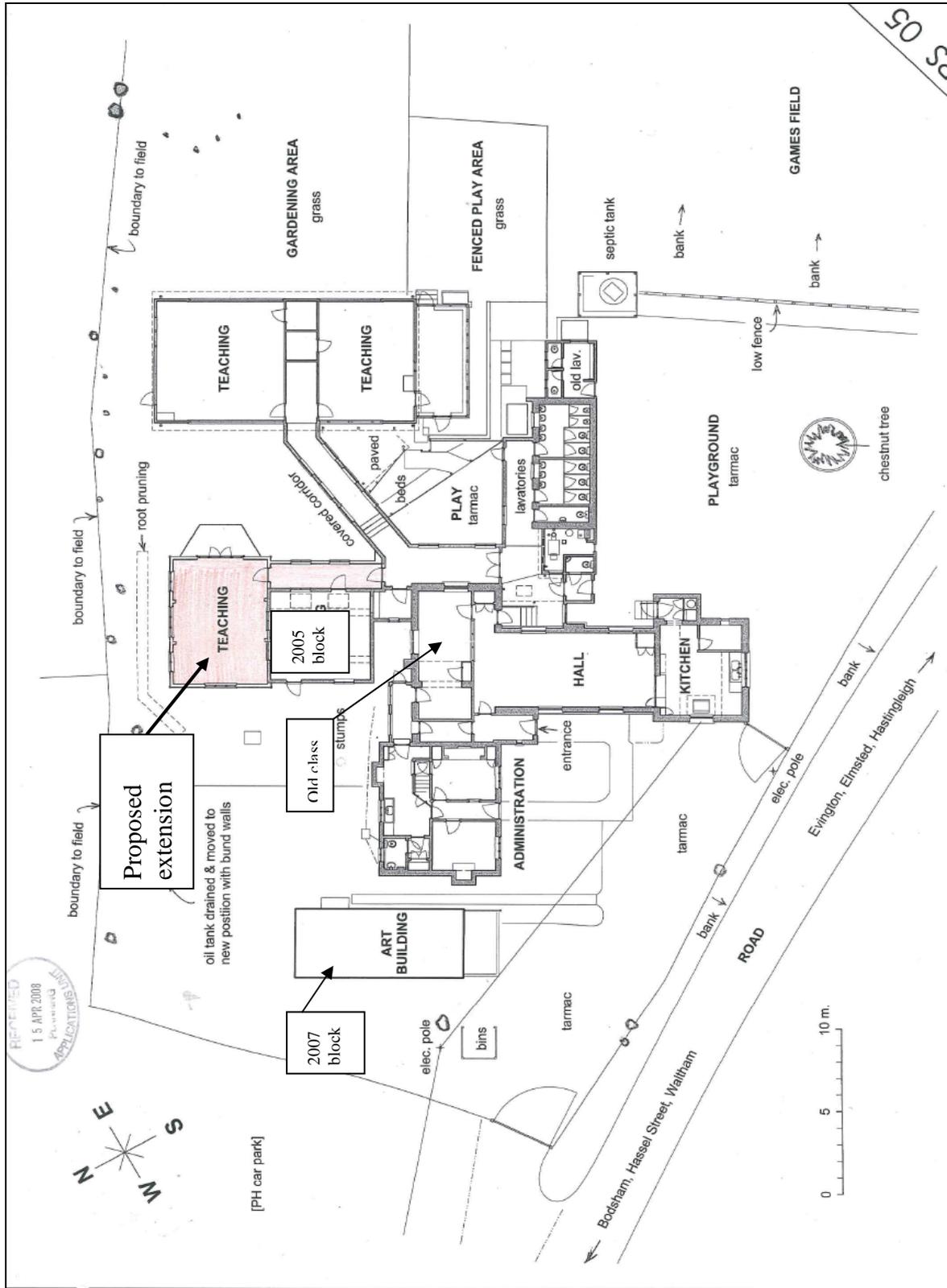
operate effectively, they need to update and extend the available accommodation. Specifically, it was recognised that the smallest classroom, needs to be replaced by bigger accommodation. Then, the old classroom could be used for a parent room to provide a meeting place for the Parent Support Adviser meetings. It could also be used for staff meetings, which currently must take place in a small staff room on the second floor of the School House.

Site plan



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Layout



Photomontage



Planning Policy

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

(i) The Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006:

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| Policy SP1 | Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's environment and to ensure a sustainable pattern of development. |
| Policy SS6 | Seeks to improve the built and natural environment, functioning and appearance of the suburbs, including the provision of services and facilities that serve local needs. |
| Policy QL1 | Seeks to ensure that all development is well designed and of high quality that responds positively to the local character. Development, which would be detrimental to the built environment, amenity, function or character of the area, will not be permitted. |
| Policy QL8 | The setting of listed building must be protected and enhanced. |
| Policy QL11 | Provision should be made for development and improvement of local services in existing residential areas, particularly where services are deficient. Flexibility in the use of buildings for mixed community uses should be encouraged. |
| Policy EN4 | The primary objective of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation is to protect, conserve and enhance landscape character and natural beauty. Development that is essential to meet local social or economic needs should be permitted provided that it is consistent with the purpose of AONB. |

(ii) Shepway District Local Plan Review 2006:

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|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Policy BE1 | A high standard of layout, design and choice of materials is expected for all new developments. |
| Policy BE5 | Development, which would adversely affect the setting of the listed building, should be refused. |
| Policy SC2 | Planning permission for improved social and community facilities will be granted where the proposal would be compatible with surrounding land uses, acceptable in highway, infrastructure and environmental terms, accessible by a range of transport alternatives to the car and includes provision for access for disabled persons. |
| Policy CO3 | In assessing proposals affecting the designated Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty priority will be given to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, including landscape, wildlife and geological features, over other planning considerations; unless the economic and social benefits of a proposal outweigh the primary objective of conserving natural beauty. |
| Policy TR13 | Where development proposals are considered likely to have significant transport implications, which may include extensions |

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to school facilities or developments where there is a particular local traffic problem, a travel plan should be submitted with the planning application.

Consultations

7. **Shepway District Council:** raises no objection to the proposal.

Divisional Transportation Manager: raises no objection to the proposal.

Elmsted Parish Council: no comments received to date.

Local Members

8. The local Member, Susan Carey was notified of the application on the 21st April 2008.

Publicity

9. The application was publicised by the posting a site notice on the site boundary and six individual notification letters to private properties.

Representations

10. 1 letter was received from the occupiers of an adjacent property. The main planning issues raised by the neighbours can be summarised as follows:

- there is a danger that the school may “out-grow” the village; the numbers at the school have grown considerably and have certainly doubled since we arrived 15 years ago; parking has become a difficult and is a sensitive issue in the village which concerns other residents as well; parents have been parking thoughtlessly in a way so that buses, lorries and tractors cannot pass them without destroying the village green and verges;
- the noise in the outside playing area has increased with the numbers and if there were more children this would become intolerable and a private nuisance;
- the request is that any planning permission should be subject to planning conditions restricting any increase in the number of pupils at the school and that the school should enforce on parents a considerate parking/driving policy.

Discussion

Introduction

11. The application is required to be determined in accordance with the relevant Development Plan Policies, unless other material considerations are of overriding importance. In particular, I consider the key determining considerations to be impact on the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and special landscape character and amenity consideration, balanced against the need for improvements in community facilities.

12. The reason for reporting this planning application to the Committee is a letter from the School's neighbours, as set out in paragraph 10 above. The issues raised can be summarised as issues relating to the existing traffic problems in School Hill during drop-off and pick-up times and general noise concerns. The neighbours are concerned that should the extension be permitted, the current problems with traffic and noise would increase.

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Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty issues

13. The objective of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) policies set in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan (EN4) and the Shepway District Local Plan (CO3) is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, including the landscape, wildlife and geological features. Development within the AONB should be kept to a minimum and where acceptable should be designed and constructed so that the visual impact on the landscape is minimised and it makes a positive contribution to the attractiveness of the area. Policy EN4 requires extra justification for major development in AONB but this proposal does not relate to major development. These and other policies state clearly that the local social or economic needs need to be taken into account, provided that it is consistent with the purpose of AONB.
14. The applicant states that the new facility is necessary to operate effectively and to provide the necessary community support. As stated in paragraph 5 above, the current accommodation is substandard to deliver the Schools' objectives and the proposed development aims to address this shortfall. It is noted that the design of the proposed building is of a high quality and would match in character, scale and materials the recently built adjoining building (Image D5.4). The extension would only be visible from The Timber Batts Inn's car park, which is approximately 20m north from the proposed extension. However, mature trees and two lines of hedgerow dividing the school's play areas would soften the view. I consider that this would not change the current pleasant rural ambience of the site. Consequently, I consider that the setting of the public house, which is a Grade II Listed Building, would not be significantly affected by the proposal. The north-east (rear) boundary of the school is also well landscaped with shrubs and trees and therefore, the extension would not become prominent in a wider landscape, seen from across the farm land, especially that it would be seen against the other school's buildings in the background.
15. In summary, no concerns are raised regarding the quality of the design and its suitability in the setting. I consider that the proposal would preserve the special character and overall appearance of the AONB and would enhance the social provision in the locality. Therefore, in my view, the development would be in accordance with the development plan policies.

Amenity

16. Policy QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan (KMSP) and Policy BE1 of the Shepway Plan require that the development is of high quality design, which has already been discussed above in relation to the AONB issues. These policies also require that development should not be detrimental to the amenity and functioning of settlements. The local resident raised concerns about this factor. The neighbour is concerned that the extension would lead to an increase in pupil numbers and therefore be of detriment to the local amenity, as set in the paragraph 10 above. The neighbour made a request that should planning permission be granted for the proposal, then a planning condition should be imposed restricting the potential increase in pupil numbers to avoid the situation of the school "out-growing" the village. The Headteacher, however, confirmed that there is no intention to increase pupil numbers at the school as a result of this extension. The development aims to improve the standard of the accommodation available to the users of the school.
17. Further, I note that the pupil numbers has increased from 50 pupils in 2004 to 76 pupils currently at this rural school and therefore the neighbour is correct in observing an increase in school roll. It is also acknowledged that a high proportion of parents transports their children to/from this relatively isolated rural school by car. This is partially a result of the school serving remote rural communities. It is important that there

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are sufficient school spaces to meet that demand. Additionally, the Kent Primary Strategy requires primary schools to sustain a minimum of four classes, beyond which it would become difficult to run an effective school. Moreover, the Headteacher indicated that the official capacity of the school is 93 and therefore limiting the school to the current pupil numbers would not be appropriate. Having consulted the Transportation Engineer, I understand that it would not be justified to impose a restriction on pupil numbers on the ground of the highway constraints under the current circumstances.

18. Nevertheless, it is important that available measures are undertaken to promote walking, cycling and car sharing to/from the school. It is noted that in 2007 the School adopted a School Travel Plan to promote greater use of car share arrangements, remind parents of the cycle storage available in school and actively promote walking to school where appropriate. I would recommend that a full revised School Travel Plan be submitted following the completion of the development, should the planning permission be granted.
19. Another issue raised by the neighbour was the potential increase in noise levels generated by children in the playing area of the school. Again, as the development is not intended to increase pupil numbers, it is unlikely that the development would cause any significant change in noise levels in the locality.
20. Overall, I consider that the proposed classroom extension would not result in a detriment to the amenity and functioning of the village and therefore would be in accordance with the local planning policies.

Conclusion

21. This proposal has to be considered against the relevant planning policies, principally the AONB designation and amenity of the locality. I am satisfied that the proposed size and design of the extension is appropriate and of high quality to meet the AONB policy and development plan requirements. The development would not result in an increase in staff or student numbers and so would not add to any highway inconvenience during pick-up and drop-off hours and other amenity aspects. On the other hand, I consider that the school and the rural community would benefit from the proposed extension. Overall, I consider that the proposed development would be in accordance with the aims and objectives of the relevant Development Plan Policies.

Recommendation

22. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions, including conditions covering:
 - Standard time condition for it to be implemented
 - Trees and shrubs along the north and north-east boundary should be retained
 - Preparation of an updated School Travel Plan
 - The development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details

Case Officer –Anna Michalska-Dober	01622 696979
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Background documents –See section heading
