

SECTION D
DEVELOPMENT TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Background Documents: the deposited documents; views and representations received as referred to in the reports and included in the development proposals dossier for each case; and other documents as might be additionally indicated.

Item D1

Proposed 2 Form of Entry expansion at Bennett Memorial
Diocesan School, Tunbridge Wells – TW/19/239
(KCC/TW/0523/2018)

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 10 July 2019.

Application by Kent County Council Property and Infrastructure Support for a 2 form of entry expansion involving the erection of a new 2 storey teaching block, extension to Ann Scott building, extension to catering/kitchen area, provision of additional 36 car parking spaces, reconfiguration of access layout within school boundary including site entrance area, provision of temporary classrooms, and associated landscaping works at Bennett Memorial Diocesan School, Culverden Down, Tunbridge Wells – TW/19/239 (KCC/TW/0523/2018)

Recommendation: the application BE REFERRED to the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government on Sport England grounds, and that SUBJECT TO his decision and SUBJECT TO a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the required monetary contribution regarding the Travel Plan and Public Transport Capacity Improvements and that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions.

Local Members: Mr Peter Oakford

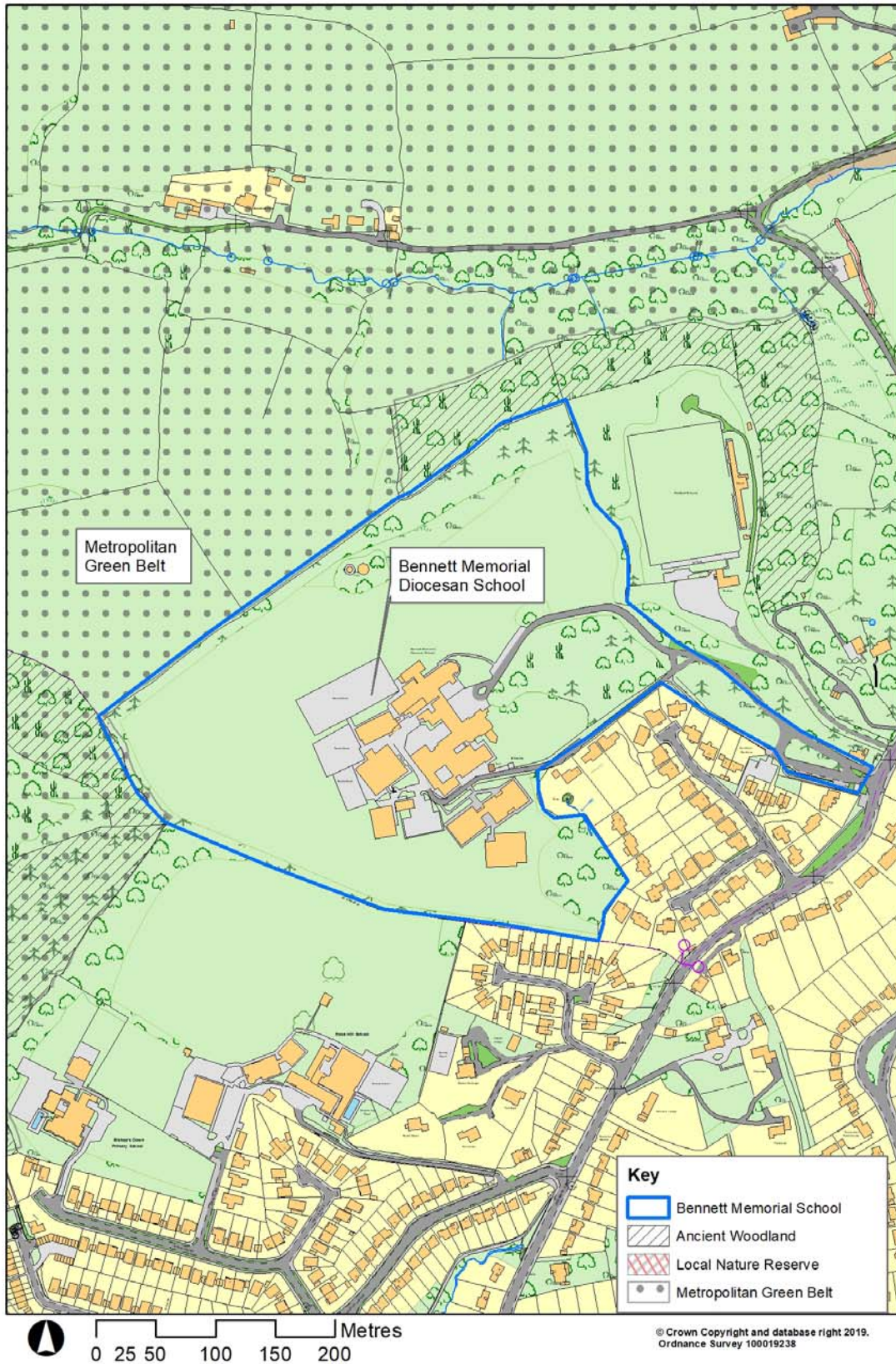
Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. Bennett Memorial Diocesan School occupies a 12.7 hectare site on the edge of the built up area of Tunbridge Wells, approximately a mile to the north west of the Town Centre. The Church of England School currently has 1678 pupils (8 Forms of Entry (FE)), supported by 89 full time staff and 62 part time staff. The school is accessed via Culverden Down and is within an area of Tunbridge Wells referred to locally as 'Culverden'. The school buildings, which are located to the south west of the site, are not visible from the site access/public vantage points as they are set behind residential properties and well screened by the site's mature and heavily treed boundaries. The school access road also affords access to five private residential properties before reaching the main school campus and car parking areas (118 spaces in total), as well as accommodating an on site bus pick/up drop off area.
2. Rose Hill School, and Bishops Down Primary School beyond that, lie to the southern boundary of the site, as do properties to Derwent Drive which back onto the school boundary. Properties in Huntleys Park (accessed via Culverden Down) lie to the east of the school buildings and to the south of the access road, with properties in Culverden Down located adjacent to and opposite the narrow site frontage/access to the east. Tunbridge Wells Football Club, and its associated facilities, lies to the north east of the site.
3. The north/west of the site accommodates the school playing fields and floodlit all weather pitch, beyond which lies the open countryside. The Schools northern boundary, which is heavily treed, marks the boundary of the Metropolitan Green Belt. Although the school site is not within the Green Belt, the whole of the site is outside of the limits of

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Site Location Plan



Proposed 2FE expansion of Bennett Memorial Diocesan School, Tunbridge Wells - TW/19/239 (KCC/TW/0523/2018)

Proposed Teaching Block - Ground Floor Plan



Proposed Teaching Block - First Floor Plan

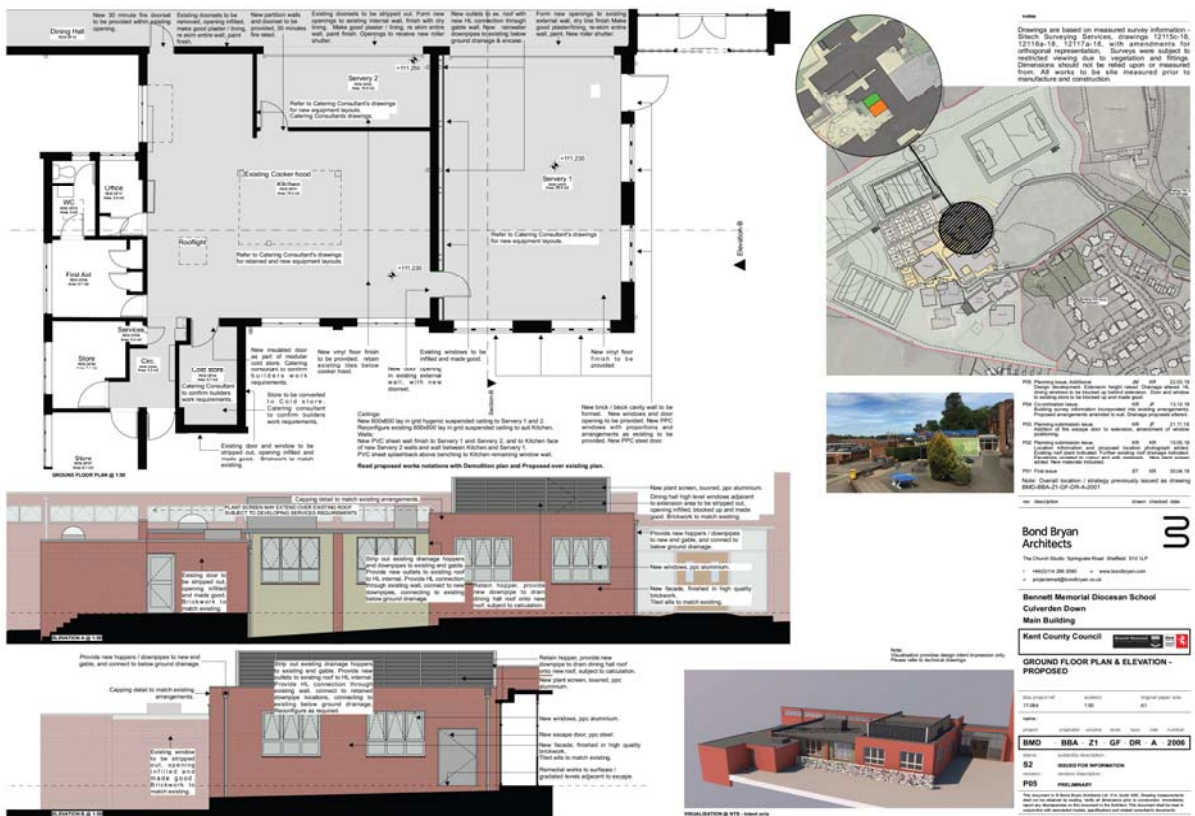


Proposed 2FE expansion of Bennett Memorial Diocesan School, Tunbridge Wells - TW/19/239 (KCC/TW/0523/2018)

Existing - Kitchen/Servery Extension



Proposed - Kitchen/Servery Extension



Proposed 2FE expansion of Bennett Memorial Diocesan School,
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Existing and Proposed - Ann Scott Building Visuals



South East View - Existing



South East View - Proposed

Proposed - Anne Scott Building Floorplan



GROUND FLOOR PLAN - PROPOSED @ 1:100

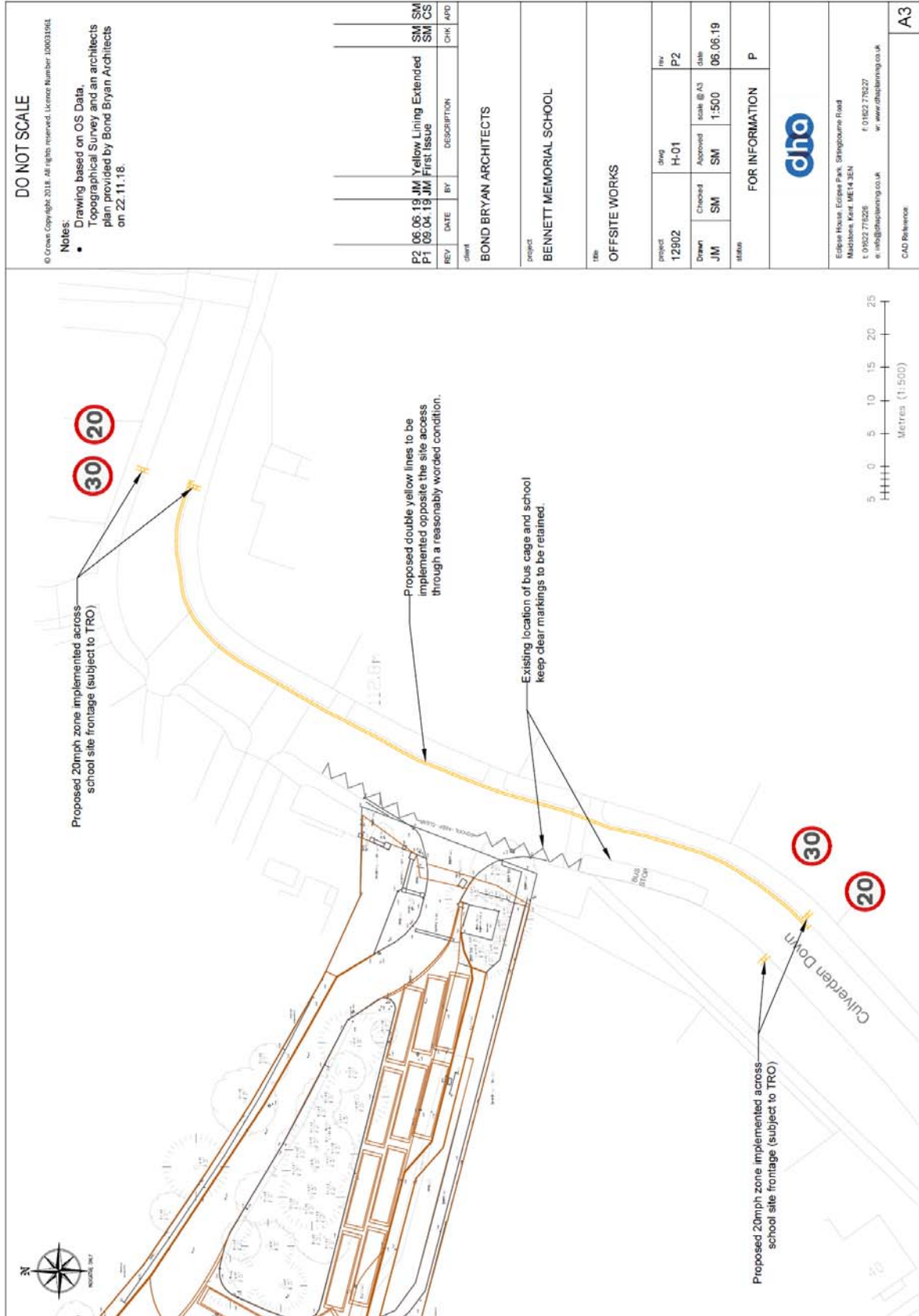
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Proposed Access Alterations



Proposed 2FE expansion of Bennett Memorial Diocesan School, Tunbridge Wells - TW/19/239 (KCC/TW/0523/2018)

Proposed Off Site Highway Works



Proposed 2FE expansion of Bennett Memorial Diocesan School,
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built development and classified as rural fringe (Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Site Allocations Local Plan 2016). Further, areas classified as ‘Local Nature Reserve’ and ‘Ancient Woodland’ (Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Local Plan 2006) are located in close proximity to the site boundaries, and many of the trees within the school site are subject to Tree Preservation Orders. *A site location plan is attached.*

Background/Relevant Planning History

4. The table below summarises recent and relevant planning history at the site. In addition to those listed below, the Borough Council have considered various applications regarding works to TPO trees around the site. It should also be noted that the Bennett Memorial Diocesan School converted to an Academy on the 1 April 2011. Applications after that date have therefore been submitted to and determined by the Borough Council:

Application Reference	Description	Decision
15/504892/FULL <i>(submitted to and determined by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council)</i>	Retention of mobile classrooms	Approved 26/02/2016
15/505291/FULL <i>(submitted to and determined by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council)</i>	The construction of a floodlit third generation artificial grass pitch for football and rugby	Approved 10/05/2016
12/02577/FUL <i>(submitted to and determined by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council)</i>	Removal of shed and construction of single storey 6th form study centre with associated hard and soft landscaping	Approved 09/11/2012
TW/10/803	A new mobile, on the site of a previous mobile classroom (which was removed in 2008), located on land adjacent to the existing car park to the south of the school site	Approved 26/05/2010
TW/07/601	A new two storey classroom building and associated landscaping, installation of a temporary double classroom mobile and the removal of two mobiles (4 classrooms) on completion	Approved 10/04/2007

5. The Kent County Council Education Commissioning Plan for 2018-2022 details the significant increase in demand for Secondary School places within the Tunbridge Wells Borough and shows the anticipated shortfall in school places if no action is taken. Pressure on Year 7 places are predicted to increase from a deficiency of 121 spaces in 2018/19 to a peak deficiency of 245 places in 2022-2023 (see the discussion section of this report for more detail in this regard). There is particular pressure in the urban areas of the Borough (primarily Tunbridge Wells), with the forecasts skewed by the only surplus capacity available in Cranbrook - which is outside of the ‘travel to learn’ distance for children resident in central Tunbridge Wells.

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6. The KCC Education Commissioning Plan identified an approximate 6 Form of Entry (FE) deficit of Secondary School placed for the September 2018 intake, which is anticipated to increase to over 11 FE within five years. Recent applications for a 1FE expansion of St Gregory's School (TW/18/2129) and a 1FE expansion of Tunbridge Wells Boys Grammar School (TW/18/2548) have been granted permission by the County Planning Authority and go some way to aid in reducing that forecasted deficit.
7. The applicant advises that Bennett Memorial Diocesan School is a very popular school judged 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in June 2012 and is consistently among the highest achieving schools. For the Year 7 intake in September 2017 the school received a total of 843 parental preferences, of which 289 were 1st preferences, for a PAN of 240. Therefore, the Governing Body, in conjunction with Tenax Schools Trust and Kent County Council, are proposing to provide additional school places by permanently expanding Bennett Memorial Diocesan School by 2FE, increasing the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) from 240 to 300 (8FE to 10FE) in September 2019.
8. It is intended that the expansion would occur incrementally, with 60 additional Year 7 places offered in each year from September 2019, so that the school would grow over a 5-year period until it reached capacity in 2023. The additional 2FE capacity would increase the school roll by 300, from approximately 1678 to 1978 (1500 in years 7 to 11, plus sixth form), and would increase staff numbers by approximately 20 (to 171 in total).

Additional/Amended Information Following Initial Submission

9. Following the submission of this application, the applicant has submitted additional information regarding highway and access matters, including an updated School Travel Plan, a Tree Removal/Protection Plan, an Air Quality Technical Note, and a set of amended drawings which show a number of minor changes to the scheme. In summary, the amendments made were changes to the window and door arrangements on the proposed extensions, an increase in height of approximately 20cm to the extensions, a 21.5cm increase in height of the proposed stand alone teaching block, an increase in the number of cycle parking spaces and re configuration of the bus parking spaces layout to facilitate access for local residents (vehicular access to their properties is via the school site). An additional 14 car parking spaces were also proposed, bringing the total number to 36, including 4 electric vehicle charging spaces. It is the amended proposal that will be discussed throughout this report.

Proposal

10. This application has been submitted by Kent County Council Property and Infrastructure and proposes to provide the accommodation required for the expanding school roll at Bennett Memorial Diocesan School (2FE increase). The proposed development comprises of the following key components:
 - The construction of a freestanding 2 storey teaching block with a gross internal floor area (GIFA) of 2272m². The building would provide a range of general and ICT teaching spaces, a flexible hall space, and staff facilities required to accommodate the proposed 2 FE expansion (300 additional students);
 - Minor alterations and extension to two of the existing buildings on site (the 'Ann Scott' building and kitchen) in order to improve science facilities and provide additional capacity in the kitchen/servery;
 - The provision of an additional 36 car parking spaces, including 4 electric vehicle charging bays;
 - Improvements/modifications to the existing on site bus drop off/pick up area;

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- Improvements/modifications to the existing pedestrian pathways in the site and provision of additional pathways to better separate pedestrian and vehicle movements;
- Provision of 4 temporary classroom units to be provided until completion of the permanent accommodation;

The stated intention is to complete the above by the end of 2020.

11. The proposed freestanding teaching block is proposed to be constructed on an area of playing field located to the south west of the existing school buildings, to the north of the site boundary with Rose Hill School. The two storey building would be orientated south east to north west, with the classrooms/teaching areas accommodated in a linear building accessed via a central corridor on each floor. A double height activity hall is proposed to the east of the building, facing towards the existing school buildings creating a T shape floor plan. Access points to the building would be located at both ends of the building, and centrally adjacent to the activity hall, with staircases located at either end. The building would measure 63 metres in length by 30 metres in width, with a height of 9.3 metres (height from external ground level to top of parapet). Externally the building would be finished in a combination of red brick work and white render with powder coated aluminium windows. A 60m² area of the flat roof has been allocated for an array of Photovoltaic (PV) panels.
12. In addition to the stand alone teaching block, two extensions to existing school buildings are proposed. First, a small extension (59m² Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA)) is proposed to the existing kitchen/servery, located to the north east of the cluster of school buildings. The single storey extension would create an additional servery area to address the increase in pupil numbers, enabling the existing kitchen space to be reconfigured internally. The extension would be constructed of brickwork to match the existing building. Secondly, the 'Ann Scott' building, located to the south east of the site, is proposed to be altered internally (planning permission not required) to convert 6 classrooms into 3 science labs. However, in order to accommodate the necessary 'prep room' a small single storey extension is proposed. That extension would provide 49m² of GIFA, and would involve infilling an existing space between 2 sections of the building on the south elevation. The extension would have a low pitched roof and be constructed of brick work to match the existing.
13. As stated in paragraph 8 above, an additional 60 pupils are to be offered places at the School in September 2019. Therefore, 4 temporary modular classrooms are proposed, to be arranged in two pairs around a central access ramp. The modular classrooms are proposed to the south of the site, to the rear of existing school buildings. The modular classrooms would be removed and the site used for additional car parking (see paragraph 16 below) upon completion of the permanent accommodation.
14. The proposal includes the reconfiguration of the main access/entrance area within the school boundary to improve access for buses and to better separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic. With regard to the existing bus drop-off/pick-up area, is it proposed to widen the waiting/drop-off area to improve vehicle flow and enable more buses to be accommodated on site (12 in total).
15. Further, the access road into the school forks to form a northern and southern arm, and it is proposed that the southern arm be primarily designated for pedestrian access at the start and end of the school day. Although some vehicular access would need to be retained to the existing (and proposed – see paragraph 16) car parking and service area, it is proposed that these be managed to minimise potential conflict with peak pupil

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flows. The northern arm of the access road would therefore be the primary vehicle access route. As a result of the above, additional internal footways/footway improvements are proposed to link the pedestrian access into the site with the southern arm of the access road. The existing pupil footpath which runs to the north of properties in Huntleys Park is to be widened, and a new link added to it from the north of the driveway with an internal crossing point provided.

16. In total, 36 additional car parking spaces are proposed, and 52 cycle spaces. 22 car parking spaces are proposed to be provided to the north west of the existing northern arm of the access road into the site, adjacent to an existing area of car parking, on an area of amenity grassland. In addition, upon completion of the permanent accommodation and removal of the modular classrooms, 14 additional car parking spaces would be provided where the modulares were sited. They would be accessed via an existing car parking area which is fed by the southern arm of the access road, be available for use by sixth formers, and would include 4 spaces with electric vehicle charging points. The 52 cycle parking spaces are proposed to the east of the school buildings, also accessed via the southern arm of the access road.
17. Further highway mitigation measures are proposed off site, and include the introduction of an 20mph zone on Culverden Down for approximately 120 metres across the school site frontage and parking restrictions to the eastern side of Culverden down for the extent of that 20mph zone.
18. The applicant advises that the proposal would require the removal of 2 trees, but that 6 new trees would be planted in replacement. In addition, planting/soft landscaping is proposed to the south of the widened bus drop-off/pick-up area.

Planning Policy Context

19. The most relevant Government Guidance and Development Plan Policies as summarised below are pertinent to the consideration of this application:
 - (i) **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) February 2019** and the **National Planning Policy Guidance** (March 2014), sets out the Government's planning policy guidance for England, at the heart of which is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The guidance is a material consideration for the determination of planning applications but 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 approach decisions in a positive and creative way, 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:

- consideration of whether the opportunities for sustainable transport have been taken up and safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people;

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- whether impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity or congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree;
- achieving the requirement for high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings;

In addition, Paragraph 94 states that: *The Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local Planning Authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools.*

- (ii) **Policy Statement – Planning for Schools Development (15 August 2011)** which sets out the Government’s commitment to support the development of state-funded schools and their delivery through the planning system. In particular the Policy states that the Government wants to enable new schools to open, good schools to expand and all schools to adapt and improve their facilities. This will allow for more provision and greater diversity of provision in the state funded school sector, to meet both demographic needs, provide increased choice and create higher standards.

(iii) **Development Plan Policies**

(iii) **Tunbridge Wells Borough-Local Plan 2006 (Saved Policies):**

Policy LBD1	States outside the Limits to Built Development, development will only be permitted where it would be in accordance with all relevant policies contained within the Development Plan.
Policy EN1	Seeks all proposals to be compatible in nature and intensity with neighbouring uses and not cause significant harm to character and amenities of the area in terms of daylight, sunlight, privacy, noise or excessive traffic generation. Seeks the design of the proposal to respect the context of the site and not cause significant harm to residential amenities.
Policy EN8	Seeks to ensure that proposals for outdoor lighting are the minimum of lighting necessary, be un-obstructively sited or well screened and the design and specification of lighting would minimise glare and light spillage.
Policy EN15	Seeks to prohibit proposals that would have adverse impact upon the nature conservation interest.
Policy EN16	Seeks to ensure that there is no adverse or unacceptable impact on the water quality or potential yield of groundwater.
Policy EN25	Seeks to ensure that outside of the Limits to Built Development, that all proposals for development would have a minimal impact on the landscape character of the locality, would have no detrimental impact on the landscape setting of settlements, would not result in unsympathetic change to the character of a

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rural lane, and new buildings should be located adjacent to existing buildings or well screened by vegetation.

- Policy R1** Seeks to ensure that proposals would not result in the loss of recreation open space and would only be permitted where no deficiency in accessible open space in that area.
- Policy T1** Requires Transport Assessments and Travel Plans to accompany any development proposals for any large scale non-residential development.
- Policy TP4** Seeks to ensure that any additional traffic generated by the proposal has adequately been assessed.
- Policy TP5** Vehicle parking in connection with development proposals will be restricted to the maximum necessary having regard to local highway conditions. Kent County Council's Vehicle Parking Standards, adopted by the Council, will be applied to such development proposals.
- Policy TP9** Seeks to ensure that cycle parking standards for non-residential development are in accordance to the latest Kent County Council Cycling Strategy.

(iv) Tunbridge Wells Borough Core Strategy 2010

- Core Policy 3** Promotes sustainable modes of transport and requires development proposals which would have significant transport implications to be accompanied by a transport assessment and travel plan showing how car-based travel can be minimised.
- Core Policy 4** Seeks to ensure that the Borough's built and natural environments, which are rich in heritage assets, landscape value and biodiversity, are conserved and enhanced.
- Core Policy 5** The Borough Council will apply and encourage sustainable design and construction principles and best practice. Developments should also be of high quality design, creating safe, accessible, and adaptable environments, whilst conserving and enhancing the public realm.
- Core Policy 8** Where there is a demonstrable continuing need, the provision of additional community facilities will be supported where they are deficient, particularly where this will provide a range of facilities on a single site or provide facilities that may be used for a variety of purposes.
- Core Policy 9** Development must conserve and enhance the landscape and heritage and biodiversity assets of Royal Tunbridge Wells, including the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, to secure its special character in the long term.

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(v) **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Site Allocations Local Plan 2016**

Policy AL/STR 1 The extent of the Limits of the Built Environment - the saved policy from the Local Plan will continue to be relevant in considering details of the appropriate uses inside, and outside of, the defined areas until such a time as they are updated and superseded by the Core Strategy Review (Local Plan).

Policy AL/GB 4 Rural Fringe - this will continue to be designated as long-term land reserved beyond the Plan period to ensure that the Green Belt boundaries are protected. Proposals for development at these sites will need to demonstrate that the needs of an established use on these sites are being met, or the development is temporary, and the land can be restored back to its previous use.

Consultations

20. **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council** raise no objection to this application subject to conditions regarding the retention and protection of existing trees on site, and subject to Kent County Council Highways and Transportation being satisfied that the proposal would not harm highway safety or the local highway network.

Kent County Council Highways and Transportation has no objection to this application on highway safety grounds, subject to receipt of a Memorandum of Understanding (regarding a £232,931 contribution for public transport improvements, and a £5000 contribution to School Travel Plan monitoring), and conditions of consent. Highways and Transportation (H&T) comment as follows:

Public Transport Capacity Improvements

Owing to the pressing need for additional school places in the town of Tunbridge Wells, four school expansions are proposed (St Gregory's, Tunbridge Wells Boys Grammar School, Skinners and Bennett Memorial). These four schools are located on the A26 corridor to the north of the town. A lack of bus service capacity has implications on mode choice and may result in greater numbers of pupils needing to travel by car than currently anticipated. It therefore has an important influence on the conclusions drawn by KCC Highways on the impact of the school on the highway network, given the congestion already prevalent at several nearby junctions.

With significant capacity issues already being experienced on the A26 bus services for pupils attending these schools, contributions towards increased capacity on school peak times services are being sought as part of the legal agreements associated with these applications.

The Transport Assessment for Bennett Memorial Diocesan School presents a base travel mode share for pupils, where 911 pupils (54.3%) travel by public bus services. An estimated increase of 163 pupils would travel to school by bus when the extension is completed. (132 based on Young Persons Travel Pass and 16+ Travel Card purchases by existing students.)

The required School Travel Plan would identify what proportion of the children would travel by bus. The bus company will not put extra buses on to accommodate these children without being paid to do so. If they are not funded,

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the students would be driven to school and the mode share targets would not be achieved, resulting in an impact on the highway. This is why the suggested mitigation measure is required. As and when new house building occurs, KCC will request contributions to improve the bus services and there may be no need to use the contingency fund required as mitigation for this extension.

KCC Highways would only require the payment if children from the school buy YTP and they live on corridors where there is not sufficient bus capacity for them to travel. A document entitled 'Payment Mechanism for A26 school expansions Rev 3' outlines the calculations undertaken by KCC Highways to ensure public transport is available to all students as a result of the four school extensions. As a result of these calculations, KCC Education is asked to underwrite the cost of resolving any additional capacity requirement, thereby mitigating the impact of the proposed development, up to a capped maximum amount of £232,931. This payment mechanism should be secured as part of a legal agreement between KCC Education and KCC Highways.

KCC Education has accepted the proposed mitigation measure and payment mechanism, although this would need to be in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as a legal agreement between two parts of the County Council is not possible.

Junction capacity

The Transport Assessment (TA) outlines the modelling assessments undertaken by the applicant on key junctions associated with traffic from this development.

To understand the impact of the proposals on the local road network, the mode split data (i.e. which modes of transport staff and pupils use to access the site) was factored against the increase in pupil and staff numbers to calculate the increase in movements on the local highway network. Traffic surveys were completed by an independent survey team at the key junctions to establish the base flows. A distribution exercise was then completed to demonstrate the future routing of vehicle movements, and the base flows and development trips were then included in a spreadsheet model. Junction assessments were then completed using the industry standard PICADY and LinSig software to assess the local junctions in the 2018, 2023 and 2023 plus development scenarios.

The assessments show that none of the junctions would be severely impacted by the additional trips associated with the development, providing the modal share of private car trips does not exceed the predicted percentage (based on current modal share). The required school travel plan would allow this to be monitored.

School Travel Plan

The TA acknowledges that an updated School Travel Plan is required. Should this application be permitted, the School Travel Plan should be updated (to include measurable targets) within 6 months of the date of the permission, and a school travel plan monitoring fee would be payable to KCC by the school. These aspects should be conditioned as part of the Travel Plan requirements;

- a) A monitoring fee of £5,000 will be required and will cover a 5-year monitoring period;

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- b) Quantifiable targets for the maintenance (at least) of the current public bus service mode share should be specified (following discussion with KCC officers);
- c) A Travel Plan Coordinator should be appointed to oversee implementation;
- d) A Steering Group should be formed to enable key stakeholders, including KCC H&T, to meet and guide any actions taken;
- e) The range of measures that could be taken forward to encourage sustainable travel behaviours will form the basis of an Action Plan, alongside a commitment to monitor and review progress through the regular undertaking of travel surveys.

20mph speed limit

An advisory speed limit of 20mph is proposed by the applicant. This would require a Traffic Regulation Order and could be facilitated by the implementation of appropriate signage, to be agreed by H&T and funded by the developer.

Parking restrictions on Culverden Down

There are currently no parking restrictions on Culverden Down in the vicinity of the site access road. The TA notes that vehicles (suggested to belong to 6th formers) are parked on the eastern side of the carriageway which can cause a pinch point and restrict the flow of traffic on this section of road. The applicant has agreed to implement parking restrictions (subject to a Traffic Regulation Order), which H&T consider to be acceptable. The introduction of parking restrictions would also assist pedestrians crossing Culverden Down.

Pedestrian Crossing

Since the application has been received, a number of residents and a County Member have raised the need for a pedestrian crossing point on Culverden Down owing to the lack of parking restrictions making it difficult for pupils to find a safe place to cross.

The crash records show that there have been no crashes within the vicinity of the school access within the last five years. The implementation of parking restrictions and an advisory 20mph speed limit would result in improved visibility for children crossing Culverden Down. This is considered to be a suitable mitigation measure in this location. No formal pedestrian crossing would be required if these measures are introduced.

Bus layout improvements on site

The current onsite bus collection arrangement would be improved as part of this application with a formalised onsite bus waiting area within the site ensuring existing and future pupils have access to the necessary services.

Parking

An additional 36 car parking spaces are proposed as a result of this extension. Maximum Parking Standards (SPG4) allows 1 space per member of staff + 10%. There would be 109 Full Time (FT) staff and 62 Part Time (PT) staff. If it is assumed the 62 PT staff = 31 FTE staff this totals 140 staff if this application goes ahead. This results in 154 spaces including the additional 10%. The total number of parking spaces proposed for the site is now 154 which accords with the standards and is acceptable.

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The County Council's School Travel Plan Advisor 'approves' the submitted Travel Plan.

Environment Agency state that they have no comments to make on the planning application as it falls 'outside their remit as a statutory planning consultee'.

The County Council's Flood Risk Team (SuDs) raises no objection to the application subject to the imposition of conditions requiring the submission of a detailed sustainable surface water drainage scheme prior to commencement of the development and the submission of a verification report prior to occupation of the development (or within an agreed timeframe).

Sport England objects to the application because it is not considered that the development accords with any of the exceptions to Sport England's Playing Field Policy or with paragraph 97 of the NPPF.

The proposal includes a new building on an area of existing playing field to the south west of the site. The area of playing field that would be affected has previously hosted cricket, football and rounders pitches. The proposed location of the building would therefore result in a permanent loss of playing field, reducing the ability to accommodate and rotate pitches on the site. The existing floodlit all weather pitch on the site is not considered to mitigate against the loss because that pitch itself involved a loss of playing field land. This application does not propose to mitigate for the lost playing field.

Sport England's Policy is to oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to a loss of, or prejudice the use of, all/part of a playing field, unless one or more of the five exceptions stated in Sport England Policy apply. These are as follows:

Exception E1 – There is an excess of playing field provision in the local area, and the development site has no special significance to the interests of sport.

Exception E2 – The proposed development is ancillary to the principal use of the site as playing field and does not affect the quantity/quality of the pitches.

Exception E3 – The proposed development affects only land incapable of forming or forming part of a playing pitch.

Exception E4 - The playing field or playing fields, which would be lost as a result of the proposed development, would be replaced by a playing field or playing fields of an equivalent or better quality and of equivalent or greater quantity.

Exception E5 - The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor sports facility, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of the playing field or playing fields.

The County Council's Biodiversity Officer has no objection to this application and considers that sufficient information has been provided to support the application. However, should permission be granted conditions of consent are required regarding the setting up of a 25m exclusion zone around potential badger setts prior to the commencement of the development, submission of a lighting plan for the site boundaries prior to the installation of external lighting, and submission of a biodiversity enhancement plan prior to the completion of the development.

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Kent Wildlife Trust no comments received.

Natural England has no comments to make on the application.

Local Member

21. The local County Member, Mr Peter Oakford, was notified of the application on the 14 January 2019. The County Member for the adjacent Division, Mr James McInroy, was also notified of the application on the 14 January 2019. Both County Members were also notified of the submission of additional and amended information on the 10 April 2019.

22. Mr James McInroy comments as follows:

“The School is actually located in Peter Oakford’s division of Tunbridge Wells North and not in my division of Tunbridge Wells West.

However, although residents in Tunbridge Wells West recognise the need for the proposed 2 Form of Entry expansion, residents have expressed their concerns about the dangers to children and other pedestrians in the mornings and afternoons. This is caused by the lack of available parking along Culverden Down causing car drivers to park very closely to the school entrance, blocking visibility.

Residents have asked me if KCC is prepared to install a pedestrian crossing as there are large numbers of children crossing the road at school rush hour, often taking risks in crossing the road.

The local councillor Peter Oakford and I met with the Cabinet Member for Education and have requested a Highways investigation into this matter, which we believe to be safety-critical.

I hope that appropriate steps are taken to safeguard children and others crossing Culverden Down to and from the school, as the risks of a death or serious injury can only increase with the school expansion.”

Publicity

23. This application was publicised by an advertisement in a local newspaper, the posting of 2 site notices and the individual notification of 162 residential properties. All those originally notified and those that had written in, including the Culverden Residents Association, were notified of the submission of additional and amended information on the 10 April 2019

Representations

24. In response to the publicity, 12 letters of representation have been received from 8 local residents. A summary of the main planning issues raised/points of objection is set out below:

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Amenity Matters

- Five properties are accessed via the school site. Access to these properties should not be adversely affected by the proposed development, and signage/road marking should be introduced to ensure users of the school access road do not block residents drives/access points.
- Lighting of the coach/bus drop off area appears excessive, increasing light pollution and adversely affecting the amenity of adjoining residents;
- The new access path would result in the removal of existing vegetation which currently acts as screening, and would also be lit with 3m high lighting columns which is not necessary and would directly face into local properties;
- Additional vehicles will increase air pollution and generate additional noise;

Highway and Access Matters

- The introduction of parking restrictions on Culverden Down will only result in increased parking (mainly sixth formers) in other local roads, such as Huntleys Park;
- Parking restrictions should be implemented in the whole of the Culverden Area, with residents only parking between certain hours to prevent sixth form parking;
- Parents/guardians park illegally and dangerously, causing congestion at peak school times, as well as inconvenience to local residents;
- There appears to be a lack of understanding about the way private and public transport currently operate to and from the school resulting in an inadequate proposal for mitigating the impacts of additional vehicles;
- Local roads are already at capacity, especially at peak school times. Parking on local roads also adds to this congestion and narrows the roads to single carriageway width in places;
- The impact of the development on the local highway network would be severe and the application should therefore be refused;
- The A26 St Johns Road/Culverden Down junction is already severely congested;
- Sixth form parking should be allowed on site and they should be strongly advised not to drive to school (provision of bus passes for example);
- An onsite pick up-drop off loop for use by parents/guardians should be provided;
- Primary School children walk along the pavements in the area (Bishops Down Primary School pupils amongst others) but the roads and pavements are not safe;
- Cycling to school is not an option due to the unsafe nature of local roads;
- Additional parking should be provided on Culverden Down by removing the verge to the west of the highway. This area was used informally until recent parking restrictions were introduced;

Other

- There is no allowance or assessment in the planning application for the resulting increase in sixth form numbers. If pupil numbers in years 7 to 11 are to increase, sixth form numbers would also increase. The increase in sixth form numbers has not been included in the Transport Assessment and therefore the conclusions are inaccurate;
- Trees on the site should not be removed or adversely affected by the proposals;
- The expansion of the school is not for the benefit of Tunbridge Wells residents, the catchment area will simply increase;

Support

- The need for additional school places is accepted;
- The school and its expansion plans are supported in principle.

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Two representations from the Culverden Down Residents Association were also received. The Residents Association do not oppose the expansion of the school and appreciate the need for additional school places but those additional places should be for local children first on the basis of proximity. Approval of this application must be conditional on a revised admissions policy guaranteeing 2 forms of entry dedicated to local children before any others. Further, it is stated that satisfactory conditions must be imposed to encourage active travel to the school, accompanied by the introduction of further traffic calming measures, filtered permeability on certain local roads to deter rat running and the introduction of a 20mph speed limit for the whole of the Culverden area. Such conditions should be implemented before the additional school places become available and be fully funded by the County Council. Culverden residents already find traffic conditions in the area unacceptably dangerous for road users and pedestrians.

Discussion

25. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph 19 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, this proposal needs to be considered in the context of Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning for School Development Policy Statement, and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity.
26. In this case the key determining factors, in my view, are the principle of the development and need, access and highway matters, design, massing and siting including loss of playing field, general amenity matters, and the policy support for the development of schools to ensure that there is sufficient provision to meet growing demand, increased choice and raised educational standards, subject to being satisfied on other material considerations. In the Government's view the creation and development of schools is strongly in the national interest and planning authorities should support this objective, in a manner consistent with their statutory obligations. In considering proposals for the creation, expansion and alteration of schools, the Government considers that there is a strong presumption in favour of state funded schools, as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework and reflected in the Policy Statement for Schools. Planning Authorities should give full and thorough consideration to the importance of enabling such development, attaching significant weight to the need to establish and develop state funded schools, and making full use of their planning powers to support such development, only imposing conditions that are absolutely necessary and that meet the tests set out in paragraph 55 of the NPPF.

Principle of the Development and Need

27. The Tunbridge Wells Site Allocations Local Plan (2016) confirms that the whole of the school site is within the designated Rural Fringe (Policy AL/GB4) and outside the Limits of the Built Development (AL/STR1). It should also be noted that site borders the Metropolitan Green Belt to the north, but specific Green Belt Policies are not relevant to the determination of this application.
28. Policy AL/GB4 states that proposals within the Rural Fringe will need to demonstrate a) the needs of an established use on the site are being met, or b) the development is temporary. In this instance the proposal has been designed to meet the needs of the established school use on the site, in accordance with the above policy. In addition the proposed new teaching block and extensions to existing buildings, are located as close

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as practicably possible to the existing built-up part of the school which would help reduce visual and landscape impact.

29. Furthermore, Policy AL/STR1 states that saved policies of the Local Plan will continue to be relevant in considering details of the appropriate uses inside, and outside, of the area defined as 'Limits to Built Development'. In this instance, the proposed development is directly associated with the existing established education use of the wider site.
30. In light of the above, I consider the planning application to be in accordance with the Local Plan Policies AL/GB4 and AL/STR1. I also note that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has not raised objection in this regard. I therefore am satisfied that the principle of additional school development is acceptable in this location.
31. As outlined in paragraph 19 of this report, great emphasis is placed within planning policy generally, specifically paragraph 94 of the NPPF, on the need to ensure that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. The NPPF states that Planning Authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. The NPPF further states that Planning Authorities should give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools. The Policy Statement – Planning for Schools Development (15 August 2011) also sets out the Government's commitment to support the development of state funded schools and their delivery through the planning system. There is a presumption in favour of the development of state funded schools expressed in both the NPPF and the Policy Statement – Planning for Schools Development.
32. Kent County Council, as the Strategic Commissioner of Education Provision in the County, is responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient school places of high quality for all learners. As set out in paragraphs 5, 6 & 7 of this report, the latest admissions data for Tunbridge Wells Borough indicates a strong demand for Secondary School places and, if no action is taken, the deficiency in Year 7 places is predicted to increase from 121 in 2018/19 to 245 in 2022/23. There is particular pressure on the urban areas within the Borough, primarily on the town of Tunbridge Wells. The KCC Education Commissioning Plan identified an approximate 6 Form of Entry (FE) deficit of Secondary School places for the September 2018 intake, which is anticipated to increase to over 11 FE within five years. Recent applications for a 1FE expansion of St Gregory's School (TW/18/2129) and a 1FE expansion of Tunbridge Wells Boys Grammar School (TW/18/2548) have been granted permission by the County Planning Authority and go some way to aid in reducing that forecasted deficit.
33. The applicant advises that Bennett Memorial Diocesan School is a very popular school judged 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and is consistently among the highest achieving schools in the County. Therefore, the Governing Body, in conjunction with Tenax Schools Trust and Kent County Council, are proposing to provide additional school places by permanently expanding Bennett Memorial Diocesan School by 2FE, increasing the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) from 240 to 300 (8FE to 10FE) in September 2019. It is intended that the expansion would occur incrementally, with 60 additional Year 7 places offered in each year from September 2019, so that the school would grow over a 5-year period until it reached capacity in 2023.
34. Based on the above, in my view, it is evident that there is a clear case of need for additional secondary school places within Tunbridge Wells. The applicant has demonstrated that there is an existing shortfall of places within the local area, and a future need which will be further outstripped by demand unless additional places are

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provided. Support for the provision of school places is heavily embedded in the NPPF, the Planning for School Development Policy Statement, and local Planning Policy, and I consider that the need for the development should be given significant weight in this instance. I therefore accept the need for the expansion of Bennett Memorial Diocesan School, subject to being satisfied on the relevant material considerations set out below.

Access and Highway Matters, including Off-Site Highways Works

35. As outlined in paragraph 24 of this report, there is local objection to this application based on highway and access concerns, in addition to the concerns expressed by the County Member, James McInroy (see paragraph 22). The primary points of local concern and objection relate to the capacity of local roads/junctions, highway and pedestrian safety, and the impacts resulting from the introduction of parking restrictions on Culverden Down. These matters will be discussed below. Air quality and noise concerns will be discussed in the amenity section of this report, as will access to properties from within the school site.
36. As set out in paragraph 8 of this report, the additional 2FE expansion (8FE to 10 FE) would increase the school roll by 300, from approximately 1678 to 1978 (1500 in years 7 to 11 plus sixth form), and would increase staff numbers by approximately 20 (to 171 in total). It should be noted that this application proposes to expand years 7 to 11 only, and not the sixth form.
37. This has been questioned by local residents, who are concerned that sixth form numbers would naturally increase as a result of the expansion of the lower school years. However, the applicant advises that education and training for young people aged 16 to 19 years is commissioned and funded by the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) and not the County Council. The number of sixth form students at the school would be constrained by a lack of accommodation as the proposed development is to provide accommodation for years 7 to 11 only. If the School (which is an Academy) were to require additional accommodation to increase sixth form capacity in the future, then a separate planning application would be required which, unless promoted by the County Council, would be determined by the Borough Council. Therefore, this application needs to consider the resulting impacts on the increase in pupil numbers in years 7 to 11 only.
38. The submitted Transport Assessment concludes that once the school's 10FE capacity has been reached a total of 633 vehicle trips (arrivals and departures) would occur in the morning peak hour, compared to 541 existing movements, and 596 total vehicle trips (arrivals and departures) would occur in the afternoon peak hour, compared to 508 existing. The School Travel Plan, which has been updated and approved by the County Council's School Travel Plan Advisor as part of this application, and would be the subject of a condition of consent should permission be granted (see paragraphs 49 & 50 below), would aim to reduce the proposed total vehicle trips (as set out above) by 10 percent. The additional vehicle trips resulting from the expansion from 8FE to 10 FE, taking into account of the Travel Plan targets (and associated monitoring), are predicted to be an additional 29 movements in the morning peak hour and an additional 28 in the afternoon peak hour.
39. Before assessing the impact of the proposal on the immediate locality of the school, concern is expressed that local junctions, specifically the A26 St John's Road/Culverden Down junction, are unable to accommodate the additional vehicle movements that would result from the school expansion. However, as set out in paragraph 20 of this report, Highways and Transportation are satisfied that the junction assessments

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undertaken by the applicant have been completed in accordance with the required standards and further conclude that the assessments show that none of the local junctions would be severely impacted by the additional trips associated with the development. This is on the basis that the modal share of private car trips would not exceed the current and predicated percentage (18.7%). In addition, the required School Travel Plan should in fact reduce that percentage and the stipulations of the Travel Plan condition (see paragraph 49) would enable vehicle journeys/modal shares to be monitored. In considering the above, and the views of Highways and Transportation, I am satisfied that local junctions would not be significantly adversely affected by the proposed school expansion.

40. The applicant is proposing to provide the following mitigation to aid in reducing any impact of the proposed expansion on Culverden Down and local roads in the immediate vicinity of the school access. These are as follows:
- Improvements/modifications to the existing on site bus drop off/pick up area;
 - Improvements/modifications to the existing pedestrian pathways in the site and provision of additional pathways to better separate pedestrian and vehicle movements;
 - The provision of an additional 36 car parking spaces, including 4 electric vehicle charging bays;
 - The provision of an additional 52 cycle parking spaces;
 - Off-site highway works including the introduction of a 20mph speed limit for approximately 120m along Culverden Down in the vicinity of the school access, and provision of parking to the eastern side of Culverden Down for the extent of the 20mph zone;
 - A contribution of up to £232,931 for public transport improvements, should they be required;
 - A £5000 contribution to School Travel Plan monitoring and review.
41. The school currently have an onsite bus pick-up/drop-off area and it is proposed to upgrade this to improve vehicle flow and enable more buses to be accommodated on site at one time (12 in total). Further, as set out in paragraph 15 of this report, improvements to pedestrian access are proposed in an effort to separate pedestrian and vehicle movements within the site. No direct objections to these on site works have been raised, although concerns are expressed regarding the impact of additional lighting and the loss of trees/screening. These matters will be discussed in detail later in this report, but the lighting is ancillary to the works and only 2 trees are proposed for removal. Highways and Transportation support the onsite improvements and I therefore am satisfied that the improvements to the bus pick-up/drop-off and pedestrian routes and a loss of the 2 trees within the site are acceptable in this case.
42. With regard to bus access to the site, it should also be noted that Highways and Transportation require a potential contribution of up to £232,931 towards 'Public Transport Capacity Improvements'. This contribution has been agreed with the Education Authority prior to the submission of this application. Four school expansions are proposed (St Gregory's, Tunbridge Wells Boys Grammar School, Skinners and Bennett Memorial) within Tunbridge Wells, all of which are located on the A26 corridor to the north of the town. As set out in paragraph 20 of this report, with significant capacity issues already being experienced on the A26 bus services for pupils attending these schools, contributions towards increased capacity on school peak times services are being sought as part of these applications (two have already been granted permission by the County Council with the necessary mechanism for payment a condition of the consent).

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43. The Transport Assessment for Bennett Memorial Diocesan School states that currently 911 pupils (54.3%) travel by public bus services. An estimated increase of 163 pupils would travel to school by bus when the expansion to 10FE is complete. The payment would only be required if children from the school buy a Young Persons Travel Pass and they live on corridors where there is not sufficient bus capacity for them to travel. A document entitled 'Payment Mechanism for A26 school expansions Rev 3' outlines the calculations undertaken by KCC Highways to ensure public transport is available to all students as a result of the four school expansions. As a result of these calculations, KCC Education is asked to underwrite the cost of resolving any additional capacity requirement, thereby mitigating the impact of the proposed development, up to a capped maximum amount of £232,931. This payment would be secured via a Memorandum of Understanding rather than a legal agreement as the County Council cannot have a legal agreement with itself. This has been received and signed by both parties, and should permission be granted for the development, that Memorandum of Understanding would form part of the application documentation.
44. Off site highway works are also proposed as part of this application, which would be subject to a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) should permission be granted for this development. A 20mph speed limit is proposed to extend for approximately 120m along Culverden Down in the vicinity of the school access point. The reduction in speed limit is supported and has not met with local objection. However, the proposed parking restrictions to the eastern side of Culverden Down have met with concern from some local residents, whilst others have requested that a much wider area be subject to such restrictions.
45. First, it must be recognised that this development cannot be expected to address a wider on-street car parking issue – that matter must be considered and if necessary addressed by the Borough Council. However, the applicant is expected to mitigate any highway impact that would occur as a result of this application. In this case, on-street car parking occurs during the school day to the eastern side of Culverden Down which narrows the carriageway width creating a 'pinch point' which can restrict the flow of traffic on this section of road. To mitigate this, parking restrictions are proposed for the length of the 20mph speed limit section of Culverden Down, to the eastern side of the road. Local residents are concerned that the implementation of the parking restrictions as proposed would result in additional on-street car parking in other local roads. It is suggested by residents that the parking to the eastern side of Culverden Down is mainly by sixth form students, and that they already park on other local roads, adversely affecting access and also being an inconvenience to local residents and a danger to local road users.
46. As a result of these concerns, the applicant has increased the onsite car parking provision from 22 to 36 additional car parking spaces. The school have confirmed that the additional 14 spaces, to be located on the site of the required temporary buildings (see paragraph 52) and constructed upon their removal, would be available for use by the sixth form, mitigating for the loss of on-street car parking. I am further advised that 4 of these spaces would be equipped with electric vehicle charging points. Highways and Transportation confirm the total number of parking spaces proposed for the site would now be 154 (118 Existing & 36 proposed), which accords with parking standards and is acceptable. Further, subject to a TRO, Highways and Transportation support the parking restrictions as proposed. I therefore recommend that should permission be granted, the offsite highway works be completed (subject to TRO) and that the car parking be provided prior to occupation in the case of the 22 spaces to the north of the site, and upon removal of the temporary accommodation for the additional 14 spaces to the south of the site. Subject to these conditions I am satisfied that the off-site highway works are

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acceptable, and that the parking provision on site would meet the additional parking requirements that would result from the school expansion.

47. In addition, the provision of a pedestrian crossing is suggested by the County Member, Mr James McInroy, and local residents suggest that local roads and pavements are not safe for use by pupils walking to school (including walking to local primary schools). However, Highways and Transportation are satisfied that the implementation of the parking restrictions and 20mph speed limit on Culverden Down would result in improved visibility and therefore safety for pupils crossing Culverden Down. I am further advised that the crash records show that there have been no crashes within the vicinity of the school access within the last 5 years. Highways and Transportation are satisfied that no formal pedestrian crossing is required and that the parking restrictions and speed limit reductions would improve road and pedestrian safety. I therefore am satisfied that the development as proposed would improve safety on local roads due to the mitigation proposed.
48. It is also considered by local residents that it is not safe to cycle to the school. However, 52 cycle spaces would be provided on site to encourage cycling, but the general safety and the suitability of the wider road network for cycling is not a matter that can be addressed by this planning application. This is again a matter for the Borough Council/Highway Authority as part of a wider issue across the town/Borough.
49. Lastly, whilst an updated Travel Plan has been submitted with this application and accepted/approved by the County Council's School Travel Plan Advisor, Highways and Transportation require the submission of a further updated Travel Plan within 6 months of the date of the permission (should permission be granted) and that the following aspects form part of the planning condition:
- a) A monitoring fee of £5,000 will be required and will cover a 5 year monitoring period;
 - b) quantifiable targets for the maintenance (at least) of the current public bus service mode share should be specified (following discussion with KCC officers);
 - c) A Travel Plan Coordinator should be appointed to oversee implementation;
 - d) a Steering Group should be formed to enable key stakeholders, including KCC H&T, to meet and guide any actions taken;
 - e) The range of measures that could be taken forward to encourage sustainable travel behaviours will form the basis of an Action Plan, alongside a commitment to monitor and review progress through the regular undertaking of travel surveys.
50. The applicant has agreed to the above stipulations and, therefore, should permission be granted the above matters would be secured by an appropriately worded planning condition. As with the monetary contribution required for improvements to the bus service should they be deemed necessary, the £5000 contribution to Travel Plan monitoring would be secured via a Memorandum of Understanding. This has been received and is signed by both parties.
51. In this case, in considering the level of mitigation proposed, I am satisfied that this development would not significantly exacerbate existing highway and access matters, including safety concerns to a level to warrant refusal (as set out in Policy Guidance and the NPPF). The NPPF, the Policy Statement Planning for Schools Development, and Development Plan Policies heavily promote the provision of school places and consider that there is a presumption in favour of development unless impacts resulting from the development would be severe. Highways and Transportation have no objection to this application subject to the mitigation proposed and subject to the imposition of conditions, as set out above. Subject to the conditions outlined above, and the matters covered by the Memorandum of Understanding, I am satisfied that, in this instance, that

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the proposal would not have a significantly detrimental impact on the local highway network and therefore see no overriding reason to refuse the application on this ground.

Design, Massing and Siting

52. Apart from the playing field implications of the siting of the proposed teaching block and the subsequent Sport England objection, which will be discussed later in this report, the design, massing and siting of the built development as proposed has not met with objection. Some concerns have been raised regarding the amenity impacts of the proposed access improvements (to be discussed later in this report), but the proposed teaching block, small extensions and temporary accommodation are proposed in locations that would not impact upon residential amenity due to the degree of separation and the significant level of screening. The siting of the permanent and temporary accommodation is, in my view, logical and practicable, and I am satisfied that the built development as proposed would not adversely affect local amenity and/or the wider landscape. However, the temporary classrooms must be removed within one month of the first use of the permanent teaching block to enable the 14 additional car parking spaces to be provided. Therefore, should permission be granted, a condition of consent would require the removal of the temporary classrooms within one month of first use/occupation of the permanent teaching accommodation.
53. As set out in paragraphs 11 & 12 of this report, the proposed teaching block would be finished in a combination of red brick work and white render with powder coated aluminium windows, and the two extensions to the existing buildings would be finished in materials to match the existing. However, in my view, it would be appropriate to seek further and final details of all materials to be used externally pursuant to condition, should permission be granted. Subject to the imposition of that condition, I do not consider that the design of the building would have a significantly detrimental impact upon the appearance or amenity of the locality and, therefore, would be acceptable.
54. Lastly, the applicant advises that sustainable design has been integrated into the building concept. The building would achieve an 11% improvement on the carbon emissions standards laid out in Part L of the building regulations. This improvement is achieved through the specification of quality, energy efficient mechanical, electrical and plumbing equipment with smart controls such as LED lighting with decentralised daylight dimming and highly efficient low-emission condensing gas boilers. The need for cooling in the classrooms has been removed by using a hybrid natural-mechanical ventilation strategy that would keep the building from overheating in the summer. Furthermore, the energy statement identifies an opportunity to install a 60m² photovoltaic solar panel array on the roof of the new build that would generate 10.4kWp of electricity, over a quarter of the building's electrical demand and improving the carbon reduction to 19% better than building regulations. The car park would also be fitted with 4 electrical car charging points to encourage sustainable transport and the system could be extended to accommodate more charging points as we move towards a petrol and diesel car free UK by 2040. In considering the sustainable design credentials of the proposed development, I am of the opinion that the building design is sustainable and require no further details in that regard.

Sport England matters

55. As set out in paragraph 20 of this report, Sport England objects to this application because it is not considered that the development accords with any of the exceptions to Sport England's Playing Field Policy or with paragraph 97 of the NPPF. This application proposes a new teaching block on an area of existing playing field to the south west of

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the site that Sport England advise has previously hosted cricket, football and rounders pitches. The proposed location of the building would therefore result in a permanent loss of playing field, reducing the ability to accommodate and rotate pitches on the site. Sport England further consider that the existing floodlit All Weather Pitch (AWP) on the site does not mitigate against the loss because that pitch itself involved a loss of playing field land.

56. The applicant has not proposed any mitigation for the loss of playing field in this instance. However, available space on the site is limited and it would not be possible to provide the required teaching accommodation without encroaching onto playing field. Alternative locations could also result in tree removal or ecological implications given the designated areas that border the site. The applicant advises that the selected location for the teaching block was deemed the most feasible as it is as close as practically possible to the existing school buildings whilst also avoiding the main areas of playing field and laid out pitches to the north and northeast areas of the site. In addition, it is calculated by the applicant that the school has approximately 47,328m² of playing field, excluding the AWP pitch and hard play areas. This proposal would result in the loss of approximately 2,385m² of the playing field, which equates to just 5%.
57. I consider this to be a minimal loss of playing field which, when balanced against the strong need for the additional teaching space to meet the demand for additional secondary school places in Tunbridge Wells, would be acceptable in this instance. Further, the School have confirmed that the remaining playing field space and pitch layout would meet the schools outdoor curriculum space when the school roll is expanded, and also that the floodlit AWP pitch is used extensively by the local community as well as the school. I therefore am satisfied that the proposal would not have an unacceptable impact on sporting provision and see no reason to refuse the application on this ground. If Members agree with this and are minded to grant permission, in accordance with the recommendation, the application would need to be referred to the Secretary of State due to Sport England's objection.

Amenity Concerns – access, lighting, and air & noise pollution

58. With regard to amenity matters, concerns were raised by local residents with regard to the amended bus pick-up/drop-off area and pedestrian access routes resulting in the potential blocking of access to properties and also additional light pollution. Air quality and noise implications arising from additional vehicle movement were also raised.
59. With regard to access to properties, as set out in paragraph 1 of this report, the school access road also affords access to 5 private residential properties. Two of these properties are accessed via the northern end of the bus pick-up/drop-off area and concern was raised that the amended bus access would affect access to those properties. As a result of these concerns, the applicant amended the plans to show a slightly amended layout to the bus parking area, with added annotation to highlight the fact that access must be maintained to these properties. Drop kerbs/level access would be provided, and school management of the bus pick-up/drop-off area would ensure that access is not blocked, as is currently the case. The properties are currently accessed via this drop-off/pick-up area, and the amendments proposed to it (slight widening) are to the south of the area and should not directly affect access to the residential properties. The applicant advises that the improved efficiency of the bus pick-up/drop-off should actually reduce the time buses are on site at the start and end of the school day, which would reduce the amount of time residents could be inconvenienced by the buses parking on site over the current situation. I am therefore satisfied that the amendments to the bus pick-up/drop-off facility would maintain the status quo with regard to access

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arrangements to residential properties, and that the development would not have an adverse impact in that regard.

60. In addition to the improvements proposed to the bus access, additional and improved pedestrian access routes are proposed in an effort to improve onsite safety by separating pedestrian and vehicle movements. The existing footway to the south of the access road, to the rear of properties in Huntleys Park, is proposed to be widened, and a new footway is proposed to the north of the access road, linked to the footway to the south via a new crossing and footpath link. Apart from the arboricultural implications of those works, which will be discussed later in this report, concern is raised regarding the proposed lighting of the footways, and the bus pick-up/drop-off facility itself.
61. The applicant advises that the proposed lighting is required to improve the overall safety and security of the site. The footway from Culverden Down to the bus pick-up/drop-off area would be lit with bollard lighting, whereas the footway from the bus pick-up/drop-off to the school building is proposed to be lit with 3metre high column lighting. The bus pick-up/drop-off facility is proposed to be lit with 6metre high lighting columns. The applicant has submitted a lux level drawing which plots the lighting levels as proposed for the bus pick-up/drop-off facility and the pathways, and the lighting levels beyond the site boundary are predominately 0 lux, with only a small number of plots showing a level of 1 or 2. Further, the applicant advises that lighting controls would be installed in the form of movement sensors and daylighting sensors to minimise illumination during the hours of darkness, and that further time controls would restrict the period of operation. It should also be noted that boundary planting and mature trees within the bus pick-up/drop-off area would further mitigate the visual impact of the lighting.
62. In considering the above, I am satisfied that the lighting scheme proposed for the bus pick-up/drop-off facility and pedestrian access routes are acceptable in principle and would not adversely affect the amenity of local residents. However, no details of the external lighting on the new teaching block have been submitted, nor have details of lighting to the new car parking areas. Kent County Council's Biodiversity Officer also requires details of any lighting affecting the site boundaries to be submitted pursuant to condition, should permission be granted (see paragraph 68 below). I therefore consider it appropriate to require details of all new external lighting, including hours of operation, to be submitted pursuant to condition should permission be granted. This would also give a further opportunity to assess any impact on local residential amenity and to control the hours of lighting operation if necessary. Subject to that condition, I do not consider that external lighting would have a significantly detrimental impact on the amenity of the locality.
63. In addition to the highway impacts of the additional traffic movements associated with the expansion, local residents express concern regarding additional noise pollution and also air quality matters. First, with regard to noise pollution from additional vehicle movements, it should be noted that the additional vehicle trips resulting from the expansion from 8FE to 10 FE are predicted to be an additional 29 movements in the morning peak hour and an additional 28 in the afternoon peak hour. Given the existing background noise levels at peak school times, and the limited duration of the morning and afternoon peak, I do not consider that the low number of additional vehicle movements would have a notable impact on noise levels in the locality.
64. With regard to air pollution, as a result of the concerns raised by local residents, the applicant has submitted an Air Quality Technical Note (AQTN) in support of this application. The purpose of the AQTN is to provide details of the existing baseline conditions at the proposed development site and to assess whether the proposals would

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have a potential to effect air quality in the locality, both during the construction phase and upon completion (operational phase). The assessment is carried out in accordance with the relevant Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) guidance. The AQTN concludes that air quality impacts resulting from the construction and operational phases of the development would be classified as 'not significant' and that, therefore, the development complies with national and local planning policies regarding air quality. I therefore am satisfied that the development would not have a significantly adverse impact on air quality in the locality.

Arboricultural Matters

65. As outlined in paragraph 3 of this report, the school site is bound by areas of 'Ancient Woodland' (Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Local Plan 2006), and many of the trees within the school site are subject to Tree Preservation Orders. The applicant has submitted a Tree Survey Report and Tree Protection details with this application, which conclude that two trees would require removal as a result of this development, a Silver Birch and a Laurel, neither of which are subject to a TPO. Some vegetation clearance would be required to accommodate the pedestrian access improvement works, but this would be low level shrub/undergrowth only. Local residents express some concern about the possible removal of boundary planting, but I can advise that all mature trees would be retained. However, I consider that a scheme of landscaping should be required pursuant to condition, should permission be granted, which should include details of supplementary boundary planting, where appropriate.
66. In addition, the Borough Council require conditions of consent, should permission be granted, to ensure that trees to be retained are protected and unaffected by the proposed works. The development is required to be carried out in accordance with the submitted 'Tree Protection, Removal and Replacement Strategy', and further details of an Arboricultural Method Statement with 'restrictive dig and surfacing details' are required to be submitted, in addition to arboricultural supervision/monitoring reports. Subject to suitably worded conditions to cover those matters, I am satisfied that the proposed development would not adversely affect trees to be retained on the site.

Biodiversity

67. As set out in paragraph 3 of this report, the school site is in close proximity to/borders areas classified as 'Local Nature Reserve' (Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2006). Although the development proposed is primarily on mown and managed grassland and existing hard standing within the site, both of which have limited potential to support protected species, due to the sensitive location of the site the applicant submitted an Ecological Impact Assessment, Bat Survey and the results of an analysis of local ponds in support of this application. The County Council's Biodiversity Officer is satisfied with the level of information provided, and has no objection to the application subject to the imposition of conditions.
68. Should permission be granted conditions of consent are required regarding the setting up of a 25m exclusion zone around potential badger setts prior to the commencement of the development, submission of a lighting plan for the site boundaries prior to the installation of external lighting, and submission of a biodiversity enhancement plan prior to the completion of the development. In addition, I consider that a further condition of consent should be imposed to ensure that there is no tree removal during the bird breeding season, unless supervised by a suitably qualified ecologist. Subject to the imposition of the conditions outlined above, I am of the view that the development would not have a detrimental impact upon ecology/biodiversity interests. With regard to

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external lighting on the site boundaries, that matter would be incorporated into the external lighting condition outlined above which requires the submission of details of all new external lighting across the whole site.

Drainage

69. The Environment Agency have no comments to make on this application, and the County Council's Flood Risk Team (SuDs) raise no objection subject to the imposition of conditions. The Flood Risk Team require the submission of a detailed Sustainable Surface Water Drainage Scheme prior to the commencement of the development, and the further submission of a verification report prior to occupation of the development (or within an agreed timeframe). Should permission be granted, the conditions as outlined above would be imposed upon the consent to ensure that drainage of the site was both sustainable and effective.

Construction Matters

70. Given that there are nearby residential properties, if planning permission is granted it would, in my view, be appropriate to impose a condition restricting hours construction to protect residential amenity. I recommend that works should be undertaken only between the hours of 0800 and 1800 Monday to Friday and between the hours of 0900 and 1300 on Saturdays, with no operations on Sundays and Bank Holidays. It is also good practice on school sites for contractors to be required under the terms of their contract to manage construction traffic/deliveries to minimise conflict with traffic and pedestrians at the beginning and end of the school day.
71. I also consider it appropriate that details of a Construction Management Strategy be submitted for approval prior to the commencement of the development. That should include details of the location of site compounds and operative/visitors parking, details of site security and safety measures, lorry waiting and wheel washing facilities, details of how the site access would be managed to avoid peak school times, and details of any construction accesses. Therefore, should permission be granted, a Construction Management Strategy would be required pursuant to condition and the development would thereafter have to be undertaken in accordance with the approved strategy.

Conclusion

72. This application seeks the provision of additional accommodation for non-selective secondary education places in the Tunbridge Wells area by expanding Bennett Memorial Diocesan School by 2FE. The proposal has given rise to a variety of issues, including the impact of the development on the local highway network, loss of playing field, general amenity impact, arboricultural matters, and the need to ensure that there is a sufficient choice of school places available to meet community needs. 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. The development is in accordance with the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning Policy Statement for Schools (2011). Subject to the imposition of the conditions outlined throughout this report, I consider that the proposed development would not have a significantly detrimental impact on the local highway network, the provision of sport facilities, the amenity of local residents and other material considerations, and would accord with the principles of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF. In addition, support for the provision of school places is heavily embedded within the NPPF, the Planning for Schools Development Policy Statement,

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and local planning policy, and this development would satisfy a required need for secondary school places in the Tunbridge Wells area.

73. Therefore, I recommend that the application be referred to the Secretary of State on Sport England grounds, and that subject to his decision, and subject to the Memorandum of Understanding regarding the required monetary contribution regarding the Travel Plan and Public Transport Capacity Improvements permission be granted subject to appropriate conditions.

Recommendation

74. I recommend that the application BE REFERRED to the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government on Sport England grounds, and that SUBJECT TO his decision and SUBJECT TO a signed Memorandum of Understanding regarding the required monetary contribution regarding the Travel Plan and Public Transport Capacity Improvements that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT to conditions;
- the standard 3 year time limit for implementation;
 - the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
 - the submission and approval of details of all materials to be used externally;
 - the submission of a scheme of landscaping to include additional tree planting, soft landscaping, & hard surfacing;
 - development to be carried out in accordance with the submitted 'Tree Protection, Removal and Replacement Strategy';
 - further details of an Arboricultural Method Statement with 'restrictive dig and surfacing details' to be submitted;
 - arboricultural supervision/monitoring reports to be submitted;
 - no tree removal during the bird breeding season;
 - the setting up of a 25m exclusion zone around potential badger setts prior to the commencement of the development;
 - the submission of a biodiversity enhancement plan prior to the completion of the development;
 - removal of the temporary teaching accommodation within 1 month of the first use/occupation of the permanent teaching accommodation;
 - the submission of details of external lighting and hours of operation regarding the new building, the building extensions, the bus pick-up/drop off zone, pedestrians access routes, car parking and the site boundaries;
 - completion of the bus pick-up/drop off zone and on-site pedestrian access improvements prior to first use/occupation of the development;
 - the provision and retention of car parking, loading and turning facilities, 22 prior to first use/occupation, and the following 14 within 3 months of the removal of the temporary teaching accommodation;
 - implementation a Traffic Regulation Order to provide parking restrictions on Culverden Down and a 20mph speed limit in the vicinity of the school, and its completion prior to occupation of the development;
 - the submission and approval of an updated Travel Plan within six months of occupation, and ongoing monitoring/auditing of the Travel Plan for a period of 5 years, within which there will be annual updates with funding secured for KCC Highways (via an MoU) to ensure adequate resourcing to audit and oversee this process, including the setting up of a Steering Group and the appointment of a Travel Plan Coordinator;
 - the submission and approval of a detailed Sustainable Surface Water Drainage Scheme prior to the commencement of the development;
 - submission of a verification report (relating to the SuDs) prior to occupation of the development;

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- hours of working during construction and demolition to be restricted to between 0800 and 1800 Monday to Friday and between the hours of 0900 and 1300 on Saturdays, with no operations on Sundays and Bank Holidays;
- the submission and approval of a construction management strategy prior to the commencement of the development, including details of the location of site compounds and operative/visitors parking, details of site security and safety measures, lorry waiting and wheel washing facilities, details of how the site access would be managed to avoid conflict with peak school times, and details of any construction accesses;

75. I FURTHER RECOMMEND THAT the applicant BE ADVISED of the following informatives:

- With regard to the requirement to prepare and submit a (revised/amended) School Travel Plan, the applicant is advised to register with Kent County Council's Travel Plan Management system 'Jambusters' using the following link <http://www.jambusterstpms.co.uk>. Jambusters is a County Wide initiative aiding Schools in the preparation and ongoing monitoring of School Travel Plans.
- With regard to the requirement to prepare and submit a scheme of landscaping, consideration shall be given to the inclusion of species that encourage Bees;

Case officer – Mary Green	03000 413379
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Background documents - See section heading
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