

Applications for construction of a replacement two storey building (CA/09/1769) and 3 temporary classrooms (CA/09/1972) at the St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Northwood Road, Whitstable

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 17th February 2010

Applications by the Diocese of Southwark and the Kent County Council Children Families and Education for the demolition and removal of an existing four classroom temporary structure and the construction of a replacement four classroom two storey building (Ref CA/09/1769) and proposed removal of 2 existing playground shelters and the installation of 3 temporary classrooms on the school playground for a 12 month period during the proposed development of the replacement four classroom two storey building (Ref CA/09/1972) at the St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Northwood Road, Whitstable.

Recommendation: Permission for both applications be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mr M. Dance and Mr M.Harrison

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. St Mary's Catholic Primary School is located in an urban residential area at Northwood Road, Tankerden, to the east of Whitstable town centre. Access to the school is from Northwood Road but there is also a rear access to the school playing fields from Strangford Road which runs parallel to Northwood Road to the rear of the site. A site location plan is attached.

Background

2. A number of permissions have been granted for development at the school in recent years. Most recently, permission was granted in 2008 for the construction of a timber building at the site to be used as a music room (reference CA/07/1414). This was adjacent to a new teaching block which together with a new hall, was permitted in 2005 (reference CA/05/1002). A small staffroom extension was also permitted in 2006 (CA/06/1498). The staffroom extension, music room and new teaching block have been completed but the new hall has not been built.
3. This report concerns two further planning application proposals at the site. Plans showing the proposals are attached.

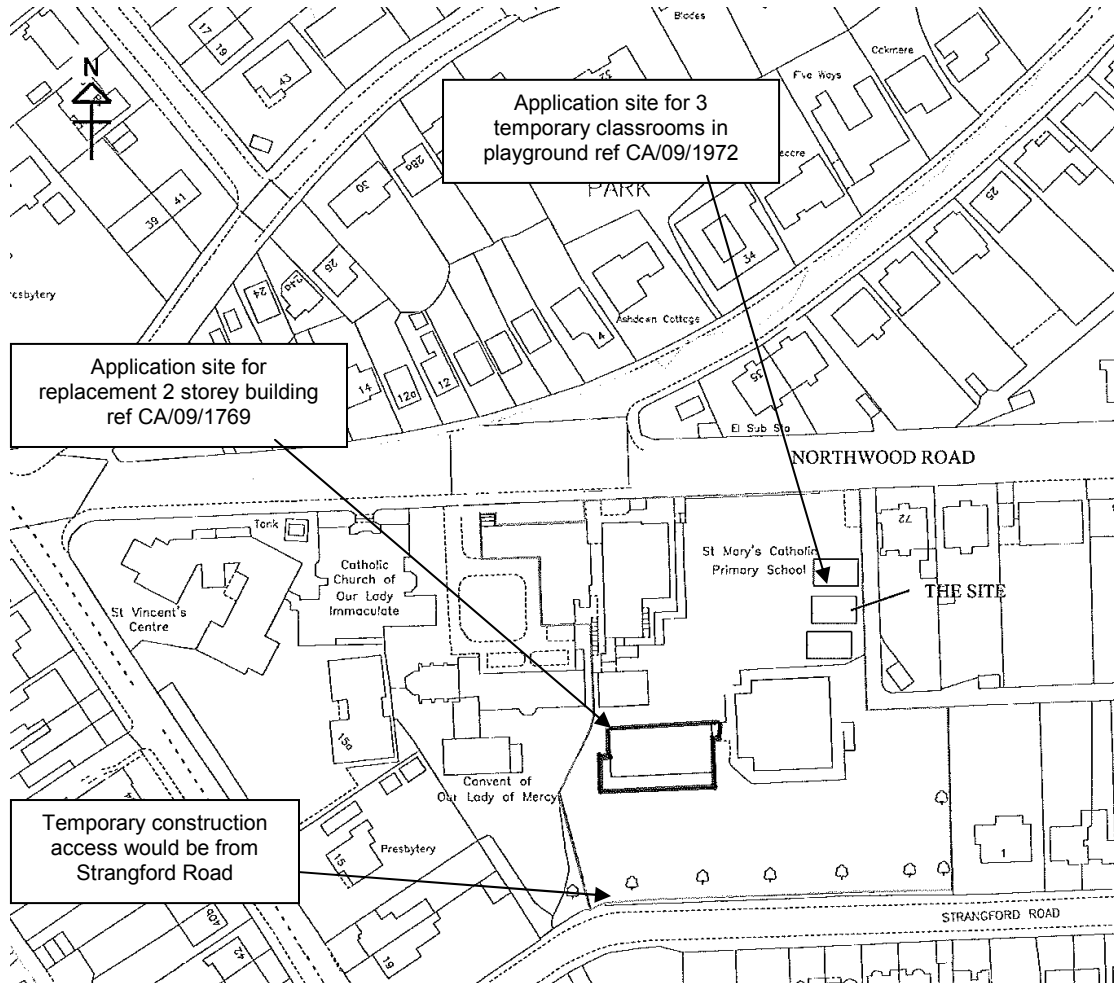
Proposal

Application reference CA/09/1769

4. First, application reference CA/09/1769, is for the demolition and removal of an existing four classroom temporary structure which is a timber building set on two levels on the existing playground (shown in figure 1 attached). The applicant proposes to replace this building with a four classroom two storey permanent building. The proposed new building would also have additional facilities such as computer/IT room which would allow for modernisation of the existing IT facilities in order to provide a dedicated teaching area, toilets, and a meeting room/library.

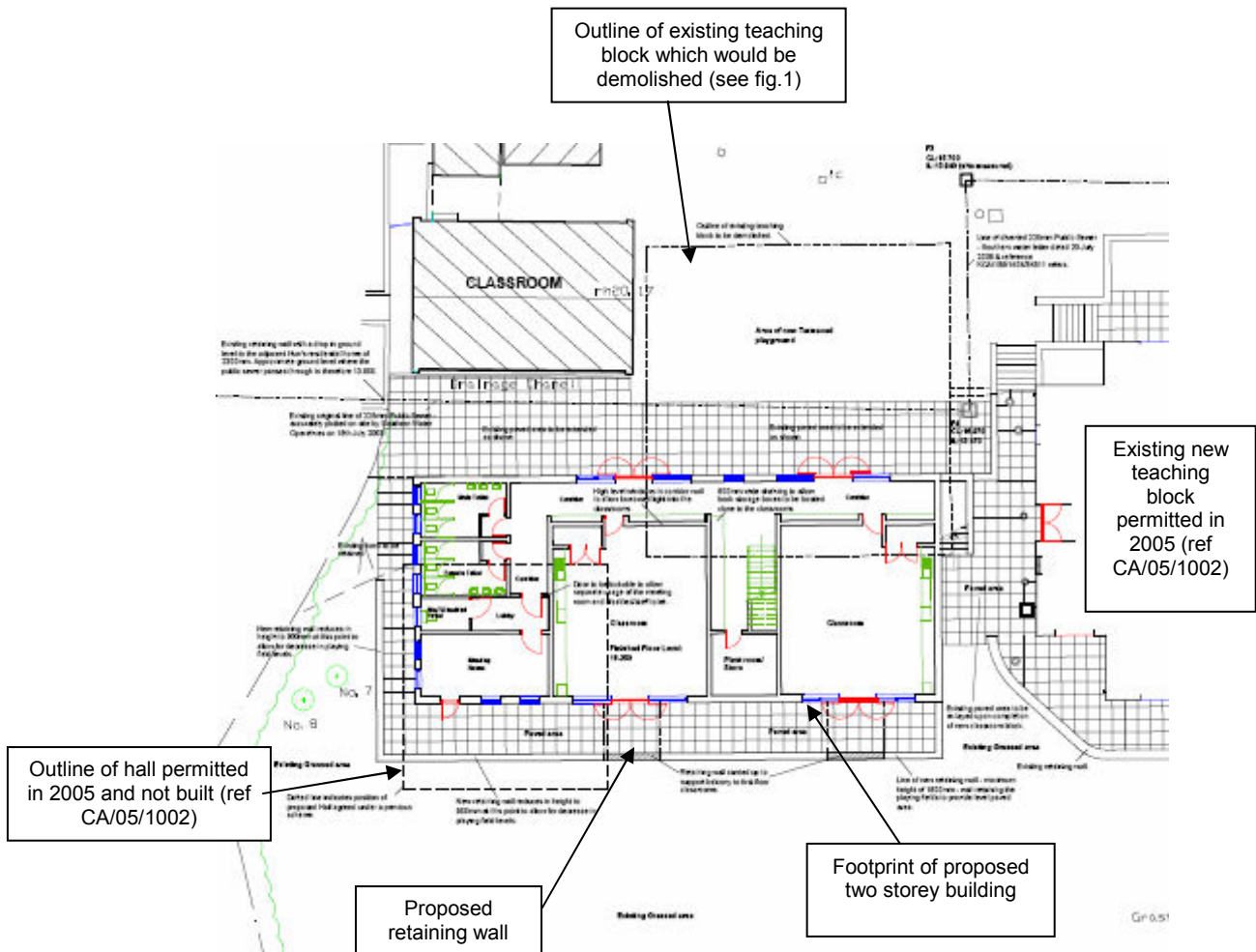
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Site location plan



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Proposed site layout



Outline of existing teaching block which would be demolished (see fig.1)

Existing new teaching block permitted in 2005 (ref CA/05/1002)

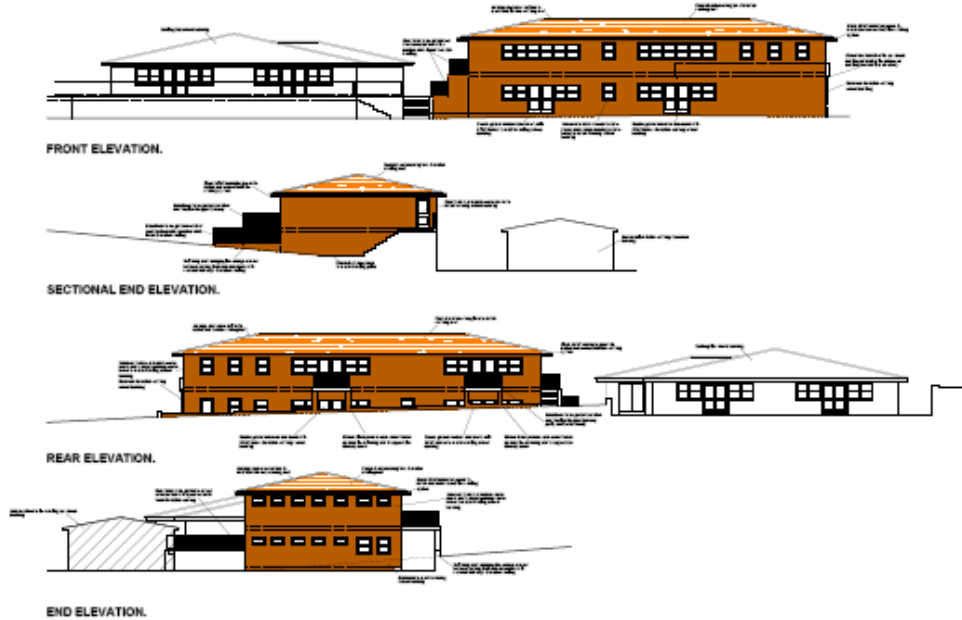
Outline of hall permitted in 2005 and not built (ref CA/05/1002)

Proposed retaining wall

Footprint of proposed two storey building

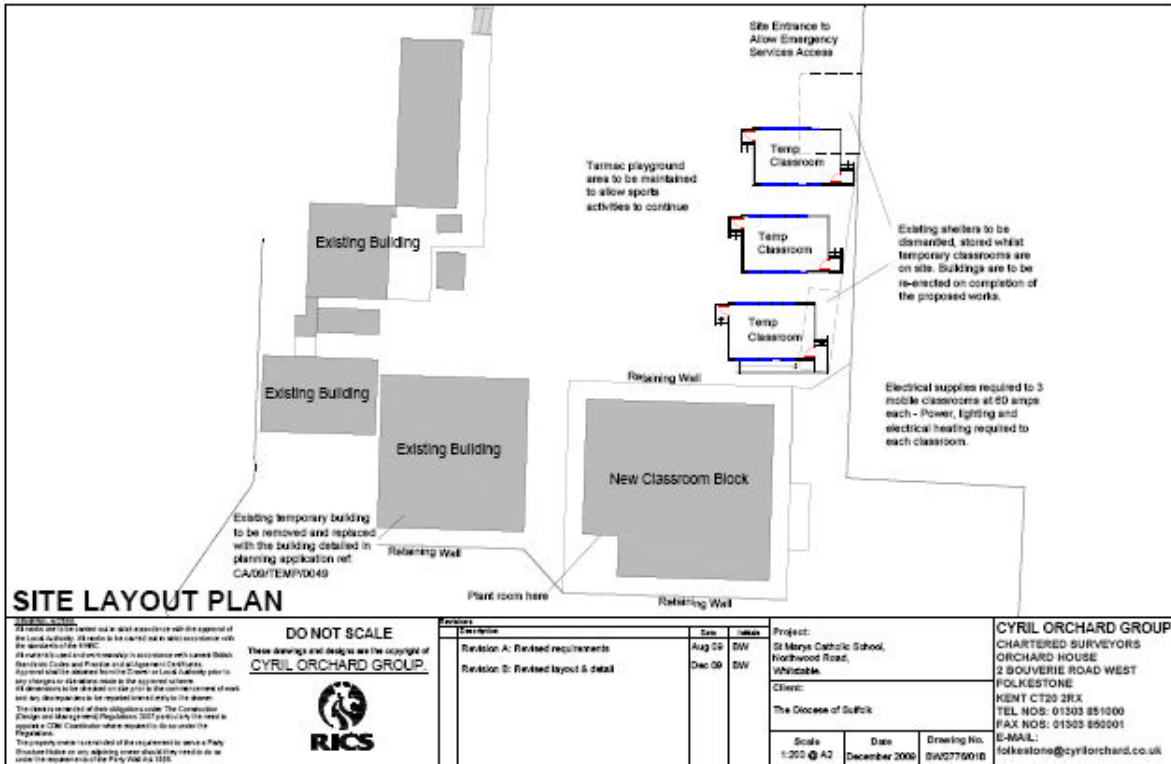
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Proposed elevations



PROPOSED ELEVATIONS (With retaining wall)

Temporary classroom layout



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Temporary classroom details

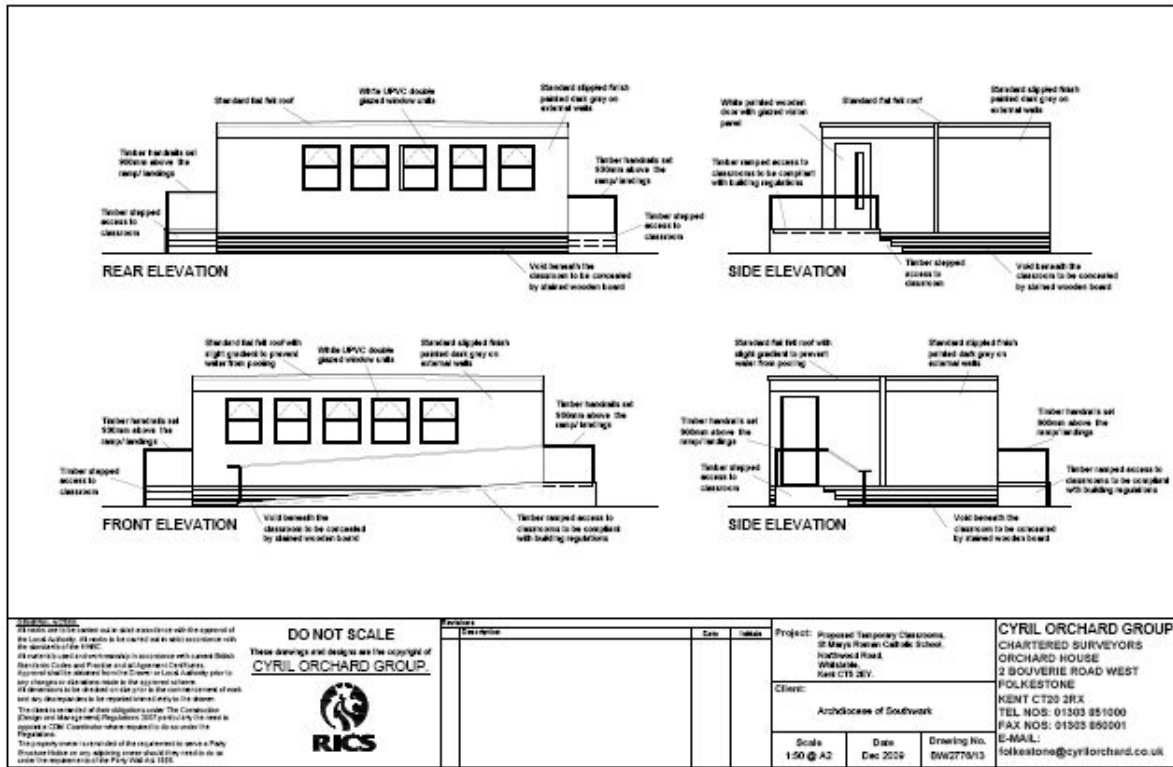


Figure 1 - View from Strangford Road towards the rear elevation of the existing temporary teaching block to be removed from site.



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Figure 2 – View of new teaching block (rear elevation) permitted in 2005 and showing retaining wall and views over the site from Strangford Road towards the existing temporary teaching block to be removed and beyond to existing older school buildings



Figure 3 - View from Northwood Road, looking across the playground towards the front elevations of the new teaching block permitted in 2005 and the existing temporary teaching block to be removed.



5. The applicant states that the new accommodation is expected to provide facilities which would allow the school to respond to a reduction in classroom pupil numbers or future expansion of the school if required, although no increase in pupil numbers is expected or planned at present.

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6. It is proposed that part of the area of the existing temporary classroom, which is to be demolished, would be returned to tarmac playground and part of the area would be used for the construction of the new building.
7. The proposed building would be of red brick walls, concrete interlocking tiles on a pitched roof and white double glazed UPVC window units and doors to match the adjacent single storey new teaching block built at the site, which is shown in figure 2. Two balconies are proposed at the rear 1st floor. Because of the site ground levels, the proposal includes a brick retaining wall at the rear of the building which matches the line and style of the existing retaining wall at the rear of the new teaching block, also shown in figure 2. Paved areas, steps and railings are incorporated into the design.
8. The proposed building would require the removal of some of the grassed area of the school playing field. It is intended that the existing rear access onto the playing field from Strangford Road would be used for the construction work access and associated deliveries to the site.

Application reference CA/09/1972

9. The second application, reference CA/09/1972, is for the installation of 3 temporary mobile classrooms in the school playground for a 12 month period whilst the demolition and construction work is proceeding (on the assumption that the 2 storey classroom building (CA/09/1769) is permitted). This is to allow the School to continue teaching with adequate space for those classes that currently take place in the temporary structure which is to be demolished, and whilst building works continue. The proposal requires removal and temporary storage of 2 existing playground shelters for this to happen. It is proposed that these would be reinstated at the end of the 12 month period when the temporary classrooms would no longer be required.
10. It is proposed to site the temporary mobile classrooms to the east of the school playground near the boundary. Each mobile would be painted grey with a stippled finish with a flat felt roof and with double glazed white UPVC window units and with white painted wooden doors with a glazed vision panel. Access is to be provided by ramp or stepped access.

Planning Policy

9. The Development Plan policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:

(i) **The South East Plan (2009):**

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|------------|--|
| Policy CC1 | Seeks to achieve and maintain sustainable development in the region. |
| Policy CC6 | Seeks to create sustainable and distinctive communities via development which respects the character and distinctiveness of settlements and promotes a high quality built environment. |
| Policy BE1 | Seeks to promote and support design solution opportunities with new development that are relevant to context, local character and distinctiveness and sense of place. |

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(ii) The Canterbury City Council Local Plan 2006:

- Policy BE1 Seeks proposals that are of high quality design and which respond to the objectives of sustainable development, with regard to the need for the development; accessibility and safe movement within the proposed development; the landscape character of the locality and the way that the development is integrated into the landscape; the conservation and integration of natural features including trees and hedgerows to strengthen local distinctiveness, character and biodiversity; the visual impact and impact on local townscape character; the form of the development: the efficient use of land, layout, landscape, density and mix, scale, massing, materials, finish and architectural details; the privacy and amenity of the existing environment; the compatibility of the use with adjacent uses and the need to keep the building in use and fit for purpose.
- Policy C11 Proposals for new buildings or uses for local communities to provide social infrastructure will be encourage where they are appropriately designed and located and highway safety would not be prejudiced.
- Policy C27 Permission will only be granted for proposals for development that would result in loss of part of playing fields where there is an overriding need for the proposed development which outweighs the loss of the playing fields.

Consultations

10. **Canterbury City Council** raises no objection to the proposals although requests that the proposal reference CA/09/1769 for the two storey building should not result in loss of amenity to the occupiers of the adjacent Convent.

Sport England raises no objections to the application reference CA/09/1769 and advises that the playing field is not able to accommodate a playing pitch of 0.2Ha or more and does not cater for a playing pitch as defined by Sport England. As no formal sport facilities would be affected by application reference CA/09/1972 for the temporary loss of playground they do not wish to comment on that application, although suggest that a condition is attached to any planning permission granted requiring reinstatement of any damage.

Divisional Transportation Manager was consulted in relation to application reference CA/09/1769 for the two storey building and raises no objection.

Local Member(s)

11. The local County Member(s), Mr M Dance and Mr M Harrison were notified of the applications on the 13th November 2009 and 16th December 2009 respectively. No views have been received to date.

Publicity

12. Both applications have been advertised by the posting of site notices and the individual notification of a number of neighbouring properties.

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Representations

13. Emails containing representation in relation to both proposals have been received from one neighbouring property. Those that are material and relevant to the decision making process are included below:
- Comments about replacement of a temporary structure with a permanent structure
 - Change in the height of the existing structure to a two storey structure resulting in an increased roof line
 - An increase in the footprint of the new building compared with the existing structure
 - Concern about the reinstatement of the fences, field surface and hedging as a result of previous building carried out at the site.
 - Concern about the impact of previous and proposed building works on the school playing field and the limited use of the school field for sports activity as a result.
 - Concern about the access to the site and control of mud on the road.
 - Considers that the school has reached its capacity limitations.

Discussion

14. Development Plan policies require proposals to be acceptable in terms of the site, context, design and impacts. Decisions are required to be in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. South East Plan Policies CC6 and BE1 and Canterbury City Council Local Plan Policies BE1 require development proposals to respect the local character and context of the area, without causing significant harm to the amenities and character of the area. The proposal needs to be considered in relation to the site context which is in a residential urban area and the privacy and amenity of the existing environment together with Policy C11 regarding the provision of social infrastructure and Policy C27 relating to development of part of the existing playing fields. Discussion of the site, design and impacts of the proposals below relate to these policy considerations.

Site and design

15. These proposals arise as a result of the deterioration of an existing temporary building which currently accommodates 3 classrooms, toilets and library space on two levels. That was built in the 1990's as a temporary solution to classroom shortages at that time. The building has deteriorated and is showing signs of age, and whilst structurally safe, it is becoming unfit for purpose and beyond economical repair. It is proposed to replace this temporary solution with a more permanent solution. Development at the site is practically constrained by the need to avoid a public sewer running through the site and which restricts development within 3 metres of it. The building cannot be sited further into the site because of this and the sewer cannot reasonably be diverted.
16. Whilst demolition and construction work proceeds there is a short term need to ensure that teaching continues as normal for the duration of the construction work, hence the proposals for temporary mobile classrooms in the playground away from the construction works. It is expected that the construction works would last for a 40 week period although the applicant has applied for a 12 month period to accommodate unforeseen circumstances.

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17. Should permission be granted, development of the proposed two storey building would prevent the new hall which was permitted in 2005 (reference CA/05/1002) but has not yet been built, from being developed on the school playing field, as the proposed footprint overlaps that of the hall. The building line at the rear of the site would be extended to accord with that of the new teaching block also permitted (reference CA/05/1002) in 2005. The permitted hall extends the building line further into the playing field.
18. The visual impact of the proposal and the design proposed needs to be considered at this location, particularly in relation to the height and appearance of a new permanent two storey building at the site set against the context of a mix of building heights and designs at the site and the prominence of a new building. The proposed building is larger than the existing temporary building, and is a permanent replacement. This has been identified as a concern by the neighbour notification. In addition to replacing the facilities already provided in the existing temporary building, a new Information Technology (IT) room is also proposed in this building. IT is currently taught in converted roof space in the older part of existing school buildings and this proposal provides an opportunity to transfer the IT teaching facilities to the new building, meeting modern standards and assisting more effective teaching. A meeting room and space for one to one teaching is also included within the proposal along with toilet facilities.
19. The footprint of the existing temporary building which would be replaced by the new building is 14.4m x 14.9m (214.56 sq metres). The footprint of the hall, which was a permanent building and which has already been permitted, but would not be built if this development proceeds, is 10.7m x 9.5m (101.65sq metres). Therefore the area already permitted, and that this building would replace, is 316.21sq metres. The footprint of this proposed permanent building, (excluding external stair wells and amendments to paving) is less than that already permitted at the site 10.8m x 25m (270sq metres). The applicant has sought to limit the footprint and impact of the building by proposing a two storey rather than a single storey proposal.
20. However, the two storey proposal increases the height of the roof line on part of the site, although in my view this is not significantly higher and is in keeping with the surrounding area. The pitch of the roof has been designed to match the adjacent building. The increase in height of buildings in this area of the site would be most evident to properties in Strangford Road with open aspects over the site. However, because of the change in levels of the site, the building has been set down with the ground floor at the existing playground level. From the rear, parts of the ground floor level and the proposed retaining wall would be hidden from view by the ground level of the school playing field. This would help to minimise the impact of the scale of the building at the rear. The building would be red brick walls and concrete interlocking roof tiles, with white UPVC double glazed wall and door units to match the materials, style and appearance of the new teaching block which has already been built at the site and which was permitted in 2005 (CA/05/1002) and in my view this would be acceptable visually. The windows to the side elevation of the proposed building and which face the adjacent Convent would be positioned at high level to reduce the likelihood of overlooking of the adjacent convent. Obscured glass would also be used in windows to the side elevation in order to further reduce the likelihood of overlooking the adjacent Convent. In my view the proposed two storey building is acceptable in terms of the site; design and visual appearance there are no significant impacts on visual amenity.

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21. The siting of 3 temporary mobile classrooms on the playground is temporary for a 12 month period. This is not an unreasonable period of time to cover the construction works proposed and to allow continuity of the teaching facilities at the school. No specific planning objections or representations have been received in relation to the site or design of the temporary mobile classrooms and I consider that this element would be acceptable in planning terms.

Access

22. The temporary access for demolition and construction works relating to application CA/09/1769 at the site is proposed to be via the existing access onto the school playing field in Strangford Road. Whilst construction hours proposed at the site are between 0800 and 1700 hours Monday to Friday, the applicant proposes to restrict the use of the access to the site to between 0900 and 1600 hours Monday to Friday. This access has been used for previous construction projects at the site and I am not aware of any previous concerns being raised in the use of this access. The applicant has stated that access to the site across the playground from the Northwood Road access would generate serious health and safety concerns and is not therefore feasible as construction work needs to be separated from the children at the site. I therefore accept that an appropriate separate access needs to be used and the temporary impacts considered in relation to highways safety. The Divisional Transportation Manager did not raise any objection in relation to the proposals and I therefore conclude that the access arrangements are acceptable in planning terms.

Conclusion

23. Although the two storey building proposed is larger than the school hall that has already been permitted, the principle of further development on the school field has already been established by the granting of previous planning permission for the school hall. The existing temporary structure is due for replacement having a limited life and opportunity to improve other facilities has been sought at the same time. The site and design of the proposed two storey building has been proposed with as little impact on the remaining green areas of the site as possible and the applicant has sought to compensate for the loss of grassed area by returning part of the area freed up by demolition of the temporary classroom to tarmac playground. The applicant has limited the building footprint but consequently a two storey building is proposed. The scale is relevant to the site context and the design responds to the surrounding school buildings. The proposal accords with the Development Plan policies referred to above. No objections have been received from Canterbury City Council or Sport England or the Divisional Transportation Manager in relation to highway impacts and the remaining concerns raised by neighbouring representation relate to impacts such as the quality of reinstatement works and use of the construction access which are temporary and can be controlled by planning conditions.

Recommendation

24. I RECOMMEND that:

- i) PERMISSION BE GRANTED for the demolition and removal of an existing four classroom temporary structure and the construction of a replacement four classroom two storey building (Ref CA/09/1769), SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS that include the standard time condition, the development be carried out in accordance with the permitted plans,

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external materials to match those of the existing teaching block, a requirement to reinstatement any damage of the school playing fields, hedges, fence and surfaces reinstatement of the temporary access and control over the transfer of mud from the school field onto the highway from the development whilst the temporary access is in use for construction purposes.

ii) PERMISSION BE GRANTED for the proposed removal of 2 existing playground shelters and the installation of 3 temporary classrooms on the school playground for a 12 month period during the proposed development of the replacement four classroom two storey building (Ref CA/09/1972), SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS that require the removal of the 3 temporary mobile classrooms from the site and reinstatement of the application area to school playground within 12 months.

Case officer – Hazel Mallett

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Background documents - See section heading
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