

Platt Borough Green And Long Mill	562043 157411	28.04.2005	TM/05/01328/CR3
Proposal:	Replacement six class primary school together with nursery class, playing field, servicing, parking and new vehicular access (KCC ref. TM/05/TEMP/0025)		
Location:	Land Opposite The Ferns North Of Maidstone Road Platt Sevenoaks Kent		
Applicant:	KCC/Platt School Governors/Diocese Of Rochester		

1. Description:

- 1.1 This application proposes the construction of a new primary school and therefore falls to be determined by the KCC. The proposals have been submitted in outline form with all details apart from the means of access reserved for future consideration. (An illustrative site layout plan and floor layout plan have been included to show how the school could potentially be provided and accommodated on the site).
- 1.2 The application is supported by the following documents:
- A supporting planning statement.
 - A transport assessment.
 - A school travel plan.
 - A school needs document.
 - A noise assessment.
 - A landscape appraisal.

2. The Site:

- 2.1 The site comprises part of a field of fallow agricultural land and extends to approximately 1.6 hectares in area (approximately 4 acres). It is situated on the north side of the A25 between the Micawber Works site and the access road serving the Platt Industrial Estate. The Ashford to London (Victoria) railway line forms the northern boundary of the site and the A25 the southern boundary. The land falls gently in a south-westerly direction and features no vegetation of note or with any significant screening qualities save for boundary hedging along its frontage with the A25.

3. Planning History:

3.1 TM/03/03647/OA Refused 15.07.2004

Outline Application: New replacement primary school with attached playing field, new replacement Memorial Hall, 20 affordable houses, 16 private houses and public open space.

4. Consultees:

Carried out by KCC

- 4.1 PC: Platt Parish Council unanimously take the view that the necessary exceptional case has been made out here. We accept, for the reasons set out in the Applicants' documentation that the school urgently needs to relocate and that no other suitable site can be found. The move would be good for the Parish. We take account of the fact that were the school to move from its present separated sites those sites would be developed for housing. We acknowledge that there is a significant body of opinion, which opposes the application on the basis of consequent development in a village, which has already had more than its fair share. Nevertheless we believe that the substantial majority of local people support the proposals.

We believe that by locating the new school on the western side of the field, and by keeping the building to low level, the view of the North Downs which features in the ALLI designation can be preserved, and that there would still be a substantial green break here.

We see the sense in keeping the children away from the heavy traffic on the road to Platt Industrial Estate, which runs down the eastern side.

Some concern has been expressed locally that the land on the eastern side of the field (which would become the property of the Diocese of Rochester in a land swap envisaged in the wider scheme) would make that land prey to developers before long.

The PC believes that the following factors would work against that:

- (a) TMBC last year unanimously rejected a proposal to build houses on the field.
- (b) The Parish Council would likely be a strong objector.
- (c) The proposer could not, as the school presently do and we accept that, that the view which is the subject of the ALLI would be preserved.
- (d) There is some hope that the Local Development Framework being prepared will protect Platt from further major development.

In short, the Parish Council support this proposal. We trust that , if permission is granted, design and materials will be suitable for the locality but appreciate of course that those are matters for the detailed stage.

4.2 EA (summarised): No objections subject to the attachment of conditions to prevent pollution to ground water as site lies within a 'Source Protection Zone' for water supply abstraction.

4.3 Kent Highways: Will be provided direct to KCC.

4.4 Private Reps: 0X/5R/96S. Support has been lodged on the following grounds:

- The existing school buildings are too old, too cramped and costly to maintain and the playing field serving the school is annexed from the site.
- Opportunities to enlarge the buildings or expand the school are restricted. These proposals will provide an excellent new, modern facility with an adjacent playing field. Concerns are expressed that the school may not be able to provide for a modern curriculum and that this could in future affect the school's popularity and viability which would be a very damaging thing for the wider community. Existing classroom dimensions are below that of the recommended standards.
- The close proximity of the school to the A25 road means that the current site for the school is poor and not acceptable/practical and existing access arrangements are hazardous for both pedestrians and vehicles. (Particularly since the school's existing playing fields are separate and so children have to walk to that facility). Parking facilities on site are also inadequate.

4.4.1 Objections have been raised on the following grounds:

- The development would be harmful to this area of Platt in terms of its visual character by urbanising the locality further views of the AONB will be obstructed by the development.
- The development would be harmful to the MGB.
- The LEA should fund the school rather than it be funded through the development of the village.
- The new school location will give rise to highway hazards to users of the A25. This would not be a suitable site for school due to the heavy trafficking of the, A25.
- Damage to wildlife such as slow worms and newts would result from developing this site.

Consultations carried out by TMBC:

4.5 DHH: No objections.

5. Determining Issues:

5.1 As Members will recall, a proposal for a new school, new memorial hall and an affordable housing scheme on this site and adjoining land was refused planning permission last year (the application also included proposals for new housing on two other sites in the locality). Those proposals were refused on the following grounds and are the subject of a current planning appeal:

The Borough Council does not consider that the case of Very Special Circumstances advanced, in seeking to justify the provision of Affordable Housing on Site 1, is sufficient to set aside the strong policy objection to new development in the Metropolitan Green Belt, the undeveloped countryside or within an Area of Local Landscape Interest. As a result, the proposal is contrary, inter alia, to PPG2: Green Belts; policies MGB3 and RS5 of the Kent Structure Plan 1996 and policies P2/16 and P3/7 of the Tonbridge and Malling Local Plan 1998.

5.2 As can be noted from this ground of refusal, no specific objection was raised to the principle of siting a school within the MGB – it was accepted that there was a justifiable case for the school and its playing field being sited in the Green Belt

5.3 Indeed, in my report for application TM/03/03647/FL I recognised that the existing school facilities are substandard to the extent that a new school is highly desirable. It was concluded that a new school would constitute considerable and widespread community benefit and would also provide the opportunity to improve traffic conditions in the locality. In the absence of any site large enough within the built confines of Platt to properly accommodate the school and its playing field together, in a safe and integrated fashion, the only place that a new school could realistically be sited would be outside the confines of the village and under such circumstances the proposal satisfies the requirements of TMBLP Policy P2/16. In light of this the proposal can be seen as an acceptable exception to policies ENV1 and RS5 of KSP1996, policy E1 of KMSP.

5.4 The site lies within the MGB and a case of very special circumstances for such a form of 'inappropriate' development within the MGB was accepted by this Council in the 2003 case and I consider that the same considerations hold sway in this current case. In this context therefore the balance of policy judgement raised by PPG2, policy MGB 3 of KSP 1996, policy SS9 of KMSP and policy P2/16 of the TMBLP falls in favour of the proposed school.

5.5 Similarly, no objections were previously raised in the grounds of refusal to the siting of a new school on this land in terms of impact on the ALLI. However, the previous application sought to build a new school on the eastern side of this field,

whereas this application seeks outline permission to build a new school on the western half of the field. Accordingly, it is appropriate to revisit the issue of whether or not the new school in this location would unduly damage the ALLI, which was designated specifically for its quality of providing a “*prominent break between the built-up areas which contributes to the setting of Platt and offers long-distance views from the rural settlement across to the North Downs.*” (TMBLP policy P3/7 makes it clear that proposals will normally be refused if they cause the erosion or loss of the identified character).

- 5.6 The development of a significant tranche of this ALLI with a new school building and its associated car park, access road and other hardstandings would inevitably have an impact in this respect. However, this should also be balanced against the identified merits of the proposal itself. I feel that the siting of the school on the western portion of this site would actually serve to reduce the visual impact upon both the visual openness of the MGB and the ALLI when compared to the original scheme. This part of the site is generally a lower part of the field and so the height of the development would be lowered. Indeed the illustrative drawings show the school sited in the optimum location that it could be on this field in landscape impact terms. (Incidentally, since the key quality of this particular site is its openness, I do not feel that the detail landscaping scheme should seek to provide dense tree screening along the road frontage as this will significantly reduce that openness and change the inherent character of the land).
- 5.7 Turning now to highway issues, given that a new access would be proposed onto the A25, there is the potential for an increase in highway hazards in the context of Policy T19 of the KSP. (Particularly given that the new access would be almost directly opposite the entrance to the Brickmakers Arms, which has an existing A3 use and has been the subject of proposals for residential redevelopment).
- 5.8 Although the application has been submitted in outline form, the proposed access arrangements have been submitted for consideration at this stage. Given that this proposal involves a new access onto the A25, highway safety is of course highly important. (Highway and pedestrian safety will also be an important aspect of any detailed internal layout that may be proposed). KCC is the local planning authority and the Highway Authority in this case and the County Engineer will need to be satisfied that highway matters are carefully scrutinised at this sensitive location. It would seem that a technical solution is capable of delivery. Nevertheless, I consider that this Council should urge KCC to ensure that the location and details of the new access on to the A 25 are assessed with the utmost of care in respect of vehicle and pedestrian safety and that any assessment takes into account the potential traffic movements arising from the Brickmakers Arms site.
- 5.9 I also feel that it would be prudent in this Council’s comments to KCC to flag up at this early stage the need for KCC to ensure that any detailed design proposals for the school fully take into account issues of crime and disorder in the form of safety and security.

5.10 The issue of impact upon wildlife has been raised and this is something that I feel warrants a thorough investigation as the site has been left 'fallow' for many years and would appear to be ideal habitat for slow worms and other wildlife. Consequently, I feel that KCC should be asked to ensure that this matter is properly evaluated.

6. Recommendation:

6.1 **Raise No Objection** but advise KCC that, in the event that planning permission is granted, the Council would wish the following comments to be taken into account:

- The indicative siting of the school buildings shown on the illustrative plan is considered to be the preferred location for the buildings.
- The vehicular access to the Brickmakers Arms site lies almost directly opposite the proposed access to the new school. Whilst that site is currently dormant it has a lawful planning use for a pub/restaurant and may also be found suitable for an appropriate form of residential use. Accordingly, TMBC strongly urges KCC to ensure that the design and layout of the new access is safe given the location of the Brickmakers Arms site and the potential number of vehicle movements arising therefrom.
- The illustrative landscaping details show a line of trees along the site frontage with the A25. TMBC considers that it would be preferable for any landscaping scheme to take into account the open characteristics of this field and, thus, not seek to obscure the views across the land by dense tree planting. It is suggested that it would be preferable therefore to use hedging to define the frontage boundary.
- TMBC is aware of the duties placed upon LPAs to ensure that appropriate care and attention is paid in the design of facilities such as new schools to ensure that they have a safe and secure environment. Consequently, TMBC urges that very careful and detailed analysis be given to any full design details for the school complex that may be submitted to ensure that the security and the safety of pupils is protected by adoption a well integrated detailed design which reflects the possibility of the existence of a village hall on adjoining land.. In particular, the Borough Council considers that the site layout needs to focus on pedestrian movements in and around the site and also to security issues of public access – including looking at the interrelationship between public access to the school and any new Memorial Hall. In this respect, TMBC would welcome the attachment of a planning condition to any permission that may be issued requiring full details of security and safety measures.
- KCC ensures that adequate measures are taken to protect any wildlife that is identified on the site.

Contact: Kevin Wise