

Committee: **Regulatory
Planning Committee**

Date: **15 November 2017**

Report by: **Director of Communities, Economy and Transport**

Proposal: **Extension of nursery school to form additional play room
including covered play space and additional WC facilities.**

Site Address: **Grovelands CP School, Dunbar Drive, Hailsham, BN27 3UW**

Applicant: **Director of Children's Services, East Sussex County Council**

Application No. **WD/3376/CC**

Key Issues: **1. Purpose of the development
2. Siting & Design
3. Effect on Residential Amenity
4. Effect on the Ashdown Forest SPA/SAC
5. Effect on Traffic**

Contact Officer: **Ms Kiran Sajjan Tel. 01273 481595**

Local Member: **Councillor Gerard Fox**

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. To grant planning permission subject to conditions as indicated in paragraph 8.1 of this report.**
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CONSIDERATION BY DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES, ECONOMY AND TRANSPORT

1. The Site and Surroundings

1.1 Grovelands Community Primary School is located within a residential area to the north west of Hailsham Town Centre. The School is sited to the west of London Road (B2104) and approximately 500 metres to the east of the A22. The School is at the centre of a predominantly residential area, bounded by Derwent Close and Grovelands Road to the east; Hempstead Lane to the north; Gleneagles Drive and Dunbar Drive to the West and Grovelands Farm to the south. The School site and Grovelands Farm are separated by a Public Right of Way (Footpath 22). Immediately adjacent to the West of the School site is a Family Resource Centre and a Children's Centre on Dunbar Drive.

1.2 Grovelands Acorns pre-school and nursery which is the site subject to this application, is located within the School site. It is based within the purpose-built eastern wing of Grovelands Primary School. The Nursery was constructed in 1997

and currently accommodates 24 children during term-time. The Nursery is open to children aged 2.5 years and upwards.

1.3 The School building is partly a two-storey structure, with some single-storey sections constructed of red facing stock bricks with pitched roofs and dark wooden window frames. It has four distinct wings arranged around a central core with several hard play areas, a large grass playing field and a large Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) to the north east of the main building. The site is relatively flat, rising slightly to the north and east of the site. The Nursery building is located in a single-storey section of the building and has a separate outdoor play area to the east.

1.4 The School site is bounded by mature trees and hedges. The main vehicle and pedestrian access is from Dunbar Drive to the west of the site. Pedestrians and vehicles can also access the site at School pick up and drop off times from Grovelands Road to the east.

2. The Proposal

2.1 The proposal is to facilitate the Department for Education's scheme to deliver 30 hours free childcare a week for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds. The nursery would increase its capacity from 24 children to 48 children as a result of this proposal. Planning permission is sought for the construction of a permanent flat-roof, single-storey extension to the existing Nursery building in the eastern wing of the School. The extension is proposed to accommodate a large play room measuring approximately 7 metres in length, with a width of 9 metres; providing a total of 63m² additional indoor play space. As a result of the proposal, internal reconfiguration of the existing Nursery building would take place to include an additional four toilet rooms and two store rooms. This change would make the main corridor slightly narrower; however there would not be a loss of indoor play space.

2.2 The proposal also includes the provision of an outdoor sheltered area in the form of a canopy. The canopy would measure 4 metres in width, with a length of 7 metres. It would be attached to the proposed extension along its northern elevation. There is currently a hard surfaced playground present in the area where the extension and the canopy would be located, therefore resulting in the loss of some hard surfaced outdoor play space. Furthermore, the proposal also comprises new timber palisade fencing to the east of the extension separating the remaining hard surfaced play area and a grassed bank further to the east.

3. Site History

3.1 Grovelands Community Primary School has been subject to a number of planning applications dating back to the early 1990's. In 1993, planning permission was granted for the School to be demolished and replaced to include provision for nursery aged children (ref. WD/1465/CC). The most recent implemented permission was granted in October 2012 for the erection of security fencing, entrance and pedestrian gates to part of the perimeter of the School grounds (ref. WD/3096/CC).

4. Consultations and Representations

4.1 Wealden District Council: raises no objections and note that the proposal would ensure adequate provision of teaching and classroom facilities for the School. The Council also stated that the proposal does not raise any significant issues in terms of visual impact on the surrounding area, nor would it have a harmful impact

on the privacy and amenities of the neighbouring properties. It is also noted that East Sussex County Council should as the competent authority be satisfied that the proposal would not have a likely significant effect upon the Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

4.2 Hailsham Town Council: supports the proposal for an extension to the nursery at Grovelands Community Primary School.

4.3 Highway Authority: Raise no objections subject to the recommendation of a condition to undertake a travel survey and annually update the Travel Plan to encourage sustainable modes of transport e.g. walking, cycling and car sharing.

4.4 Local Representations: Two letters of objection from the occupiers of properties in Derwent Close, Hailsham have been received in response to the proposal. In summary, concerns are raised regarding the increased traffic that would be an inevitable consequence of this application, albeit a relatively small increase. If planning permission were to be granted, it is considered by the objectors that the existing parking problem around the School site with parents' double parking, parking on grass verges and blocking driveways during School drop-off and pick-up times would be exacerbated causing more chaos and potentially posing a risk to the children and the senior residents of the surrounding roads.

5. The Development Plan policies of relevance to this decision are:

5.1 The Wealden District Council (incorporating part of the South Downs National Park) Core Strategy Local Plan: Policy WCS12 (Biodiversity), as amended following the Court of Appeal judgement¹

The Wealden District (incorporating part of the South Downs National Park) Core Strategy Local Plan was adopted on the 19 February 2013. The Core Strategy Local Plan is the key policy document setting out a strategic vision, objectives and spatial strategy for the area up to 2027. Currently, saved development management policies contained in the Wealden Local Plan 1998 remain part of the Development Plan for this area.

5.2 Wealden Local Plan 1998: Saved Policies GD1 (Development Boundaries), EN27 (Layout and Design of Development) and EN28 (Design of Development for People with Disabilities), TR3 (Traffic Impact of New Development) and CS1 (Community Services).

Wealden District Council has not formally determined whether its Saved Policies in the Wealden Local Plan are in general conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). However, the above referenced Saved Policies are considered by the County Planning Authority to be in general conformity with the overarching principles of the NPPF.

5.3 National Planning Policy Framework, 2012:

The NPPF does not change the status of the Development Plan as the starting point

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for decision making and constitutes guidance as a material consideration in determining planning applications. Paragraph 72 of Part 8 (Promoting healthy communities) advises Local Planning Authorities to give great weight to the need to alter and expand Schools. Furthermore, Part 4 (Promoting sustainable transport) and Part 7 (Requiring Good Design) are of particular relevance to this proposal.

5.4 Policy Statement on Planning for Schools Development, 2011:

The national policy statement encourages a positive and collaborative approach to planning applications for state-funded schools, with a presumption in favour of the development of such schools. Pre-application discussions and the use of planning obligations are encouraged to help mitigate adverse impacts of the development and where it is necessary to impose conditions, they should be necessary in order to make the development acceptable and clearly justified, thereby demonstrably meeting the tests set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) 'Use of Planning Conditions'. The policy statement also indicates that the Secretary of State will be minded to consider refusal of any application for state-funded schools to be unreasonable conduct, unless it is supported by clear and cogent evidence.

6. Considerations

Purpose of the development

6.1 Under Part 8 of the NPPF, the Government advises how the planning system can be used to promote healthy communities. A component of this is the importance attached to ensuring that community facilities including Schools and Nurseries are able to develop and modernise in a way that is sustainable. Furthermore, the Policy Statement on Planning for Schools Development states that there is a presumption in favour of development of state funded schools. In addition, Saved Policy CS1 of the Wealden District Local Plan supports the development of community infrastructure, including schools and nurseries.

6.2 The applicant has noted that the Government's Department for Education has committed to providing 30 hours' free child care a week for working parents of 3 and 4 years olds as of September 2017. Consequently, the proposal aims to support this commitment by increasing the Nursery's capacity from 24 to 48 children. To support the expansion of the Nursery, an additional 3 full-time equivalent staff members would be employed. As such, there is considered to be a demonstrable need to provide additional space to aid the Department for Education's Scheme to support working parents. It is therefore considered that this proposal accords with Saved Policy CS1 of the Wealden Local Plan and is supported in principle by the NPPF and the Policy Statement on Planning for Schools Development.

Siting & Design

6.3 Grovelands Community Primary School is located within the defined development boundary of Hailsham. Saved Policy GD1 states that development will be supported where proposals accord with the other policies within the Development Plan. Saved Policy EN27 of the Wealden Local Plan allows for development only if its scale, form, site coverage, density and design respect the character of adjoining development and it has no unacceptable adverse impact on the privacy and amenities of occupiers of neighbouring properties. In addition, Saved Policy EN28 of the same plan requires proposals for development on land used for educational

purposes to provide safe and convenient access for people with limited mobility, where it is reasonable and practicable.

6.4 The proposed extension would be approximately 3 metres in height and would protrude 7 metres to the east of the existing Nursery building which is located in the eastern wing of the School building. The building would be single-storey, with a single-ply membrane flat roof. Although the existing main School building predominantly has a pitched roof; the existing Nursery building has a generally shallow pitch. Moreover, there are already existing flat roofed buildings within the School site. As such, it is considered that the proposed flat roof would integrate well with the existing rooflines within the vicinity. Furthermore, the external finish of the extension would be red multi-brick to match the existing architecture of the main School building. Overall, the proposed extension is considered to relate well to the existing built form of the site, as well as the design and materials of the existing School buildings.

6.5 In order to integrate the extension with the existing Nursery building, it would be located on an area of hard-surfaced playground. Locating the extension in this position would allow the existing and proposed internal play rooms to flow whilst still creating separation between the two rooms. The additional play space would measure 63m². The proposed space is deemed to be sufficient to support the addition of 24 pupils; in accordance with DFE statutory framework for the Early Year's foundation stage which recommends 2.3m² per child, this equates to 55.2m² for an additional 24 pupils. The proposal also comprises four additional toilet rooms within the Nursery, providing a total of six toilets one of which would be a disabled toilet. Furthermore, access to the extension would be from ground level and therefore it would be wheelchair accessible and accessible for those with limited mobility.

6.6 As the extension would be located on an existing outdoor play area, improvements would be made to the remaining outdoor space. A canopy structure would be attached to the northern elevation of the proposed extension to provide a year-round outdoor play space to be used by the Nursery children. A raised soft play area is proposed to be situated beneath the canopy. There is already a canopy present on the site to the south of the Nursery building which serves as a reception/waiting area for parents. Thus, the proposed canopy would blend in well with the surrounding structures already present in the School site. Details of the proposed canopy have not been provided and it is recommended that a condition is attached to any permission granted with regards to the materials and finish of the canopy. A larger hard surfaced playground, to the south of the existing Nursery building would remain as present and therefore the loss of the playground is not considered to be detrimental. Furthermore, new timber palisade fencing and gates would be installed along the eastern edge of the playground and adjoin the existing fencing to the south of the Nursery building. The fencing would match the style and height of the existing fencing (approximately 1.2 metres high) and would provide a secure outdoor play area. The external works are considered acceptable as there would be sufficient and secure outdoor play space should the proposal be approved. In summary, it is considered that the proposal accords with Saved Policies EN27 and EN28 of the Wealden Local Plan in terms of its siting and design.

Effect on Residential Amenity

6.7 Saved Policy EN27 of the Wealden Local Plan requires, inter alia, development proposals to respect the character of adjoining development and to

create no unacceptable impact on the privacy and amenities of adjoining developments by reason of scale, height, form, noise or traffic movements.

6.8 The site is considered to be of low visual sensitivity from the wider landscape and of a higher sensitivity from surrounding residential properties. The proposed location for the new extension and canopy has an open aspect with minimal boundary treatment in the form of weldmesh fencing, which separates the School site from the adjoining residential properties. These properties are situated approximately 19 metres to the east of the hard playground where the proposed single-storey extension would be situated. Whilst public views into this part of the site are limited, the proposed extension and canopy would be clearly visible from the rear gardens of two properties in Derwent Close (no's. 5 and 7) due to the lack of tree screening along this part of the eastern boundary of the School site. However, the proposal would be viewed against the backdrop of the existing School building.

6.9 Directly to the east of the proposed extension is a grassed bank which would act as a buffer between the proposed extension and the residential properties in Derwent Close. The properties sit on slightly higher ground and therefore there is potential for minor views of the extension from the rear gardens of these properties.

6.10 Overall, it is considered that the proposed extension and canopy would not significantly alter the views that the properties on Derwent Close already experience of the existing Nursery building and the main School. Given the proportionate scale and like for like design, and considering that the proposed extension would be single-storey, it is unlikely there would be any adverse visual impact as a result of the proposed development. Therefore, it is considered that the proposal accords with Policy EN27 of the Wealden Local Plan.

Effect on the Ashdown Forest SPA/SAC

6.11 The Ashdown Forest is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), thereby affording it the highest protection in nature conservation terms. It is important that levels of nitrogen deposition in the Forest are not increased to a level that adversely impacts the heathland that benefits from the SAC designation. One of the causes of nitrogen deposition is from vehicle emissions. Proposals should therefore consider the potential for issues relating to air quality and or emissions, which may affect the heathland habitat.

6.12 As described above the applicant seeks to expand the Nursery at Grovelands Community Primary School. As the pupils attending the School and Nursery are expected to be travelling in from the local area, therefore avoiding routes through the Ashdown Forest, it is considered that the proposal would not increase vehicle trips on routes through the Ashdown Forest and would not materially affect nitrogen levels on the Ashdown Forest. It is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy WCS12 of the Wealden District Council's Core Strategy Local Plan.

Effect on Traffic

6.13 Saved Policies EN27 and TR3 of the Wealden Local Plan require, inter alia, that new development does not create or perpetuate unacceptable traffic conditions and provides satisfactory means of access.

6.14 Grovelands Community Primary School occupies a large site and therefore benefits from two vehicular and pedestrian access points; a gate to the south-west from Grovelands Road and a further gate to the south-east from Dunbar Drive. As mentioned in the submitted Travel Plan, the School currently runs a 'kiss and drop' type system where a one-way system is implemented during drop-off and pick-up times. Parents are required to enter the site via the Dunbar Drive access and exit via the Grovelands Road access. This system is in place to ease congestion. Additionally, a 5mph speed limit is also enforced within the School grounds. There are also 3 zebra crossing points allowing children and parents to crossover safely within the School site.

6.15 At present, there are two separate car parks within the School site; the main School car park which is available for use by parents and a separate staff car park. In total there are 69 parking spaces on site, it is noted by the applicant that the existing car parking is sufficient for existing and anticipated staff members, which is likely to give a rise of 3 additional cars.

6.16 As with many other schools in the County, the dropping off and collection times at Grovelands Community Primary School can result in significant increases in traffic in the vicinity of the School, which can lead to congestion and inappropriate parking. This can then result in poor visibility for users of the highway and disturbance to residents and ultimately, potential hazards.

6.17 As previously mentioned, two representations from residents of Derwent Close to the east of the School site, were received regarding the existing traffic and parking issues within the locality. Both of the representations received raise concerns with regard to the increase in traffic movements in the area should the proposal be approved. The objectors expressed similar issues concerning poor parking on the surrounding roads causing disruption to residents with driveways often being obstructed. Furthermore, concerns were raised with regard to parents double parking and parking on grass verges. Additionally, further concerns were raised regarding the elderly population living in the area which could potentially cause problems with emergency services gaining access during peak times.

6.18 While it is not possible to fully address all of the difficulties associated with the 'school run', certain measures can be incorporated to lessen the effect of the proposed development in the locality. The applicant notes that measures are due to be implemented by the School to reduce the parking pressures and can be summarised as follows: (i) The Nursery starting and finishing times have been staggered in comparison to the main School times (ii) on-site car parking has been rearranged and formalised to aid traffic flow through the drop off zone within the School site. Furthermore, the Highway Authority has commented on the proposal and recognised the issues of parking pressures and congestion in the area during peak traffic periods. Further travel surveys are requested by the Highway Authority to be undertaken to more accurately assess the extent of parking on the roads in the vicinity of the School. The survey is required to also determine the preferred travel modes of parents, children and staff to and from the School and any specific road safety concerns that may relate to their School journeys. It is then requested that the Travel Plan be updated annually to encourage alternative modes of transport e.g. cycling, walking and car-sharing to reduce the pressures on the road system.

6.19 The submitted Travel Plan aspires to encourage children to walk or cycle to School to reduce car use by 25% which could realistically be achieved by encouraging a shift to more sustainable travel modes such as car sharing and using

the bus. This would contribute to the overall aim of the Travel Plan to reduce the number of car trips to the School, which in turn, would reduce demand for parking in the area and subsequent potential congestion. Additionally, it is likely that the siblings of the prospective children at the Nursery already attend the School. This is therefore likely to reduce the numbers of car trips generated as a result of this proposal.

6.20 Although the proposed development is likely to result in some additional disruption to the use of the public highway in the vicinity of the School, particularly at peak times, the proposed measures to lessen the effects of the proposal on the surrounding highway network should assist in ameliorating the situation. The NPPF states that 'development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe'. In this case, it is not considered that the proposal will result in 'severe' impacts and therefore, planning permission should not be refused on highway grounds. As such, the proposal can be supported in highway terms. A condition is recommended with regards to the implementation, monitoring and review of the Travel Plan.

7. Conclusion and reasons for approval

7.1 In accordance with Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the decision on this application should be taken in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

7.2 The proposal is for an expansion of Grovelands Acorns Nursery. The extension is proposed, together with an outdoor canopy and fencing. The extension would be linked to the existing building at the eastern side and would comprise a playroom and ancillary facilities. As an additional 24 children are proposed at the Nursery, there are likely to be additional car trips to and from the site. However, by ensuring that a Travel Survey is undertaken and that measures within the School's Travel Plan are robustly engaged and implemented, such an increase should not result in unacceptable effects. Taking all matters into account, including the need to offer additional Early Years nursery spaces, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in planning terms. As such, the proposal complies with Policy WCS12 of the Wealden District Council Core Strategy Local Plan, Saved Policies GD1; EN27; EN28; TR3 and CS1 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998 and provisions of Parts 4, 7 and 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 and the Policy Statement on Planning for Schools Development 2011.

7.3 In determining this planning application, the County Council has worked with the agent in a positive and proactive manner. The Council has also sought views from consultees and neighbours and has considered these in preparing the recommendation. This approach has been taken positively and proactively in accordance with the requirement in the NPPF, and as set out in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

7.4 There are no other material considerations and the decision should be taken in accordance with the Development Plan.

8. Recommendation

8.1 To recommend the Planning Committee to grant planning permission subject to the following conditions:-

1. The development hereby permitted shall be commenced before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the plans listed in the Schedule of Approved Plans.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

3. Prior to installation of the canopy hereby approved, details of the specifications, materials and finish of the canopy shall be submitted to and approved by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

Reason: In the interests of appropriate design and the visual amenity of neighbouring properties, in accordance with Saved Policy EN27 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

4. Within 3 months of occupation of the proposed extension, the submitted Travel Plan shall be updated and submitted to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport for approval. The Travel Plan shall include a Travel Survey, which must provide the following details to inform the measures and targets in the Travel Plan:

- (i) the current and preferred travel modes of parents, children and staff and;
- (ii) any specific road safety concerns parents, children or staff may have in relation to their School journey's.

Once approved by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport, the Travel Plan shall be implemented forthwith and monitored in accordance with the approved details and reviewed annually.

Reason: In the interests of traffic safety and road conditions, in accordance with Saved Policy TR3 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

5. Unless otherwise agreed in advance and in writing by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport, all materials and finishes to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the extension shall match those used in the existing building.

Reasons: In the interests of appropriate design, in accordance with Saved Policy EN27 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

Schedule of Approved Plans

Design and Access Statement, PL-02 - Block Plan, PL-04A - Elevations, 18483se-01 - Topographical Survey, PL-03B - Existing and Proposed Floor

Plans, PL-02B - Site & Location Plan, Grovelands Acorns Pre-School Travel Plan July 2017, Grovelands School Travel Plan 2017/2018, Travel Survey Covering Letter Rev B

RUPERT CLUBB

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

7 November 2017

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Application File WD/3376/CC

Planning permissions WD/1465/CC and WD/3096/CC

The Development Plan

National Planning Policy Framework 2012

Policy Statement on Planning for Schools Development 2011