

Committee: **Regulatory
Planning Committee**

Date: **22 June 2016**

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

Proposal: **Installation of a temporary single mobile classroom and ramp to be located to the south west of the main school building**

Site Address: **Park Mead Primary School, Michelham Priory Road, Upper Dicker, BN27 3QP.**

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

Application No. **WD/3312/CC**

Key Issues: **1. Need for the Development in the Countryside
2. Siting and Design
3. Traffic and Access**

Contact Officer: **Katie Rayner, Tel No: 01273 481833**

Local Member: **Councillor Nick Bennett**

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To grant planning permission subject to conditions as indicated in paragraph 8.1 of this report.

CONSIDERATION BY DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES, ECONOMY AND TRANSPORT.

1. The Site and Surroundings

1.1 Park Mead Primary School is located on the southern side of Michelham Priory Road in Upper Dicker, a small village approximately 3 kilometres west of Hailsham. The School site lies on the south-eastern edge of the Village outside of the Upper Dicker Development Boundary. The School is bordered to the east and south by open countryside, with playing fields and sporting facilities belonging to the nearby St Bede's School, to the west and north. The nearest residential properties are approximately 200 metres to the east of the School along Michelham Priory Road and 335 metres to the west of the western boundary of the School, located on High Barn Road.

1.2 The School site is roughly rectangular in shape and is arranged with the main School buildings, car park and hard-surfaced play areas to the north of the site and playing fields to the south. The School buildings take the form of an “L” shape with the original Victorian building in the north-western corner, a large extension providing additional classrooms in the north-eastern corner and a large sports hall extension in the south-western corner. In addition, a small ancillary area including a pond, sheds and chicken run lie to the west of the main School building. The temporary mobile classroom unit is proposed to be sited to the rear of this area, on the northern edge of the School playing field, which gently falls away to the South. Vehicular and pedestrian access is off Michelham Priory Road only, the main road running east to west to the north of the School site.

2. The Proposal

2.1 Planning permission is sought for the installation of a temporary single mobile classroom, for a period of 5 years (2021), to facilitate the current oversubscription of pupils in the Reception Year of the school admitted in academic year 2015/16. This proposal will not result in further pupils attending the School but is required to alleviate the pressures following the movement of the larger Reception Year into Year 1. The mobile unit will be located on an area of the existing School playing field to the south of the main School buildings where two previous temporary accommodation units had been sited and subsequently removed.

2.2 The single mobile classroom will provide approximately 70 square metres of floorspace, measuring 8.5 metres in length with a width of 7.9 metres and a height of approximately 4 metres. A timber ramped entrance will be provided along the eastern elevation, with stepped emergency access on the southern elevation. The external appearance of the mobile will comprise of a rough textured finish in ‘East Sussex Green’ under a felt flat roof, with white upvc windows and timber ‘hit and miss’ boarding below floor level.

3. Site History

3.1 The School has been subject to several applications since the 1980s for various extensions, alterations and temporary accommodation. The most recent application was granted in 2011 for the construction of a single storey extension adjoining the library area to the south of the main School building, to provide a new care suite with level access (Ref: WD/3039/CC).

3.2 The previous temporary units at the School, on the area subject to this application, were granted planning permission in 2004 (Ref: WD/2351/CC). This permission approved the provision of one, two bay mobile classroom and one, three bay mobile classroom unit for a temporary period to accommodate staff and pupils during the construction of the new hall and entrance lobby approved in 2004 (Ref: WD/2287/CC). These units were subsequently removed one month after the completion of the works.

4. Consultations and Representations

4.1 Wealden District Council: Raises no objection and notes that there are no issues with regard to neighbour impact, and given that the mobile classroom would be temporary, there are no significant issues in terms of the long term impact on the wider landscape character.

4.2 Arlington Parish Council: Objects to the application on the grounds that any increase in parental car usage with the current drop-off/ pick-up arrangements presents an unacceptable danger to children. Furthermore, they request that a travel plan should be resubmitted with proposals from ESCC on how they will effectively address the problem. Councillors suggest double yellow lines, a fixed barrier, walking buses or a school crossing patrol as possible solutions.

4.3 Sport England: Raises no objection and considers that the proposed development results in a minor encroachment onto the playing field and having considered the nature of the playing field and its ability to accommodate a range of pitches, it is not considered that the development would reduce the sporting capacity of the site. As such, Sport England is satisfied that the proposed development broadly meets the intention of the Sport England exception Policy E3.

4.4 Highway Authority: Raises no objection subject to the recommended Highway conditions which include the requirement for the submission of a revised School Travel Plan and revised Construction Traffic Management Plan.

4.5 Local Representations: Two letters of objection have been received. One is from a local resident who has children that attend the school and the other is from the Dicker Residents Association. Both objectors refer to concerns with regard to the increase in traffic in the area from the additional pupils that are likely to be from the surrounding area and the potential impact on the safety of pupils and parents who have to cross the Michelham Priory Road from the footpath to the School entrance. Both objectors express concern that the current experience during pick-up and drop-off times is considered dangerous, with cars parked along the road from the access to the St Bede's playing fields up to the brow of the hill. This reduces the road to single file with obstructed visibility for other drivers and those crossing, which can be exacerbated if traffic is being re-routed from the A27. It is therefore requested that a feasible and realistic road safety plan is in place before an expansion of the School is considered.

The Dicker Residents Association is also objecting on the grounds that allowing Park Mead Primary School to expand, together with the impending housing development on land adjacent to Shermans Oak, would encourage the St Bede's School to attempt to seek an amendment to the Section 106 agreement relating to the land on the south side of Michelham Priory Road. The result of which would be the submission of a planning application for

development, which would then equate to the loss of yet more rural greenfield in the Village to development.

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

5.1 Wealden District (incorporating part of the South Downs National Park) Core Strategy Local Plan 2013: Policy WCS12 (Biodiversity).

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 the area.

5.2 Wealden District Local Plan 1998: Saved Policies GD2 (Development within Development Boundaries), EN27 (Layout and Design of Development), EN28 (Design of Development for People with Disabilities) and TR3 (Traffic Impact of New Development).

5.3 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012:

The NPPF does not change the status of the Development Plan as the starting point for decision making and constitutes guidance as a material consideration in determining planning applications. Paragraph 72 advises Local Planning Authorities to give great weight to the need to alter and expand Schools.

5.4 Policy Statement on Planning for Schools Development:

The policy statement states that the planning system, when dealing with planning applications for state-funded schools should operate positively and there should be a presumption in favour of the development of such schools. The policy statement encourages a collaborative approach to applications, encouraging pre-application discussions and the use of planning obligations to help mitigate adverse impacts of development. Where it is necessary to impose conditions, they should be necessary in order to make development acceptable and be clearly justified, thereby demonstrably meeting the tests set out in Circular 11/95 (now superseded by Planning Practice Guidance 'Use of Planning Conditions'). The policy statement goes on to indicate 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

Need for the Development in the Countryside

6.1 Saved Policy GD2 of the Wealden Local Plan resists development outside of the defined Development Boundaries unless it is in accordance with other policies within the Plans. Regard should also be had to the provisions of the NPPF, which require Local Planning Authorities to give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools. The Policy Statement on Planning for Schools Development (2011) also advises that the planning system should operate positively when dealing with planning applications for state funded schools.

6.2 Park Mead Primary School has a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 15 and a capacity of 105, which is arranged across 4 classrooms, providing mixed age group teaching for pupils aged 5-11. In the 2015/16 academic year, at the request of the Local Authority, the School exceeded the numbers of children admitted into its Reception Year by 5 additional pupils. However, the applicant advises that there is insufficient space within the School to facilitate the progression of this larger cohort, which will transfer into Year 1 in September this year. The installation of the proposed unit will therefore provide the temporary additional teaching accommodation required and will subsequently allow the School to arrange its year groups in a more coherent manner to avoid class sizes in excess of 30 pupils.

6.3 The School is outside of the Development Boundary of the Village and therefore any development within the site will be in the Countryside. This needs to be taken into account in considering the requirements of the School. The provision of the proposed unit is considered acceptable for a temporary period in order to facilitate the movement of the larger cohort through the School which satisfies other policies within the Wealden Local Plan and therefore meets the requirements of Saved Policy GD2. If the need were to persist and be anticipated into the long term then a more permanent solution would need to be considered. Furthermore, the proposal is supported in principle by Paragraph 72 of the NPPF and by the Policy Statement on Planning for Schools Development.

6.4 In addition, a representation from the Dicker Residents Association raises concerns regarding the expansion of Park Mead Primary School, which could lead in its view, to the St Bede's School seeking to amend a Section 106 agreement to develop other land outside of the development boundary of the Village. However, whilst the concerns of the Residents Association are noted they are not relevant to the consideration of this application.

Siting and Design

6.5 Saved Policy EN27 of the Wealden Local Plan requires development, inter alia, to respect the character of adjoining development and not create an unacceptable adverse impact on the amenities of adjoining developments. Saved Policy EN28 of the Wealden Local Plan also requires that proposals for development on land used for educational purposes should provide safe and convenient access for people with limited mobility where it is reasonable and practicable.

6.6 The proposed single mobile unit would be sited close to the rear of the main School buildings on the northern section of the School playing field, approximately 15 metres from the western boundary of the School site. The unit is basic and utilitarian in appearance, reflecting the standard design typical of the temporary classrooms used across the County. A ramp would be provided to the northern elevation of the classroom to provide level access from the adjacent School building. This would ensure appropriate accessibility to the classroom for those users with mobility concerns.

6.7 There are no residential properties immediately adjacent to the School that would have a view of the proposed unit. Whilst the unit would be visible from the unmade track to the west of the site, which is in the ownership of the St Bede's School, providing access to their playing fields, this view and the views in general from the surrounding countryside are obscured by the mature trees and hedges on the western and southern boundaries of the School site.

6.8 On balance, whilst the proposed unit is not suitable as a permanent form of development, given its scale and design it is considered acceptable in terms of its visual impact for the proposed temporary period and therefore accords with Saved Policies EN27 and EN28 of the Wealden Local Plan.

Traffic and Access

6.9 Saved Policy TR3 of the Wealden Local Plan requires, inter alia, that new development does not create or perpetuate unacceptable traffic conditions and provides satisfactory means of access.

6.10 Park Mead Primary School is situated on Michelham Priory Road. The School benefits from separate pedestrian and vehicular access points with safety barriers and gates, which are accessible from Michelham Priory Road only. The vehicular access serves the existing car park located in the north-west corner of the School site providing formal car parking for 13 members of staff. Whilst it is understood that this area is for staff and visitor use only, parents can apply to the Head Teacher for temporary use, if for instance a child has mobility concerns, and there is also a designated area for parking in the layby opposite the School. In addition, an agreement exists for the use of the visitor's car park and main car park at the St Bede's School, located on the northern side of Michelham Priory Road. There is also a continuous footway on the northern side of Michelham Priory Road connecting the St Bede's School car park to the Park Mead Primary School site, allowing pedestrians to cross to the main School entrance.

6.11 Representations have been received from local residents which raise concerns with regard to the potential increase in vehicle movements and the impact on the safety of pedestrians and road users in the vicinity of the School particularly at drop off and pick up times. This is exacerbated by poorly parked cars causing a reduction in the road to single file and obstructing visibility. Arlington Parish Council also raise concerns with regard to the potential increase in parental car use, as the current drop off and pick up arrangements present, in its view, an unacceptable danger to children. The Parish Council

has therefore requested that a revised Travel Plan be submitted to address how the School intend to deal with this problem.

6.12 The proposed temporary mobile classroom is required to accommodate the movement of the larger cohort of pupils, which were admitted into the Reception Year at the School last academic year. This resulted in an increase from a PAN of 15 pupils to a PAN of 20 pupils, therefore increasing the capacity of the School from 105 to 110. As the School currently provides mixed age group teaching once the pupils move from the Reception Year into Year 1 they are joined with the Year 2. As a consequence of this, following the installation of the proposed classroom 2 additional members of staff (1 full time and 1 part time) will be required to avoid classes in excess of 30 pupils. The School staff will therefore increase from 15 to 17 in total and the existing car parking arrangements providing 13 formal spaces is considered sufficient to support this modest increase. The Highway Authority note the concerns raised with regard to the associated increase in traffic from the additional pupils already in attendance at the School and consider that it is important to ensure that the parking on the site and at the St Bede's School is managed to its full potential. In addition, the Travel Plan should be used to encourage non-car modes of transport, particularly for parents, to reduce the number of parked cars along the Michelham Priory Road.

6.13 A number of existing measures are also in place to help alleviate the concerns raised, which includes the provision of School Keep Clear Markings, which help to maintain visibility for pedestrians crossing at this location, alongside the provision of 'A' Boards with 'Polite Notices' at peak times and a 30mph speed limit which is in force in the local area. Furthermore, given the expected increase in development within the Village and surrounding area there are likely to be pupils attending the School from the local area and it is therefore considered that the submitted Travel Plan is acceptable as a basic framework, however, further measures will need to be implemented in order to ensure its effectiveness. These should include greater encouragement of car sharing, cycling and walking. A revised Travel Plan should therefore be secured by Condition. It has also been recommended that the provision for additional cycle and scooter parking at the School is secured by Condition.

6.14 The construction of the unit is expected to take place during the School summer holidays, however, further details are required to determine the access to the site, the routing of vehicles and the parking of contractor vehicles to avoid any detrimental impact on the surrounding area and existing trees along the western boundary of the site. It is therefore recommended that the details of the construction traffic management are secured by condition.

6.15 Overall, it is considered that the provision of the proposed unit to support the movement of the larger cohort of pupils through the School will not create an unacceptable impact on the surrounding highway network, and the existing pedestrian and vehicle access points are acceptable and supported by the other measures adopted by the School. Moreover, the requirement for a robust Travel Plan will help ease the identified pressures along Michelham Priory Road and the provision of a Construction Traffic Management Plan will help alleviate any short term impact on the area. It is

therefore considered that subject to the provision of conditions, the proposal accords with Saved Policy TR3 of the Wealden Local 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 will provide the School with the additional teaching space that is required in order to accommodate the increased number of pupils currently on roll and allow the School to organise its year groups in a more coherent manner. The proposed single mobile classroom will be located in a discreet area of the School site with no immediate residential views in to the site. Furthermore, it is considered that the proposal will have no unacceptable traffic implications. As such, the proposal complies with Policy WCS12 of the Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan 2013 and Saved Policies GD2, EN27, EN28 and TR3 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

7.3 In determining this planning application, the County Council has worked with the applicant and 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 mobile classroom unit hereby permitted shall by 31 August 2021 be removed and the land restored to its former physical state of a grassed field or as agreed in accordance with a scheme submitted to and approved in writing by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

Reason: The nature of the development is considered appropriate for a temporary period only.

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 the commencement of the development hereby permitted a Construction Traffic Management Scheme shall be submitted to and approved by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport and shall include the size of vehicles, routing of vehicles, the proposed access to the site and hours of operation. The hours of delivery/collection should avoid peak traffic flow times and AM/PM peak School travel times. Details should also be provided on the contractors' parking which should be provided off-street. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved Construction Traffic Management Scheme, unless with the prior written agreement of the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and amenity, in accordance with Saved Policies TR3 and EN27 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

4. Within 3 months of the occupation of the development hereby permitted, an updated Travel Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport. The Travel Plan should include targets for reduced car use and a programme to monitor targets. This will need to recommend realistic proposals for providing for and improving non-car modes of travel, through walking, cycling and public transport and assess the residual impact of the development on the surrounding highway network with ameliorative measures as necessary. The updated Travel Plan thereafter shall be implemented in full.

Reason: To increase awareness and use of alternative modes of transport for school journeys in accordance with Saved Policy TR3 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

5. The development shall not be occupied until cycle and scooter parking areas have been provided in accordance with details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport and the areas shall thereafter be retained for that use and shall not be used other than for the parking of cycles and scooters.

Reason: In order that the development site is accessible by non car modes of transport, in accordance with Saved Policy TR3 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

6. During any form of earthworks and/or excavations that are carried out as part of the development, suitable vehicle wheel washing equipment shall be provided within the site and used by any vehicle carrying mud or any dirt on its wheels or body work.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and the amenity of the locality, in accordance with Saved Policies TR3 and EN27 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

7. Any trees, shrubs or hedges located within the School site are to be protected during the installation and removal of the temporary single mobile classroom and any potential impact should be mitigated in accordance with BS5837: 2012, Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction. Any trees, shrubs or hedges within the School site that are removed uprooted or destroyed or which become seriously damaged or diseased or die from the installation or removal of the development shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless with the prior written agreement of the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

Reason: In the interests of protecting the on site vegetation and of visual amenity, in accordance with Saved Policy EN27 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

8. No artificial external lighting, including floodlighting, shall be installed or used in relation to the use of the single mobile classroom other than that in accordance with the approved plans, unless with the prior written agreement of the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

Reason: To prevent disturbance to the known bat roost within the main school building and to protect the amenity of the locality in accordance with Policy WCS12 of the Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan 2013 and Saved Policy EN27 of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.

Schedule of Approved Plans

0001-B - Proposed Site & Block Plans, 0002-B - Proposed Floor, Location Plans and Elevations, Design and Access Statement dated April 2016

RUPERT CLUBB
Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
13 June 2016

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Planning Application File WD/3312/CC
The Development Plan
National Planning Policy Framework
Planning Statement on Planning for Schools Development