

Committee: **Regulatory
Planning and Highways Sub Committee**

Date: **15 October 2003**

Report by: **Director of Transport and Environment**

Proposal: **Demolition of existing single mobile unit at playground location;
installation of new single mobile classroom adjacent to school field**

Site Address: **Battle and Langton School, Market Road, Battle**

Applicant: **Director of Education & Libraries**

Application No. **RR/2226/CC**

Key Issues: i) **Impact on the AONB**
 ii) **Siting and Design**
 iii) **Removal of trees**
 iv) **Generation of waste**
 v) **Need**
 vi) **Impact on recreational facilities**

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

To refuse planning permission.

CONSIDERATION BY DIRECTOR OF TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

1. The Site

1.1 Battle and Langton Primary School is situated in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) partly outside the town's development boundary, adjoining a mixed-use area of Battle, south of the A2100. To the north, east and west are residential, retail and business uses, and to the south are fields, which form part of an informal recreation and picnic area, and woodland. South-east of the school is Battle Abbey and the battlefield, which is a designated historic park.

1.2 Battle Conservation Area is south-east of the school, and there are public rights of way across the northern boundary of the school site and parallel with the school's eastern boundary. A ghyll is adjacent to the western and southern boundary.

1.3 The main school building is situated to the north of the site, and two single mobile classrooms and one double mobile classroom are located to the east of the school playground, which is south of the main school building. The school playing field is south of the school on a levelled terrace. The school is situated on a gently sloping site that is steepest to the north-west, sloping downwards to the south-east.

1.4 The main school buildings are constructed in red brick with dark brown bricks providing a horizontal soldier course at the centre of the elevations of the school building. Soldier courses in the same dark brown brick border the diamond-shaped windows, but not

the rectangular shaped windows. All the windows have brown UPVC frames, and the existing roof tiles are red/brown in colour.

1.5 To the south-west of the existing school buildings, close to the boundary with an adjacent nursing home, there is a group of approximately 15 trees, which were planted as part of the landscaping to the original planning permission (RR/750/CC and RR/750/CC/1).

2. The Proposal

2.1 It is proposed to demolish the single mobile classroom that is situated on the far north-eastern part of the school playground, and to install a new single mobile classroom unit adjacent to the school playing field on the part of the site immediately south-west of the main school building.

2.2 The mobile classroom unit measures 9m in length by 7.3m in width, and is 3m in height, with a ramped access. The mobile classroom is proposed to be finished with a green/brown finish to the walls and grey/green bituminous felt roof.

2.3 The submitted plans show a repositioned fence between the school and the playing fields, with the mobile classroom aligned 4m beyond the western elevation of the permanent school building. Permission is sought for a temporary period of 5 years.

3. Site History

3.1 1984 – Granted – RR/750/CC - To build a new primary school for about 280 pupils to replace the existing school in Marley Lane, Battle.

3.2 1993 – Granted - RR/1235/CC/1. Retention of existing mobile classroom.

3.3 1994 – Granted - RR/1577/CC. Proposed alterations and single storey extension to enlarge one existing classroom, form four new classrooms and two activity areas, and link corridor between new and existing buildings.

3.4 1996 – Granted - RR/1521/CC/1. The retention of an existing single mobile classroom unit.

3.5 1998 – Granted - RR/1883/CC. Provision of a single mobile classroom unit.

3.6 1999 – Granted - RR/1923/CC. Proposed additional classroom.

3.7 1999 – Granted - RR/1944/CC. Provision of a single mobile classroom and relocation of one single mobile classroom.

3.8 2000 – Granted - RR/1977/CC. Removal of single classroom and installation of double mobile classroom.

3.9 2003 – Withdrawn - RR/2186/CC. Retrospective retention of two single mobile classroom buildings.

3.10 2003 – Granted – RR/2210/CC. Change of use of external roof material to coated aluminium standing seam roofing system.

4. Consultations

4.1 Rother District Council Raises no objections to the proposed development subject to any trees which are lost being replaced.

4.2 Battle Town Council Raise no objections to the proposed development.

4.3 Sport England Raise no objections to the proposal and welcomes the removal of the playground mobile classroom and recommend that a condition is attached to the permission requiring its removal as soon as the new classroom is installed.

4.4 Neighbours No representations received.

4.5 Representations The Chair of Governors has written in support of the application. It is confirmed that the school is two form entry and at present year 5 classrooms are at opposite ends of the school. The repositioning of the replacement mobile adjacent to the classroom at the end of the infant block (western end of the school) will allow the two year 5 classes to be at the same end of the school. At present only year 6 has a three-class year group; however, the school will revert to 2 classes in each year in September 2004, allowing the remaining single mobile on the playground to be removed. Reference is made to the additional merit of returning the playground space to use as a second netball court and the absence of any adverse educational or recreational impact from the siting of the new mobile. The trees affected are not considered to have any landscape merit and the removal of the present unit would allow the restoration of a hedge.

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

5.1 East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan 1991-2011 : Policy S1 (sustainability); EN1 (the environment); EN2 and EN3 (AONB); W10 (waste minimisation). EN23 (sites of historical interest and conservation areas).

5.2 Waste Local Plan Second Deposit Draft April 2002 : WLP11 (waste reduction).

5.3 Rother District Local Plan Initial Deposit January 2001 : Policy CNE3 (protection of the countryside); CNE4 (development in the countryside); CNE5 (protecting the High Weald AONB); CNE6 (protection of trees); CBE10 (protection of conservation areas); PS1 (new educational facilities); ST1 (development control criteria).

6. Summary of Policy Issues

6.1 Policy EN1 of the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan seeks to ensure that development sustains, conserves and where possible enhances the character, local diversity and quality of the landscape and the natural and built environment. Policies EN2 and EN3 seek to ensure development conserves and enhances the landscape quality of the AONB. Policy S1 seeks to ensure a sustainable approach to development and policy W10 encourages a reduction in the amount of construction waste in development. Policy EN23 seeks to protect sites of historical importance, listed buildings and conservation areas from inappropriate change or development.

6.2 Policy WLP11 of the Waste Local Plan seeks to ensure that all development encourages the reduction, reuse and recycling of materials on site where possible.

6.3 Policies CNE3, CNE4, and ST1 of the Rother Local Plan require development to conserve and enhance the countryside environment, and seek to ensure that development is not detrimental to the surrounding residential and rural amenities of the area. Policy CNE5

seeks to conserve and enhance the AONB, and any development conflicting with this aim will not be permitted. Policy CNE6 seeks to protect trees which contribute to the character of areas, and policy CBE19 seeks to protect the character and setting of historic parks. Policy CBE10 seeks to ensure that development proposals on land outside, but affecting a conservation area, are considered in relation to their effect on the character or appearance of the conservation area. Policy PS1 seeks to ensure that for new educational facilities existing trees on the school site are safeguarded as far as possible.

7. Considerations

Impact on the AONB

7.1 The school is located within a very sensitive and prominent location commanding fine views over open countryside. The whole site is within the High Weald AONB, where new development is expected to conserve and enhance the landscape quality and character of the area (Structure Plan policy EN2). The school site is adjacent to the town's conservation area, which includes listed buildings, and the school site is seen in views from Battle Abbey, which is a Grade I listed building, and public footpaths to the south and east. There are close views of the school and playing fields from the adjacent informal recreation and picnic area.

7.2 The sensitivity of the site was acknowledged at the time of the original planning application, and subsequently, when extensions to the school have been approved. These sensitivities are recognised in both the design of the school, and requirements for the provision of landscaping, to integrate the buildings into the wider landscape of the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

7.3 At the time when the most recent extensions to the south-west corner of the school were approved, there was the same emphasis on the quality of design and landscaping. Whilst a landscape scheme was submitted, the steep banks to the north were considered inappropriate, and the level of tree planting inadequate. A revised scheme was not submitted, and therefore this remains unimplemented to the detriment of this part of the school site. This has been brought to the attention of the Education department to ensure the submission and implementation of an appropriate high quality scheme. A further scheme has been submitted and is being considered.

7.4 To meet development plan policies it needs to be shown that the siting and design of this proposal is acceptable in this sensitive location.

Siting and design.

7.5 The current proposal is to reposition and replace a mobile classroom, placing it within a newly excavated area adjacent to the most recent permanent extension to this school. This involves relocating it within a more prominent position than at present, involving the repositioning of a boundary fence between the school built area and the playing field by about 4m. The absence of landscaping to this corner of the site and the physical position of the mobile beyond the building line of the existing elevation places it in an exposed position.

7.6 The flat roofed and utilitarian unit will be seen immediately adjacent to the pitched roofed gable end of the permanent building. In addition it will be viewed from the public footpath along the north boundary of the school, where it will again be seen to clutter the permanent school building. It is considered that in this location the unit will have a disjointed and incongruous appearance, which will detract from the current qualities of this part of the AONB. Accordingly, the proposed development is considered contrary to development plan policies, which seek to protect the AONB. In some views it will be seen against the backdrop

of the town's conservation area, and is therefore considered to be detrimental to its character and appearance, introducing further temporary development in views of the school.

7.7 The existing mobile classroom, which is proposed to be replaced, is situated on the north-east corner of the school playground. The school's other mobile classrooms (another single and one double classroom) are also located on this playground. All 3 classrooms are well screened by dense shrubs and trees. This is an acceptable existing location for a single mobile classroom, which is strongly preferred in terms of near and distant public viewpoints. In these terms a more exposed location is not considered acceptable in planning terms.

7.8 The proposed single mobile classroom would be green/brown in colour and have white UPVC framed windows. The design of the mobile classroom is incongruous against the background of the school's permanent main school buildings. In this location, only a permanent extension in character with the existing building could be acceptable. Painting the mobile in a similar colour to the school has been considered but because of the form of the building this will not overcome the disadvantages of this substandard form of construction in this location. It is considered that the proposal fails to meet the requirements of design policies in the Development Plan. In this location it is likely that a temporary building would occupy a part of the footprint to any permanent building, and therefore require further repositioning.

Removal of trees

7.9 The original planning permission for this new primary school required significant landscaping to ensure the satisfactory integration of the school into its setting. A group of 9 deciduous trees (including grey alder, oak and Indian horse chestnut) and 3 Scots pine and hollies were included within the school grounds, within and adjacent to the site chosen for the replacement mobile classroom. Three of these trees would be removed as part of this development, and others may be affected by the close proximity of excavation works.

7.10 Considerations of planning proposals at this school have emphasised the importance of the retention of landscaping "to retain and/or establish the three dimensional green element between buildings". The landscaped areas to this site are important to the setting of the school as they help to blend the buildings and facilities into the AONB location. The position of the mobile will involve the direct loss of some trees and place a building between trees and public viewpoints reducing the effectiveness of the existing site landscaping.

7.11 The proposal will result in the loss of trees and, therefore, the effectiveness of site landscaping, diluting the visual quality of the site. These impacts are considered unacceptable within an AONB, where proposals should enhance the character and appearance of the area, and particularly as the removal of trees is sought to accommodate this temporary development.

Generation of Waste

7.12 The proposal requires excavation works to form a levelled area within land, which rises to the north. This will result in the generation of waste soils, albeit not significantly large quantities. Having regard to the existing satisfactory location of the current mobile unit, the generation of waste in this manner for a temporary form of this development is considered unnecessary and, therefore, contrary to Structure Plan policy W10 and draft Waste Local Plan policy WLP11, which seek to avoid the creation of waste.

Need

7.13 The proposal, with the provision of a replacement single mobile classroom in this new position, does not change the amount of accommodation available to the school. It is accepted that the condition of the existing mobile has deteriorated to the extent that replacement is necessary. The applicant has stated that the new position is preferred, to allow the school to rationalise the organisation of the school site, and provide better delivery of the curriculum. Supporting information also suggests that it will allow the school to regain a netball court which was lost when the mobile was placed on site, and will stop access to the roof, which is gained from nearby trees.

7.14 There are currently 452 pupils on the school roll. The loss of the larger year group in July 2004 will allow the removal of another older single mobile, but numbers indicate that the double mobile and the mobile in the current application will be needed to provide adequate accommodation for a period of at least 5 years. Based on the approved plans, there were believed to be 14 permanent classroom bases within the school, and with the addition of the three existing mobile units (two single and one double unit) this increases to 18 class bases.

7.15 Information submitted by the Education Department confirms a current need for 15 classrooms; 4 bases within mobiles and 11 permanent bases within the existing school. The position of the new mobile would be adjacent to an existing year 5 classroom within the main school. Comparison with the original approved plans reveals the loss of 3 of the original classrooms to provide a new music room, Headteacher and Deputy Head's office, and a staff room. Consequently there remain 11 permanent classrooms at this school.

7.16 On the basis of the current school roll there is a clear need for more permanent accommodation at this school to provide for two form entry, which increases to three form entry for year six. With the exception of the year 5 permanent classroom and the provision for year six, which is entirely in temporary mobiles, all other classrooms share adjacent activity areas. There would not appear to be any alternative arrangement of classrooms within the school because of the uneven number of permanent classrooms. At present the distance between the two year 5 class bases is 103m and the current proposal would lower this to 64m. The temporary mobile would not provide the same adjacent arrangements of shared activity areas as the permanent classrooms.

7.17 Having regard to the adequacy of the existing location for temporary mobile units, and the decisions which have been taken to convert classroom accommodation within the permanent school, I am not entirely convinced that the organisational constraints could not be met in another way. There are no alternative locations available for mobile units which would not be either more exposed or involve the loss of playground. The requirement needs a permanent solution either with a further extension or internal alterations within the existing school building. Until such time the existing location of mobiles is the least worse in environmental terms.

7.18 I understand that the school is concerned that a tree adjoining the existing mobile is aiding unauthorised access to the roof of the present mobile classroom, out of hours. I do not consider that the removal of one single mobile classroom will deter this activity, as the other mobile classrooms will still be accessible by climbing the adjacent fencing, trees and hedge. There are structures located around the site which would seem to enable access onto the existing permanent school building's roofs, ie. low gates and fences immediately adjacent to the school buildings. Whilst I understand the school's concerns about trespass, I do not consider that the repositioning will fully overcome this problem, or that this outweighs the other material planning considerations.

Impact on recreational facilities.

7.19 The proposal will involve adjustment to the alignment of the fence between the playing field and the built part of the school. This does not appear to impact on the layout of any formal pitches. The letter of representation from the Chair of Governors at Battle and Langton School indicates that the "proposed site is a considerable distance from our playing fields in an area of the school grounds which is not used for any educational or sporting activity".

7.20 However, inspections of the site have shown that the formal playing field is in close proximity to an area used for recreational and other activities.

7.21 It is also suggested that a further netball court would be gained if the development were to proceed. Whilst the current mobile overlaps the edge of the existing playground this is only to a small extent (about 3m). I also note that, since the playground was built, an extension to the school has resulted in the loss of 11m to the western end of the playground with the provision of another netball court on a lower area. The removal of both single mobiles will release a small area of playground but will not allow two full size courts to be laid out. Given the apparent flexibility in court dimensions to suit areas where space is limited, the presence of mobiles is not considered to unduly constrain the provision of netball courts. On this basis, I am not convinced that the current proposal would result in any significant recreational gain.

8. Conclusion

8.1 The proposed relocation of the single mobile classroom for a temporary period is not considered to be acceptable, as it would result in a substandard form of development, detrimental to the character of this sensitive area of the County. It will also result in the loss of trees planted to provide a landscaping setting, and the unnecessary generation of waste. In consequence it is contrary to policies in the Structure Plan, Waste Local Plan and the Rother Local Plan

8.2 Although a need for the relocated mobile classroom has been identified, it is not considered that those arguments are sufficient, or robust enough, to overcome the significant planning policy objections. There is an existing and preferred location for a mobile classroom, which is less prominent. I do not consider that the applicant has shown an overriding need to relocate the mobile classroom in the position chosen.

8.4 For the reasons set out in the considerations above it is recommended that planning application RR/2226/CC be recommended for refusal.

9. Formal Recommendation

9.1 The Planning & Highways Sub Committee resolve to refuse planning permission for the following reasons below :-

1. The form and materials of the proposed replacement mobile classroom are inappropriate in the proposed location and would be detrimental to the visual appearance of the area, which is contrary to policies S1 and EN1 of the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan 1991-2011 and policies PS1 and ST1 of the Rother District Local Plan Initial Deposit Draft January 2001.
2. The proposal gives rise to the unnecessarily generation of waste contrary to policy W10 and S10 of the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan 1991-2011, policy WLP11 of the Waste Local Plan Second Deposit Draft April 2002.

3. The proposal would result in the loss of trees, which contribute to the landscape setting of the site, contrary to policy S1 and EN1 of the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan 1991-2011, and policies CNE6 and PS1 of the Rother District Local Plan Initial Deposit Draft January 2001.
4. The proposed development would detract from the character and appearance of the area and is contrary to policies EN2, EN3 and EN23 of the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan 1991-2011 and policies CNE3, CNE4, CNE5, CBE10, and CBE19 of the Rother District Local Plan Initial Deposit Draft January 2001, which seeks to conserve and enhance Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, settings to conservation areas and historic parks.

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Director of Transport and Environment

7 October 2003

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan 1991-2011

Waste Local Plan Second Deposit Draft April 2002

Rother District Local Plan Initial Deposit January 2001

RR/2226/CC; RR/2210/CC; RR/2186/CC; RR/1977/CC; RR/1944/CC; RR/1923/CC;
RR/1883/CC; RR/1521/CC; RR/1577/CC; RR/1235/CC; RR/750/CC.