

MC/18/1468

Date Received: 15 May 2018

Location: Abbey Court School Cliffe Road Strood Rochester

Proposal: Proposed development of existing school field into a rural activities centre consisting of a new vehicular access road, fenced paddocks, hub with stables, barn, feed-barn, a horticultural area consisting of a polytunnel and planter beds, and a classroom building with classroom and ancillary accommodation for pupils at Abbey Court School

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Ward: Strood Rural Ward

Case Officer: Mary Smith

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**Recommendation of Officers to the Planning Committee, to be considered and determined by the Planning Committee at a meeting to be held on 1st August 2018.**

**Recommendation - Approval subject to:**

- (a) The receipt of details to demonstrate that a solution to surface water drainage can be found (delegated powers to agree this are requested); and
- (b) referral to the Secretary of State (as approval is recommended contrary to the Sport England's objection)

**And**

- (c) The following conditions:-

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun 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 (as amended).

- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

Drawing numbers 5189/PL/111Rev A, 5189/PL/112 Rev A, 5189/PL/113, 5189/PL/114, 5189/PL/116, 5189/PL/117, 5189/PL/118 Rev 1 received 29 May 2018.

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

- 3 No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written specification and timetable which has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: Required prior to commencement in order to avoid damage to archaeology and to ensure that features of archaeological interest are properly examined and recorded in accordance with Policy BNE21 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

- 4 No development shall take place until a scheme showing details of the disposal of surface water, based on sustainable drainage principles, including details of the design, implementation, maintenance and management of the surface water drainage scheme have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Those details shall include (if applicable):

- A timetable for its implementation, and
- A management and maintenance plan for the lifetime of the development which shall include the arrangements for adoption by any public body or statutory undertaker, or any other arrangements to secure the operation of the sustainable drainage scheme throughout its lifetime.

Development shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: Required prior to commencement to ensure that drainage is adequately designed for the site as part of any groundworks and to manage surface water during and post construction and for the lifetime of the development.

- 5 No development above slab level shall take place until details and samples of all materials to be used externally have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the appearance of the development is satisfactory and without prejudice to conditions of visual amenity in the locality, in accordance with Policy BNE1 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

- 6 Prior to the bringing of any animals onto the site full detail of the type of animals (e.g. sheep, pigs), the maximum numbers/stocking densities and the areas of the site which each animal may be kept (e.g. ponies in paddocks 1 and 2 and the stables) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Only animals agreed pursuant to this condition shall be kept on the site and only to the maximum numbers/stocking densities approved.

Reason: In the interests of the amenities of local residents and with regard to Policy BNE2 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

- 7 Prior to the first use of any part of the rural activities centre hereby approved:
- (a) details of how the development will enhance biodiversity shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority (these shall include the installation of bat and bird nesting boxes along with details of native planting where possible, and a timetable for implementation); and
  - (b) the approved details shall be fully implemented and shall be retained as such thereafter.

Reason: To enhance biodiversity in accordance with Paragraph 118 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 8 Prior to the first use of the development hereby approved a signed verification report carried out by a qualified drainage engineer (or equivalent) must be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority to confirm that the Sustainable Drainage System has been constructed as per the agreed scheme and plans.

Reason: In accordance with paragraph 103 of the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure that suitable surface water drainage scheme is designed and fully implemented so as to not increase flood risk on-site or elsewhere.

- 9 Prior to the installation of any external lighting on the site details of such lighting shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Details shall include the type of lighting, its spread and intensity together with a report to demonstrate its effect on local residents, showing how this effect has been minimised. Only the external lighting approved pursuant to this condition shall be used on the site and it shall be in full accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In order to limit the impact of the lighting on local residents in accordance with Policies BNE2 and BNE5 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

- 10 Prior to the bringing of any animals onto the site the stock fencing shall be erected as shown on the plans hereby approved and it shall be maintained as

such at all times thereafter. No animals shall have access to the areas of the site between this stock fencing and the site boundaries.

Reason: In order to limit the areas of the site which animals have access to in the interests of the amenities of neighbours and the health of the vegetation surrounding the site, in accordance with Policies BNE2 and BNE43 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

- 11 Prior to the bringing of any animals onto the site CCTV shall be installed in the animal housing and monitored remotely when staff are not on site.

Reason: In the interests of the amenities of local residents and with regard to Policy BNE2 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

- 12 Prior to the first use of any part of the rural activities centre hereby approved the pedestrian and vehicular accesses to the site together with the parking and turning spaces shall be provided in accordance with the approved plans. Thereafter they shall be kept available for these purposes and no development shall be carried out in such a way or position as to preclude pedestrian and vehicular access to the rural activities centre and its parking space and turning space.

Reason: Development without provision of adequate access and accommodation for the parking and turning of vehicles is likely to lead to hazardous on-street parking and in accordance with Policies T1 and T13 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

- 13 Other than as specified in this condition and by staff directly employed to oversee the rural activities centre hereby approved the use of the centre shall be restricted to use by pupils attending the Abbey Court School located on the adjacent site or Temple Mill Primary School directly to the south of the site and their teachers and official helpers, this use only being between the hours of:

- 9am and 3:30pm Monday to Friday in school term time; and
- After school between 3:30pm and 6:30pm in school term time a maximum of once a week.
- Use of the rural activities centre by others shall be restricted to:
  - Evening use for a pupil/student Young Farmers Club until 8:30pm a maximum of once a week;
  - A maximum of two visits per week by pupils of other schools, this being between 9am and 3:30pm Monday to Friday in term time with a maximum of one class visiting at any one time; and
  - A maximum of 6 open days per year at weekends between 10am and 3pm and the car parking facilities for Abbey Court School shall be made available for use by these other visitors during these times.

Reason: In the interests of the amenities of local residents and with regard to Policy BNE2 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

- 14 The storage and disposal of animal waste and bedding shall be undertaken in accordance with the details given in the design & access statement submitted with this planning application. This shall include the storage of waste within a water-tight container to be positioned as shown on the approved plans. No waste shall be burnt on site.

Reason: In the interests of the amenities of local residents and with regard to Policy BNE2 of the Medway Local Plan 2003.

**For the reasons for this recommendation for approval please see Planning Appraisal Section and Conclusions at the end of this report.**

### **Proposal**

It is proposed to provide a rural activities centre on a school field. This would be specifically tailored to the needs of the Abbey Court School pupils, all pupils having Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) or Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) as their main presenting need. The proposed centre is intended to be an educational resource and not an intensive farm production unit, enabling pupils to experience animals and learn about their care, to learn outside of the classroom, to transfer their skills into a practical setting and to facilitate the development of life skills such as taking responsibility and budgeting.

The centre would consist of a core area containing a number of structures:

- a partially open hay and feed barn 13m by 6m with a mono pitch roof 2.6m – 5.3m high with a metal profile roof;
- a barn indicated for lambs and calves with a pitched roof, ridge height 7.1m, constructed of concrete panels to lower walls, timber boarding above and a corrugated roof;
- a classroom with associated staff facilities, changing rooms and small tool shed with a shallow pitched roof 4.2m to ridge, timber clad with a black single ply roof;
- 3 stables, a tack room and a feed room 18.4m by 5.9m (including covered walkway to front), timber clad with a tiled roof;
- a building for rabbit petting and egg sorting 10.7m by 3.4m timber clad with a tiled roof;
- chicken coops (with run) for approximately 24 to 36 chickens; and
- a rabbit exercise area for approximately 8 to 12 rabbits.
- pig arks (with pig pen) for approximately 2 pigs;
- a polytunnel 14m by 4.75m; and
- raised planters.

This area would also include hardstandings, a muck trailer, 2 mini bus and 3 car parking spaces. The central complex would be accessed via a new access road from Templars Drive, near to the junction with Brompton Farm Road. The first section of this road would have an asphalt surface but the majority would be gravel, 3m wide with passing places. The road would roughly follow the line of Templars Drive but set in

from this nearby road by a minimum of approximately 15m. A new 2m wide asphalt footpath would be provided to provide a pedestrian link to the complex from the main school buildings. The main field area would be divided into three paddocks. The exact type and numbers of animals would vary but as an example paddock 1 between Templars Drive and the western end of Larkin Close could be for sheep (approximately 9), paddock 2 to the southwest of this could be used for goats (approximately 3) and paddock 3 to the eastern section of the playing fields could be used for ponies and a donkey (approximately 2 ponies and 1 donkey). Other animals such as rabbits (approximately 8-12), chickens (approximately 24-36) and pigs (approximately 2) would be kept to the south of the proposed buildings, by the boundary with Temple Mill Primary School.

The proposed facilities would be principally for pupils of Abbey Court School. There are no other such facilities in Kent which are tailored specifically for pupils with severe and profound learning needs, nor at any education site in Medway. It is stated that it is proposed to offer the facility to other special needs children and other schools but not to open the centre to the public.

### **Relevant Planning History**

MC/18/0796	Variation of condition 29 on planning permission MC/14/1599 to postpone submission of community agreement until Phase 2 Undetermined
MC/14/1599	Demolition of existing buildings and construction of a part two storey part single storey building for use as an educational establishment (Class D1) with associated external recreational areas, access, parking and landscaping Decision Approval With Conditions Decided 16 September 2014
MC/13/0722	Refurbishment of existing educational buildings to form new child development centre including construction of a single storey extension to form new entrance into existing building together with new car parking arrangement; adapted entrance; new bin store, play equipment, installation of air handling units and erection of a new boundary fence and gates and ancillary external works (demolition of existing redundant hall) Decision Approval With Conditions Decided 17 May 2013

### **Representations**

The application has been advertised on site and in the press and by individual neighbour notification to the owners and occupiers of neighbouring properties. The Environment Agency, KCC Archaeology, KCC Biodiversity, Southern Water and Sport England have also been consulted.

**KCC Archaeology** confirms that the site is located within an area of broad archaeological potential, based on its geological and topographical position and because of this there is a chance of past archaeological finds and discoveries. Within the immediate vicinity of the site geological mapping shows the presence of 3rd Terrace River Gravel and Head deposits. Such deposits are not precisely mapped and may extend into the site in question. These geological deposits have been identified in the Medway Valley Palaeolithic project as having a theoretically high potential for important remains of Palaeolithic date. Furthermore, finds of Romano-British material including pottery, tile and domestic debris (perhaps indicative of settlement) have been recorded to the west, whilst a Romano-British amphora and iron lamp have been recorded to the north-east. Other chance finds from the wider area include finds of Neolithic, Bronze Age and medieval date.

The proposed development has the potential to affect remains and deposits of archaeological interest. A condition to secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work is therefore recommended.

**KCC Biodiversity** advise that no ecological information has been submitted with the application but as a result of reviewing the data they have available (including aerial photos and biological records) and the information submitted with the application they advise that the proposed development has limited potential to result in ecological impacts. The site is currently used as a school recreational field, and as such, is mowed regularly therefore they consider that the proposed development would have negligible impacts upon protected species or habitats.

The application provides opportunities to incorporate features into the design which are beneficial to wildlife, such as new hedgerow planting, the creation of areas of rough grassland, or the installation of bat/bird nest boxes. Measures to enhance biodiversity should be secured by condition in accordance with paragraph 118 of the NPPF.

**Sport England** confirm that they have considered the application in light of the NPPF (particularly para 74) and their Playing Fields Policy, this being to oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or prejudice the use of, all/part of a playing field, unless one or more of the five exceptions stated in its policy apply. In considering this application they have consulted the Football Foundation on behalf of the FA, which stated that there is demand from local leagues/clubs for pitches in the area. The grass pitches were used previously and these were lost to the new build of the school. In the absence of an up to date Playing Pitch Strategy, the FF/FA would object to any further loss of playing field capable of forming grass pitches.

In terms of Sport England's potential policy exceptions:

E1 - There is no evidence that this playing field represents a surplus in the area, ie a playing pitch strategy supported by pitch sport NGBs and Sport England. Furthermore, the FF/FA suggests that there is a need for all of this playing field land;

E2 - The development is not solely ancillary to the use of the playing field;

E3 - The development is proposed on land that has clearly previously been used as playing field according to aerial photography and is therefore capable of forming part of a playing pitch;

E4 - There is no suggestion that the lost playing field will be replaced;

E5 - The proposal is not for an alternative formal sport facility of sufficient benefit to the community to outweigh the loss of playing field.

Sport England therefore objects to the application because it is not considered to accord with any of the exceptions to Sport England's Playing Fields Policy or with Paragraph 74 of the NPPF. Should the local planning authority be minded to grant planning permission for the proposal, contrary to Sport England's objection then in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009, the application should be referred to the Secretary of State, via the National Planning Casework Unit.

**13 letters of objection** have been received on the following grounds:

- Ruin the environment, should be in a rural area and not in a residential area, outlook concerns;
- Large development near to houses;
- Noise and disturbance including 7 days a week;
- Odour, already unpleasant when fertilizer used on local fields;
- Would the waste be stored in a trailer or a skip (a trailer could be moved about the site), either leaves potential for cover not to be fixed;
- Not hygienic in a built up residential area, food and waste would attract flies and vermin, health and safety issues;
- Doubt that the clearing of waste from paddocks would be done on a regular basis, the area between neighbours and school fencing is very rarely maintained;
- Upsetting to local dogs;
- Potential animal welfare and comfort issues in school holidays, also additional disturbance to neighbours;
- Increased traffic including from deliveries and parking on a quiet residential street including outside school hours and at weekends, access should not be from Templars Drive;
- If bulk deliveries would not be beyond the site entrance any unloading by the access from large delivery vehicles would block access for residents and be potentially dangerous, what time of day would deliveries arrive;
- The access from Templars Drive only has rights for maintenance, will the school contribute towards its upkeep as residents have to;
- Access road is close to neighbours, poor outlook and disturbance for neighbours, could it not be relocated to the centre;
- Why is a car park needed;
- Potential lighting pollution from floodlights;
- Why are the opening times outside school hours and what exactly are they;
- How many visits from neighbouring schools would occur, also farmers club, how many people at one time and when;
- Greater problems when it is forced to open to the public due to fund itself;
- Would support a horticultural area and a small petting area instead but object to large animals;



- Pre-application positive responses were probably made by people closely connected to the school rather than local residents, not all were reported and also different information was given at this time;
- Increased strain on school resources, how would it be funded and money would be better spent in other areas of the school;

## **Development Plan**

The Development Plan for the area comprises the Medway Local Plan 2003 (the Local Plan). The policies referred to within this document and used in the processing of this application have been assessed against the National Planning Policy Framework, 2012 (the NPPF) and are considered to conform.

## **Planning Appraisal**

### *Background*

The site is part of the school playing fields of the former Temple School, a boys secondary school which is part of the now Strood Academy relocated to the Carnation Road site. Planning permission for the demolition of the majority of the former school buildings and the construction of new school buildings was granted, reference MC/14/1599, with separate planning permission given for a new residential development (now built) on the land between this and Brompton Farm Road, to the west of the main school playing fields. The new school buildings were to accommodate an Abbey Court SEN schools complex and phase 1, the primary school wing, has been built and is occupied. Phase 2, the secondary school element which includes the MUGA adjacent to the main playing fields has not yet been started. It is stated that the playing fields were originally offered to Medway Sport to develop as a sporting facility, however they were left unused when the former schools relocated until they were gifted to Abbey Court School as part of their new school development, such that they have not been used for recreation since 2009.

### **Principle**

Although the site is located within the urban area, the school playing fields are designated as protected open space by Policy L3 of the Local Plan. This policy says that the loss of open space will not be permitted unless one of the given exceptions apply, subsection (iv) saying that in the case of educational establishments the development is required for educational purposes and adequate areas for outdoor sports can be retained or provided elsewhere in the vicinity. The more recent advice in the NPPF confirms that the Government attaches great importance to ensuring that sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education (paragraph 72). This needs to be balanced against the desire that open space including playing fields should not be built on unless given circumstances occur (paragraph 74). These exceptions include where an assessment has been undertaken which clearly shows the open space to be surplus to requirements or where the development is for alternative sports and recreation provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

In the current case Abbey Court is a special school for pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties, with additional educational needs which may include visual impairment, sensory impairment, autism and /or physical disability. This means that they can make little use of the (inherited) school playing fields, indeed they are currently inaccessible to many pupils. The school is therefore seeking to use this open area for a purpose which they consider would benefit the pupils and their development, this being a rural activities centre incorporating a horticultural area as well as the keeping of a number of different animals. It is stated that adequate areas for outdoor sports would be retained as recommended by Building Bulletin 102 for a school of this nature. In addition the majority of the area would remain open/grassed and it is noted that should the site cease to operate as a special needs school the fairly modest scale and lightweight construction of the proposed additions means that the physical development could be removed. Due to these individual circumstances it is considered that the development would fall within subsection (iv) of Policy L3 of the Local Plan and also that it can be supported in principle with regard to the above advice in the NPPF.

It is noted that Sport England has objected to the application due to the loss of playing fields as the development would not meet any of their set exceptions. However these set criteria do not account for the special nature/circumstances of Abbey Court School and the limits and needs of its pupils. The playing fields have not been used for competitive sports for some years and the school would not upkeep the facilities for the benefit of others when formal pitches are unsuitable for use by their own pupils. In these circumstances the application is supported in principle, despite this objection, although the acceptability of the proposals will depend on an assessment of their detailed impacts.

## **Design**

The proposed buildings and associated structures consist of a mix of functional designs to provide for the various activities and animals envisaged for the site. They would be positioned towards the middle of the southern boundary of the site with the grounds of Temple Mill Primary School. Although they would clearly introduce a new use/activity to the area, it is not considered that their appearance would be harmful. There are no objections on design or visual grounds including with regard to Policy BNE1 of the Local Plan and paragraph 56 of the NPPF.

## **Amenity**

It is not considered that the proposed physical building works would have any direct impact on neighbours with regard to light, privacy and overbearing impact due to their position within the site, away from the boundaries of the site with its residential neighbours. In addition although the outlook of neighbours would alter, it is not considered that this in itself would be unacceptably harmful within this urban area. The main use of the playing fields would remain in open use for paddocks while the built additions are considered to be appropriate in scale in relation to the open land and bearing in mind the schools proposed requirements.

The main amenity issues raised by the development are noise and odour. The proposed buildings and structures would be positioned away from boundaries with neighbouring dwellings in an attempt to minimise the impact on local residents. In addition the paddock areas would be enclosed by stock fencing and this would be set in from the boundaries near residents to provide a buffer between gardens and the animal areas, as well as helping to protect trees along these boundaries. For example there would be a minimum of a 10m buffer area between paddock 1 and the end of the gardens at the western end of Larkin Close, 7m between paddock 3 and the south of Larkin Close and 13m between the east of paddock 3 and the frontages of the houses in Gardenia Close. To the west there would be a minimum of 16m between the paddocks and the site boundary, with Templars Drive itself between the boundary and the front of the nearest houses facing on to it.

### *Noise*

With regard to noise, the submissions explain how the proposals attempt to minimise any impact. The building hub has been located away from residential boundaries, with the proposed buildings helping to screen the chicken and pig areas from local residents. Lambs would be weaned away from the site as this procedure can cause increased noise and CCTV would be installed in the animal housing, monitored remotely when staff were not on site to ensure that any sick or distressed animal could be attended to quickly. The animal barn would be some 110m from the nearest house in Templars Drive and the stables would be 64m from the nearest house in Larkin Close and 114m from Gardenia Close. The stock fencing to contain animals in paddocks would be set back from the site boundaries to create a buffer from neighbours. In addition it is confirmed that the number of animals, particularly larger animals, would not be high as the facility is intended for education rather than intensive farm production. In these given circumstances it is not considered that noise from animals is likely to result in an unacceptable impact to the local environment, including to residents.

With regard to use by pupils and visitors the proposed hours of use by Abbey Court pupils are given as 9am – 3:30pm Monday to Friday in term time with occasional after school use (e.g. until 6:30pm no more than twice a month in term time) with no more than 6 days per year for occasional family days at weekends, 10am – 3pm. It is stated that other schools would be able to visit for one-off activities, with no more than two half day visits per week in term time for a maximum of 30 pupils/one class at any time. The school also wish to operate a Young Farmers Club for local secondary school pupils one evening per week. The centre would be run by one full-time member of staff with one part-time worker providing cover after hours and at weekends. Volunteers and pupils are also expected to help out. Pupils and general staff would access via the proposed pedestrian access from Abbey Court School but the dedicated centre staff and some visitors would use the proposed new vehicular access way, three car and two mini-bus parking spaces being provided on site in connection with this (the centre would also have a small tractor for transport and heavy work on site). This new access way would use the existing vehicular access gates, with a new road, mainly a 3m wide gravel track, which would be set in from Templars Drive by a minimum of approximately 15m. Whilst the need for vehicular access to the site is recognised (there is no realistic alternative via the existing Abbey Court school building area), the frequency/intensity of use is likely to be very low.

In summary it is not considered that the scale of use and levels of activity over the week are likely to result in significant levels of noise and disturbance to local residents, including the use of the proposed vehicular access to the facilities from Templars Drive. However it will be important to control hours of use and numbers of visitors to the site in order to ensure that any potential intensification of use of the site in the future would not result in an issue in this respect. Conditions are therefore proposed in order to address these matters.

### *Odour*

As already stated the proposed buildings have been sited away from neighbouring residential boundaries in an attempt to minimise the potential impact on local residents. All animal bedding waste would be stored in a water tight vessel of solid construction such as a trailer or skip with a cover designed to keep odour in and rainwater out. This would be positioned on a hardstanding to the southeast of the proposed buildings, away from houses, and would be removed from the site once full. A condition would require this method of disposal to be used. It is unlikely that odour from animal waste in the paddocks would be significant due to the fairly low numbers of animals and also as there would be a buffer around the site edges. There may be some residual odour which can occur as part of the keeping of any animals, regardless of cleanliness and waste disposal, however on balance, due to the proposed site layout, buffer strip and low intensity of use it is considered that this is unlikely to result in any harm. A condition would ensure that no waste would be burnt on the site.

With regard to animal feed it is stated that this would be stored in steel vermin-proof boxes, with bulky feeds such as straw and hay bales kept in a separate barn from the animals.

In summary the impact of the development on amenity including the living conditions of local residents is considered acceptable including with regard to Policy BNE2 of the Local Plan and paragraph 17 (point 4) of the NPPF.

### *Flood Risk*

The submissions do not include a flood risk assessment and the proposal includes the installation of soakaways. In this location there is an underlying clay geology, by a 'seam' of chalk and clay, and it is therefore not known whether or not there is a suitable drainage solution for surface water disposal as soakaways may not be suitable and there is no known surface water sewer network nearby. In these circumstances the applicant has been requested to undertake some soakage tests or similar evidence to confirm the suitability of soakaways or to explore other measures if this is not feasible. In advance of this it is not possible to determine whether or not there would be a solution for the surface water disposal for the development with regard to the advice in paragraph 103 of the NPPF. As these tests may take some time to arrange, delegated power to agree the results is therefore requested.

## Highways

From a highways safety viewpoint the use of the existing vehicular access onto Templars Drive is considered to be acceptable, with the main pedestrian access via the main Abbey Court school buildings area. The frequency of use would be fairly low, taking into account staff, deliveries and visitors, as detailed above. Although Templars Drive is not adopted the school have confirmed that they have a right of way over it (any financial matters regarding upkeep are not a material planning consideration). It is not intended that bulk deliveries would off-load within Templars Drive but that they would do this on the asphalt road within the site and then transfer goods to the buildings by tractor or similar, avoiding the need for any (infrequent) large vehicles to use the gravel section of the access way.

With regard to parking the three car and two minibus spaces within the site would be sufficient for the level of use envisaged, particularly as many visitors would come via the pedestrian route from Abbey Court School building and its existing parking facilities. It is recognised that there may be overflow onto local streets for occasional family opening days, however as these would be restricted to a maximum of 6 days per year (and the school parking facilities would also be open), on balance the impact of this is considered acceptable.

In summary there are no objections to the parking and highway impacts of the development including with regard to Policies T1, T2 and T13 of the Local Plan.

### *Other Matters*

There are a number of trees around the edges of the playing fields/site, many of which are protected by a Tree Preservation Order. In addition the school have recently planted approximately 400 saplings to supplement the existing trees, helping to enhance both the tree line, which limits views between the site and nearby residents, and to enhance wildlife. These trees are virtually all within the buffer areas of the site, between the stock fencing and the boundaries with neighbours, such that there would be minimal impact on them. There is no objection with regard to Policy BNE43 of the Local Plan.

No specific ecological information has been submitted with the application however as the majority of the site is a regularly mown playing field the development is likely to have negligible impact on protected species or habitats. A condition to require details of biodiversity enhancements is recommended in accordance with paragraph 118 of the NPPF.

The site is located within an area of broad archaeological potential and the development would have the potential to affect remains and deposits of archaeological interest. A condition to secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work is therefore recommended in accordance with Policy BNE21 of the Local Plan and paragraph 129 of the NPPF.

A condition to require details of any external lighting is recommended in order to ensure that light pollution would not harm local residents and with regard to Policy BNE5 of the Local Plan.

### *Local Finance Considerations*

There are no local finance considerations raised by this application.

### **Conclusions and Reasons for Approval**

In summary whilst the development would result in the loss of (currently unused) school playing fields, Abbey Court School consider that the proposed rural activities centre would best serve the education and development of their pupils who, due to their special needs, are unable to use the previous formal pitch facilities. In the specific and unusual circumstances the proposed development is therefore considered acceptable in principle. In addition the detailed impact of the proposed buildings and use are also considered acceptable including with regard to design, amenity, transport, trees, biodiversity and archaeology. Further details are awaited regarding surface water disposal and subject to these demonstrating that a solution can be found, approval is recommended including with regard to Policies BNE1, BNE2, BNE5, BNE21, BNE43, L3, T1, T2 and T13 of the Local Plan and Paragraphs 17, 56, 72, 74, 103, 118 and 129 of the NPPF.

As this recommendation is contrary to the objection from Sport England the application must be referred to the Secretary of State before a decision of approval can be issued.

*The application would normally be determined under delegated powers but is being referred to Planning Committee due to the extent of the representations received expressing a view contrary to the recommendation.*

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### **Background Papers**

The relevant background papers relating to the individual applications comprise: the applications and all supporting documentation submitted therewith; and items identified in any Relevant History and Representations section within the report.

Any information referred to is available for inspection in the Planning Offices of Medway Council at Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham ME4 4TR and here <http://publicaccess1.medway.gov.uk/online-applications/>