

A10

F/TH/15/0173

PROPOSAL: Change of use from dwelling to language school with ancillary residential accommodation

LOCATION: 65 WESTGATE BAY AVENUE, WESTGATE ON SEA, WESTGATE-ON-SEA, CT8 8SW

WARD: Westgate-on-Sea

AGENT: Designs Architecture Ltd

APPLICANT: London House School of English

RECOMMENDATION: **Approve**

Subject to the following conditions:

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

GROUND:

In accordance with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

- 2 The premises shall be used as a language school and for no other purpose including any other purpose in Class D1 of the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification.

GROUND:

As the proposed development would generate significant economic benefit to the local economy, in accordance with Policy T6 of the Thanet Local Plan, and in the interests of highway safety.

SITE, LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The site is located within the Westgate Conservation Area, in a predominantly residential street, close to the district centre of Westgate. Other uses within this main road include hotels, a church and a doctors surgery. The property which is the subject of this application is a large, semi-detached, 3-storey dwelling, located on the corner at the junction of Westgate Bay Avenue and Ethelbert Square. The adjoining semi-detached property has an existing use of a language school.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

No relevant planning history for site, however, the applicant has advised that prior to its existing use as a dwellinghouse the building was used as a hotel.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

London House School of English was founded in 1965 and previously had premises at 53 Sea Road. In 2010 it re-opened at 63 Westgate Bay Avenue (following a grant of planning permission), and the school employs up to 20 staff in the high season, nearly all of whom live locally. The applicant advises that the continued success of the school and growing numbers of students wanting to attend has prompted the need to expand the business. The school provides a variety of English courses, which focus on all aspects of English language learning.

Students first arrive in Westgate generally on a Sunday, and are dropped off by coach or minibus on the Royal Esplanade adjacent to the tennis courts where they are met by a member of staff. They are then collected by host families which they will be staying with. Student classes finish each day at 1pm, and afternoon activities begin at 2pm, which are usually held at local facilities. i.e. bowling, mini golf, cinema.

The proposal is for the change of use of the adjoining building from a single dwellinghouse to a language school, to provide additional classroom space, and student accommodation on the upper level when needed. The proposed language school will accommodate up to 100 additional pupils, and 14 new members of staff will be employed. In addition to this the applicant has advised that the number of local 'host' home stay families will be increased by between 160-200.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

Thanet Local Plan (2006)

H12 - Retention of Existing Housing Stock

T6 - Language Schools

D1 - Design

NOTIFICATIONS

Neighbouring occupiers notified. One letter received. The main concerns are:

- school has carried out work without planning permission,
- coaches have caused chaos by double parking in road,
- students block right of way.

Westgate CAAG - Do not oppose, and are pleased to note no external changes, no loss of front garden, and there do not appear to be any noise complaints that they are aware of.

CONSULTATIONS

KCC Highways and Transportation - I note that the existing school appears to operate as originally intended without any apparent problems on the highway, i.e. nearly all students and a significant proportion of staff appear to walk to/from the school and there are no apparent parking issues. The extended school is likely to operate in a similar fashion and I would therefore not recommend refusal on highway grounds. A condition should be applied restricting use to a language school only and preventing other uses under class D1, as applies to the existing school. This is because other uses under this class may have significantly different travel characteristics to the language school, with potentially many more associated vehicle trips to/from the site.

Conservation Officer - No objections

Environmental Health - On reviewing the above application I have noted that this is a dwelling that is only attached to the neighbouring language school 63 Westgate Bay Avenue. On checking systems, the complaint history for 63 Westgate Bay Avenue does not indicate any concerns where noise has affected residents in the nearby vicinity. Based on this information I conclude that Environmental Health have no comments to raise at this point.

COMMENTS

This application has been brought before planning committee as a departure to Thanet Local Plan Policy H12. The main issues are the principle of the development, and the impact upon the character and appearance of the area, living conditions and highway safety.

Principle

The existing property's lawful use is as a single dwelling house. Thanet Local Plan Policy H12 states that the loss of existing residential accommodation is not generally considered permissible. Exceptions to this are made, including where the continuation of a residential use of the premises is undesirable for reasons of incompatibility with adjacent uses, where a change of use would provide the best reasonable means of preserving a building of architectural or historic importance, where it relates to the provision of a community facility, or where it relates to a proposal in the Local Plan. Whilst the change of use of the property to a language school would be compatible with the adjoining language school use at 63 Westgate Bay Avenue, it could not be argued that the retention of the residential use is undesirable, and as no other criteria within the policy would apply, there is considered to be no initial justification for the loss of the existing residential accommodation. The proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to Thanet Local Plan Policy H12.

However, Policy T6 of the Thanet Local Plan supports applications for language schools, due to the contribution they make to the local economy, both in the short and long term. This is supported by a recent economic impact survey carried out

recently, which showed that in 2013 overseas students spent an estimated £33.6 million in the area, and that this spend supports 905 jobs. The proposed use will result in an additional 100 students and 14 members of staff, and would require the number of host families locally to be increased by 160-200. It is therefore acknowledged that the proposed use will have an economic tourism benefit locally, and therefore in my opinion in this instance the benefits of the proposed use of the property as a language school would outweigh the disbenefits of losing a residential dwelling. Therefore, subject to the impact upon the character and appearance of the area and neighbouring living conditions being considered acceptable, the proposed use would be acceptable in principle.

Character and Appearance

No external alterations are proposed and the Conservation Officer has raised no objections to the proposed scheme.

The proposal is to expand an existing language school, and whilst there are other language schools located within Westgate, there do not appear to be any within the immediate vicinity, and as such there is not considered to be a over-concentration of these uses to an extent that could affect the character and appearance of the area.

Living Conditions

The neighbouring language school accommodates approximately 100-120 pupils. Whilst the proposal would result in an additional 100 pupils being accommodated at the language school, there is no evidence to suggest that the impact upon neighbouring amenity would be significantly worse than that existing, and the site is located within an area where there are a variety of alternative uses, including a church, doctors surgery and hotels. Having spoken to Environmental Health there would appear to have been no noise complaints made by any neighbouring residential occupiers since the language school use commenced. The proposed use will also be in the semi-detached property adjoining the existing language school, and it is on a corner, so the nearest neighbouring residential property is to the rear of the site at least 10 metres away. It is therefore considered that, on balance, the impact on neighbouring living conditions is acceptable. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policies D1 and T6 of the Thanet Local Plan.

Transportation

No off-street car parking spaces are proposed, however, the school is within a couple of minutes walking distance of the town centre, sea front, railway station and bus stops. In addition the host families are all located within a maximum 10-15 minute walking distance of the site.

KCC Highways and Transportation have been consulted and have advised that the existing adjoining school appears to operate as originally intended without any apparent problems on the highway, i.e. nearly all students and a significant proportion of staff appear to walk to/from the school and there are no apparent parking issues. The proposed extended school is likely to operate in a similar

fashion and KCC would therefore not recommend refusal on highway grounds. They do recommend that a condition be applied restricting the proposed use to a language school only, preventing other uses under class D1, as applies to the existing school. This is because other uses under this class may have significantly different travel characteristics to the language school, with potentially many more associated vehicle trips to/from the site.

A letter of objection has been received which raises concern with coaches double parking and students blocking pavements. KCC Highways are not aware of any problems caused by the existing use, and only the one letter of objection has been received, suggesting that this is not a significant problem for neighbouring occupiers. Any inconvenience is likely to be of a temporary nature before or after lessons at the school, and the road is wide enough to allow any groups of students to disperse quickly.

Subject to the necessary safeguarding condition, KCC Highways and Transportation raise no objections to the proposed use. The impact on highway safety is therefore considered to be acceptable.

Conclusion

Whilst the proposal will result in the loss of an existing residential use, the proposed use is compatible with the adjoining language school use, and will further support the local economy. The impact upon the character and appearance of the area and neighbouring living conditions is considered to be minimal, and KCC Highways and Transportation have raised no objections. On balance, the tourism benefit for language schools as supported by Policy T6 of the Thanet Local Plan is considered to outweigh the concern regarding the loss of the existing residential use, and as such it is recommended that members approve the application as an acceptable departure to Thanet local Plan Policy H12.

CASE OFFICER
Emma Fibbens

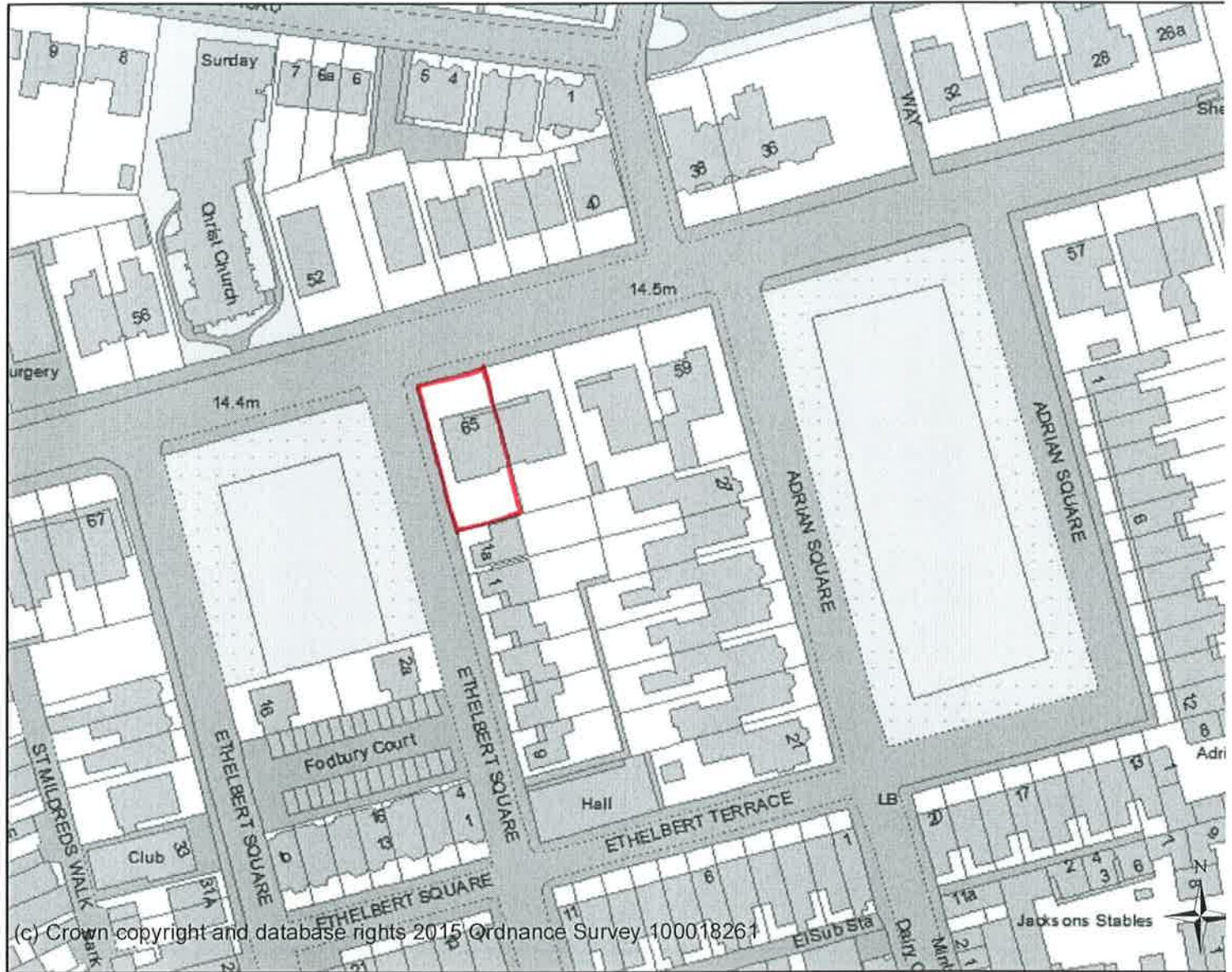
Title: F/TH/15/0173

Project name: 65 WESTGATE BAY AVENUE, WESTGATE

Notes:

Scale: 1:1,250

Author:



Legend

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65 WESTGATE BAY AVENUE, WESTGATE-ON-SEA

