



Delegated Report

Planning Application

Planning Application No: 20250863

Location: Gads Hill House School Gravesend Road Higham Rochester

Description: Retention of the Hewlett Pavilion and ancillary buildings on a permanent basis with associated external alterations.

Applicant: Mr Malcolm Gray

Site Visit Date: 19 September 2025

Submitted Documents/Plans

- Application form;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/100 Rev. A – Location Plan;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/101 Rev. A – Block Plan;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/110 – Existing Ground Floor & Roof Plan;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/111 – Existing South Elevations;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/112 – Existing West Elevation;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/113 – Existing North Elevations;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/114 – Existing East Elevations;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL115 – Existing Section through pavilion;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/120 – Proposed Ground Floor & Roof Plan;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/121 – Proposed South Elevations;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/122 – Proposed West Elevations;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL123 – Proposed North Elevations;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/124 – Proposed East Elevations;
- Drawing no. 5309/PL/125 – Proposed Section through pavilion;
- Revised Planning Statement;
- Revised Heritage Statement;
- Design & Access Statement;
- Landscape and Visual and Green Belt Assessment; and
- Drawing Register.

Superseded

- ~~Planning Statement;~~
- ~~Heritage Statement;~~

Relevant Planning History

Reference	Description	Decision	Decision Date
20200385	Retention of the Hewlett Pavilion on a permanent basis.	Refused	18.09.2020
		Appeal dismissed	18.05.2021

20160271	Retention of the single storey building (Hewlett Pavilion) to the south of the walled kitchen garden to provide five classrooms, offices and storerooms for a temporary period of three years, or until the senior school element of the approved building programme is complete.	Temporary permission	21.07.2016
20090076	Retention of the single storey building (Hewlett Pavilion) to the south of the walled kitchen garden to provide five classrooms, offices and storerooms for a temporary period.	Temporary permission	10.03.2009
20060385	Renewal of temporary planning permission reference number GR/2003/276 for erection of a single storey building to the south of the walled kitchen garden to provide five classrooms, offices and storerooms for a temporary period.	Temporary permission	03.07.2006
20030276	Erection of a single storey building to the south of the walled kitchen garden to provide five classrooms, offices and store rooms for a temporary period.	Temporary permission	20.10.2003

Development Plan

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale & Distribution of Development
- CS11 - Transport
- CS12 – Green Infrastructure
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Development & Design Principles
- CS20 – Heritage and the Historic Environment

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards
- TC2 – Listed Buildings

Paragraph 34 of the NPPF (2024) sets out that policies within adopted local plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years, and should then be updated as necessary. Such reviews are also a legal requirement as set out in Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012.

The Council undertook such a review in September 2019 and found that the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy is in need of a partial review in terms of Policy CS02, due to the increased need for housing since the Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted and the need to ensure that a sufficient land supply exists to meet this need. Whilst saved policies from the Local Plan 1st Review (1994) generally conform with the NPPF (2024), the Council will also seek to replace these.

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

- Section 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development
- Section 12 – Achieving Well-Designed Places
- Section 13 – Protecting Green Belt land
- Section 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Section 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- Design for Gravesham – Design Code (2024)
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009)

Emerging Local Plan as a Material Consideration

Paragraph 48 of the Framework makes it clear that planning applications can only be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. An emerging Local Plan, does not form part of the Development. The Framework, at Paragraph 49 allows local planning authorities to give weight to relevant policies in emerging Local Plans, according to:

- The stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);
- The extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and
- The degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the Framework, the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given to those policies.

West Oxfordshire District Council v Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government & Rosconn Strategic Land Ltd [2018] EWHC 3065 (Admin) is a High Court judgement that deals with the weight to be given to a Regulation 19 Local Plan. In this judgement the Court found that the weight to be given to an emerging Local Plan, was a matter of planning judgement, which had to be reached having fully considered the relevant part (Paragraph 49) of the Framework.

The Council's emerging Local Plan, is in the process of being consulted upon (it has reached Regulation 19 stage), the Council is not yet aware of whether third parties will support or object to specific policies within the Plan, or whether they will consider the policies with the emerging Local Plan to be broadly sound and consistent with the NPPF (2024). Taking this into consideration, one can only conclude that at this stage of the process, **limited (i.e. minimal) weight should be afforded to the emerging Regulation 19 Local Plan**. This position would only change once the emerging Local Plan has progressed towards submission and examination, with the Council being fully aware of policies that are subject to unresolved objections and with knowledge of policies that have had their soundness and conformity against the Framework challenged.

This approach accords with the approach taken in a separate High Court case, Gladman Developments Ltd v SSHCLG & Corby Borough Council; & Uttlesford DC [2020] EWHC 518 (Admin) and Court of Appeal [2021] EWCA Civ 104, which was also the subject of a Court of Appeal Ruling [2021] EWCA Civ 104.

Consultations, Publicity and Representations

Consultees

GBC Conservation Officer

The proposal does go some way to mitigating the harm caused by the existing roof colour and finish. This is assuming the sedum roof is properly planted and maintained and that the roof is structurally capable of taking the loads. I recently attended a site meeting where a sedum roof is to be planted with meadow flowers and is conditioned with the need to agree the type of plants and proper maintenance programme. I am sceptical about the success of sedum roofs (as opposed to green roofs that require a substantial supporting structure and a greater depth of soil) as they can look rather dead in the summer months (this may be why meadow flowers are proposed at the site referred to; the illustrations adopt a winter roof appearance when the roofs tend to flourish and look greener. Regarding the walls of the building you should consider screening these with an appropriate landscaping proposal to be agreed. The planting should follow the line of the picket fence that is just visible in the images. It could take on the form of a maintained privet or yew hedge and be grown and maintained to a height to conceal the walls of the pavilion, when seen from the upper windows of the house.

Providing the above is taken into account it can be reasoned that the harm has been successfully mitigated in accordance with local and national policy.

Historic England

Thank you for your letter of 3rd September 2025 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Background

Gads Hill House has been in use as an independent school since the early 1920s and several extensions to the site were made over the years to provide associated facilities.

In particular, in 2002, additional classrooms were urgently required. After failing to acquire a neighbouring property, the school resolved to construct a temporary structure, awaiting the development and construction of a new permanent building. Planning permission was granted in 2003 for a period of three years for the Hewlett Pavillion to the south-east of the listed building, providing five classrooms, offices and storerooms (ref: 20030276). This temporary consent was renewed in 2006 (ref: 20060385), and again in 2009 (ref: 20090076).

A wider scheme to improve facilities was conceived in 2010, including a new junior block and a senior block in the grounds of the listed building, with the intention of relocating classrooms from the Pavilion and converting Gads Hill Place into a Dickens Visitor Centre. Consent was granted (refs: 20070188 and 20070189) but only the junior block was eventually built.

In 2016, temporary planning permission was again secured for the retention of the Pavilion for three years or until the senior school element of the approved building programme was complete (ref. 20160271).

The construction of the senior block was finally deemed unviable and a subsequent application in 2020 for the permanent retention of the Pavilion was refused (ref: 20200385), with the appeal dismissed in 2021 (ref: APP/K2230/W/20/3261674), partly on heritage grounds. The Pavilion was considered, by virtue of its location, size, utilitarian appearance and bright materials, overly prominent and incongruous within the setting of Gads Hill Place, causing harm to the significance of the listed building and to the designated Shorne Woodlands, part of the Kent Downs National Landscape.

An alternative phased masterplan for the senior school was developed in 2022-23 but was not progressed beyond pre-application stage. The scheme included leasing the historic house to a charity as a heritage and educational resource, celebrating the life and work of Charles Dickens.

Historic England Advice

Significance of the Site

Gads Hill Place is a fine example of a late 18th-century, middling-sized country house, prominently located on a hilltop, which allows dramatic views of the Medway valley and surrounding countryside.

Originally built for Thomas Stevens, Mayor of Rochester, it became Charles Dickens's country retreat from 1857, for the last 14 years of his life. The renowned novelist was particularly fond of this house, having admired and aspired to own it since childhood. Here, in his preserved study, Dickens wrote many of his major works, including *Great Expectations*, whose opening scenes are set in the locality.

The author undertook many works both to the house and garden, including the construction of a large conservatory to the south-east of the the dining room, raising the floor of his bedroom above, and erecting a Swiss chalet in the wilderness accessed via a tunnel beneath the main road.

The association with one of greatest British novelist of the Victorian era gives the site exceptional historic and cultural significance on a national scale. This value, together with Gads Hill Place's architectural and

historic interest, is recognised in its grade I statutory listing.

Impact of the Proposal on Significance

The current proposal seeks retrospective permission for the permanent retention of the Hewlett Pavilion, following expiration of its latest temporary consent in 2019 (ref: 20160271).

The pavilion is a large, single-storey building of approximately 48m by 8.5m, clad in black shiplap, with a terracotta-effect Kingspan panels on the 6m high pitched roof. Located at a lower level in a relatively prominent location to the south-east of the main house, close to the former kitchen garden, the structure is clearly visible both to and from the listed mansion.

Notably, the Pavilion disrupts the house's 'noble prospect at the side and behind, looking down into the valley of the Medway,' as described by Dickens in a letter dated 9th February 1856, which is still appreciable from the reconstructed conservatory and Dickens' first floor bedroom on the south-east corner of the mansion.

Although, historically, the views were more open due to the absence of the intervening, relatively modern woods, the detractive presence of the Hewlett building across these sightlines would result in harm to its significance.

The Applicant proposes mitigation by replacing the roof panels with a sedum-covered flat section and recladding the Pavilion in natural vertical timber boarding, intended to weather to silver-grey. Visualisations in the submitted Heritage Impact Assessment (August 2025) indicate that this strategy would reduce the building's prominence and its distracting effect in views from the house towards the Medway valley. Accordingly, the harm would be reduced but not entirely removed.

Relevant Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024) sets out the government's policies for decision-making on planning proposals. Section 16 of the document specifies how the historic environment should be conserved and enhanced and makes it clear in paragraph 208 that conflicts between the conservation of the heritage asset and any aspect of the proposal should be avoided or minimised.

Paragraph 212 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on a heritage asset, local planning authorities should give great weight to preserving the asset's significance, and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.

The NPPF states that any harm or loss to the significance of a designated heritage asset, from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting, should require clear and convincing justification (paragraph 213). It also requires decision makers to determine whether the harm is substantial, or less than substantial. If the harm is deemed to be less than substantial, paragraph 215 requires the harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Relevant is also paragraph 210a, c which states that, in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Historic England Position on the Proposal

We consider that the permanent retention of the Hewlett Pavilion would cause some degree of less than substantial harm - under the NPPF - to the significance of this highly graded heritage asset, due to its impact on setting and historic views. While the proposed mitigation would reduce this harm, it would not remove it entirely.

It is for your Council to assess whether the harm has been sufficiently minimised and whether it can be outweighed by the public benefits delivered by the proposal, as required by paragraphs 208 and 215 of the Framework.

You should also be convinced that those benefits cannot be delivered by a more sympathetic long-term strategy for addressing the school's needs, while preserving the listed building's fabric and setting.

Recommendation

Historic England has concerns regarding the application on heritage grounds. In reaching a decision on this proposal, your Council will need to be satisfied that the benefits arising from the scheme are sufficient to outweigh the heritage harm.

We consider that the issues and safeguards outlined in our advice need to be addressed in order for the application to meet the requirements of paragraphs 210a,c and 212 of the NPPF.

In determining this application, you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Relevant is also section 85(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of National Landscapes.

Your authority should take these representations into account and seek safeguards, as set out in our advice. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us.

No response from:

- Higham Parish Council
- National Amenity Societies
- Ward Councillor

Neighbouring properties

12 surrounding properties were consulted plus site and press notices – overall consultation expiry date is 25.03.2026 – no responses received.

Officer's Analysis

The application site consists of the Hewlett Pavillion and ancillary buildings to the north, which is situated to the south-west of the main Gads Hill House Place.

The site is situated in the Green Belt, in the Shorne Woodland Landscape Character Area and Gads Hill House Place is a grade I listed building.

The proposal is for retention of the Hewlett Pavillion and ancillary buildings on a permanent basis with associated external alterations. These are:

- Replacing the existing red tiles with a green sedum roof to blend in with the surrounding vegetation – the sedum mix is to be confirmed; and
- Replacing the existing black shiplap timber cladding with vertical board on board natural timber cladding in a natural finish which it is said will gradually oxidise and turn silver-grey – timber species are to be confirmed.

It is the case that what is described as the Hewlett Pavillion consists of two groups of buildings. There is firstly the main 48m long building which provides five classrooms, IT office and main server for the upper school and toilets; a flat roofed extension built onto the east end of the pavilion has been used as a classroom and an office. Then there are the ancillary buildings which are the long line of low sheds north of the pavilion which are built into the retaining wall of Dicken's former kitchen garden and houses toilets, maintenance workshop, Combined Cadet Force office, science preparation, chemical store and kiln room.

The Hewlett Pavillion building was first granted temporary planning permission in 2003 under application ref. 20030276. It has subsequently been granted a further three temporary planning permissions with the last one (ref. 20160271) stating that the building needed to be removed within three years of the date of the permission (i.e. by 21 July 2019, or when the senior school permitted under application refs. 20070188 & 20070189 is first occupied). In 2020 the applicant submitted an application for the permanent retention of the Hewlett Pavillion (ref. 20200385). This was refused on 18.09.2020 on the following grounds:

1. *This proposal would result in the construction of a new building within the Green Belt. Such development is regarded as inappropriate development unless it meets any of the exceptions set out in paragraph 145 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019). The development would not meet any of these exceptions and would harm the openness of the Green Belt. In the absence of any very special circumstances to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, the proposal is considered to constitute inappropriate development, contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) and Policy CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014).*
2. *The proposal by virtue of the size, siting, design and materials of the Hewlett Pavilion building would be an overly prominent, incongruous and unsympathetic form of development harmful to the setting of the Grade I listed Gads Hill House School. As such the proposal would be contrary to Policies CS19 and CS20 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy, saved Policy TC2 of the Gravesham Local Plan First Review and sections 12 and 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework.*
3. *The site is within the Shorne Woodland designated landscape character area and the building would be detrimental to the landscape by introducing further built development on the site and by virtue of its size and materials would adversely affect the landscape character and natural beauty of the valued landscape. The development is contrary to Policy CS12 of the Borough Council's adopted Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (September 2014) which seeks to give long term protection to these areas.*

The applicant appealed this refusal to the Planning Inspectorate, and the Inspectorate dismissed the appeal on 18.05.2021. The Inspector agreed with the Council on grounds 1 (Green Belt) & 2 (Heritage) but did not agree on ground 3 (landscape).

This current application has been submitted which is again for retention of the Hewlett Pavillion and ancillary buildings to the north but with some external alterations to the building proposed.

It therefore needs to be seen whether the grounds of refusal nos. 1 (Green Belt) & 2 (Heritage) of application ref. 20200385 have been resolved (i.e. the two grounds of refusal that the Inspector upheld).

This is a good quality submission in respect of not only the suite of drawings submitted but also a Planning Statement, Heritage Statement, Design & Access Statement and Landscape and Visual and Green Belt Assessment.

Within the Design & Access Statement, an Options Appraisal states that four options have been explored for the Hewlett Pavillion. The four options that were explored are:

- Option 1: Remove the pavilion and relocate the classrooms elsewhere on the school site
- Option 2: Replace the pavilion with a new building located away from the house
- Option 3: Dismantle the pavilion, move it away from the house, and re-assemble the pavilion in the

new location to reduce its impact

- Option 4: Retain the pavilion, replace the roof and cladding to reduce its visual impact and harm on significance

Options 1, 2 & 3 are said to be unviable with option 4 being the only option which is said to be viable.

Option 1 (removing the pavilion and relocating the classrooms elsewhere on the school site) is said to be unviable because the condition of the house means it is physically impossible to relocate classrooms from the pavilion elsewhere in the school buildings as there is not enough spare classrooms suitable for conversion. It is said that even if it was possible to relocate into the mansion the specialist requirements of the classrooms in the pavilion would be likely to cause harm to the significance of the mansion. It is therefore said that the loss of the pavilion completely would therefore have a significant impact on the school.

Option 2 (replacing the pavilion with a new building located away from the house) which was the proposal put forward in the phased masterplan in PRE20230077 – downslope from the existing pavilion, further away from the house, screened from the house by mature trees is said to be unviable due to cost and prolongation. Given the existing site layout and large number of mature trees it is said that there are not many options where a new replacement building the size of Hewlett Pavillion could be sited. Historic England commented in the pre-application enquiry that although the proposed siting was an improvement on the existing situation, it is likely that the new building in such a location would still cause some harm to significance. It is said the cost for this option would be £3m excluding fees, contingency & VAT and due to the time it would take for the school to raise funding for structural repairs to the house and the new replacement building, this would lead to the prolongation of the expired temporary permission for the Hewlett Pavillion.

Option 3 (dismantle the pavilion, moving it away from the house, and re-assemble it in the new location) is also said to be unviable. The building would need to be divided back into parts, which could then be moved downslope to the location identified for option 2 but due to the length of the pavilion it would need to be divided into two buildings to fit the space available. It has been found that new steels would need to be introduced to strengthen the floor before the original primary steels can be cut, and before the building can be divided, lifted and moved which would add a level of complexity which would increase the time, cost and risk of relocating the pavilion. As would the need to relocate all of the service connections, including the IT server and fibre optic cable and it is said this would be challenging to execute this in the summer break. It is said temporary classrooms would then need to be rented as an additional precaution during the building works, adding to the project cost and Historic England's comments on option 2 would still stand with this option. Therefore, although more economic than option 2, it is said that option 3 is prohibitive due to its technical complexity and disruption to the activities of the school.

Option 4 (retain the pavilion, replace the roof and cladding and is the proposal which has been submitted in this application) is said to be the only option which is technically feasible, will cost significantly less than options 2 or 3 and it is said that arguably, after refurbishment, option 4 will have an impact on significance no worse than option 2 or option 3.

After setting out the details of the proposal, it will now be assessed whether the proposal for retention of the Hewlett Pavillion and ancillary buildings on a permanent basis with associated external alterations has addressed the grounds of refusal nos. 1 (Green Belt) & 2 (Heritage) of application ref. 20200385 (i.e. the two grounds of refusal that the Inspector upheld).

The principle issues in the determination of the application are:

- Whether the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
- The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
- The effect of the development on the setting of Gads Hill Place, a grade I listed building; and
- If the development is inappropriate, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special

circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Green Belt

This matter related to ground of refusal no. 1 of application ref. 20200385 and the Inspector agreed with this ground of refusal in the appeal decision.

The NPPF (2024) states at Paragraph 142 that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts and that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

At Paragraph 153 of the NPPF (2024) it is stated that, when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness.

Paragraph 154 of the NPPF (2024) states that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the exceptions given in 154 (a) – (h) applies. Furthermore, paragraph 155 states that the development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where all of the criteria listed in 155 (a) – (d) are met.

Whether the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt

Paragraph 154 of the NPPF (2024) states that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the following exceptions applies

a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;

b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;

e) limited infilling in villages;

f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and

g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

h) Other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

i. mineral extraction;

ii. engineering operations;

iii. local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;

- iv. the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;*
- v. material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and*
- vi. development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.*

Clearly (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) (g) and (h) do not apply in this instance as the proposal is not for agriculture or forestry, is not appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries, burial grounds or allotments, is not extension or alteration of an existing building, a replacement building, limited infilling in a village, affordable housing, limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, mineral extraction, engineering operations, local transport infrastructure, the re-use of buildings, a material change in the use of the land or development, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

The agent states in the Planning Statement that the development complies with paragraph 154 (g) as it meets the definition of 'limited infilling', which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt. However, 154 (g) is 'limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt'. The application site is not previously developed land however. The definition of previously developed land in the NPPF Glossary is:

Land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed). It also includes land comprising large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed. Previously developed land excludes: land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill, where provision for restoration has been made through development management procedures; land in built-up areas such as residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape.

The land of the application site did not have any permanent structure on it prior to the Hewlett Pavillion being erected. As such the application site is not previously developed land.

It is therefore considered that the proposal does not meet any of the exceptions of paragraph 154 of the NPPF (2024) and therefore the proposal represents 'inappropriate' development in the Green Belt which is by definition harmful.

Grey Belt

Having concluded the development does not meet any of the exceptions of paragraph 154 of the NPPF (2024) consideration of paragraph 155 of the NPPF (2024) now needs to be considered which discusses grey belt land and states:

"The development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where all the following apply:

- a. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;*
- b. There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;*
- c. The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and*

d. Where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157 below."

(A) The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan

The definition of 'grey belt land' is set out in the Glossary of the NPPF (2024) and is defined as:

"Grey belt: For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development."

It therefore needs to be considered whether the site can be defined as constituting grey belt land by assessing whether the site strongly contributes to purposes (a), (b) and (d) of the Green Belt or not.

The application site is not considered to play an important role in ensuring that development does not sprawl further east, there would still be a large gap between Higham and Strood which is the nearest large built-up area to the east. It is therefore considered that the application site does not strongly constitute to purpose (a) of the Green Belt (checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas).

The application site on its own is not considered to play an important role in ensuring Gravesend and Strood (which is the two nearest neighbouring towns) do not merge into one another as there would still be a large gap between the two. It is therefore considered that the application site does not strongly constitute to purpose (b) of the Green Belt (preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another).

Gravesend is an old town in origin and has a number of historic buildings however, the application site itself is not considered to play an important role in preserving the setting and special character of the town. It is therefore considered that the application site does not strongly contribute to purpose (d) of the Green Belt (preserving the setting and special character of historic towns).

As such the site is not considered to strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b) or (d) in paragraph 143 of the NPPF (2024). In addition, the proposal would not affect areas or assets in foot note 7 of the NPPF (2024) (other than Green Belt). The development is therefore considered to be on grey belt land.

The proposed development would result in a new building and the spatial and visual impacts of the proposed development would result in a small loss of Green Belt openness. However, the development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt across Gravesham. Therefore, the proposal would comply with criterion (a) of paragraph 155 of the NPPF (2024).

(B) There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed

The applicant highlights how there is a need for the Hewlett Pavillion. It is stated that if the Hewlett Pavillion is removed the school would not be able to relocate the classroom space anywhere else on the site.

Gads Hill Place – It is said that Gads Hill Place is not fit for purpose as an educational building. A structural report carried out in summer 2025 identifies areas of the building that are not adequate to withstand the recommended loading for classrooms and a number of recommendations are made. This includes some areas of the building not being used at all or being used at less capacity. This therefore severely limit's the school's options for relocating classrooms from the Hewlett Pavillion. The report advises that there are likely to be significant implications to the integrity of the existing building were it to be continued for use as a school building beyond 5 years from the date of the survey. The main house cannot therefore be used for relocated classrooms from the Pavillion as it lacks the sufficient space and facilities

and is not structurally sound.

Senior School – The Senior School permitted as part of application refs. 20070188 & 20070189 has never been built as it was not financially viable. This was meant to provide permanent accommodation for the classrooms replacing the Hewlett Pavillion and release Gads Hill Place for a Dickens Visitor Centre. The masterplan project for the redevelopment of a more permanent complex so the temporary buildings can be replaced, is currently on hold largely due to a lack of funding, design changes and alterations required for the masterplan. The Hewlett Pavillion provided essential educational space during construction of the junior school and continues to in light of the Senior School delay and with the delay in the development of alternative permanent buildings on the site – Gads Hill cannot afford to lose these facilities;

All other buildings on the site are said to be at 'timetable capacity' and also have no room for the classrooms that would need to be relocated from the Hewlett Pavillion.

It is stated that any future redevelopment of the school site would include the crucial refurbishment of the grade I listed Gads Hill Place, the suitability of which for continued operation for educational purposes in the long term is under ongoing review. It is said that in the absence of solidified redevelopment plans, the temporary buildings on the site are now very important to provide necessary educational space and maintain the long-term viability of the school. The school cannot at this time relocate the classrooms from the Hewlett Pavillion to any of the other existing buildings on the site.

It was discussed above how four options were considered as part of the options analysis of addressing the matter of the Hewlett Pavillion but only the current one which has been submitted is an option for the school.

This is the only site for the school and there are no other sites where the classrooms in the Hewlett Pavilion could be relocated.

It is stated that the loss of the Hewlett Pavillion would result in the school not being able to meet standards requiring a broad and balanced provision of subjects and reduce their ability to teach the required elements of the GCSE curriculum. The loss of the building may result in the need to reduce pupil numbers which would mean a loss of funding to keep the school running and could ultimately lead to the closure of the school with the loss of over 100 staff and students having to move schools which would cause huge disruption which may be detrimental to their education and progress.

The application therefore sets out in great detail the need for the Hewlett Pavillion. It is therefore considered that there is a demonstrable unmet need for the classroom provision which the Hewlett Pavillion provides. There are not any other sites outside the Green Belt to meet the classroom need and there is no other provision on site where it can be re-allocated. Essentially, the Hewlett Pavillion provides essential classroom provision which cannot be re-allocated anywhere else, not in the Senior School as there is said to be no room nor in the Gads Hill House as there is also no room but also it is pivotal that as required by the s106 agreement attached to application ref. 20070188, Gads Hill House ceases being used as a school and is turned into the Dicken's visitor centre. Further to this is the fact that the protection of this grade I listed building is paramount and the use of the building as a school is, and will continue to, cause great damage to the integrity of this listed building.

Overall, it is considered that there is a demonstrable unmet need at a national level for the electricity infrastructure which is proposed. Therefore, the proposal would comply with criterion (b) of paragraph 155 of the NPPF (2024).

(C)The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework.

The application site is located within the school grounds, it is not a completely new school proposed but additional provision in the form of classrooms etc for an existing school. As such the site is considered to be in a sustainable location. Therefore, the proposal would comply with criterion (c) of paragraph 155 of the NPPF (2024).

(D) Where applicable the development proposed meets the ‘Golden Rules requirements set out Paragraphs 156-157

The proposed development is not major development involving the provision of housing and therefore criterion (d) is not applicable to this proposal.

As the proposal meets the requirements of (a), (b) and (c) of paragraph 155 (and (d) does not apply) it is not inappropriate development and therefore the proposal is compliant with Policy CS02 (LPCS) and section 13 of the NPPF (2024).

It is therefore considered that the proposal has now addressed ground of refusal no. 1 of application ref. 20200385 and the Inspector’s views on this matter.

It is now necessary to assess all of the other principle considerations in the assessment of the proposal.

Design, Character and Appearance and impact on the setting of the grade I listed Gads Hill House

This matter related to ground of refusal no. 2 of application ref. 20200385 and the Inspector agreed with this ground of refusal in the appeal decision.

In summary, the Inspector did not consider that the Hewlett Pavillion resulted in a demonstrable loss of appreciation of the view described by Dickens of the house having a ‘noble prospect to the side and behind, looking down into the valley of the Medway’, due to the existing landscaping around the side garden.

The Inspector did state the issue was the cumulative harm to the significance of the listed building in combination with the other development that has taken place or has been permitted within the grounds. The Inspector noted how ‘the setting of the listed building has undoubtably changed significantly since the time of Charles Dickens occupation’...and that ‘the recent construction of a large modern primary school building and the infrastructure associated with the use of the site as a school, including the provision of playgrounds, playing fields and tennis courts has significantly altered the overall character of the site and the grounds to the side, in particular, are dominated by the new school’. The Inspector stated that the existing buildings have ‘cluttered the setting of the listed building and eroded the views referred to by Charles Dickens. Therefore, the appeal scheme would compound this, as it would result in another structure visible from the grounds of the listed building. The impact would be all the more due to the utilitarian appearance of the building and the bright red roof covering.’

In this new application, the proposal is still for retention of the Hewlett Pavillion but some changes are proposed. These are:

- Replacing the existing red tiles with a green sedum roof to blend in with the surrounding vegetation; and
- Replacing the existing black shiplap timber cladding with vertical board on board natural timber cladding in a natural finish which it is said will gradually oxidise and turn silver-grey – timber species are to be confirmed.

The Conservation Officer advises that the proposal does go some way to mitigating the harm caused by the existing roof colour and finish but this is assuming the sedum roof is properly planted and maintained and that the roof is structurally capable of taking the loads. The Conservation Officer states that they recently attended a site meeting where a sedum roof is to be planted with meadow flowers and is conditioned with the need to agree the type of plants and proper maintenance programme. They are sceptical about the success of sedum roofs (as opposed to green roofs that require a substantial supporting structure and a greater depth of soil) as they state they can look rather dead in the summer months (this may be why meadow flowers are proposed at the site referred to). They advise that the submitted illustrations adopt a winter roof appearance when the roofs tend to flourish and look greener.

The Conservation Officer also advises that consideration should be given to screening the walls of the building with an appropriate landscaping proposal to be agreed. The planting should follow the line of the picket fence that is just visible in the images. It could take on the form of a maintained privet or yew hedge and be grown and maintained to a height to conceal the walls of the pavilion, when seen from the upper windows of the house.

The Conservation Officer advised that providing the above is taken into account it can be reasoned that the harm has been successfully mitigated in accordance with local and national policy.

Officers also shared the same concerns regarding the planting on the sedum roof throughout the year. In both the originally submitted Heritage Statement & Design & Access Statement it was stated that the sedum mix is to be confirmed. The agent was asked to provide confirmation that the sedum roof will be evergreen planting and that to ensure this confirmation detail is included in the application documents rather than confirming by e-mail they were asked if the Heritage Statement & the Design & Access Statement could be amended at the parts where it is stated that the sedum mix is to be confirmed, and instead provide the details that the mix will include evergreen planting please. They were advised that suitable conditions would then be attached to address the matters raised by the Conservation Officer.

Following this, the agent provided a revised Heritage Statement & Design & Access Statement and within both of these it is stated that the sedum mix will be evergreen. It is also stated that the roof is structurally sound (which a structural engineer has confirmed is the case) and that consideration will be given to the screening of the walls with appropriate landscaping with planting to follow the line of the picket fence.

It is therefore known that the sedum roof would be evergreen planting however, no details of the type of plants to be used have been submitted. It would also need to be known what the maintenance programme would be for the planting, as well as details of landscaping for the screening of the walls of the building. It is considered that such details could be conditioned and that subject to obtaining these details, this would greatly improve the appearance of the Hewlett Pavillion and soften its impact. Firstly, the bright red tiles would be replaced with a sedum roof which make the building much less visible and now it has been confirmed that evergreen plants would be used, mean it would look bright all year round not just in the summer. Secondly, the replacement of the black shiplap timber cladding with vertical board on board natural timber cladding in a natural finish is a much more sympathetic wall covering and for added mitigation, a landscaping scheme would also be conditioned to conceal the walls.

Overall therefore with the sympathetic materials for the wall and roof in terms of natural timber cladding and a sedum roof respectively, together with the additional landscaping for the walls, the building would be much less visible all year round and thereby the impact on the setting of the grade I listed building would be greatly reduced. The Inspector stated that the site has cluttered the setting of the grade I listed building and significantly altered its character with the large Junior School and the infrastructure associated with the use of the site as a school, including the provision of playgrounds, playing fields and tennis courts. Out of all of these the Hewlett Pavillion is not the most dominant, it is much smaller than the Junior school and with the changes proposed it would be much less visible than the Junior School and all the other buildings, playgrounds, parking areas etc.

As such on balance it is considered that the proposed changes, details of which would be subject to condition, would mean that the Hewlett Pavillion building would not have a harmful impact on the setting of the grade I listed Gads Hill House building and the proposal in respect of design, character and appearance including the impact on the setting of the grade I listed Gads Hill House, would be compliant with Policies CS19 and CS20 (LPCS) and saved Policy TC2 (LPFR).

It is therefore considered that the proposal has now addressed ground of refusal no. 2 of application ref. 20200385 and the Inspector's views on this matter.

Landscape Character

This matter related to ground of refusal no. 3 of application ref. 20200385 and the Inspector did not agree

with this ground of refusal in the appeal decision.

Section 15 of the NPPF (2024) highlights the importance of conserving and enhancing the natural environment, one aspect of which is the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes. Policy CS12 (LPCS) states that the overall landscape character and valued landscapes within the Borough will be conserved, restored and enhanced and that proposals will take account of the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment.

The application site is within the Shorne Woodland Landscape Character Area. The Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment demonstrates the qualities which make the landscape area special and underpins Policy CS12 of the Local Plan Core Strategy which seeks to conserve and enhance its quality.

The Inspector stated:

... 'The siting of the building within established school grounds close to the existing junior school results in a development which is viewed within the context of the site, which is identifiably a school. Therefore, given the siting of the pavilion within the established school site, any wider views from the character area would be limited and would be viewed against the backdrop of the existing built development on the site.

Nor would the development have an adverse effect on the rural character of the wider area, taking into account its setting within the educational use of the site as a whole. The appeal site does not contribute to the distinctive features identified within the GCA and the removal of the pavilion would not lead to any longer term reinforcement of the wooded character, as it would remain part of the wider school grounds.

26. I therefore conclude that the proposal would not have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area and would comply with Policy CS12 of the CS which seeks to conserve, restore or enhance the landscape character of areas identified within the GCA.'

As such the views of the Inspector are noted and accepted. In any case this current proposal would have much less impact on the previous proposal for retention of the building as it is as, as a sedum roof is now proposed and more sympathetic cladding and conditions will be attached to secure landscaping to conceal the walls. The proposal is therefore considered in respect of landscape character and compliant with Policy CS12 (LPCS).

Other Matters

Neighbouring Amenity

As before, it is considered that due to the distance of the building from any neighbouring properties the proposal would not cause any impact on the amenity of any neighbouring properties. As such, in respect of neighbouring amenity the proposal is compliant with Policy CS19 (LPCS).

Parking and Highways

As before, there is ample parking provision on site and the proposal does not affect this. In respect of parking and highways the proposal is considered compliant with saved Policy P3 (LPFR).

Any Other Material Planning Considerations

None.

Conclusion

This re-submitted application for retention of the Hewlett Pavillion but with the changes of replacing the existing red tiles with a green sedum roof and the existing black shiplap timber cladding with vertical board on board natural timber cladding in a natural finish, subject to conditions, would now be acceptable and

resolve the grounds of refusal of previous application ref. 20200385.

Subject to conditions as discussed, it would now not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and has therefore resolved ground of refusal no. 1 and would not harm the setting of the grade I listed Gads Hill House and has therefore resolved ground of refusal no. 2. The Inspector did not agree with the Council on ground of refusal no. 3 and so the proposal would have been deemed acceptable in respect of landscape character in any case, but it so happens that with the proposed changes the building would not have a harmful impact on landscape character. The proposal remains acceptable as before in respect of neighbouring amenity and parking and highways.

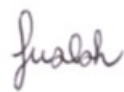
The proposal is compliant with local and national planning policy.

The applicant has advised that they require until August 2027 to implement the permission due to sourcing materials and the school calendar, this has been discussed with Planning Enforcement, and they have advised that whilst not ideal this can be accepted. It will therefore be conditioned that details shall be submitted within 6 months of this approval and the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details no later than 31 August 2027.

Recommendation

Permission

(For detailed conditions and informatives, see draft Decision)

Case Officer:	Ms Rebecca Harrison	Team Leader:	Mrs Faye Walsh
Signed:	<i>Rebecca Harrison</i>	Signed:	
Dated:	12 June 2026	Dated:	18 June 2026