



# New school for Graven Hill, Bicester

## School specification document for potential sponsors of a new primary school in Graven Hill, Bicester, Oxfordshire

### Section 1: Introduction and context

Oxfordshire County Council has identified the need to establish a new primary school in Bicester to open in September 2021. Under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the 'free school presumption') where a local authority identifies the need to establish a new school it must, in the first instance, seek proposals to establish an academy.

(The local authority led free school presumption is a different route to the DfE's free school programme. Further information about how to establish a new school via the DfE's free school programme route can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/opening-a-free-school>.)

The new school will chiefly serve a permitted new housing development of 1,900 homes south of Bicester, construction of which is underway. This school forms part of the strategic planning for additional school capacity to meet the expected growth in pupil numbers arising from housing growth included in the Cherwell Local Plan for Bicester.

A public consultation ran between 13 June – 24 July 2018, seeking to gain feedback and engagement with the proposed education specification for this new school. The consultation received 19 responses which were considered and used to help shape the school specification design.

**The authority is therefore seeking proposals from appropriate providers to sponsor this new school. The new school would be deemed a free school. Section 9 sets out how potential sponsors can apply.**

### 1.1 Planned housing growth in Bicester

Bicester and its surrounding area is planned to grow by over 12,000 homes over the next 20 to 25 years. The largest housing developments underway or approved in the adopted Cherwell Local Plan (Shown on the map on page 4 of this specification) are:

- Graven Hill – approximately 1,900 homes with this new primary school

- South West Bicester – approximately 2,500 homes with new primary and secondary schools
- The North-West Bicester eco-town – approximately 6,000 homes with new primary and secondary schools
- Upper Heyford – approximately 2,400 homes with expansion of Heyford Park (all-through) Free School
- South East Bicester – approximately 1,500 homes with a new primary school

There are also smaller developments proposed, including for surrounding villages such as Ambrosden, which may affect demand for school places in Bicester.

## **1.2 School capacity planning for Bicester**

Oxfordshire County Council is planning school capacity strategically across Bicester to meet the needs of the recent and planned housing growth, as well as the existing population growth.

The number of extra children needing school places will depend on the size, type and timing of the houses, but current forecasts indicate that between 2017 and 2024 the number of primary pupils in the Bicester area will grow by 1,000 and the number of secondary pupils by 900, with significant further growth in the longer term.

This growing population will need new schools:

- Graven Hill is expected to generate up to 2.5 form entry equivalent of pupils at its peak.
- SW Bicester – St Edburg’s Primary School relocated and expanded in 2016; a new primary school is included within the Phase 2 site, currently expected to open in the early 2020s, growing to 2 form entry. A new secondary school is also due to open.
- NW Bicester – based on current data, three (possibly four) primary schools will be required as well as a secondary school. The first primary school is part of the exemplar site, and opens in September 2018; the timings of subsequent school will depend on the progress of the housing development.
- SE Bicester will require a new 2 form entry primary school.
- The Upper Heyford development has already provided an all-through free school, which would be expected to expand in line with population.

## **Section 2: The Graven Hill Village development**

Graven Hill Village is a unique development, of 1,900 homes that will be self- and custom-built. The developer (Graven Hill Village Development Company, GHVDC), is wholly owned by Cherwell District Council, which has purchased land for the village from the Ministry of

Defence. As this is an innovative model for a local-authority to deliver affordable homes, the site is gaining significant attention from both national media and other local authorities. This attention is set to increase as more homes are built and because the village is the subject of a special season of the TV series 'Grand Designs', to be aired in early 2019.

Graven Hill Village is being developed with extensive open space, which includes a large wooded hill at the centre of the village, parks and playgrounds, allotments, playing fields, a network of cycle and footpaths and amenity spaces. The primary school sits within the village's centre, which will include a small supermarket, shops, a village green, pub, community centre and potentially other amenities such as medical centre or fitness facilities. The village will be connected to Bicester Village Train Station and town centre by improved roads and cycle lanes.

Once complete Graven Hill Village will consist of 30% affordable housing and 70% custom and self-built. The plots being sold for self-build range from small starter home 'pocket plots' aimed at first time buyers on median incomes, to large plots for 5 bed detached houses. Most plots are designed for 3-4 bed detached homes of similar size to nearby newbuild developments. GHVDC sells plots of land to individual purchasers and supports them throughout planning and foundation building. Once a house's foundations are built, owners have two years to finish the construction of their home. Purchasers can choose their involvement in their house build, from physically building their home entirely by themselves, to hiring an architect, builder and project manager deliver their home, to purchasing a complete 'tailor-made' home with bespoke layout and finishes directly from GHVDC.

GHVDC is encouraging purchasers to adopt cutting-edge designs and construction methods for UK housing. They advocate the use of highly energy efficient materials, renewable energy generation, the highest quality modular construction methods and contemporary designs which fit in with modern life. All homes built at Graven Hill Village are required to comply with Fabric Energy Standards, which are in excess of the Building Regulations requirements and are unique to the development. GHVDC are building many of the affordable homes to PassivHaus standard, the most rigorous energy efficiency standard for ultra-low energy buildings. The first phase of plots at the site were released in summer 2016, and the first families are moving to the village now. Homes will continue to be built on the site for the next 10 years. Self and custom build houses are expected to be completed at a rate of 200 per year, with affordable homes being ready.

The Cherwell Local Plan policy Bicester 2 requires that the development includes an on-site primary school. A site has been secured for the school in the new development as shown in the plan on page 4 of this specification.

An important characteristic of the development is that a significant proportion of purchasers at Graven Hill are moving to Bicester from elsewhere in the UK in order to build their own home. Early indications suggest that the majority of children will be changing schools as they move into the village, and many will be new to the Oxfordshire school system. A further

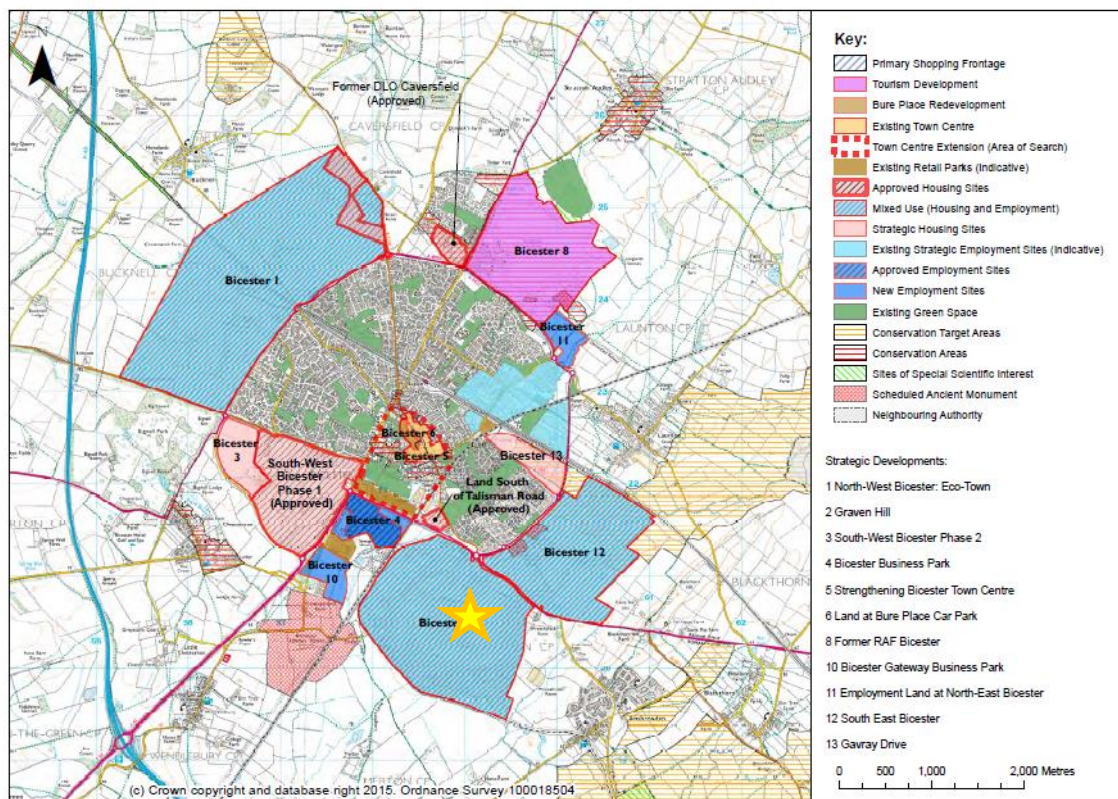
complication is uncertainty in when families will move to the village: after a plot is purchased, families may take between 2 months and 2 years to complete their home and move to the village. GHVDC is setting up an expression of interest list from purchasers to determine the age profile of the families moving to the area that would like to attend the new school, and an estimate of when they expect to move to the village.

An academy sponsor is sought who will ensure not only a successful school, but one which fully responds to the unique opportunities and circumstances of this development.

### Plan of the Graven Hill Village development



## Map of Bicester planned development



Further information on the Graven Hill development can be found from the developers' website: [www.gravenhill.co.uk](http://www.gravenhill.co.uk)

## Section 3: Size and type of school

The new primary school at Graven Hill will be designed and built by the developer, GHVDC, to Oxfordshire County Council's specification. It is expected to open in September 2021, although this date may be amended subject to the continued speed of delivery of housing on this development. There is expected to be sufficient primary school capacity in the town for families moving in to Bicester before that date, as a result of the previous school capacity expansion.

The school's catchment is expected to be primarily the Graven Hill strategic development area, but could draw from a wider area to meet population pressures to the south of Bicester. The nearest postcode to the school's location at the current time is OX25 2AQ.

The unique nature of the Graven Hill development increases the uncertainty about the precise scale and timing of the population growth which will result. The school will initially be constructed as a 2 form entry 2-11 primary school, providing capacity for 420 primary places (Reception – Year 6) and 90 (fte) nursery places.

The total site area secured, and the buildings's key core facilities, enable the school to expand to 2.5 form entry or even 3 form entry if required in the longer term. However, sponsors should not assume any certainty over the timing for such expansion.

Families moving to Graven Hill have identified that a key priority for the school will be to open as many year groups as possible from the outset. This will need to be balanced against financial realities, but a flexible approach to mixed age teaching would be welcomed, to ensure the school can respond to the growth in local school-age population, including children who move to the development after the normal age of starting school.

Proposers will be expected to demonstrate realistic planning for growth in the circumstances of Graven Hill, including how they will ensure the needs of new residents of the development are met without promoting or encouraging a large-scale relocation of existing pupils from other schools. An academy sponsor is sought who will ensure not only a successful school, but one that fully responds to the unique opportunities and challenges of this development.

The school will be co-educational. The county council does not have a view as to whether it should have a faith designation.

The new school will be included within the county council's coordinated admission scheme, but the successful sponsor will be responsible for consulting on, and publishing, its specific admissions policy. Information about Oxfordshire's school admissions and home-to-school transport is available at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/school-admission-rules-and-policies](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/school-admission-rules-and-policies).

## **Section 4: Educational Vision**

Oxfordshire County Council's vision is for an autonomous and self-improving education system; we are committed to enabling schools and settings to promote excellence and lead their own improvement. This is set within the context of a well-planned continuum of provision from birth to 25 that meets the needs of children and young people in Oxfordshire. Our ultimate purpose is to improve attainment, achievement and well-being, including the progression into employment for young people, by developing collective capacity in the county.

An academy sponsor is sought to work with the county council to achieve this vision. In particular, prospective sponsors will need to demonstrate how they will help meet the following outcomes. Applicants should already be an approved sponsor, but can apply to become an approved sponsor at the same time as submitting an application to sponsor a presumption free school.



## **4.1 High Educational Quality and Standards**

The school should:

- Provide sustainably good or outstanding education with an exciting and inspiring broad and balanced curriculum.
- Rigorously focus on educational standards to ensure that every child achieves their potential, and goals and national expectations are met or exceeded.
- Ensure an inclusive learning environment in which all pupils, including those with special or additional educational needs and those with disabilities, are supported and enabled to make appropriate progress.
- Develop a strong moral and caring ethos, ensuring care and support for the whole child.
- Seek out and share best practice within and beyond the school, promoting innovation and creativity in learning and teaching.
- Draw upon the local environment and community as resources for education.
- Maintain outstanding and dynamic leadership, management and governance.
- Attract, retain and develop the highest quality teachers and support staff to ensure good or better teaching and learning, and effective and motivated workforces.

## **4.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners and Children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities**

The school should:

- Promote inclusive opportunities for the most vulnerable children and have a strong focus on equalities, early intervention, and supporting the needs of the local community.
- Provide specialist support to address each learner's specific needs and to improve their progress.
- Provide a learning environment for learners to benefit from specialist small group teaching and interventions as part of a personalised learning programme.
- Ensure suitably qualified and trained staff to deliver quality teaching and learning experiences for children with special educational needs, and support for their families.

## **4.3 Safeguarding, Well-being and Community Development**

A key component of selection will be the proposers' willingness to work in collaboration with other providers and local partners to develop services which meet the needs of local children, young people and families in a coordinated way.

The school should:

- Work in partnership with the county council and other educational providers to contribute towards meeting the collective responsibility to secure the best for all Oxfordshire's learners, including participating in school-to-school support, and a commitment to cooperating with Fair Access protocols.
- Implement strategies to ensure that attendance of children matches the attendance rates of the highest performing authorities.
- Support the strategic responsibilities of the county council to ensure sufficiency of high quality school places and improved educational outcomes through agreed sharing of data and information.
- Engage parents/carers in supporting and encouraging their children's learning. The school will also be expected to contribute towards meeting local needs for wraparound care and childcare.
- Support the county council in delivering effective early intervention services, ensuring school readiness and supporting our most vulnerable learners and families.
- Work in partnership with wider services such as social care services, health and police to keep children safe, support families and build stronger communities.
- Be outward facing from the outset, playing a key role within its immediate community and the wider local economy, including through opening up facilities to the community, participating in community activities, and encouraging the local community to contribute to school life.
- Be an active participant in local initiatives such as the Bicester Healthy New Town programme.
- Develop strategic alliances, partnerships and networks to better meet the needs of children and families in the Bicester area.

## **Section 5: Education Plan**

Prospective sponsors should submit details of:

- An ambitious, broad and balanced, deliverable curriculum plan which is consistent with the vision and pupil intake.
- The school's approach to: PSHE; citizenship; education for sustainable development; the Prevent Duty; safeguarding and welfare; and promoting fundamental British values (democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs).
- Enrichment and extended services, for example, breakfast clubs, sports clubs, homework clubs and music/art clubs.
- Strategies for measuring pupil performance effectively and setting challenging targets.
- Rigorous processes of self-evaluation and continual improvement, including recognising the importance of Pupil Voice in these processes.



- How the school will seek out and share best practice within and beyond the school.
- A staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum within the expected income levels, with a focus on outstanding teaching (including strategies for recruitment, retention and effective performance management).
- Strategies for ensuring that the needs of all children are fully provided for, and that the school will be fully inclusive.
- How the new school will support the collective responsibility to educate Oxfordshire's children and young people.
- Strategies for ensuring safeguarding responsibilities are met.
- How the school will create a culture supportive of physical and mental well-being.
- How the school will encourage all users of the school to make active and sustainable travel choices when travelling to the school.
- What actions the school will take to embed itself in the new village community of Graven Hill, as well as in the wider Bicester context.
- Groups and organisations seen as being key partners, and plans for engagement and joint-working with those partners both during the pre-opening period and after opening.

## **Section 6: Capacity and Capability**

Prospective sponsors should demonstrate:

- Their prior experience of successfully providing the nature of education required in this specification.
- The resources available to support the development of the new school by the opening date.
- Clear evidence of the skills and abilities necessary to set up and then run a school effectively, including: managing school finances; leadership; project management; marketing; human resources; safeguarding; and health and safety.
- How the school would be organised and what the management and governance arrangements would look like, including a diagram of the proposed structures.

## **Section 7: Funding and Cost**

Under Section 106 of the Town and County Planning Act, 1990, the county council has negotiated a site of approximately 3ha for the school. The school will be designed and built by the developer, GHVDC.

The school site will be owned by Oxfordshire County Council, and is expected to be made available to the academy on a 125-year lease, with the usual terms pursuant to the 2010 Academies Act.

School start-up costs will be provided by the county council to the total of £66,000 for pre-opening costs and £280,000 for post-opening costs, the phasing of these payments being agreed through negotiation between the county council and the successful sponsor. This is based on the school being a 2-form entry school. If, as a result of local population growth, the county council requires the school to grow to 2.5 form entry, a further phase of post-opening funding up to £75,000 would be made available towards the additional revenue costs incurred during expansion.

The Department for Education will provide a one-off grant payment of £25,000 to the successful sponsor to cover the legal costs incurred in establishing the new free school.

## **Section 8: Impact and Equalities Assessments**

As prescribed by section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 and section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the local authority must assess the potential impact of any new school on existing educational provision in the area. The local authority must also consider whether the new school would impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

The provision of a new school at Graven Hill is necessary as the scale of growth is expected to generate more pupils than could be accommodated through expansion of existing nearby schools, and a new school in the heart of significant new housing developments is considered to be an important element of community building.

Taking into account the high level of housing growth in Bicester and the forecast sustained increase in pupil numbers, the impact of the proposed new primary school is not likely to be significant in the medium to long term. In the short-term, there may be some turbulence in pupil numbers at local schools, as patterns of parental preference shift in reaction to the new provision. However, it is not considered that this would be sufficient to threaten the viability of any existing schools.

The county council has sought to minimise any risks to the existing schools by writing into the school specification that the eventual sponsors will manage school growth in such a way as to not adversely affect existing schools, and will work closely with the existing partnership of schools.

The new school is not expected to have an adverse impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

The new school is expected to have a positive impact on children and young people, one of the groups with protected characteristics:

- the new school will help to minimise travel distances to school, and increase choice. If sufficient primary school places are not available within the heart of the community

this can affect access to out of school activities, social contact with peers, travel patterns and community cohesion.

## **Section 9: How to Apply to Sponsor this New School**

Oxfordshire runs a two-stage application process, first inviting outline expressions of interest from potential sponsors, and then shortlisting up to three applicants to submit a detailed proposal.

### **Key Dates (subject to change):**

- 27 September – 29 October 2018: Expressions of Interest (Eoi) invited from potential sponsors.
- November 2018: Shortlisting of Eoi received, with reference to how well they meet the specification for the school.
- November / December 2018: Shortlisted potential sponsors develop detailed bids for submission by midday on Tuesday 8 January 2019.
- February / March 2019: Interviews and presentations by shortlisted bidders, after which the OCC Member for Education approves the county council's choice of preferred sponsor. This is communicated to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC).
- April / May 2019: RSC makes the final decision on the sponsor for the new school.
- September 2021: New school opens.

The county council must receive outline Expressions of Interest by 29 October 2018, and requires one hard copy and one electronic copy of all documentation.

Expressions of Interest should be submitted using the Oxfordshire County Council New School Expressions of Interest Form. The Application Form and this Specification Document are available to download from [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/newschoolproposals](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/newschoolproposals)

Further information is available from, and Expressions of Interest should be sent to:

**Barbara Chillman,**  
Service Manager – Pupil Place Planning,  
Children, Education & Families,  
Oxfordshire County Council,  
County Hall, New Road,  
Oxford, OX1 1ND  
Tel: 07554 103418  
[academies@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:academies@oxfordshire.gov.uk)