

PLANNING & REGULATION COMMITTEE – 15 FEBRUARY 2010

DEMOLITION OF DETACHED TEMPORARY CLASSROOM/ COMMUNITY RESOURCES BUILDING AND BRICK BUILT STORE AND THE ERECTION OF A SINGLE STOREY BUILDING TO PROVIDE A CHILDREN'S CENTRE, AND THE ERECTION OF EXTENSIONS TO THE EXISTING SCHOOL TO PROVIDE A REPLACEMENT CLASSROOM AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES FACILITY, A READING ROOM AND A REPLACEMENT STORE ALONG WITH ASSOCIATED EXTERNAL WORKS

Report by Head of Sustainable Development

Location: Great Milton C of E School, The Green, Great Milton

Application No: R3.0188/09

District Council Area: South Oxfordshire

Introduction

1. This is an application for the erection of a detached single storey building to provide a children's centre on the school site together with three extensions to the existing school to provide a reading room, furniture store and community resources room. The proposal also involves the removal of a temporary classroom/community use building and a storage building.
2. The children's centre element of the application forms part of the strategy aimed at ensuring that by 2010, every community is expected to be served by a Sure Start Children's Centre offering permanent universal provision of children's services across the country so that every child is given every opportunity to get the best start in life.

Location

3. Great Milton is located about 16 km (10 miles) east of Oxford. The M40 passes about 1.2 km (0.75 miles) to the north of the village and the A329 Thame-Wallingford Road about 300 metres to the south. The village is located within the Oxford Green Belt.

The site and its setting (see Site Plan)

4. The Primary School is located centrally in this linear village on the eastern side of the settlement. The existing school buildings are situated at the

northern end of the school site immediately behind residential properties that front on to Lower End. The school playing field areas are to the east and south of the main school buildings.

5. Immediately to the north are allotment gardens and to the east is open agricultural land. The village recreation ground abuts the school to the south. Residential properties abut the site to the west. The latter are included within Great Milton Conservation Area.
6. There are a number of trees within the school site including along the existing access road to Lower End. There is a small pond immediately to the east of the existing school building.

Details of the Development

7. This planning application can be divided into two elements (i) a new children's centre and (ii) extensions to the existing school building.

(i) Children's Centre

8. The Sure Start Children's Centre programme is regarded as a vital part of national government's ten year strategy aimed at enabling all families with children to have access to an affordable, flexible, high quality childcare place for their child. The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children's and Learning Act 2009 (amending the Childcare Act 2006) defines Sure Start Children's Centres in law and places duties on local authorities to establish and run children's centres. Local authorities are therefore now under a duty to secure sufficient children's centre provision for their area. The centres are intended to be the first, local port of call when a parent or carer needs help or advice (whether in relation to their role as a parent/carer, the child's wellbeing or development, or simply to find out about neighbourhood activities). Phases 1 and 2 of the children's centre programme were approved in 2005 and 2006 and were aimed at those areas in greatest need for the services. The Great Milton project is part of Phase 3 of the programme and is aimed at improving access to services for families living in less disadvantaged and more affluent areas. The applicant has indicated that a major consultation exercise was undertaken in Oxfordshire to select the organisations to lead the development of the Phase 3 centres. Great Milton school was chosen through a competitive process as the organisation best able to provide children's centre services in this area.
9. The catchment area for this children's centre (known as Area 10, see plan 3) covers a large area taking in the wards of Wheatley, Forest Hill and Holton, Garsington and Great Milton. Apart from Wheatley, the majority of the area is rural (including villages and hamlets). The area has been assessed using the Index of Multiple Deprivation in local authority areas. The area around Great Milton is ranked in the top 50% most disadvantaged nationally and is rated 85 out of 404 in Oxfordshire. This indicates that there is a clear need for such a facility in this catchment area.

10. The services to be potentially provided from the centre would include outreach services to vulnerable families in the community (this would be home support i.e. the centre staff would go to them) plus amongst other things:
 - drop ins for parents and their young children (where information, advice and staff support would be available)
 - small groups for parents e.g. delivering parenting programmes
 - delivery of health services such as post and ante natal groups
 - provision of advice and information e.g. how to find childcare and adult learning provision
 - one to one advice, information and support sessions
 - small meetings of practitioners from a range of social and care professions
 - a variety of Stay & Play opportunities.

11. The applicant has outlined the benefits of locating the centre at Great Milton Primary School is as follows:
 - Access to services – they consider it an advantage that a very rural community like Great Milton has this centre at its heart, providing an opportunity for a range of partners (such as health) to deliver services locally.
 - Good use of space and site – the centre would be used by the school including breakfast and after school clubs (which are currently housed in the school hall)
 - Value for money – carrying out this project at the same time as the school extensions would provide savings for the two projects
 - Staff deployment – it is easier to manage staff if based on the same site.

12. The children’s centre is proposed to be a free standing independent building located in close proximity to the school entrance so that it can function independently of the existing school activities and not compromise them, but can be easily seen by visitors to the school without compromising school security.

13. The proposed building measures just over 24m by 9m and would be sited immediately to the south of the main entrance into the school (see plan 1). It would be brick built with a clay tiled roof to match the existing school buildings. The height of the building would be 4.3m to the roof ridge line, and 2.3m to eaves level. There would be a gap of 1.2m between the new building and the boundary wall running along the rear of the gardens of adjacent properties (Clematis Cottage, Woodbine Cottage and Old Cottage). An existing single storey brick built storage building and three trees would be removed to make way for the new building.

14. The building is proposed to be built to a BREEAM rating of Very Good (BREEAM – Building Research Environmental Assessment Method). This is a measurement of the sustainable design and construction of a new development.

(ii) Extensions to the School

15. The second part of this application proposes three extensions to the existing school building. The existing school comprises a single storey brick built development incorporating shallow pitched tiled roofs with gable ends. The school hall area is higher than the rest of the building. The extensions proposed are:
- a classroom/community resources extension attached to the northern elevation of the school. The extension would be built in brick with a pitched roof to match the existing building. It would be linked to the school via a small flat roofed lobby area. As part of the proposal the temporary classroom building that previously provided a classroom and community resources accommodation would be removed from the site. A single tree on the northern boundary would also have to be removed;
 - a flat roofed infill extension (to provide a reading room) on the eastern elevation of the building. Again it would be brick built to match the existing building;
 - a small lean-to extension to the west elevation to provide a replacement furniture store for the storage building to be removed. The store extension would be brick built with a tiled roof to match the existing.
16. The school has 16 parking spaces in regular use within the school site. These are provided as properly constructed parking bays, on tarmac widening of the road along the access driveway and on an area of hardstanding closer to the school building. The proposed extensions to the school do not involve any increase in staff or pupil numbers to the site. No additional parking is proposed in connection with this element of the development. As part of the children's centre project, it is proposed to provide 3 additional on site parking spaces. Given the restrictive nature of the site, these spaces may not be to full parking specification.
17. At the time of the original submission of the planning application, it was the intention that temporary parking accommodation be provided on the adjoining recreation ground for the duration of construction (it is proposed to use the existing school car park as the contractor's compound for the period of building works). This option is not now available and the project architect is looking to secure alternative temporary parking arrangements close to the school.

Consultation Responses

18. South Oxfordshire District Council – object for the following reasons:
- Children's centre
 - Have concerns with the size and location of the building. Given its location it will affect views into and out of the conservation area

from the High Street/Lower End eastwards. The building fails to reinforce local distinctiveness and is therefore harmful to the character, appearance and setting of the conservation area. It is therefore contrary to Policy CON7 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan.

- In addition there are concerns over the impact on neighbouring properties. The trees to be removed are of low amenity value but do provide a degree of screening to adjacent properties. The proposal would have an oppressive and overbearing impact on the neighbouring dwellings. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CF2 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan.
- The canopy proposed to the north west elevation of the new building would be very close to the Sugar Maple tree (a high quality tree in the conservation area). Such proximity could lead to pruning of the tree in the future contrary to Policy C9 of the Local Plan.
- Reading Room extension – no objection.
- Furniture Store – no objection.
- New classroom/community resources extension
 - Will require the removal of an important tree and will have significant impact on another. Although loss of the trees will have a limited impact on the amenity of the area, it will have a detrimental impact on the ecological, environmental and social benefits the trees bring to the school. The development is therefore contrary to Policy C90 of the Local Plan.

19. Great Milton Parish Council – Whilst supporting the proposed upgrading of the school facilities, the Parish Council originally objected to the children’s centre on the following grounds:

- severe inaccuracies in the supporting documentation
- overdevelopment of the site
- encroachment on the conservation area
- strong objections from neighbours

20. Following a meeting at the Parish Council, attended by the project architect and council officers, further information has been submitted and consulted on. As a result, the Parish Council have commented as follows:

21. The re-submitted proposal corrects the errors of the original submission but there are no other tangible differences to the original proposal. None of the issues raised in our objections have been addressed and our objections remain. In summary, the Parish Council supports the principle of children’s centres, but is opposed to the establishment of the proposed centre in Great Milton for the following reasons:

- Suitability of location
 - supply driven, not demand led;
 - conclusions are based on flawed data;
 - needs inadequately researched;
 - inappropriate motivation;
 - inappropriate and misleading propaganda from the school.
 - Funding
 - long term availability of funding;
 - misuse of budgets.
 - Impact on immediate neighbours.
 - Traffic generation, parking and safety.
 - Impact on the conservation area.
 - Overdevelopment of the site.
22. Environment Agency – No objection. Applicant should consider the drainage of surface water from the site using a sustainable drainage approach to surface water management.
23. English Heritage – Do not wish to offer any comments. The application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice.
- Oxford Green Belt Network – No objection. The proposed impact of the development on the Green Belt will be relatively insignificant.
24. Campaign to Protect Rural England – Support Parish Council’s opposition to the proposal. It would bring harmful new traffic flows on to already congested village roads and inappropriate development into the heart of the village with little if any apparent justification in terms of properly researched strictly local need.
25. County Archaeologist – The building lies within an area of some archaeological interest. However, it would seem unlikely that the small scale nature of the proposals would justify an archaeological investigation. Archaeological Informative is required.
26. Transport Development Control
- The Travel Plans team know from experience that where schools have children’s centres, there tends to be an increase in the number of journeys to the site by non sustainable means. It is important that the headteacher and manager of the children’s centre work together to lessen the impact of these additional journeys on the school and local community.
 - Concerned that the children’s centre will give rise to an increase in vehicles parking on the site. Recommend that the area currently not dedicated as parking be made available as an overspill parking area.

- There is no indication of how the construction phase will be managed. If no agreement can be secured for off-site parking during building works, would be concerned that vehicles may park on the surrounding highway network. Further consideration needs to be given to temporary parking provision during construction phase and further information is needed about how parking is to be managed during this period.
- A further response from Transport DC adds:
 - Further information on temporary parking arrangements is required to be submitted to the local highway authority.
 - Reference is noted of the provision of 3 extra parking spaces as overspill parking. The school is to update its existing Travel Plan. Both of these are considered acceptable to the local highway authority. A condition should be included to require the submission and agreement of a construction traffic management plan.

27. County Forester

- The loss of the tree to allow for the classroom/community resources extension would not be significant in amenity terms. Indeed there may soon be a need to reduce the number of trees in this part of the site to allow the better trees to develop to their full potential as specimen trees.
- The construction of pile and beam foundations can be undertaken in the development to minimise damage to tree roots. Root protection areas are required for trees to be retained.
- The reading room and store extensions have no direct affect on trees.
- The children's centre has similar tree issues to the classroom extension. There is no reason why this building cannot be constructed, with little or no damage to tree roots, provided adequate care is taken.

28. County Ecologist – No objection subject to conditions to cover the following issues:

- Existing pond not to be removed until a new pond is created in a location to be agreed. Existing pond should be removed outside the months of August, September and October.
- No trees to be removed except between September and February (to avoid bird breeding season).
- Habitats for bats should be created in the new buildings.
- If works are planned after April 2010, further protected species surveys will be required.
- If any protected species found, all work to cease and details of a strategy and securing of a licence to deal with them agreed with Natural England before work can re-commence.

29. **Third Party Representations** (copies of these letters are available in the Members' Resource Centre)

30. 9 responses of support have been received to the application.

31. 23 members of the public have objected to the planning application. Whilst a number of these responses also support the proposed extensions to the school, they object to the children's centre. The objections cover a range of points, including:
- inaccuracies in the documentation supporting the application
 - proposal is not about creating a resource for the local community – it is about spending a grant because it is available
 - traffic congestion and associated problems already exist around the school; this proposal will only add to these problems
 - no genuine parking solution has been put forward. Even a temporary site to cater for construction has not been found
 - Children's centre should not receive visitors until 9.30 am and no visitors after the school closes, thereby avoiding the busiest times
 - village does not have the infrastructure to support such an application
 - loss of trees
 - size and location of children's centre is excessive and involves a clear overdevelopment of the site
 - siting, mass and design of building is harmful to character of this part of the village – a conservation area with a number of listed buildings
 - overbearing and intrusive on nearby properties, especially Clematis Cottage and Woodbine Cottage
 - proposed light pollution from the development
 - Great Milton is not an area of deprivation the majority of the target market (i.e. disadvantaged families) does not live in the village
 - Children's centre should be located in existing accommodation rather than a new building where future funding may be in doubt
 - choice of location for children's centre is based on flawed information, site was not chosen by a competitive procurement process. It was chosen as it was the only site that put itself forward
 - irresponsible to construct a new building at considerable expense when there is considerable office and storage space available locally
 - there should be consideration of alternative sites
 - the 'hub' to service a wide area should be centrally located in that area. Great Milton is not central, and not as accessible as other locations e.g. Wheatley
 - proposal does not represent sustainable development
32. Local Member (Councillor David Turner) – has made the following comments:
33. He supports the rolling out of the rural Children's Centres project. The mobile centre Chalgrove, soon to be replaced by a permanent building, has received nothing but good comments from parents from all walks of life. They have received help and advice that as rural parents they did not know existed. The Rural Children's Centre Project is a long overdue attempt to bring to rural parents the benefits which have been available to people in the urban areas for many years.

34. The major objection communicated to me by local residents has been about increased traffic and road safety issues, which I am very aware are currently a real problem in Great Milton by the School at peak hour delivery and collection times of children. Without the parking problems and associated highway safety problems for children it may be that the children's centre would not have attracted such a high level of opposition. I have been in discussion with officers and local people to see if there are any compromises that can be made to solve the parking and road safety issues which I recognise are very real indeed. There was an alternative proposal to extend the pavilion in the recreation field to accommodate the children's centre which would have had the effect of dispersing the traffic to some extent and I was hoping that compromises could be made. I am not sure if given time this idea, in particular for parking, can be resurrected or whether there is any possibility of negotiation with the Parish Council and Trustees of the recreation field to assist with the parking problems.
35. I do not want to see the Wheatley/Great Milton area deprived of a Rural Children's Centre given my understanding that Great Milton was the only school in the proposed catchment area to show enthusiasm to have the centre located on their site. Nevertheless the traffic issues deserve greater investigation to reduce them to an acceptable level.

Relevant Planning Policies

36. The South East Plan Spatial Strategy 2026 (RSS)

SP5 – The existing broad extent of Green Belts will be retained and supported.

CO4 – A Green Belt will be retained around Oxford to:

- preserve special character and landscape setting of Oxford
- check growth of Oxford and prevent ribbon development and urban sprawl
- prevent coalescence of settlements
- assist in safeguarding countryside from encroachment assist in urban regeneration by encouraging recycling of derelict and other urban land
- development only permitted if it maintains openness and does not conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt or harm its visual amenities.

CC1 – The principal objective of the Plan is to achieve and to maintain sustainable development in the region.

CC6 – Development should i) respect, and where appropriate enhance the character and distinctiveness of settlements and landscapes; and ii) use innovative design process to create a high quality built environment which promotes a sense of place.

BE1 – Local authority to use opportunities associated with new development to help provide significant improvements to the built environment.

BE5 – Local authorities should positively plan to meet defined local needs of their rural communities for small scale housing, business and service development. Development in villages should be based on functions performed, accessibility, need to protect or extend local services and capacity of built form and landscape setting. Distinctive character of villages should not be damaged.

BE6 – Local authority to support proposals which protect, conserve and where appropriate enhance the historic environment and the contribution it makes to local and regional distinctiveness and sense of place.

NRM4 – In considering planning applications local authorities in conjunction with the Environment Agency should require incorporation and management of sustainable drainage systems and other measures to minimise direct surface water run-off.

37. South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP)

G2 – The district's countryside, settlements and environmental resources will be protected from adverse developments.

G6 – Planning permission will not be granted for proposals which are not of a high quality and inclusive design, which fail to protect and reinforce local distinctiveness, or which are of a scale or type that is inappropriate to the site and its surroundings.

GB2 – Within Green Belt, construction of new buildings will not be permitted except for the following purposes –

- agriculture and forestry
- essential facilities for sport and outdoor recreation and other uses which preserve openness of Green Belt
- limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings
- limited infilling; and
- limited affordable housing.

GB4 – Within the Green Belt, new development should be designed and sited so as to minimise the impact on its character.

CF2 – Proposals that would result in the provision of additional community facilities or services within settlements will be permitted, provided that there are no overriding amenity, environmental or traffic objections to the proposals and that there is no conflict with the other policies in this plan.

D1 – The principles of good design and the protection and reinforcement of local distinctiveness should be taken into account in all new development through:

- (i) the provision of a clear structure of spaces;
- (ii) providing for a choice of routes and transport modes to the development;
- (iii) providing landscape structure as a framework for new development;

- (iv) respecting the character of the existing landscape;
- (v) respecting distinctive settlement types and their character;
- (vi) providing good quality site and building design and appropriate materials; and
- (vii) providing well-designed external areas.

C9 – Any development that would cause the loss of landscape features will not be permitted where those features make an important contribution to the local scene.

CON7 – Permission will not be granted for development which harms the character or appearance of a conservation area. Proposals for development outside a conservation area which would have a harmful effect on the conservation area will not be permitted.

- PPG2: Green Belts – maintains the presumption against inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

Comments of the Head of Sustainable Development

38. In my view, the main issues for consideration regarding the planning merits of this application relate to:
- (1) the acceptability of the proposed use on the site;
 - (2) the acceptability and effect of the development on the character and openness of the Green Belt
 - (3) the size and scale of the development proposed and impact on neighbours
 - (4) the design of the proposed buildings and their impact on the setting of the conservation area
 - (5) the impact on trees within the site
 - (6) the traffic and parking implications of the development.
- (i) The acceptability of the proposed use on the site
39. This proposal involves the improvement of education provision at this school by the extensions proposed. In addition it proposes a children's centre, one of a number of centres that are currently proposed (and have been approved) on primary school sites across the county. Policy CF2 of the SOLP supports, in principle, the provision of additional community facilities provided they do not conflict with other planning policies, whilst Policy CC1 of the SEP seeks to achieve sustainable communities. It is my view that the school building extensions are acceptable, and that the loss of one tree in order to construct the classroom extension on the northern elevation of the building, is more than outweighed by the benefits that the new accommodation would provide for the education of the children at the school.
40. The principle of allowing a children's centre on a primary school site is acceptable and indeed beneficial and similar proposals have been approved elsewhere in Oxfordshire. It would provide a valuable community service in

accordance with Policy CF2 of the Local Plan provided that other issues (discussed later) are satisfactory or can be satisfactorily managed by conditions on any approval that might be given.

(ii) Green Belt

41. Great Milton village is located within the Oxford Green Belt. SEP policy CO4 outlines the purposes of the Green Belt around Oxford. In addition Local Plan policy GB2 indicates the types of buildings/uses that may be permitted in the Green Belt. The proposed development for the children's centre, albeit a modest single storey building located on the site of a smaller building to be demolished, close to the existing school buildings and as close as reasonably possible to the edge of the school site abutting the village, is not a proposal that is allowed by Policy GB2 above by virtue of its use or location.
42. It is therefore considered to be inappropriate development within the green belt and very special circumstances must be put forward to warrant overriding that policy.
43. As part of central Government's Sure Start programme, the need for children's centres has been identified and the County Council is tasked with providing them. The Council's CYP&F service has put forward the case for Great Milton Primary School that it is best placed to provide such a facility (see paragraph 8). The first two phases of the children's centre programme aimed at those areas of greatest need have already been rolled out. Indeed in this general area of South Oxfordshire there are centres at Chalgrove and Berinsfield (to the south and south west respectively). The current phase (phase 3) of centre provision is aimed at more affluent areas which still have families and individuals who can benefit from the services on offer. Great Milton village sits in a south central location within the catchment area and the applicant considers that a rural village location is important. I consider this location to be appropriate for its clientele to access and for a base for staff to serve the area.
44. The school extensions must also be assessed against green belt policy. As with the children's centre, they are considered to be inappropriate development within the green belt and very special circumstances must be put forward to justify allowing them on this site. The three extensions proposed are closely linked to the existing school building; the resource centre largely replacing an existing temporary classroom building, the furniture store extending a couple of metres out from the main school building and the reading room extension being built in a recess in the eastern elevation. Collectively they will provide much needed, and much improved, accommodation within the school buildings which should enable staff to provide an improved educational experience for the school children. In my view this amounts to very special circumstances and warrants overriding green belt policy. Indeed, they have been designed to match the design and appearance of the existing school buildings and their impact on the character and amenities of the Green Belt (Local Plan policy GB4) would be minimal.

45. The Oxford Green Belt Network have raised no objections to the children's centre or the school extensions and there have been no objections from the District Council on green belt grounds.

(iii) The size and scale of the development proposed and impact on neighbours

46. The existing school building is primarily single storey with the school hall element slightly higher. Policy G6 of the SOLP requires development to be of a scale that is appropriate to the existing site and surrounding area. The proposed extensions are low key and fit in with the scale of the existing building and as such I consider they are acceptable. The children's centre building would be single storey, and replace a smaller, single storey storage building. It would be in keeping with the scale of buildings on the school site.

47. The District Council has objected to this proposal on the grounds that its size and location close to the site boundary with neighbouring properties would have an overbearing and oppressive impact on these dwellings contrary to Policy CF2 of the Local Plan. This view is supported by a number of local residents.

48. The children's centre building would be sited immediately to the rear of the properties known as Clematis Cottage, Old Cottage and Woodbine Cottage. The building would be located 1.2 metres away from the rear wall which runs along the rear gardens of these properties. The garden wall is approximately 1.5m high. The dwellings have fairly long gardens, the western wall of the children's centre being 34m from the rear elevation of Clematis Cottage (the nearest property). The only windows in the western elevation facing the garden of the above properties would be high level strip windows which would be obscure glazed.

49. Three trees would be removed within the footprint of the children's centre. Whilst both the County Forester and District Council agree that these trees are of low grade quality, it could be argued that they do form part of the screen of planting that residents currently enjoy. However, other larger, more significant trees in the locality would be retained and it is my view that, given the existence of the remaining trees, boundary wall and outbuilding to the rear of the gardens, the lack of windows with clear glazing overlooking the residential properties, and the distance between the new building and the existing dwellings, the impact on the residential amenities of these properties through loss of light, privacy or the size of the new building is not significant. As such I disagree with the District Council on this point and consider that the children's centre building accords with Policy CF2 of the SOLP.

(iv) Design of the development and impact on the conservation area

50. As already mentioned the existing school comprises a modern, primarily single storey building which is fairly spread out and is broken up into linked smaller blocks. The proposed extensions and the detached children's centre building would be brick built with tiled roofs, and to a design to match the

existing school building. Policy CC6 of the RSS requires new development to respect and where appropriate enhance the character and distinctiveness of settlements to create a high quality environment and sense of place. Policies G6 and D1 of the SOLP also require new development to be of a high quality design and respect the character and appearance of the surrounding area. I consider that the new works proposed clearly reflect the design and appearance of the existing school buildings on this site and that it is preferable to reflect these buildings with common use, rather than surrounding residential buildings. I consider the design approach is consistent with the aim of the policy.

51. Comments have been received that the design and appearance of the new works, particularly the detached children's centre, are unacceptable especially located close to the old properties in the adjacent conservation area along Lower End. The school however is not within the conservation area and is tucked behind the older properties that front onto Lower End. Given this location, I consider it appropriate that any new buildings on the school site which relate to the school should reflect the design of the school rather than the character of the buildings in the conservation area.
52. Mention has been made that views from Lower End (and conservation area) to the east towards the school playing fields and views in the opposite direction would be affected by the construction of the children's centre building. Policy CON7 of the SOLP states that proposals for developments outside a conservation area, but adversely affecting it will not be permitted. Views from Lower End are already obscured by existing trees alongside the school access road, the existing furniture store and existing school buildings. Lower End is also some 40m away. In the light of this I consider that the views from Lower End eastwards would not be significantly affected by the construction of the children's centre.
53. Planning Policy requires new development to incorporate high standards of sustainable design (Policy CC1 of RSS). A measurement of the sustainable design and construction of a new development is the BREEAM (Building Research Environmental Assessment Method) rating. This project is aiming for a BREEAM rating of Very Good.

(v) The impact on trees within the site

54. The proposal would result in the removal of a number of trees from within the site. None are within the conservation area nor are they protected by Tree Preservation Orders.
55. One tree would be removed to build the classroom/community resources extension on the north elevation of the main school building. The District Council consider this to be a good quality tree. They consider that although the tree has limited amenity value, its loss would have a detrimental impact on the ecological, environmental and social benefits the tree brings to the school. As such they consider the proposal conflicts with Policy C9 of the SOLP. The County Forester however has no objections to the removal of the tree (he

agrees it is not significant in amenity terms). Indeed he considers that further trees may well need to be removed in this area for better trees to develop and thrive. The school are also prepared to accept the removal of the tree and I agree with the County Forester's view that removal of one tree is acceptable subject to remaining trees being properly protected by root protection area.

56. Three trees would need to be removed to build the children's centre. Both the District Council and County Forester agree that these trees are of low quality. I consider that their removal should not adversely impact on the visual amenities of the area, particularly as larger, more significant trees close by are to be retained. It is important that should permission be granted, appropriate tree root protection areas are agreed for these retained trees before any works commence on site. The County Forester does not raise any concerns relating to the proximity of a sugar maple tree (within the conservation area) to the proposed development.
57. In the light of the above comments, I consider that the impact of this proposal on trees within the site is acceptable and does not in my view conflict with the provisions of Policy C9 of the SOLP.

(vi) Other impacts on local people (including traffic implications)

58. The school site is close to nearby dwellings and visitors to the site have to access it through the village. SOLP policy CF2 requires that new developments do not impact on amenity or give rise to traffic or highway safety concerns. In particular this policy supports the provision of community facilities provided there is no overriding amenity, environmental or traffic objections and no other policy objections.
59. From the responses received from local residents, the main objection to this application would seem to be the traffic generation that would be created by the new development and the impact this would have on residents around the school in particular and in the village in general.
60. The school has 16 parking spaces in regular use within the school site. There are also areas where overspill parking occurs on school occasions, although these are not designated as parking spaces by the school. The proposals for the extensions to the school would not involve any increase in staff or pupils to the school so no additional parking is proposed as part of this aspect of the development.
61. It was originally proposed that there would be no additional on-site parking as part of the children's centre development. This was based on the presumption that the children's centre staff are primarily 'outreach' staff who are out in the community much of their time. The view was taken by the headteacher and the centre manager that the existing parking arrangements were manageable and there was no need for extra spaces as the centre staff have already been operating from the school site since April this year. However, Transport Development Control are concerned that the children's centre may give rise to an increase in vehicles parking on site. The applicant

has confirmed that 3 additional spaces can be provided on site as overspill parking. Although not to full parking specifications, Transport Development Control consider this acceptable.

62. As well as parking for staff, the centre would also generate additional movements to the school site by the public. The intensity of the use can be gauged by an indication of the services the centre would provide (see paragraph 8). Like the majority of schools across the county, congestion can occur outside the school entrance at the beginning and the end of the school day. I would not wish the development to unnecessarily add to that congestion at that time and would recommend that, if planning permission is to be given, the hours that the children's centre is open to the public, should be controlled to ensure there is no conflict with peak hours for traffic to the school.
63. Transport Development Control have raised no objections to the proposal but they do consider it important that the school and children's centre work together to lessen the impact of any additional traffic on the school and local community. Updating the school Travel Plan to take account of this new development should go some way to addressing traffic concerns. Such a requirement should be the subject of a condition should permission be granted for this development.
64. Transport Development Control have also raised a concern about the temporary parking arrangements at the school during the construction period. The existing car park area would be used for the contractor's compound and access and would be lost therefore for this temporary period. Alternative provision should be secured before any consent is issued for this development. Initially, the intention was to use the nearby recreation ground for parking whilst building work took place on site (as suggested by Councillor Turner in his response on the application). The Parish Council however have confirmed that this is not available. The project architect has been working on an alternative and is close to securing temporary parking provision at Combe Farm just over 300m to the east of the school, a five minute walk from the school (see plan 2). Transport Development Control is prepared in principle to accept these revised temporary parking arrangements subject to planning consent being obtained.

(vii) Other Matters

65. The responses received on this application have raised two other issues. Firstly, local residents and the Parish Council have raised serious concerns about the process and background work that the applicant has undertaken in reaching the decision to site the children's centre at Great Milton School and the funding that is available specifically for the children's centre development. The background to the work that has been undertaken to justify the need for the children's centre here in Great Milton is outlined in paragraph 8 of this report. I understand that if the development does not receive favourable consideration by April the timescale remaining for an alternative project to be developed using available funding is highly unlikely to be sufficient to develop

a centre which is able to provide the full range of facilities and services planned at Great Milton..

66. The applicant and project architect have also considered the feasibility of splitting this scheme into two separate applications, one for the school extensions and one for the children's centre (a suggestion of the Parish Council). They have submitted the scheme as one because the project can be delivered most efficiently and with least disruption to the operation of the school and minimisation of disturbance to the village through a phased construction programme for the whole scheme as this would involve the children's centre building being used initially for decanting purposes whilst other building work progresses.

Conclusion

67. This proposal would provide the opportunity to locate an important community facility for Great Milton and a wider catchment as well as provide significantly improved educational accommodation at Great Milton School. My view on the main issues raised with this application are:

- (a) the siting of a building for use as a children's centre on the primary school site (similar to other centres that have been approved in the county) is appropriate given the linkages in use between the centre and the school
- (b) in addition, the size and location of the new children's centre building on the existing school site close to the existing school buildings, should not have any significant impact on the openness or character of the Green Belt
- (c) the scale and design of the development is acceptable, relating to the modern school building as it does rather than to domestic dwellings
- (d) the children's centre building is to be located close to the boundary with neighbouring properties. Although some trees are to be removed, other more significant ones would be retained. In addition, the building is to be single storey, there would be no windows overlooking the gardens and the actual properties are some distance away. As such I consider that there should not be any significant adverse impact on the residential amenities of these neighbouring properties
- (e) the traffic concerns and adverse effects can be mitigated by the provision of on-site parking, the imposition of conditions to control the hours that the children's centre can operate and the requirement for the school to update its Travel Plan to take account of this new development
- (f) temporary parking provision must be provided for the duration of the construction period however and must be secured before any planning consent for this development is issued.

(g) Strictly speaking this scheme (both the children's centre and the school extensions) should be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt and a case must be made to the effect that very special circumstances exist to justify the proposal in this Green Belt location. The applicant has sought options to locate the centre on school sites and this is the school that has come forward. There is a need to provide a centre for this catchment area to the east of Oxford and a particular advantage in providing it on this school site in a very rural community like Great Milton where the centre can be at its heart, providing an opportunity for a range of partners (such as health) to deliver services locally and where links to the school can be maximised. The school extensions would provide much improved educational accommodation at the school for the benefit of the local children.

68. I have looked at all the issues relating to this proposal, and green belt is the only substantive planning reason that one might adduce as being a reason for refusal. There is a need for the children's centre facility, and a serious risk to the provision of such a facility in this area if permission is not given for this particular site. The new extensions would significantly improve education provision at the school. No one has objected on green belt grounds. I consider therefore that very special circumstances do exist to justify overriding green belt policy in this case.
69. Subject to the proviso relating to the provision of temporary car parking the proposal is considered acceptable on its planning merits and I recommend approval subject to the conditions outlined below.

RECOMMENDATION

70. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to authorise the Head of Sustainable Development to grant permission for Application No. R3.0188/09 (for the demolition of a temporary classroom/community resources building and brick built store and the erection of a single storey building to provide a children's centre, and the erection of extensions to provide replacement classroom and community resources facility, reading room and replacement store, along with associated external works; at Great Milton C of E School) subject to:**
- (a) **the applicant first (before a planning permission is issued) securing and if necessary obtaining planning permission for suitable alternative temporary arrangements for parking for use by the school during the period of construction;**
 - (b) **conditions to be determined by the Head of Sustainable Development to include the following matters:**

1. That the development must be carried out strictly in accordance with the particulars contained in the application and the plans accompanying subject to conditions below.
2. That the development shall commence within 3 years of the date of the permission.
3. That samples of the external materials proposed to be used shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Head of Sustainable Development prior to the commencement of development.
4. That no development shall take place until the trees on the site which are to be retained and which are adjacent to or within the development area, have been protected during building operations by means of a protective fence around the edge of the canopy of the trees.
5. That the site be landscaped and planted with trees (including replacement trees) and shrubs in accordance with a comprehensive planting and landscaping scheme first approved by the Head of Sustainable Development.
6. That all planting, seeding or turfing comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting season following the occupation of the buildings or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner.
7. The hours of operation of the children's centre for use by the public shall not allow use between 8.00 to 9.15 am and 2.45 to 3.30 pm Monday to Friday during term time.
8. The hours of use of the children's centre at other times (including outside school hours) shall be submitted for agreement by the Head of Sustainable Development before any use of the Centre commences.
9. That the high split level windows on the western elevation of the proposed children's centre building shall be frosted or glazed with obscure glass.
10. That prior to the commencement of the development full details of any additional proposed lighting, shall be submitted to and approved by the Head of Sustainable Development.
11. That prior to the first occupation of the children's centre building the existing school Travel Plan for the site shall be updated and submitted to the Head of Sustainable Development for approval.
12. That prior to the commencement of the development details of a sustainable drainage scheme for the proposed site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Head of Sustainable Development.
13. Vegetation removal should not take place during the bird breeding season, which is March-August inclusive. If any trees and/or bushes need to be removed during this time, they will need to be checked over by an ecological consultant immediately prior to removal to ensure there are

- no nesting birds present. If nesting birds are present, the vegetation cannot be removed until the birds have fledged.
14. If any protected species not initially surveyed for are found at any point, all work should cease immediately. Work should not recommence until a full survey has been carried out, a mitigation strategy prepared and licence obtained (if necessary) in discussion and agreement with Natural England.
 15. The existing pond shall not be removed until a new pond is created in a position to be agreed by the Head of Sustainable Development.
 16. The existing pond shall not be removed except in the months of August, September and October. The pond shall be drained gradually and the plant material removed from it should be stacked by the side of the pond for at least 24 hours to allow any animals trapped to escape before the vegetation is removed.
 17. Details of the proposals to create habitats for bats in the new buildings shall be submitted for agreement by the Head of Sustainable Development.
 18. If any works are planned to occur later than April 2010, the submitted protected species survey must be updated.
 19. Details of proposals for the formation of 3 additional on site parking spaces shall be submitted and agreed by the Head of Sustainable Development before development commences.
 20. Details of a construction traffic management plan (to include details of times of delivery of materials) shall be submitted and agreed by the Head of Sustainable Development before development commences.

Archaeological Informative – if archaeological finds do occur during development the County Archaeologist shall be notified in order that he may visit the site and advise as necessary.

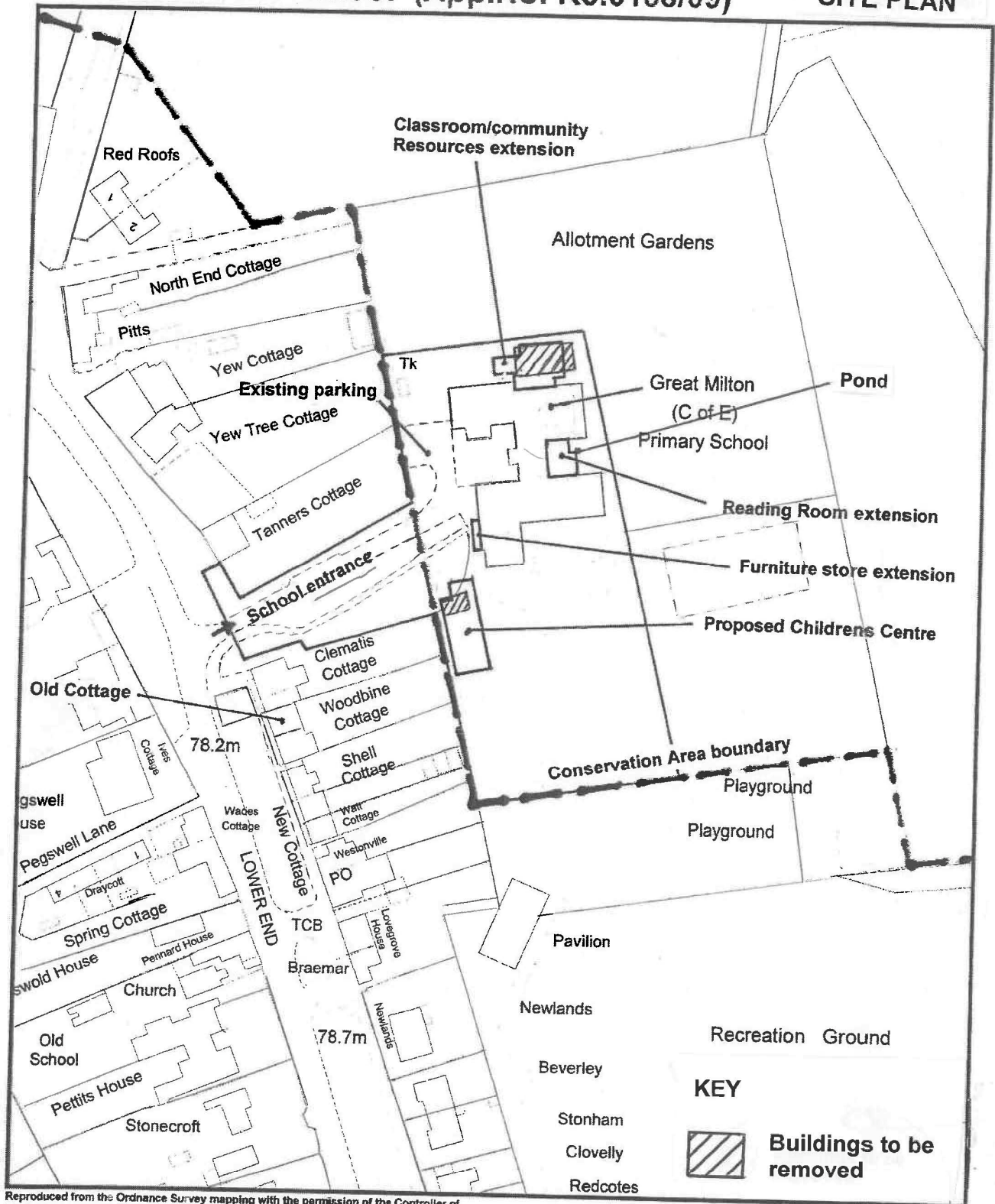
CHRIS COUSINS
Head of Sustainable Development
Environment & Economy

Background Papers: File Ref: R3.0188/09

February 2010

Great Milton CE School (App.No. R3.0188/09)

SITE PLAN

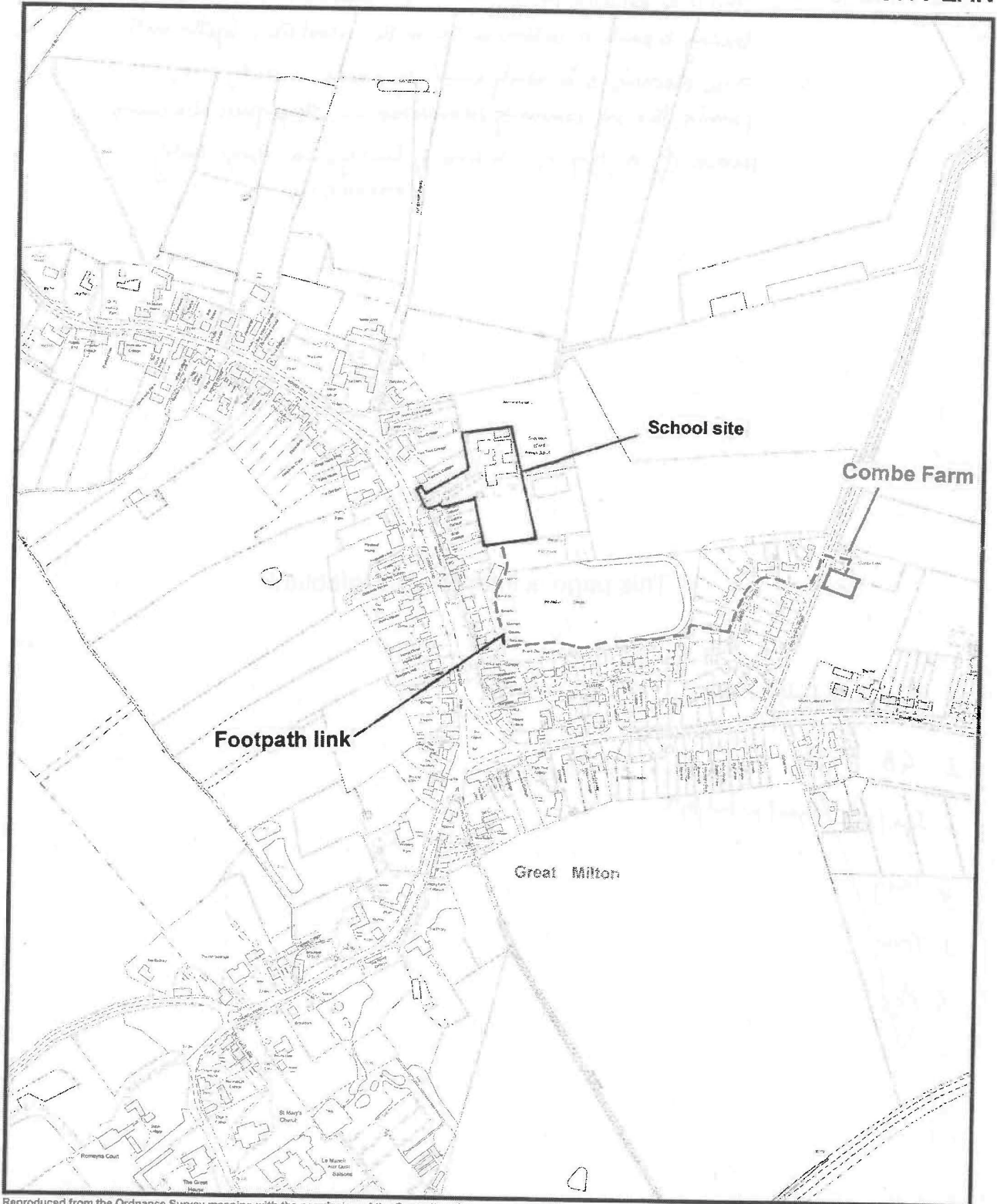


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Plot Date: 17/12/2009
By: jh
Dept: ee

Great Milton CE School

LOCATION PLAN



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Scale:1:5000
Plot Date:17/12/2009
By: jh
Dept: ee

Proposed Children's Centre area 10 - Wheatley, Forest Hill/ Holton, Garsington Great Milton wards

