

**For: PLANNING AND REGULATION COMMITTEE – 15 September 2014**

**By: DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY  
(STRATEGY & INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING)**

**Development Proposed:**

**Development of a new two form entry primary school (420 Pupils + 26fte Nursery) and associated groundworks that will form part of the Great Western Park (GWP) urban extension that is currently under construction to the west of Didcot.**

**Divisions Affected:** Didcot West and Hendreds & Harwell

**Contact Officer:** Kevin Broughton **Tel:** 01865 815272

**Location:** Land to North of B4493, Didcot Road. Land forms the Eastern edge of the District Centre within Taylor Wimpey's Great Western Park development.

**Applicant:** Oxfordshire County Council

**Application No:** R3.0092/14

**Application Received:** 24 July 2014

**Consultation period:** 7 August - 29 August 2014

**District Council Area:** Vale of White Horse District Council

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**Recommendation:** Approval subject to conditions.

**Part 1 - Facts and background**

**Site and Setting (see plan 1)**

1. The proposed primary school would be within the Great Western Park (GWP) development which is located on the western edge of Didcot. It is approximately 1km (0.6miles) to the east of the A34.

2. The GWP development is bounded by the A4130 to the north and agricultural land to the west and south. The eastern boundary of the site borders the existing urban area of Didcot. Outline planning permission was granted for a mixed-use urban extension to include 3,300 new dwellings, community facilities, services and infrastructure.
3. The GWP development is split into three areas, known as the Northern Neighbourhood, the District Neighbourhood and the Southern Neighbourhood. The proposed location of the proposed primary school is in the District Neighbourhood.
4. The application site is approximately 2.2 hectares in area.

### **Details of the Development**

5. The proposed two form entry primary school would provide 420 pupil places and 26 full-time equivalent nursery places. The school is projected to take in 60 pupils a year from 2016 until it reaches a capacity of 420 in 2025. This would be in addition to the nursery places so the total number of children at the school would be 446 in 2025.
6. The School's main entrance would be along the western boundary of the site adjoining the Public Urban Square. Separate entrances would be provided for the nursery school and for pedestrian access to the main site. Parking for staff and visitors (34 spaces including 2 disabled spaces) would be situated in the site's north west corner. Cycle stands and scooter racks would be provided. A vehicular pick up/drop off area would be provided outside of the main school site.
7. The school would be a single building, formed from three modules. The largest of these modules would contain a large resource area with a series of classrooms to either side. A second module would contain a main hall for sports, assemblies and dining. It would be capable of allowing good community access. A third module would house the foundation stage element. The building would be of an asymmetric roof pitch appearance.
8. The school's building would be single storey, but up to 8m in height at its tallest to allow high ceilings. This would be necessary for the sports hall, and also for the Learning Resource Corridor that would stretch the length of the main module. The roof would slope down to eaves at approximately 3m high.
9. The design would:
  - (i) Maximise benefits of natural cooling
  - (ii) Create a perception of open space in some areas, while limiting height above group room areas which will help to improve acoustic properties.
  - (iii) Allow beneficial management of solar gain.
  - (iv) Have an array of solar panels mounted to the south facing roof.

10. The school would be constructed of brick with a matt black finish and a pale grey (off white) render. There would be timber cladding in some areas. The roof and windows would be aluminium.
11. The Primary School will be built to the east of the District Centre. The site boundaries will be adjoined by residential properties to the north, east and south. The main school building occupies the western section of the site.
12. The primary vehicular access to the school will be provided via a new priority junction formed with a residential road running along the western boundary of the site. This access will lead directly into the school car park which will accommodate staff and visitor parking. It will also accommodate servicing and delivery access to the kitchens and bin store.
13. A secondary access will be provided to the south of the site for occasional use by emergency or maintenance vehicles.
14. A total of 34 parking spaces are proposed in the school car park comprising; 30 standard staff spaces, 2 standard visitor spaces and 2 disabled spaces.
15. Associated with the Primary School works, a 'school square' is proposed to the west of the school site. This will provide a central pedestrian and cyclist access point, creating a pleasant pedestrian environment, with play areas and green space, and linking the site to the District Centre.
16. A bus/coach bay will be provided outside the main entrance. This bay would accommodate two coaches. The applicant intends that this be used for coaches for school trips and excursions during the school day, and not regular services at the start or end of the school day. The applicant therefore assumes that this bay could be used during peak times to accommodate up to 6 drop-off or collection vehicles.
17. The applicants have also identified unallocated parking spaces within walking distance of the school that could be used for the drop-off and collection of pupils.

## **Part 2 - Other Viewpoints**

### **Representations**

18. There have been no representations from residents. The site was visited during the consultation process with a view to posting notices of the

application to new housing yet to appear on the postal database but there was none in place at that time.

### **Consultations**

19. South Oxfordshire - no comment received. This was the council that dealt with the outline application but the application for the school site itself falls within the Vale of White Horse. The consultation was sent to SODC via the South and Vale inbox but has been passed to the Vale for a response. The Vale of White Horse granted outline permission (02/01594/OUT) which included the site for the primary school.
20. Vale of White Horse DC - no objection but the District tree officer suggests that larger trees than shown should be used in the car park to provide screening.
21. Didcot Town Council - Like the design of the school but raise extreme concern about the pick up and drop off points.
22. Harwell Parish Council - does not object to this application but has the following concerns:
  - (i) parking provision is inadequate, with barely sufficient spaces for staff and no provision for visitors, parents.
  - (ii) drop-off points nearby are inadequate. This was raised by the parish to the reserved matters application P14/V1314/RM, an adjoining Great Western Park application.
23. SSE Water - no objections. The sewers on the site have been sized accordingly for the whole development including the school.
24. Archaeology - no objection.
25. County Highway Authority - no objections but made the following comments:
  - (i) Up to 64 cars could be waiting to collect pupils at the end of the school day and that 87 spaces could be available within a five minute walk of the proposed school.
  - (ii) There is no certainty that these spaces will be available and, in practice, drivers will seek to park as close to the school as possible even if this means parking on footways and across driveways.
  - (iii) For that reason there are legitimate concerns about the possible congestion, manoeuvring and road safety issues that are likely to arise as a consequence of this planning application.

This issue was recently addressed by the planning appeal that followed the refusal of the application for the Tyndale Community School in William Morris Close (application number 12/02935/FUL).

That appeal was allowed but the inspector recognised the problem and imposed conditions. The following conditions are based on those imposed by the Inspector and should be attached to any planning permission given:

- (i) Prior to the first occupation of the school a school travel plan shall be submitted and approved. That travel plan shall:
  - a. Incorporate a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) detailed appraisal. Such an appraisal shall be provided for the encouragement of the use of sustainable modes of transport for this educational development and the promotion of highways safety.
  - b. Be implemented upon occupation of the school.
  - c. Be thereafter used to promote the use of sustainable transport and avoidance of the use of the private car for single child drop offs and pick-ups.
  - d. Be subject to annual review and approval by the LPA for the first five years of occupation.
  
- (ii) The growth in the number of pupils shall not exceed 60 in any one year.
  
- (iii) Subsequent to the school roll reaching 120, no more pupils shall be permitted until the Review of the travel plan in condition (i) has been approved.
  
- (iv) That beyond 180 pupils, no growth shall be permitted until:
  - a. An updated travel plan has been approved. That updated travel plan shall include:
    - i. An assessment of the impact of the traffic generated by the school on the local highway network.
    - ii. A review of the implementation and effect of the Travel Plan, incorporating the SRTS has been carried out.
  - b. Any necessary resulting highway works or other mitigating actions have been implemented.

There would also need to be an agreement to pay a fee of £2,480 for the monitoring of the Travel Plan. This is to cover the complexity of the task and the extended monitoring that will be required.

### **Part 3 - Relevant planning policies**

#### **Relevant planning policies (see Policy Annex to the committee papers)**

##### The Development Plan

- 26. The development plan in this case is the saved policies of the Vale of White Horse local Plan 2011.
  
- 27. Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 (VOWHLP) policies:

GS1 (General locational strategy)  
DC1 (Buildings to be of high quality design)  
DC2 (Design for energy conservation)  
DC4 (Public art)  
DC5 (Mobility and transport provision)  
DC9 (Protecting neighbour amenity)  
H7 (Housing site - West Didcot)  
CF2 (Provision of community facilities)

### Other Material Considerations

28. Draft Vale of White Horse Local Plan (DVOWHLP)

CP1 (Presumption in favour of sustainable development)  
CP30 (Sustainable design and construction)  
CP33 (Natural resources)  
CP37 (Design)

29. Outline Planning Permission 02/01594/OUT. This was granted on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2008. It was for a mixed use urban extension that included the primary school site to which this application relates.

30. National Planning Policy Framework

31. The CLG letter to the Chief Planning Officers dated 15th August 2011 set out the Government's commitment to support the development of state funded schools and their delivery through the planning system. The policy statement states:

"It is the Government's view that the creation and development of state funded schools is strongly in the national interest and that planning decision-makers can and should support that objective, in a manner consistent with their statutory obligations." State funded schools include Academies and free schools as well as local authority maintained schools.

It further states that the following principles should apply with immediate effect:

- There should be a presumption in favour of the development of state-funded schools;
- Local Authorities should give full and thorough consideration to the importance of enabling the development of state funded schools in their planning decisions;
- Local Authorities should make full use of their planning powers to support state-funded schools applications;
- Local Authorities should only impose conditions that clearly and demonstrably meet the tests as set out in Circular 11/95;

- Local Authorities should ensure that the process for submitting and determining state-funded schools' applications is as streamlined as possible;
- A refusal of any application for a state-funded school or the imposition of conditions, will have to be clearly justified by the Local Planning Authority.

This has been endorsed in paragraph 72 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

#### **Part 4 - Analysis and Conclusions**

##### **Comments of the Deputy Director (Strategy and Infrastructure Planning)**

32. The main issues related to this application are: the current status of the land, the design of the building and transport implications.

##### Presumption in Favour of the Development

33. Policy CF2 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan states that development for proposals that would provide new services and facilities for the wellbeing of local communities will be permitted provided certain locational criteria are met.
34. This is reinforced by policy CP1 of the DVOWHLP and the presumption in favour of sustainable development and supporting the objective of the development of a state funded school as set out in the NPPF.
35. The site of the proposed primary school has outline planning permission, permitted by the Vale of White Horse District Council (ref: 02/01594/OUT) for development of a mixed use urban extension, of which the primary school site was a part. The principle of the development has therefore been accepted on the site.
36. The proposed development should therefore be permitted unless there is an overriding reason not to.

##### Design of the Building

37. Policy DC1 of the VOWHLP states that development will be permitted if it is of high quality design and takes account of local distinctiveness. Policy CP37 of the DVOWHLP also encourages good design. The proposed school would be predominantly a light grey render with some elevations having some black brick and wooden cladding. The roof would be aluminium. The proposed school is not an unusual design for a school and coloured drawings have been submitted to show how it would appear. The application does not have details of the colours specified so the materials would need to be agreed by condition.

38. The Design Guide for the outline application (02/01594/OUT) shows very little detail about the primary school. Subsequently there was a District Neighbourhood Framework Plan approved that gave more detail of the school layout. The proposed school building meets with most of the design criteria (Annex 1). The entrance to the building could be more welcoming and attract the eye better, but the school is oriented and set out as described in the Framework Plan.
39. The school is going into a new development site and so there is little in the way of local distinctiveness for it to follow. It does none the less have some interesting colour details on the fenestrations and would not be an unattractive building in its location. It does not have anything that would in itself constitute public art as part of the development as would be sought by policy DC4 of the VOWHLP, but there does appear to be some attempt to incorporate some interest in the building itself.
40. Policy DC2 of the VOWHLP and Policy CP30 of the DVOWHLP encourages the use of energy conservation measures in the design. Policy CP33 of the DVOWHLP requires the efficient use of natural resources. The building incorporates the management of solar heating and solar panels into its design, which would both be a significant help in terms of conserving energy.
41. Policy DC9 of the VOWHLP states that development will not be permitted if it harms the amenities of neighbouring properties. The proposed school is part of a wider development and would be a part of the forming community. It would not therefore harm the neighbouring amenity.
42. In terms of the design of the building it is largely in keeping with the principles of the approved Framework Plan. In my view there is a missed opportunity to be a more positive contribution to a new area by having a higher profile entrance, but in principle it does meet the Framework Plan. It does not cause any harm to the amenities of the neighbouring properties and it does incorporate energy conservation principles. As a result I believe that it meets policies DC4 and DC2 of the VOWHLP, and CP30, CP33 and CP37 of the DVOWHLP.

#### Transport Issues

43. Policy DC5 of the VOWHLP requires that the development has safe and convenient access both from the highway and within the site. This access includes that for people with impaired mobility. The surrounding highway network is prescribed in the outline planning permission and the road access has been judged suitable for a primary school to be located there. The proposed accesses do not vary significantly from that shown on the Framework Plan.
44. The County Highway Authority has raised concerns in relation to the dropping off and picking up of students. As a result they have



recommended conditions (as set out in paragraph 25 of this report) that would ensure that there would be safe and secure access in accordance with policy DC5 of the VOWHLP. In addition to the primary school, there would be the nursery school, and there would need to be a condition to restrict the number of nursery places to 26.

### Other Issues

45. The District Council has raised concerns about the type of tree to be used in the car park areas, and they would prefer to see heavier foliage trees to provide more screening. The area in which to plant the trees appears to be quite tight so the choice of tree will need to allow for that and not cause maintenance problems in the future. I propose that a condition be attached to any permission given requiring a schedule of planting in the entrance and car parking areas be approved.

### **Conclusions**

46. The decision on this development is finely balanced. If permitted, it would allow for the provision of an essential community facility to support the new housing growth. This would be in line with the principle of sustainable development in the NPPF and the strong instructions from central government to permit state schools.
47. The development has yet to be built and already there are concerns that there will be problems with picking up and dropping off. This has not however resulted in an objection from the Highway Authority. Instead the Highway Authority has requested the inclusion of conditions that would require the production of a travel plan to grow with the school.
48. On balance I consider that subject to the conditions set out in the report, the traffic concerns would not be such that they should override the presumption in favour of the development. Other than traffic the proposed development would not raise any significant social or environmental issues. It should therefore be granted permission in accordance with the principle of sustainable development.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

49. **It is RECOMMENDED that subject to the applicant first providing a Unilateral Undertaking to provide the sum of £2,480 for the monitoring of the Travel Plan that planning permission be approved for Application R3.0092/14 subject to conditions to be determined by the Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Strategy & Infrastructure Planning) but to include the following:**
  1. **That the development be carried out strictly in accordance with the plans P001, P002, P003, P004, P005, P006, P007 and P008, and particulars of the development contained in the application except as modified by conditions of this permission.**

- 2. That the development to which this approval relates must be begun not later than three years from the date of the grant of planning permission.**
- 3. No development shall take place until a schedule of materials have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.**
- 4. Prior to the first occupation of the primary school a school travel plan shall be submitted and approved. That travel plan shall:**
  - a. Incorporate a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) detailed appraisal. Such an appraisal shall be provided for the encouragement of the use of sustainable modes of transport for this educational development and the promotion of highways safety.**
  - b. Be implemented upon occupation of the school.**
  - c. Be thereafter used to promote the use of sustainable transport and avoidance of the use of the private car for single child drop offs and pick-ups.**
  - d. Be subject to annual review and approval by the LPA for the first five years of occupation.**
- 5. The growth in the number of primary school pupils shall not exceed 60 in any one year.**
- 6. Subsequent to the primary school roll reaching 120, no more pupils shall be admitted until the review of the travel plan required by condition 4 has been approved.**
- 7. Subsequent to the primary school roll reaching 180, no more pupils shall be admitted until an updated travel plan has been prepared, submitted to the LPA, approved and implemented. That plan shall include:**
  - i. An assessment of the impact of the traffic generated by the school on the local highway network.**
  - ii. A review of the implementation and effect of the original Travel Plan**
  - iii. Such further measures and/or works as may be necessary to deliver the objectives set out in condition 4**
- 8. The number of nursery places shall be no more than 26.**
- 9. Prior to the construction of the car park area a schedule of planting for the area be submitted and approved.**

Reasons for Approval:

The development would allow for the provision of an essential community facility to support the new housing growth. Subject to the conditions set out in the report, the benefits of the development would outweigh the social and environmental issues. It should therefore be granted in accordance with the principle of sustainable development.

Compliance with National Planning Policy Framework:

In accordance with paragraphs 186 and 187 of the NPPF Oxfordshire County Council take a positive and proactive approach to decision making focused on solutions and fostering the delivery of sustainable development. We work with applicants in a positive and proactive manner by;

- offering a pre-application advice service, as in this case updating applicants and agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application and where possible suggesting solutions. In the case of this application, the concerns of the Highway Authority were passed to the applicant giving them the opportunity to address the concerns raised where they could. The Highway Authority had also taken a positive approach to giving the opportunity to overcome the concerns raised.

BEV HINDLE

Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Strategy & Infrastructure Planning)

October 2014

District Centre Core

Character area guidance

4 Primary School

A two form entry (2FE) primary school will be provided by Oxfordshire County Council on the site identified in the Land Use and Density Framework Plan. The site has been integrated into Great Western Park as a whole.

- locating it in close proximity to the Neighbourhood Centre, the key destination for Great Western Park as a whole;
- 'wrapping' the site on three sides by residential development, so that it has one main 'public' frontage on the western side of the site. This avoids a fenced boundary onto surrounding streets, and enhances the security and privacy of the school by reducing opportunities for access from public areas;
- providing a Primary School Square (a 'Public Urban Space') on the 'public' (western) side of the site;
- providing a pedestrian-friendly link from the Neighbourhood

Square directly to the Primary School Square) and

- providing other access points to the School from the south and south-east.

It is essential that the primary school building contributes to the overall townscape of Great Western Park as a whole, and the following design principles are key to a successful building:

- the building must form a strong, positive edge to the Primary School Square. The building must not be set far back as a 'pavilion' within the school site;
- as classrooms need (i) privacy from passers-by and (ii) direct access to open space they will be located mostly to the rear of the building, or set back from the Primary School Square;
- the hall would inevitably be a 'blank box' due to the nature of activities and the level of privacy required. However,

there is an opportunity for it to be a strong architectural element addressing the square. The hall will also need to be easily accessible from the public realm to enable use by the community.

- the uses that directly face onto the Primary School Square could include spaces such as the main public entrance, offices / administration, and staff areas;
- a welcoming main public entrance should be provided off the Primary School Square;

- the building need not form a continuous building line to the Primary School Square, and may step backwards and forwards to create open space(s) onto the boundary. However, boundary treatments to any open spaces must be carefully designed to give a positive edge to the Primary School Square – continuous, solid, opaque boundaries will not be acceptable;

- the building will be single storey and, as such, will be significantly lower than other buildings in the area. Opportunities to create height and 'presence' on the Primary School Square frontage should be maximised – for example, using the height and mass of the main hall as a key building element, and using strong roof forms;

- staff parking and servicing should be to the rear or side of the building thus eliminating or minimising its visual impact on the important Primary School Square frontage.

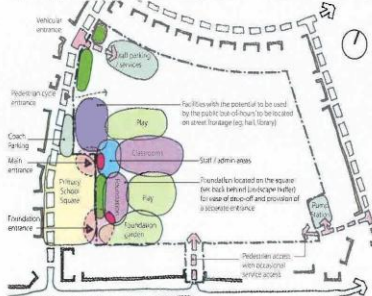


Figure 4.24: Primary School Layout Principles/Plan

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Figure 4.2.10: The blank box of the hall is a strong architectural element facing onto the square



Figure 4.2.16: Continuous edge to street architectural rhythm raising territoriality of building



Figure 4.2.17: This close horizontal and low window line addresses the public realm

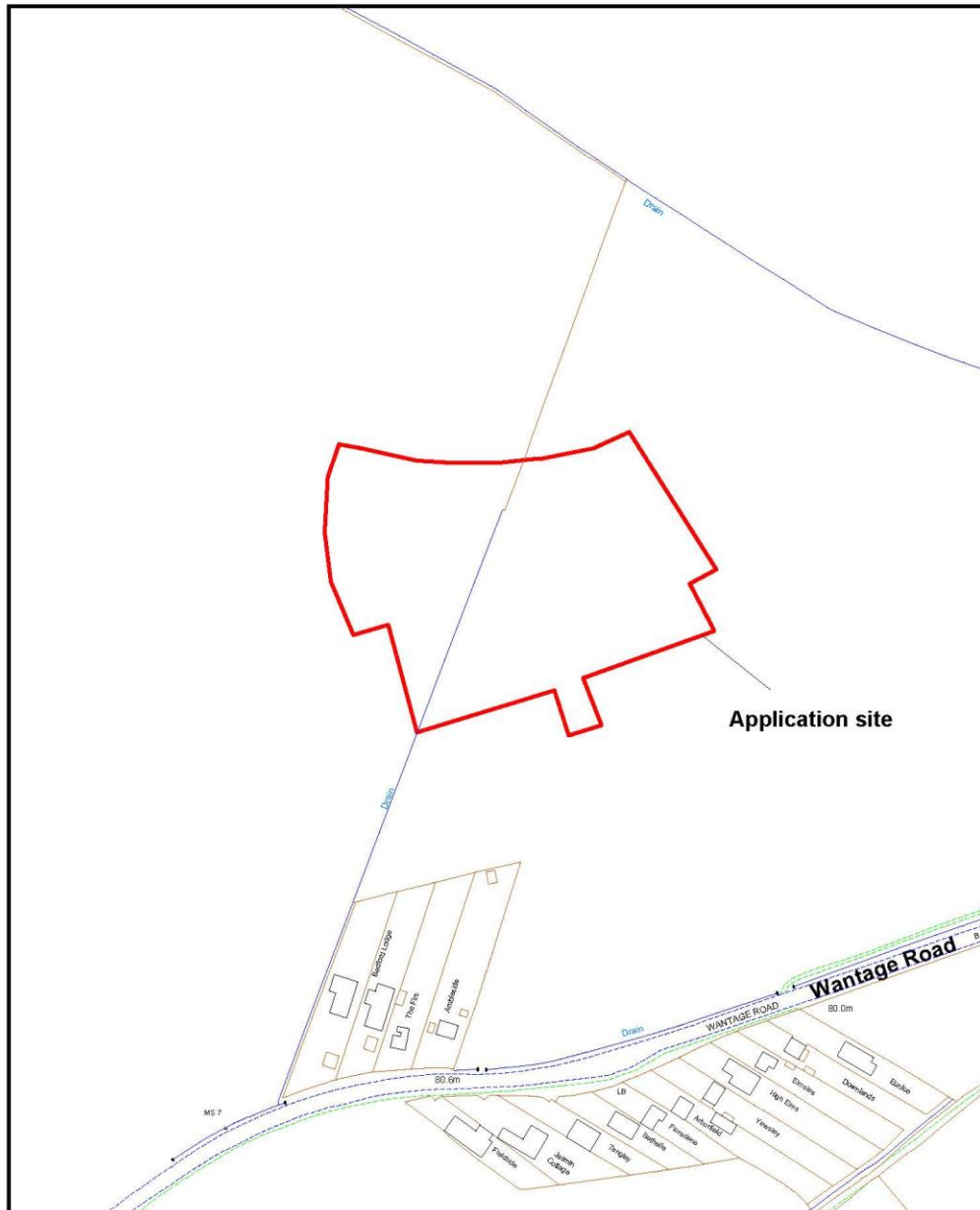


Figure 4.2.18: A very clear edge entrance

Framework Plan District Neighbourhood

Great Western Park School

Plan 1



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