

Division(s) affected: Chalgrove

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PLANNING & REGULATION COMMITTEE – 12 JULY 2010

CHANGE OF USE OF LAND FROM PASTURE TO PARKING AREA FOR USE BY GREAT MILTON CE PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR A TEMPORARY PERIOD UNTIL 31 JANUARY 2012

Report by Head of Sustainable Development

Location: Land at Coombe Farm, Chilworth Road, Great Milton

Application No: R3.0035/10

District Council Area: South Oxfordshire

Introduction

1. The Planning & Regulation Committee approved an application for a detached single storey building to provide a children's centre plus three extensions to the existing school building in February this year subject to (i) the application not being called in by the Secretary of State (the site is within the Oxford Green Belt) and (ii) the applicant first (before a planning permission is issued) securing and if necessary obtaining planning permission for suitable alternative arrangements for parking for use by the school during the period of construction. The Secretary of State has since advised that he does not intend to call in the application for his own decision.
2. The application now before you is intended to deal with point (ii) of the committee's resolution and is for temporary car parking arrangements to be provided, on land at Coombe Farm, Chilworth Road, Great Milton for use by the school during the course of the construction period for the children's centre and school extensions.

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. Coombe Farm, located on Chilworth Road, is situated on the eastern edge of the village. Great Milton is located within the Oxford Green Belt. The site for the temporary car park is 340m to the east of the Primary School.

The site and its setting (see plan)

4. The application site measures 395m² in area and is located on the east side of Chilworth Road. It is a grass paddock situated immediately to the south of the buildings that comprise Coombe Farm. Access to the site from Chilworth Road is via the existing farm access which also serves an adjoining caravan site (see plan).
5. The western boundary of the site, abutting Chilworth Road, is marked by a hedgerow, whilst beyond Chilworth Road to the west is Green Hitchings, a crescent of housing development. To the east is agricultural land.
6. The proposed walking route between the site and the school passes through Green Hitchings then follows a path between Nos. 24 and 25 Green Hitchings into the village recreation ground and then via a gated entrance into the school grounds. This route is about 400m in length (see plan). There is a longer alternative following the main road through the village measuring 650m in length (again see plan).

Background and Details of the Development

7. The existing Great Milton School car park is to be used, in part, as a site contractor's compound for the duration of the build programme (up to 8 car parking spaces would be lost for this temporary period). The construction works are likely to last until October 2011 but permission is sought for temporary car park replacement for a period until the end of January 2012 to allow for flexibility in the build programme.
8. After a search exercise by the school and discussions with local landowners, the present application site has been identified. The site measures 395m² and is currently laid to pasture. The surface of the proposed parking area would be protected with a reinforced polyethylene mesh intended to minimise the impact on the turf. The mesh would be secured to the existing turf and covered with sharp sand and topsoil to encourage grass growth through the mesh. It would be intended to provide a more stable surface on which to park vehicles, whilst protecting the grass from undue damage. Once the building work at the school has been completed, the site would be returned to pasture.
9. The supporting statement prepared by Mouchel that accompanies the application states that the development of the Children's centre at Great Milton CE School creates a very special circumstance under Green Belt policy to allow this area of land at Coombe Farm to be used as a temporary car park.
10. The Headteacher has also submitted details outlining a management plan for the use of the temporary car park which would include, amongst other things:
 - arranging car shares from Coombe Farm to school by staff who arrive and leave school at the same time each day

- regular visitors with little hand luggage being asked to use the temporary car park
 - making more flexible use of the playground within the school to allow some cars to be parked there – to be managed by staggering children’s break times and lunchtimes and changes to break time supervision
 - investigate the possibility of a shuttle service between Green Hitchings and the school.
11. Very recently – and well after this planning application was submitted, the landowner at Coombe Farm has advised that at this point he has become unwilling to release land for car park use. Notwithstanding this recent development, the school have indicated (and the landowner is content) that they would still wish the Council to decide the application.

Consultation responses

12. South Oxfordshire District Council – object for the following reasons:

Policy GB2 of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 sets out the type of development that is appropriate. This policy follows advice set out in PPG2. The development that is proposed under this current application is not identified as appropriate development, therefore the development is inappropriate and therefore by definition harmful to the openness of the Green Belt. The District Council does not consider that the construction of the Children’s Centre at Great Milton CE School to be a very special circumstance that would justify allowing the temporary car park which is inappropriate.

13. The District Council considers that the Children’s Centre development (its positioning within the site and impact), the need for temporary parking and the need for increased parking on site should be considered together and ask if the positioning of the Children’s Centre and current parking arrangements could be re-considered. They also have concerns that the proposed temporary car park would be located too far from the school and would not be a practical or desirable option.

14. Great Milton Parish Council – object for the following reasons:

1. Inadequacy and unsuitability –

The Parish Council considers that the proposed development is clearly not suitable because:

- (i) it is nearly half a mile from the school
- (ii) there is no path for sections of the proposed walking route and other sections are uneven and unlit
- (iii) the proposed walking route crosses the recreation ground and nursery school area. There is no provision for insurance to indemnify the

- Parish Council against claims for personal injury and uses of this route or provision for the security of the Nursery School play area
- (iv) the entire parking area at the school will be required to house plant and equipment for this project, without taking account of 20 or more contractors' private vehicles
 - (v) the proposed site will clearly be insufficient to accommodate the parking needs of school staff and visitors for 18 months (it only provides for 8 spaces)
 - (vi) there are further safety issues when considering access to the school driveway by school buses at peak times
 - (vii) the proposal will create an unmanageable burden on the village High Street due to increased parking.

2. Application does not meet PPG2 Green Belt guidelines –

- (i) Green Belt designation aims “to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment”. This purpose is paramount to the Green Belt protection
- (ii) Great Milton is washed over by the Green Belt, an indication that the area should be protected. Turning a field into a car park is contrary to this requirement
- (iii) this is inappropriate development – and by definition harmful to the Green Belt. Applicant has not successfully demonstrated very special circumstances for allowing it, and is awaiting review by the Secretary of State
- (iv) proposal is analogous to a Park & Ride scheme. Have alternative non-green belt alternatives been considered first?
- (v) there is no separate criteria for temporary development over permanent development within the Green Belt. Although the proposal is temporary in nature, it must still meet PPG2 requirements and guidelines.

3. Implications for village amenities –

- (a) increased parking in the High Street will create a considerable negative impact on the volume of trade for the shop/post office which relies on much passing trade. A temporary proposal cannot be allowed to threaten the viability of the village's only shop and livelihood of those who rely on it
- (b) frustrated car parkers trying to use the school or shop will park in the small car park outside the Old Garage offices, an area paid for by the tenants of these offices.

Oxford Green Belt Network – comment as follows:

15. If the Children's Centre and school extensions are to go ahead, we can see the good sense of having this temporary car park to avoid staff cars being parked on village streets provided this is restricted to the construction period (till 31 January 2012). We approve of the use of mesh to minimise damage to farmland and to allow for a green surface to be maintained.

16. If the Children's Centre proposal increases traffic on local roads and intensifies activity in the village, it clearly has Green Belt implications that are wider than we acknowledged before and we hope that the views of the Parish Council are taken fully into account. For our part we would not wish to see any enlargement of the school give rise to a demand to make this temporary car park into a permanent one or create further pressures on the Green Belt locally.

Transport Development Control –

17. *First* response – The existing vehicular access to Coombe Farm is acceptable. The proposed surface treatment will help vehicle manoeuvring and pedestrians, especially in the winter.
18. With regard to the walking route between the school and car park, comment as follows:
19. This route is part surfaced and part unmade. The surface is well worn in parts. Along the western perimeter of the recreation ground there is a surfaced path leading to the pavilion. The most direct route however for pedestrians would be straight across the playing field. The entire route is unlit and therefore unlikely to be attractive to users after dark. It is also likely to be unattractive during wet weather conditions.
20. Have concerns that vehicles displaced from the school car park are more likely to search for spaces closer to the school than Coombe Farm.
21. Have serious concerns that the temporary car park will not be used given it is a 5 minute walk away, the condition of the path and the fact that the route is unlit.
22. *Second* response – Previous conclusions were drawn from the general state of the route between the school and car park, the fact that it is poorly surfaced and unlit and is 5 minutes walking time away. There is also no official right of way. The whole parking and transfer experience would not be sufficient to encourage its use and therefore parking would be likely to take place closer to the school.
23. Ordinarily there is sufficient reason to advise refusal, however –
- (1) this is a temporary proposal
 - (2) the provision is the only solution available albeit not a perfect solution
 - (3) the provision would work if appropriate temporary changes were to be implemented and controlled by conditions.
24. I will, therefore, offer support to the application if the following is applied and controlled by conditions:
- the car park entrance and parking surface is constructed in an appropriately durable material

- the car park is lit and secure
- those persons displaced by the temporary closure of part of the school car park shall use up to a maximum of 8 vehicles, shall park in this car park at all times during school hours and not park anywhere else. Car sharing may well need to be arranged
- an attempt is made to secure a temporary arrangement of access across the recreation ground.

25. All the above details to be submitted, approved and implemented before the existing school car park is converted to a workers compound.

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

26. 28 responses have been received from local residents all objecting to this application. The objections cover a range of points, including:

- proposed area for car park not big enough
- what about signage for visitors – will there be a proliferation of signs in the area?
- Will the caravan park use the same access?
- distance from school is up to half a mile – distance, plus unmade nature of proposed walking route and fact it is unlit will mean the car park will not be used
- rather than walk for 5-10 minutes, staff will park on main road near school entrance
- staff will not use car park in bad weather
- how will visitors know to use car park?
- area is in the Green Belt – hardstanding must be removed at end of the temporary period
- would set a precedent for further permanent development in Green Belt
- inappropriate development in the Green Belt
- survival of village shop and post office will be threatened
- parking will take place on main road close to school entrance
- private car park at The Old Garage would be used
- proposed route between school and car park goes through recreation ground close to nursery – impact on safety of children
- proposal will impact on existing uses of Chilworth Road (existing traffic, cyclists, walkers, riders)
- proposal will adversely affect outlook of properties on Thame Road and Green Hitchings
- no overriding need for the development
- no genuine intent by the school to use the car park
- support objections made by the Parish Council.

Relevant Development Plan and other Policies

27. Planning applications should be decided in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
28. The development plan documents in this case are the South East Plan Regional Spatial Strategy (2026) (RSS) and the South Oxfordshire Local Plan (2011) (SOLP). The relevant policies are as follows:
 - SP5, CO4, CC1, CC6, BE1, BE5 – (RSS)
 - G2, G6, GB2, GB4, CF2, D1, C9 – (SOLP)
29. These policies are set out in the Policy Annex attached.
30. In addition, PPG2 (Green Belts) is relevant as, in particular, it refers to the presumption against inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
31. The Secretary of State has recently indicated that the RSS is shortly to be repealed and he has indicated that this fact should be a material consideration when deciding planning applications.

Comments of the Head of Sustainable Development

32. In my view the main issues for consideration of this proposal relate to:
 - 1) the need for the development
 - 2) the location of the development and whether it would be used
 - 3) the acceptability of the development in terms of its impact on the character and openness of the Green Belt
 - 4) the impact of the development on neighbouring properties.

(i) The need for the development
33. A planning application for extensions to the school at Great Milton and a separate Children's Centre building within the grounds of the school was considered by this committee earlier this year. Committee resolved to approve the application subject to the provision of alternative suitable temporary parking arrangements for use by the school whilst building work progresses on site. The purpose of this report is therefore not to revisit the principle of the main development on the school site (Children's Centre and extensions) but to consider whether the proposed temporary parking arrangements are acceptable to allow the main development to proceed.
34. The contractor's compound that would be required on site to support the proposed building works would be laid out in phases: the first phase, incorporating the site where the proposed Children's Centre is to be located, and then, once this is constructed, moving to the northern end of the site between the main school buildings and the northern boundary. At any one

time, up to 8 staff car parking spaces would be lost and this proposal seeks to accommodate these 8 spaces on this alternative site at Coombe Farm.

35. This proposal would provide an opportunity to avoid parking taking place on the main road whilst allowing contractors to cordon off appropriate parts of the school site so that the work can progress safely. The site proposed, albeit some distance from the school, is the one that has been put forward following a site search exercise. I am of the view that these temporary parking arrangements if implemented would benefit parking management during the construction phase of the development.

(ii) Location of the development

36. The proposed car park is located 340m to the east of the school. The shortest route (see attached plan) measures around 400m in length and passes through the Green Hitchings housing area, skirts the recreation ground to the south and west, passes the pavilion and Little Owls Nursery building before entering the school through its southern boundary. This route is for the most part unmade and unlit. The alternative is to walk alongside the public highways (down Chilworth Road, along Thame Road to the west and then turn northwards at the Green and up Lower End to the main school entrance. This route measures 650m approximately and is also unlit. A large number of objectors consider that the distance involved, the unmade nature of part of one of the possible routes between the school and proposed site and the fact that the route is unlit would mean that it is unlikely to be used by staff especially during bad weather.
37. I agree that the location of the car park this distance away is not ideal and that staff may be reluctant to use it especially if they are carrying heavy bags and the weather is inclement. The school have explored other options and had hoped to be able to secure use of the recreation ground car park. However, this is not being made available to them. If the school wishes to pursue the scheme for building extensions and the Children's Centre, then alternative temporary parking arrangements need to be provided to meet the Planning & Regulation Committee resolution and the staff have to be encouraged to use it. The school headteacher has submitted details outlining a management plan for the use of the temporary car park which puts forward such items as car sharing between Coombe Farm and the school, making more flexible use of the school playingfield for parking and investigating the possibility of a shuttle bus between Coombe Farm and the school.
38. Transport Development Control have concerns that the car park would not be used for the reasons already raised by local residents. However, they have indicated that they are prepared to support the proposal on the basis that it is temporary and the only option currently available, provided the car park entrance and surface is properly laid out, it is lit and made secure, that the 8 displaced cars from the school must park in the temporary car park (car sharing may well be required) and an attempt at a temporary access arrangement across the recreation ground is made. These measures could be required and encouraged by conditions and informatives to agree, and

implement, a car park management plan for the duration of the building contract.

39. The present proposal for temporary parking is the only option currently available to the school and it is the one which the Planning & Regulation Committee are invited to make a decision on now. If it had been possible to secure use, for instance, of the recreation ground car park for a temporary period, that would have been a more convenient solution. However that is not possible at this juncture. For the scheme to work the school must ensure that staff always use the car park. The school are aware of the concerns of local residents in relation to car parking in the village and I expect them to rigorously apply the car park management scheme to all their staff and visitors. My recommendation below proposes attaching conditions to any consent covering the submission of details for the construction of the car park entrance and surface, and details of any illumination. I also propose that a car park management scheme be submitted and agreed (with Transport Development Control officers) to ensure appropriate measures are put in place. Monitoring of the car park would need to be undertaken and this could be done by the Council's Monitoring Team to ensure it is being used by the school.

(iii) Acceptability of the development in the Green Belt

40. The village of Great Milton is in the Oxford Green Belt. Any proposal for temporary car parking, either on the site proposed or on any new site in the village, has to be justified in Green Belt terms. Such a change of use, is regarded as inappropriate unless it maintains the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. There is a presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Very special circumstances must be demonstrated to justify overriding Green Belt policy. Very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
41. The proposal is inappropriate development, but is driven by the desire to enable the construction of an important community facility which the Committee has already resolved to approve. There is a significant swell of local opinion against the development indicating that further on street parking would take place during the construction period which would be unsatisfactory. This proposal aims at addressing the on street parking issue.
42. The proposal is for a temporary period and would be removed at the end of that period and the land returned to its existing use. Alternative arrangements for temporary parking have been examined and none as good, or better than this proposal, appear at this time capable of being provided.
43. Although a temporary proposal, particularly because it is within the Green Belt the development must be carefully designed so that a) it is safe to use by users and b) to make sure its impacts are minimised. Subject to the conditions proposed in the recommendation to this report I consider that this is the case.

44. As part of my consideration of this proposal, I have considered the Secretary of State's pronouncement that Regional Spatial strategies are to be abolished. I do not think that this statement has significant bearing in weighing the merits of this application. The government has indicated support for the Green Belt concept. I have considered the merits of this application in the light of the importance of protecting the Oxford Green Belt.

(iv) Impact on neighbouring residents

45. Objections have been raised about the effect of the development on the outlook of properties close to the site. The site is screened by a hedgerow along the Chilworth Road boundary and, to a degree, by the existing farm buildings to the north. I consider that the site, with the existing hedgerow planting and limited activity the site would generate (8 cars at the start and end of the school day), should not have any significant impact on the outlook or setting of the nearby dwellings in particular or the village in general.
46. Concern has been raised about possible conflicts with other users of Chilworth Road – other motorists, horse riders, cyclists and dog walkers. Transport Development Control have no objections to the traffic movements the site would generate for this temporary period and consider the proposal acceptable in highway safety terms.

Conclusion

47. In February the Planning & Regulation Committee resolved to ensure that the amenity of local people in Great Milton in terms of the impact of on-street parking in the vicinity of the school could be protected during the 12 month period of construction work to extend the school and build the family centre. The proposal here is intended to address this point, though it may prove not to be implementable given the recent statement from the landowner where the car park would be sited. Overall I consider that the provision of the car park would be beneficial in terms of providing the most suitable alternative parking arrangement.
48. Indeed, its implementation should ensure that any additional parking on the public highway is minimised whilst the important community facilities which the Committee has already resolved to approve are built and this, coupled with the temporary nature of the development and subsequent restoration to pasture, in my opinion constitute very special circumstances to justify the granting of this proposal in the Green Belt. In addition, providing appropriate restoration conditions are imposed upon any permission, there should be no long term harm to the Green Belt and the long term objectives of the policy would not be undermined. Accordingly I recommend that planning permission be granted.
49. The committee may also wish to consider, in making a decision on this application, whether or not the school have sufficiently addressed the parking issue such as to discharge that part of the original resolution (see (ii) in paragraph 1).

RECOMMENDATION

50. The Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to authorise the Head of Sustainable Development to grant permission for Application R3.0035/10 for the change of use of land from pasture to parking area for use by Great Milton Primary School for a temporary period until 31 January 2012 at Coombe Farm, Chilworth Road, Great Milton subject to conditions to be determined by the Head of Sustainable Development to include the following:
1. Development to be carried out strictly in accordance with details submitted with the application.
 2. Temporary permission – permission to cease by 31 January 2012, or completion of the building works for the Children’s centre and school extensions submitted under application No. R3.0188/09, whichever is the sooner.
 3. Site to be restored to pasture on completion of the development.
 4. Details of specification for construction of site entrance and surface of the car park to be submitted and agreed. Works to be implemented prior to building works commencing on school site.
 5. Hedge protection measures to be submitted and agreed prior to any works commencing on site.
 6. Details of any lighting provision to be submitted and agreed prior to any works commencing on site.
 7. Details of a car park management plan to be submitted and agreed prior to any works commencing on site. Any approved plan shall be implemented for the duration of the development.
 8. Details of any signage proposed (both at the school and the temporary car park) to be submitted and agreed prior to commencement of the development.

CHRIS COUSINS
Head of Sustainable Development

June 2010