

Location of Youth Building in Milton  
For Milton Parish Council/  
Milton Community Centre  
Joint Meeting  
Wednesday 28th January 2004

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## **Abstract**

This document examines and proves the need for youth provision in Milton.

The youth club is more than just a social place, there is actual youth work going on. *See Youth Work Overview, Youth Work Core Principles and Youth Work in Milton for detailed information.*

Changes made over the last twelve months have seen the numbers rise to 45% of children in an academic year attending the club.  
*See Youth Work in Milton for detailed information.*

A youth building has the facilities to support the youth work.  
*See What is a youth building? and Supporting space for interaction for detailed information.*

The youth club used to be held at Coles Road and it caused lots of problems. The club has thrived at The Sycamores whilst addressing the problems.  
*See Background to the Current Situation for detailed information.*

The Youth Committee of Milton Parish Council gives its opinion that a youth building at The Sycamores recreation ground would be the preferable option for the village as a whole.  
*See Conclusion for detail information.*

## Youth work overview

**Youth work** helps young people learn about themselves, others and society, through informal educational activities which combine enjoyment, challenge and learning.

**Youth workers** work with young people aged between 11 and 25, particularly those aged between 13 and 19, in order to promote their personal and social development and enable them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society as a whole.

**Youth work** is conducted according to a set of values which include a commitment to equal opportunity, to young people as partners in learning and decision-making and to helping young people to develop their own sets of values.

(National Youth Agency Guide to Youth Work & Services -UK)

**The Government**, in its document, “Transforming Youth Work” considers that quality youth work:

- **SUPPORT:** Offers quality support to young people, which helps them achieve and progress
- **EQUALITY:** Enables young people to have their voice heard and influence decision making at all levels
- **EDUCATION:** Provides a diverse range of personal and social development opportunities
- **PARTICIPATION:** Helps prevent disaffection and social exclusion

## Youth work core principles

Youth work is based upon:

- The creation of informal and flexible learning opportunities for young people.
- A negotiated voluntary relationship between the young person and the youth worker.
- An approach that is not normally based on predetermined targets; but targets that are agreed by the youth worker and young person.
- Connecting with the young person's own starting points, their existing interests, needs and experience and working at their own pace.
- Strategies to minimise the power relationship between the worker and the young person.
- Ways of working that actively challenge oppressive behaviour and structures.
- Enabling young people to create ways in which their voices can develop and through which this voice can be heard.

## **Youth work in Milton**

Several organised groups undertake youth work in Milton. Milton Youth Club is a part of the overall work.

The professional youth work at Milton Youth Club is funded partly by government youth money via Cambridgeshire County Council/Impington Village College and partly by Milton Parish Council. Milton Parish Council supports the club in a number of ways including providing staffing, administration and facilities. The County/Impington Village College provides youth worker administration and support and access to other funding streams. Milton Parish Council believes that providing facilities for the young people is helping to reduce the incidents of anti-social behaviour in the village by giving them other ways to use their energy.

Milton Youth Club opens from 7pm until 9pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays in term time. Mondays are for all members. Tuesdays are for years 7 (11 to 12) and 8 (12 to 13) and Thursdays are for year 9 and upward. (13+)The membership is secondary school age (11 years old up to 19).

Milton has a population of 4,275 (Census 2001) of which 25% (1068) are 19 and under. Of that 25% in any academic year 52% (555) are entitled to attend Milton Youth Club.

The current membership of Milton Youth Club stands at 110 (approximately 20% of those entitled to attend).

Changes made by the Milton Youth Centre Management Group (MYCMG) in the last six months have meant that the membership for years 7 and 8 has grown to be 45% of those in Milton (non-Milton residents excluded from calculations) who are entitled to attend on Tuesday nights. MYCMG intends to consolidate the progress that has been made this year and ensure that similar numbers are achieved for every new year 7.

Replicating this success would see membership of 221 (45% of each year group for the age range applicable) each year by 2010.

## **What is a youth building?**

A place to draw young people to so they can

- meet socially
- learn to interact with one another
- talk to adults who support them
- take advantage of new opportunities provided for them
- learn to interact with other members of their community
- have ownership in the building, a place for them.

## **What is needed in a youth building for MYC?**

A café-style layout has emerged through consultation<sup>1</sup>, experience<sup>2</sup> and guidance<sup>3</sup> as the most practical, effective and preferable for both youth work and the Milton Youth Club. This maximizes the space available whilst providing support for youth work through facilities.

All facilities tie in to youth work either as an end in themselves (computers with Internet access promote IT literacy and provide opportunities to access new information) or as a means to an end (pool is an activity that entertains members whilst at the same time being a tool that youth workers can utilise for communication such as drawing out a member about their worries or bringing up an issue such as the new laws about cannabis).

## **Facilities the youth club has already proved a need for**

Disabled access

Groupings of tables and chairs for activities and small social groups

Kitchen for cookery

Computers with Internet Access (eventually six or eight plus server in secure location)

Pool, ping-pong and table football

Television and video and playstation

Sofas

Music system

Separate space for individual and group work

Blackboards for member input and discussion facility

Notice boards for information and communication

Secure storage for food

Secure storage for electrical equipment

Secure storage for confidential files.

<sup>1</sup> Consultation with youth workers and members took place over a three-year period and was revisited in 2003

<sup>2</sup> The collective experience of youth workers and volunteers from previous work and time at MYC and also from the members at MYC.

<sup>3</sup> Information from Connexions, the Government youth work agency

## Supporting space for interaction

The space in a youth building needs to encourage talking and interaction. Interaction in this sense is primarily between the youth club members. Although youth workers are engaged with the young people the aim is to encourage the young people to function independently as individuals and as a group. We have different spaces in the room that facilitate this. These are examples of how we use the facilities we have currently.

- Sofas positioned at right angles give comfortable seating whilst allowing a group to form in a relaxed manner. The television can act as a focal point for attention but the seating allows conversation to go on around and about what is showing. Youth workers are able to take advantage of the discussion opportunities given to them by programmes such as 'EastEnders'.
- The pool table is always a focal point because people enjoy playing and watching. Whilst a game is being played young people talk to each other and the youth workers in a much more friendly and easy manner because the focus is on the pool, not on them directly. Seating around the pool table and the discussion blackboard draws people in to the group and the discussion.
- The hatch into the kitchen allows one-to-one casual interaction with the youth worker who is on tuck shop duty. The tuck shop allows gives young people a legitimate reason to interact with an adult which often turns into longer conversations or activities with a youth club member who needs to be a little apart from his peers for a while.
- The large table allows us to put out an activity and to make it visible to those in the rest of the room. The hard chairs around the table let a group expand and contract in size without making it appear that there are many gaps or overcrowding. More tables with high-backed chairs are needed to allow different groups to form and different activities to take place in each group.
- The computer bench with computers for use on the sidelines of the main room allow larger groups to focus on the screen when something of particular interest is available. It also allows computer users to remain part of the social group.

Young people do not walk into the building at 7pm and leave at 9pm. The outside is equally important to a youth building.

- The outside has been well-used in official activities. There have been basketball workshops, football, rounders, man-hunt (a version of hide-and-seek played around the playing fields), football on the grass and the multi-purpose court.

- Unplanned games of basketball spring up on the basketball courts, the skaters visit the club when it becomes too cold to be outside, the youth club owns a football and games are played on the multipurpose court just about every week it is fine enough.
- Young people sit outside even during the club, sometimes because it is hot, sometimes because they want privacy from those inside the building, sometimes because there is not enough room and sometimes to smoke (not that smoking is encouraged, but those over 16 are entitled to smoke). They use the space around the building as an extension of the club and will begin gathering before the club opens and are slow to go home afterwards. The space is somewhere they can be safe but reasonably unobserved.
- Some youth club members drive, especially now the Connexions brief has raised our upper age limit to 19 (official school age). The barriers in the car park and the locked gate prevent drivers being tempted by an open space. The location of the small amount of car parking available means that activity can be monitored unobtrusively from the youth club. The car drivers are nearly all regular youth club attendees from previous years and it helps to be able to accommodate them within the club instead of refusing to have anything to do with them.

### **Supporting space for young person - youth worker conversation**

The current space is limited in that there is no real facility for private and confidential discussions between a youth worker and one or two young people. The kitchen has been used but it is not ideal because of the close presence of other people - the youth worker on tuck shop duty and the other youth club members through the hatch. A place for such interaction is a priority.

Work with small groups on more serious topics can be very difficult when in the same room as everyone else. A space for group work and activities around a table would be very useful especially in demarcating a group interested in an activity from those who are not interested. This would be especially helpful in reiterating the message that some things require a standard of behaviour for participation to be allowed.

### **Supporting space for new opportunities**

The youth work teams aim to create relevant opportunities for young people. Activities have included: building computers, cooking fajitas, cakes and biscuits, organizing events and outings, art work, creative crafts sessions, conkers, marbles, basketball, football, rounders.

The activities so far have been dependent on the space available. More computers would allow more structured ICT work. A greater number of smaller seating areas would allow different work and more intimate groups to form. This in turn makes youth work easier and more productive.

## **Background to the Current Situation**

Milton Parish Council supports the youth work in Milton and the provision of youth facilities as a measure in compliance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (all relevant authorities have a duty to consider the impact of all their functions and decisions on crime and disorder in their local area). Also Sections 5-7 and 17 require local authorities and the police, with other key agencies and the community, to work together at district level to develop and implement strategies for reducing crime (and the fear of crime) and disorder in the area. Providing youth facilities is one of these strategies.

The provision of a youth building on The Sycamores recreation ground was a response to the issues that came out of the youth club's former presence at the Coles Road community centre.

The youth club was then funded solely by the County Council through Impington Village College. The Parish Council entered into partnership with the County Council as part of its crime prevention and reduction strategy.

The club used the community centre on a Thursday night. There were many issues arising from this.

Probably the greatest of these issues was the intimidation by the young people perceived by other users of the community centre, especially by elderly people, some of whom were frightened to come to the community centre. The placing of the youth centre at The Sycamores recreation solved this.

The integrated facilities at the community centre meant that other users were affected by the presence of the young people and by the sound of their activities. The Sycamores placement mostly resolved this as the sports facilities are close but not integrated with the youth building.

Youth workers were expected to control the young people to an unaccomplishable (and sometimes unfair) level, something that took them away from proactive youth work. The current site allows young people more freedom.

There was, for a time, a security officer employed to counter the presence of the young people. The Sycamores site has less opportunities for vandalism, being largely empty.

Drug dealers would drive their cars behind the community centre on to the playing fields where it was dark and unlit and impossible to police. The Sycamores car park barriers have solved this to a large extent and the car park is clearly visible from inside the youth building.

The youth club was not able to use the Coles Road courts as they were mostly in use. At The Sycamores the multi-purpose court is almost always free.

The young people felt they had no stake in the building and had no sense of ownership. They felt barely tolerated and were not comfortable, responding by trying to stake territory in ways that are perceived as negative by other people. The youth building has been very successful in fostering that sense of ownership and belonging - young people frequently refer to it as 'ours' and enjoy rearranging the furniture, putting things up on the walls and still take great pride in 'their' mural on one wall. Apart from possibly two exceptions, the young people mostly respect the building and its contents *so long as they feel that the adults are respecting it as well*. The table football, the computer, the re-covered pool table and the stereo have all been treated rather well (these were new or in good condition).

Unfortunately, the portacabin - not new when it arrived - is showing signs of wear and tear, mostly in ways that are not the fault of the young people. It is becoming unfit for use and it needs to be replaced.

## **Next Steps**

Investigation has shown that a permanent building is the most cost-effective, long-term solution. This fits in with the original plan set down by the Parish Council. The intention was always to replace the portacabin with a permanent building.

On January 5th 2004 at the Parish Council meeting the idea of removing the youth building from The Sycamores recreation ground and instead building an extension at the Coles Road site was mooted.

## Locating a youth building at The Sycamores Recreation Ground

### Advantages

- No disturbance and perceived intimidation to other users of the Community Centre - Crime and Disorder Act compliance.
- Other youth facilities i.e. skate park, basketball court are at The Sycamores.
- Purpose built youth building with all the facilities to support youth work.
- Neighbours used to activity already.
- No loss of green space for the village's biggest resource
- No competition between youth club and other groups for use of Coles Road extension
- New building designed to be properly secure
- New building designed to be suitable for youth presence.
- New building will need less attention, freeing up staff.

### Disadvantages

- Poor disability access across car park.
- Difficult for MCC staff to manage. *New buildings need less maintenance.*
- Security problems arising from isolation. *Would be less with a building that wasn't so easy to get into.*
- Difficulties of attracting other partners and therefore funding. *Working on it. The darkroom idea is getting responses.*
- Coles Road extension would need to be built for a different plan through a different funding stream.

## Locating a youth building at Coles Road Community Centre

### Advantages

- As part of a larger project for MCC it *could* attract funding.
- A loan could be secured after October 2005 (when present loan expires). *Although this applies to other locations*
- Easier for staff to manage.
- More facilities for other groups e.g. Scouts, Guides, Kids R Us (though other uses must not conflict with evening (youth) use) *As this could be four evenings a week within two years, there won't be much use available.*
- Teenagers should be valued as part of the community. Being based at Coles Road would enable them to interact with other members of the community. *This is unlikely to happen in a positive manner on an ad-hoc basis.*

### Disadvantages

- Disturbance to other users and neighbours e.g. Barnabas Court.
- Possible loss of green space.
- Would parents of younger children be comfortable with older youths "hanging around"?
- Cars of youth club members attracted to the youth club, taking up parking places and causing concern.
- Sports facilities not available for ad-hoc use.
- Not near the current facilities that have been built for young people, would fragment the focus.
- Rules out possibility of extending Coles Road facilities to provide more sports facilities.
- More security needed on all the buildings in the Coles Road area.
- Young people under more observation and therefore more likely to move off into places where they are not observed.
- Youth building facilities not ideal for other groups.
- Compromises could mean youth building not ideal for youth club.
- Prime time evening slots booked out by youth club - less use for other groups than an extension to Coles Road after a youth building provided at The Sycamores.
- Perceived intimidation of other users by young people.
- Non-compliance with the Crime and Disorder Act in light of previous decisions taken.

## **Conclusion**

The Parish Council has an obligation under the Crime and Disorder Act to consider the implications of any decisions it makes on Crime and the Fear of Crime. Since we justified moving the Youth Club away from Coles Road on the grounds of Fear of Crime it is inconsistent to move back now. We would need to have very pressing reasons to do it, to override the Fear of Crime argument, given the problems we had in the past with groups of young people hanging around the Community Centre entrance being seen as intimidating.

The Youth Committee of Milton Parish Council think it best that any permanent Youth Building is sited at The Sycamores Recreation Ground for the reasons outlined in this document and the supporting evidence provided.

However, the Youth Committee acknowledges that the building plan (which will probably cost £100,000) is unlikely to proceed without support from MCC.