



CABINET - 5TH OCTOBER 2022

SUBJECT: SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING PROGRAMME – TRINITY FIELDS SCHOOL EXPANSION UPDATE REPORT

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet Members on a proposed amendment to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme Band B proposal for the expansion of Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre.
- 1.2 The proposal seeks to amend the previously endorsed decision by Cabinet on the 7th April 2021 to expand the school on to the Council owned sports pitch adjacent to the existing school site.
- 1.3 As a key consultee group, the views of Education Scrutiny Committee Members were sought on the amended plans and comments are included in 10.2 of this report.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The decision taken by Cabinet on the 7th April 2021 approved the expansion of Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre on to the Council owned sports pitch adjacent to the School and set aside circa £300k to create an alternative pitch and enhance the spectator and changing facilities at the nearby Sue Noake Leisure Centre.
- 2.2 The proposed expansion of the school formed part of the Council's Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B Strategic Outline Plan and would enable the school to continue to provide first class learning facilities for existing learners as well as creating 80 additional places at the school to manage with future demand.
- 2.3 Over the years the school has established an excellent reputation as a provider of education to our most vulnerable learners, many of whom have a wide range of learning difficulties and physical and medical needs. A 2019 Estyn Inspection awarded the school five 'Excellent' judgements with inspectors making a number of very positive comments about the school, its leadership and its inclusivity.

- 2.4 As the Schools reputation has grown, so too have the number of pupils on roll. The school and the LA are already employing a number of strategies to cope with this additional demand. Without additional capacity there is a risk that vulnerable children will not have their needs met locally and out of county provision would be required. There is also a risk that placements can be directed by Tribunal for children within or outside the locality.
- 2.5 The decision taken by Cabinet in April was taken in the face of significant community opposition to the scheme. The opposition was largely from members of the Rugby Club that are the main user of the sports pitch and a group established to save Green Spaces within Ystrad Mynach. The proposal was placed under further pressure as a result of an untimely series of sewage breaches at the Sue Noake Leisure Centre, close to the location of the proposed new pitch.
- 2.6 The Council recognised that the progression of the scheme to expand Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre relied heavily on Welsh Water resolving the sewage issues at Sue Noake Leisure Centre and so placed the expansion on hold in June 2021 in lieu of remedial action. Work has continued since to resolve those issues and Welsh Water have been very supportive in this regard, undertaking surveys, carrying out desilting works and clean ups on extended sections of the sewer.
- 2.7 That aside, a year has now been lost in this crucial development and the school is facing further demand for places in September. The pressure to provide additional places and facilities at the school has never been more acute and a proposal now needs to progress at pace.
- 2.8 On this basis, a compromise solution that enables the additional places to be provided in the most time efficient manner was sought with Officers revisiting the original expansion proposal, with a view to developing some innovative alternatives that did not involve the loss of the sports pitch. A suggestion was identified that seeks to develop a two storey extension on part of the Schools Car Park, which would create an additional ten classrooms and some additional facilities (see 5.6).
- 2.9 However there are a number of features that have been asked for by learners and would have been available to the wider community that will not be possible should the school be expanded in this manner. These are set out in bold text in table 5.6. This proposal is also likely to require the development of an additional Special School as part of the Council's Sustainable Communities for Learning Band C proposals although this will of course require approval at a future point.
- 2.10 While the designs continue to be refined, the proposal has received unanimous support from the School and its Governing Body and Welsh Government have also verified that no further consultation for this proposal would be required. Being able to provide the places without losing the sports pitch is also considered likely to be favourably received by the Community.
- 2.11 The Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider the revised proposals to expand Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre and support a recommendation to Cabinet to proceed on this basis. Scrutiny Committee Comments are included in section 10.2 of this report.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet Members are asked to: -

- a) Consider the information contained in the Report
- b) Approve the recommendation to expand Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre via a two storey extension on part of the School Car Park
- c) To ask officers to investigate a longer term option to create a 2nd Special School in the Borough under Band C of the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To provide Members with the opportunity to consider an amended proposal to expand the Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre as part of its Band B Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme
- 4.2 To seek Member approval on the recommendations outlined in 3.1
- 4.3 To assist the Council in discharging its duties in line with the requirements of the Welsh Government’s School Organisation Code 2018.

5. THE REPORT

5.1 Alternative Configuration for Build

- 5.2 The Council recognises that there are many routes to realising transformational change and investment in key projects is important in order to meet the strategic vision of the Band B programme.
- 5.3 As referenced in the Summary section above, there are a number of external factors that reduced the chances of the successful delivery of the original scheme in a timely manner. Factors such as community opposition, the sewage breaches associated with the development of a new pitch at Sue Noake and the ever increasing demand for pupils to attend the school, have all contributed to the need for an alternative configuration for the expansion of the school to be developed.
- 5.4 The original proposed location and layout to expand the school onto the adjacent Trinity 1 pitch was planned on a single storey with additional classroom places, a wide range of additional indoor and outdoor facilities for the pupils as well as enhanced community provision (see 5.6).
- 5.5 The potential alternative configuration now proposed is a two storey extension that makes use of part of the existing car park. It should be noted, however, that whilst the alternative configuration for the build will still deliver an expansion of the school, a number of features that were asked for by learners and would have been available to the wider community, will not now be possible.
- 5.6 When comparing the two options, the table below outlines the differences between the two proposals:

Original Option	Alternative Configuration for Build
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new single storey extension onto the adjacent pitch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new two storey extension within the curtilage of the current school

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for further expansion on site given size of area and potential for Two-Storey in future or build onto Carpark area • 80 additional places <p>New facilities in Single-Storey extension to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 x classrooms with changing facilities and toilets • Hydro-therapy Pool and changing facilities • Hall • Rebound/Therapy room • Extended seating for Café Oren • 9 x multi-use areas • Family Room • 2 x Sensory Rooms • Spaces for Holistic services – Social Services, Health • 1 x Soft play • Staff Room, offices • Internal Courtyard with Sensory Garden, Play and animal area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No further opportunity for expansion on site after this development has been undertaken • 80 additional places <p>New facilities in Two-Storey extension to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 classrooms (although requires reconfiguration of existing school to accommodate 2 of these) • No additional Pool, but upgrade to the existing pool • No additional Hall • No designated Rebound/Therapy room • Limited additional seating for Café Oren • 6 x multi-use areas Usage to be determined by the school • No designated Family Room • • Significant Reduction in space for Holistic services • 1 x Soft play • Staff Room, offices and Training area on first floor • Outdoor area with no sensory garden or animal area • Access to adjacent sports pitch during the day • Lift <p>*Note: Bold indicates differences in Facilities through new configuration</p>
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The school to be given access to the adjacent sports pitch during the school day to compensate for the loss of outdoor facilities as a result of the reconfiguration of the proposed extension.

5.7 A decision will also be sought from Cabinet at a future point on how to treat the previously set aside £300k for an additional pitch and upgrade to facilities at the Sue Noake Leisure Centre. Members will be aware that this funding was set aside to provide a mitigation for the loss of the pitch at Trinity 1. As this pitch will no longer be required to support the expansion of the school Cabinet may be minded to invest this elsewhere.

5.8 The alternative configuration option in this report would not require any further Statutory Consultation as prescribed under the School Organisation Code 2018. However, the proposal has limited potential for further development and a longer term option would therefore need to be investigated to create a 2nd Special School in the Borough under Band C of the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme. This would come with an element of risk as any future proposals would require

separate Welsh Government approval, its own consultation process and at present a site for a new build has not been identified.

- 5.9 It is anticipated that the alternative option would be deliverable by September 2024 albeit this builds in very little contingency.

5.10 **Conclusion**

Members are asked to consider the contents of this report and the potential for an alternative reconfiguration of the build to deliver the proposal for the expansion of the existing Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre, and to approve the recommendation to progress to planning and full business case submission based on this alternative way forward.

6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 That the scheme is deliverable within the allocated budget.
- 6.2 That the scheme will achieve statutory approvals.
- 6.3 That the alternative scheme will be delivered by September 2024.

7. **SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment and Post consultation Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) for this proposal was undertaken alongside the original Consultation processes forming part of the outline consultation pack which are both published on the Council's website.
- 7.2 The purpose of this further assessment is to take account of any further information that has come to light since the final determination was made and to reflect consideration of environmental factors which has resulted in the alternative option being presented.

Updated IIA (July 2022)

8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Welsh Government and Members have previously agreed in principle to earmark a total of £12,588,573 for the Trinity Fields School expansion. The Authority's contribution within this sum is £3,147,143.
- 8.2 Currently market forces are indicating a significant inflationary increase within the construction sector. This is being kept under close review but the current projected costs for the 21st Century Schools Programme will be subject to change. Members will be updated further as matters progress.

9. **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 This will be dependent on specific proposals and will be considered as part of the process.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 The draft report was distributed as detailed below. All comments received have been reflected in this version of the report.

10.2 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Education Scrutiny Committee – 26th September 2022

Subject: Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme – Trinity Fields School Expansion Update Report

Scrutiny Comments:

The Cabinet Member for Education and Communities provided an overview of the current progress in relation to the Sustainable Communities for Learning (formerly 21st Century Schools) proposal for Trinity Fields. Members were advised that due to a number of factors outlined in the report, a proposed amendment to the previously endorsed Cabinet decision of the 7th April 2021 was recommended, that being

- A) To endorse the recommendation to Cabinet to expand Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre via a two storey extension on part of the School Car Park
- B) To ask officers to investigate a longer term option to create a 2nd Special School in the Borough under Band C of the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme.

The Scrutiny Committee referred to the financial implications and asked if the contingency will be adequate when you consider the increasing cost of building materials, which seems to change almost on a daily basis.

Members were advised that there are significant pressures in the building industry at the moment, not just with 21st Century Schools but other capital works coming in well above budget. It was explained that when we get to the tender stage for this project, we would look to submit a further business case to Welsh Government for increased funding should the need arise. Despite initial budget estimates for the proposal being based on the latest Welsh Government cost standards, projects currently in progress are demonstrating that works are coming in, above and beyond the estimate. Members were assured that officers are used to dealing with these instances and have a clear process to follow.

The scrutiny committee noted that the budget set for the original project was for a bigger scheme and asked if it will therefore be sufficient for this smaller scheme despite the increasing costs for materials. Members queried if there actually be a cost saving or is it likely that the increasing costs will exceed the original budget.

Members were advised that the original projections for the project were £12.5 million and if the scheme as originally outlined progressed it would not be achievable at that cost. The revised scheme being recommended today is estimated circa £7 million, although it was highlighted that this figure is expected to come in higher as it is only an outline estimate at this stage, however, despite cost pressures, it is anticipated to be delivered close to the original £12.5 million that Welsh Government have already allocated.

With regard to a new school, we are unable to provide an estimate, but it would be well over the £12.5 million and would come under Band C of the 21st Century Schools programme.

The scrutiny committee commented that we need to consider the demand for this type of education that these children and young adults need and asked if we have any kind of time scale for the Band C programme.

Members were advised that the original indication for Band C was 2026, but Welsh Government have advised local authorities that they're changing it to more of a rolling program. Therefore, when we as an authority are ready, which will include a number of projects already underway, we can bring these to a future meeting.

Scrutiny Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations to Cabinet.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 School Organisation Code 2018 (Welsh Government)
School Standards & Organisation (Wales) Act 2013

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Background Papers:

None