



## **CABINET REPORT**

Date Written	16 <sup>th</sup> December 2020 *
Report Author	Anthony Lewis
Service Area	Learning Department
Committee Division	Strategic
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	6 <sup>th</sup> January 2021

To: *Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen*

### **3-16 Voluntary Aided School – Site Consultation**

#### **1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update regarding the 3-16 Voluntary Aided (VA) School site consultation outcomes and to seek approval for the new school build to progress to design development on the recommended option.

#### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S) that**

2.1 The land south of the 'Greenie', west of Galon Uchaf Road, be selected as the site for the purpose of building the new 3-16 school, be approved.

2.2 Option A, as identified within the 3-16 Consultation Pack – Appendix 1, design development subject to the pending appointment of a successfully tendered contractor is progressed.

2.3 Design development be undertaken with all relevant stakeholders, particularly to address concerns identified through the consultation exercise and others that may emerge through ongoing engagement and dialogue be undertaken.

2.4 Use of the whole current upper BHHS site as a contingent option to supplement Option A, if required, be retained.

### **3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 On 11<sup>th</sup> September 2019, the local authority approved the proposal to close St Aloysius Roman Catholic (RC) Primary, St Illtyd's RC Primary and St Mary's RC Primary Schools and Bishop Hedley RC High School (BHHS) with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022, creating a 3-16 all through VA Catholic school.
- 3.2 The new 3-16 school would operate across the current four school sites for a 12-month period until the completion of a new build as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Band B Programme in readiness for September 2023.
- 3.3 The statutory consultation on the school reorganisation proposals to merge the four schools as a 3-16 all through school, identified the land south of the 'Greenie', west of Galon Uchaf Road, as the preferred site for the new school. A potential option using the current BHHS upper and lower sites was also taken forward from the consultation as a candidate site solution, subject to an appropriate feasibility study being carried out.

### **4.0 3-16 VA SCHOOL FEASIBILITY STUDY**

- 4.1 Atkins were commissioned to undertake a feasibility study of the potential options on the above sites for a new 3-16 school accommodating a 525-pupil place primary school with 100 full time equivalent nursery places, and a 600 pupil (four form entry) secondary school.
- 4.2 As part of the investigations Atkins were asked to consider site layouts, proposed requirements and site/environmental constraints and their scope included Site Accessibility, Acoustics, Flood Risk, Drainage and Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS), Public Utilities, Geo-technical and Ground Conditions, Site Terrain, Ecology, Statutory Design Considerations, Site Opportunities and Site Constraints.
- 4.3 A total of seven different site scenarios, using a combination of some or all of the three sites, were scoped and from this scenario analysis four site layout options were developed further that considered potential building positioning and location/type of sports facilities to ensure the requirements of the Building Bulletin 98/99 for Primary and Secondary school areas were met.
- 4.4 Due to site constraints identified on the Galon Uchaf Road/Greenie site the four options developed all utilised some element of the current BHHS site either for car parking, drop-off, sports facilities, or all of these to ensure sufficient space was provided overall to meet the space requirements for the 3-16 school.
- 4.5 From this study two viable options emerged that satisfied the site constraints, the vision of the local authority as expressed throughout the statutory consultation processes to develop a single all through 3-16 school, and the funding constraints subject to further detailed design considerations and investigations.

## 5.0 SITE OPTIONS CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The two viable options identified as Option A and Option B were shared with Portfolio Lead members, Ward Councillors, Archdiocesan officers, and school leaders to discuss stakeholder consultation options in order to ensure ongoing listening and engagement could be undertaken in line with the Council's Focus on the Future Wellbeing Plan and the sustainable development principles.
- 5.2 Following these discussions, a three-week public and stakeholder consultation was run from Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November – Monday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020.
- 5.3 Please see Appendix 1 for the consultation pack that was made available online via the Council's webpage and social media as well as hard copies being delivered to residential properties in the immediate vicinity of the proposed school sites.
- 5.4 Hard copies and display plans from the consultation pack were also made available across the four local catholic parish churches.
- 5.5 Two letters were received from interested parties during the consultation and the views expressed have been factored into the consultation outcomes analysis undertaken in the following section.

## 6.0 CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

- 6.1 Detailed consultation findings have been included in Appendix 2.
- 6.2 A summary of the consultation outcomes and a consideration of the key themes is provided within this section.
- 6.3 There were 58 responses to the consultation that can be summarised into the following categories

**Table 1: Number and % Respondents by Category**

Respondent Category	Number	Percentage
Resident	26	44.8%
School Community (inc. parishes)	27	46.6%
Other	5	8.6%
<b>All</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

- 6.4 The preferred option selected overall was option A and this is preferred to option B by residents, the school community and other respondents as can be seen below.

**Table 2: Preferred Options selected**

<b>Respondent Category</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Neither*</b>
Resident	31%	19%	50%
School Community (inc. parishes)	56%	33%	11%
Other	60%	20%	20%
<b>All</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>29%</b>

\* the survey only gave options A or B, however some responses indicated that they did not support either option and this has been reflected in the analysis.

6.5 Option A was selected by 56% of the school community, the 11% selecting neither option did so because either they do not support the school merger or because they consider there to be better alternative site options. 50% of residents selected neither option expressing a view that the school should not be built on the land identified as the preferred site south of the Greenie. The other 50% of residents supported the proposals and favoured Option A 31% to Option B 19%.

## 6.6 Option A

6.6.1 62% of all responses were generally favourable to Option A. The majority of these responses came from the school community with 81% providing overall positive responses although 58% of residents provided unfavourable responses.

6.6.2 The many positive responses include:

- ✓ Good design and excellent facilities indicated including forest school and dance studios
- ✓ All of the school site remains on one side of the main road
- ✓ Gives a large macadam area which pupils could use during break and lunchtimes
- ✓ Very good sports facilities including the All-weather pitch
- ✓ Good amount of outside space
- ✓ Seems safest option for children
- ✓ Less disruption to students during building works
- ✓ Essential that traffic calming measures, safe drop off and safe routes to school are incorporated as indicated in high level plans
- ✓ Some of the current BHHS site could be redeveloped as a green area for communal land

## 6.7 Option B

6.7.1 53% of responses were generally favourable to Option B. The majority of these responses came from the school community with 70% providing overall positive responses although again 58% of residents provided unfavourable responses.

6.7.2 The many positive responses included;

- ✓ This is the better option as has extra outdoor space
- ✓ Provides more green space for all pupils

- ✓ Extra grass pitches for the primary school pupils
- ✓ More outside space for primary pupils that is away from secondary pupils
- ✓ I think this option makes more sense due to the size and potential scope for further expansion
- ✓ I like that they may use some of the upper BHHS site as it keeps some tradition of the current schools
- ✓ Better outdoor space and grass pitches but safety measures for pupils moving between two sites requires careful consideration

## 6.8 Key Questions, Suggestions and Concerns

6.8.1 The most important factors identified by respondents when selecting the site of a new school are Safety (52%), Accessibility (50%) and Facilities (48%).

6.8.2 These elements feature strongly in the main questions, suggestions and concerns identified in relation to both options.

6.8.3 The potential issues / most important matters requiring further consideration for Option A, taken from both favourable and unfavourable responses have been summarised below:

## 6.9 Parking / Drop-Off, Traffic Congestion & Safety

6.9.1 Concerns over location of staff parking and parent drop-off on other side of a busy road and the safety of children crossing over to access the school building. Cars currently park on the road outside the Upper BHHS site and this causes traffic backlog, difficult access/egress for residents and the danger of passing vehicles. Concerns that traffic calming measures may lead to more traffic congestion at the start and end of the school day and that the road infrastructure will not cope with the extra volume of traffic from three primary schools being added to BHHS. Concerns that the extra traffic congestion will lead to extra air pollution.

6.9.2 Questions whether sufficient parking and drop-off spaces including for school transport have been provided within indicative plans.

6.9.3 Suggestions that alternative solutions such as a pedestrian bridge and / or another access road or a second car park further away be considered to reduce the congestion. Suggestion that school opening/closing times be staggered for primary / secondary to help reduce the congestion.

### Local Authority Response

Alternative design options with regards to parking and drop-off can be considered in order to ease congestion and mitigate related risks as part of phase 1 design development if Option A is chosen as the preferred site option. Further consideration can be given to locating car parking and parent drop-off on the main school site in order to mitigate some of the risks identified. Key to this will be the outcome of the Traffic Impact Assessment and the detailed ground investigations that will inform the necessary design development.

## 6.10 School Transport and Safer Routes to School

Questions regarding how transport will work for younger school pupils and whether there will be direct safe access from the Gurnos Estate for students i.e. to avoid having to walk around and up Gwaunfarren Road onto Galon Uchaf Road.

### Local Authority Response

Free school transport is provided by the local authority in line with the statutory requirements i.e. for primary aged pupils travelling more than 2 miles and secondary aged pupils travelling more than 3 miles. Transport is also provided for pupils who do not have an available safe walking route to school. The potential for direct access to the site from the Gurnos can be considered as part of design development and ensuring that the options for safe and available walking routes to school are optimised.

## 6.11 Ground Conditions

Concerns have been raised regarding the site indicated for the school build as being a former landfill area and the exacerbation of current drainage issues with water run-off from the site towards some residents' properties. Questions have been raised regarding the impact disturbing the land will have on people's health, the stability of the ground and the impact a school build will have on site drainage due to the removal of natural vegetation. Concerns have been raised regarding the risk of landslide and property subsidence.

### Local Authority Response

Ground conditions, flood risk and SUDS have all been considered as part of the feasibility study which indicated a defined landfill area within the site and the school siting options indicated within the options have taken that into account however extensive ground investigations will be carried out at the site that will confirm any issues with ground conditions from previous use and design development solutions will factor this in accordance with legislation and current guidance. A sustainable urban drainage scheme will be designed in accordance with current standards and specific approval will be required for this to ensure there is no risk of flooding of the site or nearby properties. The above factors will ensure that all risks are substantially mitigated.

## 6.12 Positioning / Orientation of School Building on the site

6.12.1 Concerns raised regarding the loss of privacy that will be experienced by residents due to close proximity of school backing on to properties and higher elevation of proposed siting of building. Concerns also that the siting of the school presents an increased security risk to residents as school would back onto gardens at the rear or properties and the risk of anti-social behaviour from pupils e.g. throwing objects into gardens and littering near residential properties.

6.12.2 Questions have been raised regarding the positioning and orientation of the school building and whether this is an aspect that residents could have more involvement with regards to the options being considered.

### Local Authority Response

The proposed plans show a play area for nursery and reception pupils that will be located in the area of the site where the school building itself backs onto some residents' properties. It is proposed that shrubs and foliage will be reinstated to provide an appropriate barrier between the nursery/reception play area and the residents' back gardens. Further consideration will be given to the exact positioning of the building given the vantage point from the windows on the first floor to mitigate risks to privacy. There will also be significant shrubs and foliage behind the rear gardens that back onto the school playing fields and this will provide an appropriate barrier between the school grounds and the residents' properties to mitigate risks from anti-social behaviour.

Phase 1 design development will require further site exploration and consideration with residents regarding the exact positioning of the school building and appropriate mitigations will be included as part of this process. At this stage plans are only indicative and during the design development stage full consideration will be given to the neighbouring properties to mitigate and minimise any impact the school may have.

## **6.13 Other Impacts on Residents / Community**

Noise and disruption for residents caused by the building work and the ongoing use of the site during the school day and community use in the evenings; including from use of Macadam, All Weather facility and impact of floodlights. Concern regarding property value for properties that will be surrounded by the school or directly impacted by its positioning. Concern regarding the loss of green playing field space, common land and negative impacts on wildlife.

### Local Authority Response

Unfortunately, an element of noise and disruption from the school building works will be unavoidable, however we will work with residents through a stakeholder project group to be set up in order to minimise impacts during construction and foster good relationships that can support positive dialogue during the operational phase of the project.

Further mitigation to minimise noise and disruption from the site will be considered as part of the design development phase and will involve the stakeholder project group. New school buildings can help to increase the retail value of houses but the impact of the proposed school development on the property values of neighbouring properties is unknown at this stage.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was undertaken as part of the feasibility study and its conclusions and recommendations have been considered as part of the site options proposed and will be factored into ongoing design development.

As Option A retains all sports facilities on the main school site the repurposing of the current upper BHHS site for alternative uses such as for green open space can be given further consideration.

## 6.14 Facilities

- 6.14.1 Concern has been raised regarding a lack of grass sports pitches compared to Option B and whether there will be enough sports pitches overall for both Secondary and Primary pupils to use simultaneously without being concerned about shared use and timetabling. It has been suggested that all Primary age pupils should have access to the outdoors directly from their classroom and noted that this doesn't seem to be the case in the current plans.
- 6.14.2 Questions have been asked regarding whether there will be different entrances for Primary/Secondary schools, how will Primary/Secondary pupils be separated and safeguarding implications if there are shared spaces. Further questions have been asked about the internal design and use of space.

### Local Authority Response

Option A provides sufficient sports facilities and outdoor space that meets the requirements set out in BB98/99 but this is achieved in part through the use of a Macadam pitch facility and an all-weather pitch as these have multiple uses and can be used to a higher frequency and more regularly than grass pitches. Shared use and appropriate timetabling would be required to manage the access for the different age groups at the appropriate times.

The detailed design work has not taken place yet and so there are no explicit plans regarding entrances, internal design and use of space; however indicatively the vision is for there to be a single main entrance with separate wings of the school for Primary and Secondary. Nursery pupils will have a separate entrance to the main school.

## 6.15 Other Questions

A question has been asked whether as part of the project improvements can be made to the facilities on the Greenie that will be outside of the school boundary such as the current play area, MUGA, drainage on the upper playing field and the existing right of way between Galon Uchaf and the Gurnos Estate.

### Local Authority Response

21<sup>st</sup> Century school capital grant from Welsh Government can only be used to improve facilities within the school boundary on any given project. However, there may be potential to consider alternative sources of funding such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to support related projects that will help improve the facilities on the Greenie and in and around the vicinity of the school for the benefit of the whole community. Further consideration will be given to this aspect.

## 6.16 Key Questions, Suggestions and Concerns continued

Many questions, suggestions, and concerns were also noted for Option B and the majority of these have been noted in 6.8 - 6.15 above as they apply to both options, however matters raised that specifically relate to Option B only have been captured below.



## 6.17 Parking / Drop-Off, Traffic Congestion & Safety

Concern that the siting of the grass pitches across the road will lead to additional traffic congestion and presents a safety hazard to pupils accessing the facility

### Local Authority Response

Traffic calming measures and safe access to the main school site will be carefully considered and developed as part of design development if Option B is selected.

## 6.18 Facilities

Concern that the choice appears to be more grass pitches or a Macadam whereas both should be considered. Suggestion that the current BHHS upper site should be put to better use than just as playing fields and that more facilities could be located here to further improve the school.

### Local Authority Response

The inclusion of a macadam surface on the main school site is only required to ensure recommended sports facility requirements are met as part of option A and this is not required if grass pitches are provided on the other site. Sufficient internal space has been provided within the current school buildings to provide the space required for the planned for number of pupils. The inclusion of a macadam on the main site as well as grass pitches on the current upper BHHS site would not be affordable within the current cost plans and neither would additional buildings on the grass pitch site.

## 6.19 Disruption

Concern that the demolition of existing buildings on BHHS upper site increases the chance of encountering problems with the project and gives more potential for current BHHS pupils to be disrupted during project.

### Local Authority Response

The demolition of existing school buildings would be carefully planned and scheduled but would add additional complexity and cost to the phasing of the design and build project. This however has been scoped in the feasibility study and is achievable within the overall project timeline and funding envelope.

## 6.20 Shared Community Asset - All Weather pitch

6.20.1 The views expressed with respect to the all-weather facility that will have shared community use are positive overall with 69% of responses favourable, 19% negative and 12% no view provided. This can be seen in the table below

**Table 3: Views regarding shared community facility: All-Weather pitch**

<b>Respondent Category</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>No response</b>
Resident	54%	35%	12%
School community	81%	4%	15%
Other	80%	20%	0%

All	69%	19%	12%
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6.20.2 The vast majority of the school community 81% favour the proposed facility with only one response disagreeing. The majority of residents 54% support the proposal but 35% are not in favour.

#### Positive Comments

- ✓ Positive opportunity for the mental and physical health & wellbeing of children and young people and whole community
- ✓ The local community should absolutely benefit from the new school
- ✓ This is a great idea and the community needs to be involved to make it a success
- ✓ Great idea, potential to bring in extra revenue to the school
- ✓ Considering the climate an all weather pitch would be an asset as would sharing with the community.
- ✓ Positive depending on the conditions surrounding it such as maintenance and timetabling.
- ✓ May help the school generate more income by renting out the pitches
- ✓ This is an excellent facility and would provide the children with excellent opportunities
- ✓ Community assets will offer significant positive outcomes for the school, the communities they serve and a wide range of other stakeholders.

6.20.3 There were also many suggestions, questions and concerns noted. For detailed comments please refer to Appendix 2, Q8 but the key concerns fall under the following themes

#### **6.21 Management of facility / Community Access**

Who will be responsible for the facility? How will maintenance be managed? What access will the community have? Will the site be secure and separate from the school? How will open space loss be compensated?

#### Local Authority Response

The site will be the responsibility of the school but there will be a clear expectation as part of the project delivery that the site is used as a community asset, and this will be required in order to satisfy open space strategy requirements. The site will be securely fenced and gated and will have secure access to the main school and separate to the community access. Community use of the facility will be bookable and timetabled for outside of school hours. Local clubs will be encouraged to make use of the facility on a regular basis to generate appropriate community use and usage agreements may be required to secure long-term agreements and shared responsibilities including ensuring facilities are properly maintained when in use and afterwards.

The school will be required to generate an income from the community use of the facility in order to maintain the facility to an appropriate standard and the details of this will be for the school to consider in collaboration with community groups and the local authority.

## 6.22 **Traffic/Parking**

There are concerns that parking is already an issue when the current Greenie pitches are used on evenings and weekends as cars are parked dangerously on the bend of the road which will be exacerbated with increased use. Questions regarding whether additional parking will be provided and what impact will the additional traffic have on residents on evenings and weekends? A suggestion has been made regarding whether it would be possible to provide parking spaces along the north-west side of the pitches?

### Local Authority Response

These concerns are noted and will be addressed further through consideration of the Traffic Impact Assessment and the detailed design development that will be required to ensure these risks are mitigated with a fully specified design before any final plans for the build and community facility are signed off to progress to build stage.

## 6.23 **Disturbance**

Concerned that extra use from the school renting out facilities will increase disturbance for residents on evenings and weekends. Concerns regarding disturbance from floodlights, noise, bad language and anti-social behaviour

### Local Authority Response

The use of the facility will be controlled through booking via the school and all end users will be subject to terms of use agreements with expectations on their behaviour, treatment of the facility and impact on neighbouring properties. Mitigation to minimise noise and disruption from the community facility will be considered as part of the design development phase and will involve the stakeholder project group.

## 6.24 **Value for money**

Concerns have been raised that the current facilities are not well used and that included this within the project is not good value for money.

### Local Authority Response

There are existing local clubs and service users that would benefit greatly from the new facility. Providing brand new state of the art facilities also helps to generate additional demand for facilities previously under utilised. The success of the shared community facility will depend on the school-community engagement and this will be an important aspect of the project stakeholder group.

## 6.25 **Alternative Options**

Question regarding why this enhancement couldn't be carried out without the need for the school to be built on the lower part of the site.

### Local Authority Response

There are significant funding implications for purchasing and maintaining an all-weather facility and therefore a sustainable project is required for this to be a viable option. The local authority is able to access 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools funding to build a

new school that is needed by the local community and this has provided the opportunity to be able to use these funds to enhance a community facility which would be managed and maintained by the school but shared with the community so that there is a clear positive benefit to the community. Alternative funding streams would need to be accessed and operational arrangements put in place to manage this facility without the access to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century school monies.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The land south of the Greenie, west of Galon Uchaf Road is a viable site for the purpose of building the new 3-16 school.
- 7.2 Option A as identified within the 3-16 Consultation Pack is the preferred specific option with the consultees and although many questions, suggestions and concerns have been raised the feasibility study undertaken and professional officers' advice provide confidence that appropriate mitigating solutions will be found through the design development stage.
- 7.3 Further site investigations and a detailed traffic impact assessment are required as part of design development in order to appropriately design the required solutions.
- 7.4 Design development should be undertaken with all relevant stakeholders, particularly to address concerns identified through the consultation exercise and others that may emerge through ongoing engagement and dialogue.
- 7.5 There may be additional benefit to the design development solutions from retaining the current upper BHHS site as a contingent option to supplement Option A subject to budget availability. This is since the additional space provided by the site may support relevant design development solutions needed for car-parking, drop-off, sports facilities or other.

## **8.0 NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 Subject to the approval of the preferred option indicated in the Recommendations, a Stage 1 contract for design development of the proposed new 3-16 school build needs to be awarded to the successful bidder from the tender process undertaken 6<sup>th</sup> November – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020.
- 8.2 A separate report will be brought seeking appointment of the successful contractor.
- 8.3 The successful contractor will then work with all stakeholders including residents and schools to ensure that all concerns, suggestions, and questions are appropriately addressed as part of the site design development during 2021.

## **9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The indicative cost plan from the feasibility study indicate that both Option A and Option B are deliverable within the current funding envelope.
- 9.2 The required local authority match funding for the 3-16 VA school project is secured within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

## 10.0 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1

	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts	Not Applicable
<b>1. Merthyr Tydfil Well-being Objectives</b>	2 of 4	0 of 4	2 of 4
<b>2. Sustainable Development Principles - How have you considered the five ways of working:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long term</li> <li>• Prevention</li> <li>• Integration</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Involvement</li> </ul>	5 of 5	0 of 5	0 of 5
<b>3. Protected Characteristics</b> <i>(including Welsh Language)</i>	3 of 10	0 of 10	7 of 10
<b>4. Biodiversity</b>	0 of 1	0 of 1	1 of 1
<p><b>Summary:</b></p> <p>The main positive impacts are that the proposal to choose a 3-16 school site with a shared and enhanced community facility makes a positive contribution to the 'Best Start to Life' and 'Living Well' wellbeing objectives.</p> <p>There are no negative impacts. At this stage there are no impacts on Biodiversity but that may change as the project progress though its phases.</p>			

**SUE WALKER**  
**CHIEF OFFICER LEARNING**

**COUNCILLOR LISA MYTTON**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR LEARNING**

<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>		
<b>Title of Document(s)</b>	<b>Document(s) Date</b>	<b>Document Location</b>
School Reorganisation 3-16 VA School Cabinet Report	11 <sup>th</sup> September 2019	Intranet
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Cabinet Report	17 <sup>th</sup> April 2019	Intranet
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Schools Band B Strategic Outline Programme (SOP)	August 2017	Learning Dept.
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Schools Band B SOP Revision Annex 1	February 2019	Learning Dept.
<b>Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?</b>		No

***Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.***