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FULL COUNCIL REPORT

Date Written	25 th November 2021 *
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Service Area	Learning Department
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	7 th December 2021

To: Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

3-16 Voluntary Aided Catholic School - Extended Site Consultation 2

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update regarding the outcomes of the extended 3-16 Voluntary Aided (VA) Catholic School site consultation undertaken during April/May and July/September 2021, and to consider outcomes from further investigation and development of the potential site options.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION that

2.1 An additional public consultation on the following revised options for the site of the 3-16 school be approved:-

- Revised Option 2 – Greenie. This is the Greenie option but revised as per 9.12 in the report, including the provision of additional protected open space to be provided to the community on the current BHHS Phase 2 site.
- Revised Option 3a - Current BHHS sites. This is the proposed development on the current BHHS sites, with secondary sport pitch provision on plateau 2 of the Buttercup Fields.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 On 11th September 2019, following two stakeholder and public consultations, the local authority approved the proposal to close St Aloysius Roman Catholic (RC) Primary, St Illyd's RC Primary and St Mary's RC Primary Schools and Bishop Hedley RC High School (BHHS) with effect from 1st September 2022, creating a 3-16 all through VA Catholic school.

- 3.2 Following a feasibility study undertaken by Atkins of the land south of 'Greenie', west of Galon Uchaf Road and the current BHHS upper and lower sites as potential preferred sites, two site options were taken out to consultation in November 2020.
- 3.3 On 6th January 2021, following a review of the consultation responses, the land south of the 'Greenie', west of Galon Uchaf Road was approved as the preferred site for the new 3-16 VA school and Willmott Dixon Construction were engaged for phase 1 design development works to further scope the best solutions for the siting of the school building, traffic management, drop-off/parking and sports facilities.
- 3.4 As a result of the additional scoping works undertaken alternative options for the siting of the school were developed for further consultation with stakeholders as follows:-
- Option 1 – Buttercup Fields
This is a further development of the preferred option A from the consultation in November 2020, but now with all car parking and drop-off facilities on the same side of the road as the school building. There would be proposed shared use of one of the community playing fields, enhanced to an all-weather facility, and with car parking provided for community access out of school hours.
 - Option 2 – Greenie
This is an alternative configuration of the whole site, the school building now being located on the current Greenie playing fields with both playing fields relocated to the southern end of the site. One of the playing fields would be a shared all-weather facility, and the other field would be accessible to the community at all times.
- 3.5 Following discussion and engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders including Cabinet members, ward councillors, the Archdiocese, the new 3-16 Governing Body, and Headteachers / Chairs of Governors of the current Catholic schools, Gurnos FC and concerned residents, the local authority went live with a public and stakeholder consultation from Friday 23rd April to Friday 7th May 2021.

In addition to completing the survey targeted stakeholder and public consultation sessions were held on Microsoft Teams as follows:-

Thursday 29 th April 2021	4–6 pm	3-16 Governing Body / Headteachers
Friday 30 th April 2021	4-6 pm	Gurnos FC / Merthyr Football League
Tuesday 4 th May 2021	5-7 pm	Residents living in immediate vicinity of proposed sites
Wednesday 5 th May 2021	5-7 pm	Public

- 3.6 On 26th May 2021, following a consideration of the consultation outcomes, Cabinet approved that design development for proposals to build the new 3-16 VA School on the Greenie be progressed to the next stages.
- 3.7 However, on 14th July 2021 in recognition of the public response expressed on social media that a large number of residents were not aware of the public consultation, Cabinet approved that an extended consultation be undertaken from Thursday 15th July to Monday 6th September 2021, to allow further opportunity for all stakeholders including all households in the Penydarren, Galon Uchaf and Gurnos Wards to participate in the consultation.

4.0 EXTENDED SITE OPTIONS CONSULTATION 2

- 4.1 Please see **Appendix 1** for the consultation pack including a consultation survey that was made available online via the Council's webpage and social media.
- 4.2 A hard copy letter was sent to all 4,730 residential properties in the local areas directly affected by the proposal, including Penydarren, Galon Uchaf and the Gurnos Estate.
- 4.3 50 hard copy consultation packs and display packs were distributed to the four local Catholic parish churches.
- 4.4 A further 156 letters were later sent to specific streets in the Gurnos following a request by Ward Councillors, as some residents had noted they hadn't received the original letter.
- 4.5 Following this, to ensure that all residents in the local area and all parents of school children, had sufficient opportunity to respond, the consultation was further extended to the 20th September 2021.
- 4.6 702 responses were received during the extended consultation from 15th July to 20th September. This totals an overall 783 responses to the consultation on the 3-16 site options including the 81 that were received between 23rd April and 7th May.
- 4.7 **Appendix 2** provides detailed analysis of the consultation responses received from across the entire consultation period April/May and July/September, including the feedback received from the stakeholder and public consultation sessions held on MS Teams.
- 4.8 The following section provides a summary of this analysis.

5.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

- 5.1 Four consultation meetings were held with stakeholders affected by the plans including headteachers and school governors; residents; members of Gurnos FC and Merthyr Football League; and the public.
- 5.2 Key concerns arising from these discussions included the need to provide sufficient parking and manage traffic on and surrounding the site; questions around drainage, ground stability and landfill, particularly regarding Option 1 – Buttercup Fields; impact of residents in terms of noise/light pollution, residents security concerns and questions around community access to facilities, particularly regarding Option 2 – Greenie; and the project budget and timescales.
- 5.3 These concerns and questions correspond to the majority of main concerns and queries raised through the consultation surveys as detailed in 5.17 to 5.20 below. Further information regarding the project budget and timescales has been considered in sections 7 and 11.

5.4 There were 783 responses to the consultation survey that can be summarised into the following categories, the local community (including residents and local community stakeholders) and school community (including pupils, parents, members of school staff and members of local parishes). Respondents were asked to only select one category that best describes their interest in the proposals, 99.2% did this but six either choose more than one category or no category and this has been reflected in the table below.

Table 1: Number and % Respondents by Category

Respondent Category	Number	Percentage
Local Community (inc. residents and community stakeholders)	546	69.7%
School Community (inc. pupils, parents, school staff, parishioners)	231	29.5%
Both categories / no category*	6	0.8%
All	783	100%

*Made up of five respondents who fall into both categories and one respondent who gave no response to which category they belong to.

5.5 It should also be noted that although each respondent has been placed in one or other category, many may belong to both, as many in the school community may also be residents or local community stakeholders, and vice versa, however, for the ease of analysis their responses have been shown against the appropriate interest group they declared on the survey form completed.

5.6 As can be seen in Table 2 below the overall preference across respondents was for neither option, with 65.8% of responses, 21.7% selected Option 2 – Greenie and 12.5% selected Option 1 – Buttercup Fields.

Table 2: Preferred Options selected – Respondent Category

Respondent Category	Option 1 Buttercup Fields	Option 2 Greenie	Option 3 'None of the above'	Total
Local Community (inc. residents and community stakeholders)	9.2%	15.0%	75.8%	100%
School Community (inc. pupils, parents, school staff, and parishioners)	19.1%	38.3%	42.6%	100%
All	12.5%	21.7%	65.8%	100%

5.7 Table 2 also shows that 75.8% of the local community preferred neither option but that for the school community, 57.4% selected either Option 1 or 2, with 38.3% favouring Option 2 – Greenie and 19.1% Option 1 - Buttercup Fields, and 42.6% of the school community selected neither.

5.8 Of the two options developed for the consultation, Option 2 – Greenie received the most support from both the school community 38.3% and from the local community 15.0%. Option 1- Buttercup Fields is the least favourite option across each group.

5.9 This can be analysed further by considering the preferences of each individual group.

Table 3: Preferred Options selected – Individual Respondent Group

Individual Respondent Group	Option 1 Buttercup Fields	Option 2 Greenie	Option 3 'None of the above'	Total
Resident	9.1%	14.6%	76.3%	100%
Parents	25.0%	39.0%	36.0%	100%
School Staff	17.2%	51.7%	29.3%	100%
Parishioners	10.2%	22.4%	67.3%	100%
Pupils	15.4%	38.5%	46.2%	100%
Others*	12.2%	17.1%	70.7%	100%
All	12.5%	21.7%	65.8%	100%

*Others includes local community stakeholders and those who selected 'other' as category type

5.10 As can be seen from Table 3, Option 3 – 'None of the above' was the strongest preference amongst residents, parish members, and 'other' respondents with 76.3% of residents, 67.3% of local parish members and 70.7% 'other' respondents selecting this option.

5.11 Amongst parents, pupils and school staff, there was a preference for either Option 1 or Option 2, with 68.9% of school staff, 64% parents, and 53.9% pupils selecting one of these two options. Of the two options, Option 2 - Greenie was the strongest preference selected by each of these groups.

5.12 Option 1 - Buttercup Fields was the least popular option for each individual group of respondents.

Each option was also scored by respondents on a scale of 1 – 5, low to high. Scores of 1, 3 and 5 were indicated as 'unfavourable', 'satisfactory' and 'favourable' respectively.

Table 4: Options Ranking – Satisfaction scale

	Unfavourable		Satisfactory		Favourable
	1	2	3	4	5
Option 1 - Buttercup Fields	68.7%	4.7%	10.8%	4.2%	11.6%
Option 2 - Greenie	68.2%	2.7%	5.1%	4.1%	19.9%

The majority of respondents consider both options to be unfavourable, over 68% in each case. 29.1% consider Option 2 – Greenie to be at least satisfactory (a score of three or more) with 19.9% giving a maximum score of 5. 26.6% consider the Buttercup Fields to be at least satisfactory with 11.6% giving a maximum score of 5.

5.13 This can be analysed further by considering the satisfaction ranking provided by the local community and school community overall. For ease of comparison, the following tables group scores into 'less than satisfactory' (a score of 1 or 2) and 'at least satisfactory' (a score of 3 or more)

5.14 **Table 5: Local Community Satisfaction ranking of options**

	Less than Satisfactory	At least Satisfactory
Option 1 - Buttercup Fields	80.1%	19.9%
Option 2 - Greenie	80.3%	19.7%

The local community overwhelmingly consider both options to be less than satisfactory with 80.1% and 80.3% reflecting this view respectively. The overall satisfaction score for Option 2 – Greenie is marginally lower than for Option 1 – Buttercup Fields i.e. 0.2% lower.

5.15 **Table 6: School Community Satisfaction ranking of options**

	Less than Satisfactory	At least Satisfactory
Option 1 - Buttercup Fields	58.3%	41.7%
Option 2 - Greenie	48.7%	51.3%

The school community also view Option 1 – Buttercup Fields as less than satisfactory, with 58.3% scoring the option this way, however a small majority of 51.3% consider Option 2 – Greenie to be at least satisfactory overall.

65.5% of school staff and 55.5% of parents consider Option 2 – Greenie to be at least satisfactory.

5.16 The **main concerns** raised by respondents overall across the consultation and by Residents in particular have been identified below in order of those raised most frequently.

- The loss of open green space and the value of this for the health and wellbeing of the community, it's significance to generations of residents and their memories of the area, its utility for physical activity and for children to play, and its importance as a natural habitat for local wildlife.
- Traffic management, road safety and air pollution, specifically that a new 3-16 school will significantly increase the traffic burden on the surrounding roads with consequences for congestion, air quality and the safety of road crossings increasing the risk of accidents.
- Impacts on residents, specifically with regards to; noise and light pollution, security, privacy and obstructed views, and disturbance during building works.

These concerns were raised in relation to both options, with a slightly different emphasis depending on the specific details e.g. obstructed views were raised more in respect of Option 1 – Buttercup Fields with the close proximity of the school building to residential properties, whereas security concerns were raised more in relation to Option 2 – Greenie, with concerns regarding the relocation of the playing fields behind houses adjacent to the Buttercup Fields.

5.17 Other concerns raised, specifically by residents, are with respect to drainage, ground conditions, landfill, and knotweed, particularly in relation to Option 1 – Buttercup Fields. Residents also raised some concern regarding the relocation of sports pitches in relation to Option 2 – Greenie, particularly that this would mean moving the fields further from the communities that use them and that there would be a period during construction when they were out of action.

5.18 Other main concerns that were raised by other stakeholder groups were as follows:-

- Key concerns amongst parents related to traffic, parking and road safety and the need to ensure adequate provision of car parking, drop off facilities and safe access around the site. This was also raised as a key consideration by school staff.
- School staff and parents both noted the close proximity of the school building to residential properties (Option 1) and to the main road (Option 2) noting potential impacts of noise and disruption to residents and pupils. School staff also raised some concerns about the potential disruption to pupils during lessons from community access to areas adjacent to the school and the need to ensure site security is maintained. A few parents noted a concern about the distance to the school compared to the current schools.

5.19 The main concerns raised by parishioners, pupils and local community stakeholders have already been stated above but include; loss of green space, impact of traffic, impact on residents and the relocation of sports pitches further away from the residents that use them.

5.20 There were also positive responses provided by all categories of respondent, including residents, local community stakeholders, as well as from the school community and parishioners.

5.21 The following **positive benefits** of the proposals in general were identified:-

- All parking and drop off facilities are located on the same side of the road as the school building and so all facilities on a single site.
- Appropriateness of the site due to its relatively central location to the current schools.
- Improved modern facilities for pupils and community to use in the new school and on the site.
- Improved facilities for the community through access to enhanced sports pitches.
- The regeneration of the overall site and developing facilities that are currently run down or under-used would provide long-term benefits to the local community.

5.22 There was further specific positive feedback in relation to the individual options, and this was received more in relation to Option 2 – Greenie than for Option 1 – Buttercup Fields across all respondent groups, except for residents where responses were equally mixed in terms of a preference for either option.

In relation to Option 1 – Buttercup Fields, the following positive benefits were noted:

- A number of respondents expressed appreciation for the fact that the existing community playing fields remained in place in this option.

- A few members of school staff felt that this option had the benefit of integrating the school building into the surrounding woodland.

5.23 In relation to Option 2 – Greenie, more positive benefits were noted as follows:

- The layout of the parking in this option is more convenient for accessing the school and/or sports pitches.
- The site access/egress is safer as further away from the Gwaunfarren Road Galon Uchaf Road junction
- The site access/egress and provision for car park / drop-off indicates better traffic flow.
- The site provides improved pedestrian access from the surrounding areas.
- Elevation of the school building enhances natural light and facilitates surveillance of school grounds.
- Placing the school building on the north end of the site could benefit the community by disrupting the anti-social behaviour that currently occurs there.

5.24 The following suggestions were also made as part of the consultation responses.

Site/Location

- Improve and modernise the current BHHS site
- Utilise the existing BHHS site for school buildings and some of Galon Uchaf Park for sports fields
- Separate the primary and secondary schools, with one on the existing BHHS site and the other on Galon Uchaf Park (Buttercup Fields)
- Use the current BHHS car park for the drop off facilities of the new school
- Stagger the modernisation / improvements to the BHHS site, so that all pupils can be re-located to the Phase 1 building whilst Phase 2 is being updated and vice versa

Facilities

Residents suggested the site includes:

- Facilities that would be available to the community free of charge
- A larger playground and MUGA
- A library on site for community use
- Additional parking and play area close by to the site
- The maintenance of the existing playing field at the top of the site (Option 1)

In addition, school staff made suggestions that the site incorporates:

- A toilet block closer to the playing fields in Option 2 - Greenie for younger children
- Separate outdoor facilities for primary and secondary pupils
- Separate school and community changing rooms
- A forest school
- An indoor 3G pitch
- Separate primary and secondary staff parking areas
- Primary parking closer to the school building for ease of access of younger children

- 5.25 As part of the consultation, respondents selecting ‘Option 3 – None of the above’, were given the opportunity to provide alternative site suggestions.
- 5.26 In total, 515 of the responses (65.8%) selected Option 3 – ‘None of the above’ and of these 306 suggested one or more alternative sites. A further 89 answered ‘elsewhere’ but did not specify a location.
- 5.27 The most popular suggestion made was for the existing BHHS sites to be considered further. This was suggested by 152 respondents, 48.6% of the suggestions made were for this site to be considered. This is also consistent with other suggestions, noted in 5.25 above, that were made in general comments about potential alternative development of the BHHS site.
- 5.28 In recognition of this, a detailed comprehensive feasibility study of the potential to develop the current BHHS sites phases 1 and 2, for the 3-16 school, has been undertaken. Further detail of this has been provided in section 6.
- 5.29 The following table details all the alternative suggestions made and provides a comment regarding the potential to develop as a 3-16 school.

Alternative site Suggestions

	No	%	Comments
Existing BHHS site	152	48.60%	No future plans for this land in LDP. This land has been considered further as part of a feasibility study detailed in Section 6
Goat Mill Road	104	33.20%	Land is allocated for employment use in the LDP. Potential occupier has carried out pre-application consultation, with the planning application anticipated shortly
Brownfield land (unspecified)	16	5.10%	Not site specific
Cefn playing fields	14	4.50%	Site is protected open space in the LDP, and is not large enough to accommodate the proposed school (2.3ha compared to a minimum requirement of circa 6ha)
Hoover factory	5	1.60%	Site is allocated for residential development in the LDP. Site is currently under private ownership. Any potential purchase and subsequent development of the site will not fit in with WG Band B funding timescales as project completion is required by 2026.
Cefn (unspecified)	4	1.30%	Not site specific
Ivor works / Ivor tip (Rocky Road)	3	1.00%	Ivor works - site is allocated for a residential led mixed use development in the LDP. The proposed 3-16 school would require the majority of the site, which would result in the development of the site not being in accordance with the LDP. Ivor Tip (Rocky Road) - The site is potentially large enough to accommodate the proposed 3-16 school, however topography would be very challenging, and the land is protected space in the LDP.

	No	%	Comments
Dragon Park	2	0.60%	Dragonparc is under private ownership. A planning application has recently been approved permitting flood defence infrastructure that will allow the site to be developed for residential use.
Dowlais	2	0.60%	Not site specific
The Brynna	2	0.60%	Not site specific
Ground adjacent to BHHS Upper School	1	0.30%	No future plans for this land in LDP. This land has been considered further as part of a feasibility study detailed in Section 6
Heolgerrig	1	0.30%	Not site specific
Hillcrest	1	0.30%	Site is allocated for residential development in the LDP and is too small to accommodate the proposed 3-16 school
“Old tip”	1	0.30%	Not site specific
Civic centre	1	0.30%	Site is currently occupied by MTCBC and is too small to accommodate the proposed 3-16 school
“The park”	1	0.30%	Not site specific
Swansea Road	1	0.30%	Not site specific
Stephen and George’s site	1	0.30%	Not site specific
Old bus station	1	0.30%	Site is too small to accommodate the proposed 3-16 school
Total alternative suggestions	313	100.00%	

The above table shows that most suggested sites are not viable options for the 3-16 school development, however, the suggestion to build on the existing BHHS site is a potential alternative and therefore additional work has been undertaken to explore this option further.

5.30 **Appendix 3** details the other sites that have been considered for the 3-16 school, prior to identifying the Buttercup Fields/Greenie as the preferred site in 2019.

5.31 A **petition** was received by the Council on 24th September, following the closure of the consultation period. The petition, signed by 958 residents, argued that green spaces are a vital part of the community and are significant to the health and wellbeing of the local residents, particularly that of children. In addition, the petition criticised the consultation process surrounding the proposed siting of the 3-16 Voluntary Aided Catholic School, explaining that only 144 residents received letters about the consultation. It was further stated that the consultation survey failed to provide an alternative option that did not utilise land that is part of the Greenie / Buttercup Fields.

Four requests of the Council were made as part of the petition:

- To stop any proposed development on the Greenie or Buttercup Fields
- To protect local green space
- To consult residents using hard copy letters sent to residents throughout the Gurnos and Penydarren wards
- To provide an alternative option for the new school, such as the existing BHHS Phase 1 and 2 site

5.32 In response to the petition received, it should be noted that 144 letters were sent to residents during the initial consultation undertaken in April/May and that for the most recent extension to this consultation between July 15th and September 20th 4,730 letters were sent out, one to each residence in Penyardren, Galon Uchaf and the Gurnos Estate. The opposition from residents to the proposed development on the Greenie and Buttercup Fields and the request to protect local green space is also reflected in the consultation analysis above, in the detail consultation report at Appendix 2 and has been reflected in this report conclusion as part of any further consideration of developing the current options. Finally, the request to consider an alternative option, such as the existing BHHS sites, has been considered below in response to the consultation feedback provided, as well as to the petition request.

6.0 FEASIBILITY STUDY OF BHHS PHASES 1 AND 2

6.1 A previous feasibility study of the existing BHHS sites indicated that the overall space across the sites was not sufficient to provide appropriate provision for a 3-16 school including external areas and sports pitches. It was also advised that significant additional costs and complexities to the delivery of the school would be experienced including a challenging site topography, decant of pupils, demolition of buildings, and a significantly longer programme.

6.2 However, following consultation feedback to look for an alternative site to locate the 3-16 VA school, and significant suggestions that the existing BHHS site across phases 1 and 2 be considered for this, Wilmott Dixon were tasked with undertaking a further detailed and comprehensive feasibility study for a 3-16 school on the existing BHHS site.

6.3 Full details of the feasibility conducted by Wilmott Dixon can be found in **Appendix 4**.

6.4 The feasibility looked at a number of options to develop a 3-16 school on the existing BHHS site including:-

- Refurbishment of existing BHHS buildings to accommodate a primary facility on Phase 2
- Multiple iterations of the refurbishment of Phase 1 buildings with a new build primary extension
- Multiple iterations of a new build 3-16 school on Phase 2
- Multiple iterations of a new build 3-16 school on Phase 1

6.5 Each option was evaluated against building bulletin requirements, the ability to construct the option alongside a live school and the proximity of construction to neighbouring residential properties.

6.6 Three options were then taken forward to develop in further detail. Those options were:-

- Option 3a – A new build 3-16 school on Phase 2 (the building follows existing site plateaus)
- Option 3b – A New build 3-16 school on Phase 2 (the building designed as a single square block located on the lower plateau of Phase 2)
- Option 6a – Remodel and refurbishment of the existing school building on Phase 1, with a new build extension to accommodate the primary)

- 6.7 These options were developed further to include calculated site layouts, services estimates, civil investigations, costs and programmes appropriate for feasibility stage.
- 6.8 Following completion of the above work, and evaluating the options further for risk and how well they meet the project critical success factors (CSFs) (See **Appendix 5** for further detail) it was determined that neither option 3a, 3b nor 6a were viable options for the following main reasons:-
- Excessive risks due to requirement for significant engineering works across the site due to the site topography, particularly the need for extensive earthworks to level the site for sports pitch facilities
 - Excessive risks due to the extensive and oppressive retaining wall features required to provide sports pitch facilities
 - Excessive costs arising due to the significant and extensive engineering works and ongoing risks to manage the retaining wall features required as above.
- 6.9 The estimated cost of delivering the 3-16 school on the current BHHS site across these options ranges from £50.9 to £51.7 million. These costs are significantly in excess of the original budget of £28.5 million and significant savings and efficiencies need to be identified to make these options viable.
- 6.10 It was recommended by the design team that further consideration be given to utilising part of the existing Buttercup Fields, plateau 2 only, for provision of a secondary sports pitch in order to free up space on the existing BHHS site which would help to significantly reduce costs and significantly reduce the extent and risks associated with the engineering and earthworks required across the site.
- 6.11 It should be noted that whilst consultation feedback from residents and local community stakeholders expressed significant opposition to building a school on either the Buttercup Fields or the Greenie, the use of the Buttercup Fields as a sports pitch received more of a mixed response.
- 6.12 Most opposition to this, related either to the use of plateau 1 as a community open space directly behind residential properties, or to the noise and light pollution from community use of floodlit facilities on plateau 2.
- 6.13 Neither of these concerns apply if the school were to use plateau 2 as a secondary school grass sports pitch and so the community's views of this specific proposal have not been considered at this stage.
- 6.14 Moreover, as indicated in 5.25 above, use of the Buttercup Fields to provide sports facilities in support of developing a 3-16 school on the current BHHS sites was suggested in the consultation survey responses.
- 6.15 It should be further noted that the Buttercup Fields are not part of the protected open space within the Council's Local Development Plan or Open Spaces Strategy. In view of the above considerations and in an attempt to provide an alternative to the consulted upon options, it was agreed to include plateau 2 of the Buttercup Fields within the scope of a feasibility study addendum.

- 6.16 In considering all option appraisal methods, as well as the feedback from the design team undertaking the feasibility, option 3a was chosen as the preferred option that could be progressed further within the feasibility addendum, to address the significant issues identified and create a viable option for the 3-16 school on the existing BHHS site using plateau 2 of the Buttercup Fields.
- 6.17 The feasibility was therefore extended to consider further design development on option 3a to reduce risks, retaining wall features, eliminate inefficiency in the building, reduce costs and increase the sports pitch provision.
- 6.18 A copy of the feasibility addendum has been provided as **Appendix 6**.
- 6.19 In revising option 3a, inefficiencies in the building layout were addressed to reduce cost and provide more external space overall. The improved layout efficiency created a smaller building footprint which was better aligned to Building Bulletin 98/99 guidance.
- 6.20 The use of plateau 2 on the Buttercup Fields, for a grass sports pitch enables a viable scheme with appropriate sporting facilities to be provided for the school, without constructing vast retaining walls which would prove to be a significant buildability, cost and maintenance risk.
- 6.21 It is important to note that even with use of plateau 2 on the Buttercup Fields, Option 3a Revised still has a shortfall in provision of external sports pitches of 17,679 m² compared to BB98/99 requirements, and without this provision the shortfall increases to 27,179 m²
- 6.22 Option 3a Revised was scored using the same criteria that was applied to options 3a, 3b and 6a in order to evaluate the overall risks and critical success factors as part of an options appraisal to consider the improvements brought about from the further development of the option.
- 6.23 The detailed option appraisal for Option 3a Revised is also included within Appendix 5 but the summary information is included below.
- 6.24 A top five Building and Construction risk assessment was conducted for each option using the corporate framework for risk impact and likelihood. The table below shows how option 3a revised scored in comparison to options 3a, 3b and 6a. The lowest score is deemed the most favourable.

Option/Risk	Low	Medium	High	Critical	Catastrophic	Total Risk Score
3a	0	0	1	3	1	75
3b	0	0	1	3	1	75
6a	0	0	0	3	2	83
3a Revised	0	1	2	2	0	51

- 6.25 The risk assessment shows that option 3a Revised is the lower risk option when considering a viable option for the 3-16 school on the existing BHHS site.
- 6.26 Each option for the existing BHHS site was also scored against how well they met the CSFs for the project. The table below shows the weighted and total scores for each option, with the highest score being the most favourable.

Criteria	3a	3b	6a	3a Revised
Strategic alignment	21	21	19	21
Value for money	12.5	12.5	11.3	17.8
Achievability	12.5	11.3	10	16.3
Affordability	5	5	5	6.3
Total weighted score (out of 100)	51.0	49.8	45.3	61.3

- 6.27 Option 3a revised is significantly more achievable from a safe construction and maintenance perspective, with significantly reduced risks, costs and additional sports provision and overall external space. It also delivers a £3.7m saving on the original 3a option. It is for these reasons that Option 3a Revised scores significantly higher than all other options considered for the existing BHHS site.
- 6.28 Option 3a Revised is therefore carried forward as a viable option for the existing BHHS site to deliver a 3-16 school.
- 6.29 However, it should be noted that even with the significant cost savings identified compared to Options 3a, 3b and 6a, the estimated budget to deliver this school of £47.9 million is significantly in excess of the original budget of £28.5 million.
- 6.30 If this option was to be developed then further consideration and approval from Welsh Government would be required to finance 85% of this via grant as well as further approvals from Council for 15% of the additional funds.
- 6.31 It should also be noted that the estimated programme for delivering a completed 3-16 school under this option is between March and May 2026. As this is outside the timescale for Band B (March 26) this delay to the completion of the project would need further approval by WG.

7.0 OPTIONS APPRAISAL OF OPTIONS 1, 2 AND 3A REVISED

- 7.1 Further work has been undertaken on the two options consulted on in order to provide an up to date position following all site and ground investigation works that have been carried out. This also includes updated estimates for the cost and programme to deliver the 3-16 school, as well as an appraisal of risk and of how well each option currently meets the project critical success factors.
- 7.2 Significant additional costs have also been identified in relation to both option 1 and 2 for the following reasons
- Additional costs to deliver scheme above WG benchmark rates and required areas including site constraints £3.9 million, this includes inflation and cost of materials due to the pandemic
 - Ground conditions £2.1 million
 - Additional construction costs, fees, and risks £1.2 million
 - Net Zero Carbon £2.8 million
 - Section 278 highways works £536k
 - External works £750k
 - Community facilities £1.05 million
 - Contingency circa £2 million
 - Further costs are expected to address Ground conditions in Option 1 – Buttercup Fields, a longer programme and additional risk – £2.7 million

7.3 As a result of this the updated costs and programme to deliver Option 1 Buttercup Fields and Option 2 – Greenie are as follows:-

- Option 1 – Buttercup Fields £45.4 million – Delivery by January 2025
- Option 2 – Greenie £42.8 million – Delivery by September 2024

7.4 Both options are significantly in excess of the approved budget £28.5 million and require further WG and Council approvals for the 85% / 15% additional funding required.

7.5 See **Appendix 7** for an options appraisal of Option 1 – Buttercup Fields, Option 2 – Greenie and Option 3a Revised that considers appraisal against the CSFs, a Building and Construction risk appraisal and consideration of external sports pitches and areas.

7.6 A top five Building and Construction risk assessment was conducted for each option using the corporate framework for risk impact and likelihood. The lowest score is deemed the most favourable.

Risk	Low	Medium	High	Critical	Catastrophic	Total Risk Score
Option 1	0	0	0	2	3	93
Option 2	0	1	2	2	0	50
Option 3a Revised	0	1	2	2	0	51

7.7 Due to the significant additional risks associated with developing Option 1 – Buttercup Fields arising from the landfill testing and further ground investigations that have been carried out and increased risk of further cost mitigations required, this option is now indicated as significantly the highest risk option.

7.8 It is important to note that none of the three options provides the full amount of external sports pitches required for a 3-16 school of this size, and approval from Welsh Government for derogation from the BB98/99 guidance will be required for all options. Option 2 – Greenie, provides the smallest shortfall in sports pitch provision of 16,654 m2.

7.9 Both Option 1 and Option 2 also locate the school boundary adjacent to community sports pitches, which would increase the accessibility of the community pitches for potential use by the school during the day, when available and if required. This provides an ease of access without the safeguarding risks arising from crossing busy roads, although this will be managed with appropriate road safety and crossing measures on Option 3a Revised to enable secondary aged pupils to access the new fit for purpose grass pitch proposed for Plateau 2 on Buttercup Fields.

7.10 All options were also measured against how well they delivered the CSFs for the project. The table below shows the weighted scores for each of the three options.

The highest scoring option is the preferred option.

Criteria	Option 1 – Buttercup Fields	Option 2 - Greenie	Option 3a Revised Current BHHS sites
Strategic alignment	21	21	21
Value for money	13.1	18.4	17.8
Achievability	12.5	16.3	16.3
Affordability	7.5	8.8	6.3
Total weighted score (Out of 100)	54.1	64.4	61.3

Options 2 – Greenie and Option 3a Revised (Current BHHS Sites), score significantly higher than Option 1 against the critical success factors.

- 7.11 Due to the significant additional risks associated with Option 1 – Buttercup Fields this is considered a potentially unviable option and should be discounted from further consideration for the site of the 3-16 school.
- 7.12 It should also be noted that this option has the lowest CSF score of the three options and is the least popular of the two options consulted on with those who responded to the consultation overall and with most individual groups who responded.
- 7.13 Both Option 2 – Greenie and Option 3a Revised (Current BHHS sites) provide viable options for the delivery of a 3-16 school following detailed consideration of all current information on the schemes.

8.0 TRAFFIC IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- 8.1 Traffic Impact assessments have been carried out by design team consultant engineers and draft Section 278 schemes have been proposed for Option 1 – Buttercup Fields (**Appendix 8**) and Option 2 – Greenie (**Appendix 9**). These schemes are estimated to cost £536k.
- 8.2 A Traffic Impact Assessment and draft Section 278 scheme has also been proposed for the current BHHS sites option 3A Revised. There are ongoing discussions regarding this work between the design team consultants and Highways and Engineering. However, provisionally the proposed scheme is estimated to cost £933k.
- 8.3 The S278 for Option 3a Revised provisionally meets the same highways criteria as proposed for options 1 and 2 on Galon Uchaf Road, as well as additional traffic calming measures on Gwaunfarren Road to be agreed.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Following the extensive consultation undertaken, 65.8% of respondents, selected a preference for neither of the two options proposed to be developed as a 3-16 school. Option 2 – Greenie was selected by 21.7% of respondents and Option 1 – Buttercup Fields by 12.5%.

- 9.2 The majority selecting neither option, increases to 75.8% when considering residents and local community stakeholders in isolation, however, amongst the school community, support for developing the 3-16 school via one of the two options is 57.4%.
- 9.3 When considering satisfaction ratings for the proposals, dissatisfaction amongst the residents and local community stakeholders is at 80.1% or 80.3%, with slightly more dissatisfaction for Option 2 – Greenie. Conversely, satisfaction amongst school community stakeholders is highest for Option 2 Greenie at 51.3%, increasing to 55.5% for parents and 65.5% amongst school staff.
- 9.4 Following further detailed ground and site investigations, updated risk appraisals and scoring of options against project critical success factors, Option 1 – Buttercup Fields is indicated as sub-optimal and has significant risks to its viability. This option, which is also the least popular of the two options developed, should therefore be discounted from further consideration for the 3-16 school.
- 9.5 The most popular suggested alternative site from those selecting neither option is the current BHHS sites phase 1 and 2. This was also requested for consideration in a Petition received from 938 residents following the consultation process.
- 9.6 Other alternative sites suggested are not able to be taken forward either due to insufficient size, significant challenge of topography or alternative agreed use in formal Council plans.
- 9.7 Therefore, a detailed feasibility study has been undertaken of the current BHHS sites to assess the potential for accommodating a 3-16 school. However, due to the significant challenge of the site topography and the excessive site risks and development costs required to provide external sports pitches, the development of the current BHHS sites for a 3-16 school with sufficient provision to meet the needs of pupils is not considered viable.
- 9.8 In order to deliver a viable option using the current BHHS sites, it has been necessary to provide a sports pitch for secondary school pupils on one of the Buttercup Fields (i.e. plateau 2). The use of this land for a sports pitch enables a viable scheme with significantly reduced risks, costs and additional sports provision and overall external space to be provided. This scheme is known as Option 3a Revised – Current BHHS sites.
- 9.9 The cost of delivering Option 3a Revised – Current BHHS sites is £5.1 million more than Option 2 Greenie, although both projects would require additional funding to be approved by WG and Council. Option 3a Revised also has a longer programme with estimated project end date between March to May 2026 compared to September 2024 for Option 2 - Greenie.
- 9.10 Both options have similar profiles for building and construction risk, but Option 2 – Greenie scores more highly against critical success factors and overall provision of and access to sports facilities. Option 2 – Greenie also is the least disruptive to current pupils and provides the most educational value with the school building design.

- 9.11 However, in view of the strength of feeling from the local community, particularly from residents, about the risks arising from the loss of the green open space known as 'the Greenie', further consideration needs to be given regarding how to mitigate this loss and provide adequate compensation that meets the communities needs if this option is to be able to be taken forward with public support.
- 9.12 It is therefore proposed that a revised scheme for Option 2 – Greenie be considered that provides
- Community playground relocated but retained at the Galon Uchaf end of the Greenie, near the community MUGA, so current play facilities are nearest those who use them
 - Appropriate and accessible community changing facilities provided for community when using either the 3G surface or new grass pitch
 - Development of new community open space within the current BHHS Phase 2 site to mitigate the loss of green open space
 - Further enhancement to proposed S278 highways improvements to ensure safe pedestrian access is provided from Galon Uchaf to the proposed relocated community pitches and open space on the Buttercup Fields and current BHHS phase 2.
- 9.13 Further public consultation should be undertaken of a revised Option 2 – Greenie that proposes the above additional provisions and the Option 3A Revised – Current BHHS sites, with use of plateau 2 on the Buttercup Fields.
- 9.14 This public consultation should include all updated information with regards to both options as well as the reasons that Option 1 – Buttercup Fields has been discounted. This information should include Traffic Impact Assessment and proposed S278 schemes.

10.0 NEXT STEPS

- 10.1 Develop revised proposals for Option 2 – Greenie, in line with 9.12 above, including high level scoping for community open green space on the current BHHS site.
- 10.2 Submit business case to WG to seek approval in principle for additional budget requirement to deliver project
- 10.3 Undertake a 6 week public consultation in January/February 2022 on a revised Option 2 – Greenie and Option 3a Revised – Current BHHS sites.
- 10.4 Report to Council recommending decision on site in March or June 2022
- 10.5 New 3-16 school to open across the current four school sites on 1st September 2022
- 10.6 Subject to Council decision on site in March 2022, and WG approvals, new school building to be completed in readiness for occupation either in September 2024 or April to September 2026. A Council decision in June 2022, further delays the project delivery by at least three months

11.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are significant additional costs to deliver both remaining options over and above the approved project budget of £28,453,765.
- 11.2 A substantial element of these additional costs are related to increased material costs due to the pandemic, general price inflation for construction being greater than reflected in WG rates, significant site abnormalities and constraints across all options, relocation of community facilities and S278 highways improvements.
- 11.3 Project costs are funded 85% WG grant and 15% local authority match funding, except for costs for facilities outside of the school boundary which are funded 100% by the authority i.e. community facilities and S278 highways works require 100% funding by the Council.
- 11.4 The following table details the additional funding required for both options

	Cost £'000	Includes community costs of £'000	Includes S278 costs of £'000	Additional WG Funding £'000	Additional MTCBC Cost £'000	Additional Capital financing costs per annum £'000
Option 2 – Greenie	42,757	1,054	536	10,806	3,497	135
Option 3a Revised - Current BHHS Site	47,903	-	933	15,739	3,710	143

- 11.5 As per the above table, if Option 2 – Greenie is taken forward as the preferred site, the authority would require an additional £10.8 million from WG and also needs to finance an additional £3.5 million from matched capital funding, at an estimated Capital financing cost of £135k per annum.
- 11.6 As per the above table, if Option 3a Revised - Current BHHS sites is taken forward, the authority would require an additional £15.7 million from WG and also needs to finance an additional £3.7 million from matched capital funding, at an estimated Capital financing cost of £143k per annum.
- 11.7 For both options, the costs provided also include estimated figures to deliver an operational net zero school building of £2.8 million and a contingency of £2 million.
- 11.8 The Archdiocese of Cardiff are agreed to the transfer of current VA school sites to the local authority as their contribution to the 3-16 school project. These processes will be concluded following Council and WG approval to begin construction on an approved site.

12.0 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts	Neutral/Not Applicable	
1. Merthyr Tydfil Well-being Objectives	2 of 4	0 of 4	2 of 4	
2. Sustainable Development Principles - How have you considered the five ways of working? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term • Prevention • Integration • Collaboration • Involvement 	5 of 5	0 of 5	0 of 5	
3. Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	3 of 10	0 of 10	7 of 10	
4. Socio-economic Disadvantage	6 of 6	0 of 6	0 of 6	
5. Consultation and Engagement	Undertaken	Due to be Undertaken	Not Required	
	2 of 2	1 of 1	0 of 1	
6. Data and Evidence to inform the proposal	Yes		No	
	1 of 1		0 of 1	
7. Biodiversity and the resilience of Ecosystems	Maintained	Enhanced	Reduced	Neutral/Not Applicable
	1 of 1	1 of 1	0 of 1	0 of 1
Summary				
The main positive impacts are:	<p>The main positive impacts are that the proposal to choose a 3-16 school site with the options to provide enhanced school and community facilities makes a positive contribution to the 'Best Start to Life' and 'Living Well' wellbeing objectives.</p> <p>The aim of both proposals will be to maintain and enhance the overall biodiversity of the area. Further assessment and appropriate management of site ecology is required to effectively report and manage any biodiversity impacts as any development progresses.</p> <p>There have been two public consultations on the site undertaken to date. This report proposes a third public consultation.</p>			
The main negative impacts are:	<p>The loss of protected green open space in one of the options is the main negative impact identified through the consultation, this will be mitigated with the provision of enhanced facilities and alternative green open space that will be accessible to the community. The aim of both proposals will be to maintain overall access to protected green open space.</p>			

	<p>The aim is to maintain and enhance biodiversity of the site area but further assessment and appropriate management of site ecology is required to effectively report and manage any biodiversity impacts as any development progresses. This will include the mitigation of any negative impacts if identified.</p> <p>The temporary lack of access to the community facilities that need to be relocated during the construction phase is also a negative impact of this option that would require mitigation. The main negative impact of the second option is the disruption caused by the necessary decant into temporary accommodation for some current pupils and the elongated programme of works delaying the delivery of the new school building.</p>
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SUE WALKER
CHIEF OFFICER LEARNING

COUNCILLOR LISA MYTTON
CABINET MEMBER FOR LEARNING

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
3-16 VA Catholic School Site Consultation	14 th July 2021	Intranet
3-16 VA School Site Consultation report 2	26 th May 2021	Intranet
3-16 VA School Site Consultation report	6 th January 2021	Intranet
School Reorganisation 3-16 VA School Cabinet Report	11 th September 2019	Intranet
21 st Century Schools Programme Cabinet Report	17 th April 2019	Intranet
21 st Century Schools Band B Strategic Outline Programme (SOP)	August 2017	Learning Department
21 st Century Schools Band B SOP Revision Annex 1	February 2019	Learning Department
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No

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