

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

9 FEBRUARY 2021

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – EDUCATION AND FAMILY
SUPPORT**

SCHOOL MODERNISATION – BRIDGEND NORTH EAST

OUTCOME OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY AT BRACKLA HILL

1. Purpose of report

1.1 This purpose of this report is to:

- apprise Cabinet of the outcome of the feasibility study in respect of the proposed relocation and enlargement of Ysgol Gymraeg (YG) Bro Ogwr to the Brackla Hill site;
- seek approval to discount the Brackla Hill site from any future consideration in respect of the YG Bro Ogwr, Band B proposal; and
- seek approval to continue to explore alternative options for the replacement school.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

- **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** - taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
- **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council’s well-being objectives.

3. Background

3.1 The Band B Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) was submitted to Welsh Government (WG) in July 2017. In October 2017 Cabinet was presented with a report detailing the outcome of the Band B review and gave approval to discontinue the original Band B schemes identified in the November 2010 Cabinet report, and approved the revised Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) and the following projects:

- Bridgend North East (primary)
 - Bridgend South East (primary) – subsequently substituted to Mynydd Cynffig Primary School
 - Bridgend West – Welsh-medium (primary)
 - Bridgend West – English-medium (primary)
 - Bridgend Special School
- 3.2 On 6 December 2017, the WG Department for Education gave ‘approval in principle’ for Bridgend’s second wave of investment, which at that stage had an estimated programme envelope cost of £68.2m. Further costs were to be determined, and these would be associated with additional infrastructure capacity.
- 3.3 In January 2018, Council approved in principle the financial commitment required for Band B of the School Modernisation Programme, subject to sufficient resources being identified and allocated to meet the match funding commitment.
- 3.4 In January 2020, Cabinet was presented with the outcome of the extensive options appraisal relating to each of the approved projects.
- 3.5 Cabinet approval was received to progress an on-site feasibility at Brackla Hill in respect of the preferred education option for the Bridgend North East scheme ie 2.5-form entry (FE) YG Bro Ogwr on the Brackla Hill site.

4. Current situation/proposal

Brackla Hill Feasibility Study

- 4.1 In progressing the feasibility study, the project team commissioned all relevant surveys, which have been analysed by the individual disciplines. Each discipline has had input into the final ‘Brackla Hill - Feasibility Report’. The following is a summary of the key aspects of the findings from the feasibility study.
- 4.2 The most notable advantage of developing the site is the proximity of the site to the existing school and its geographical location (ie able to serve the Bridgend Town and Bridgend North East areas, where there is a growing need for additional school places.
- 4.3 The site offered benefits of an excellent outlook, potential use of the adjacent woodland for teaching and learning, and the benefit of the adjacent school sharing outdoor areas, including sports facilities and the parent drop-off area.
- 4.4 Notwithstanding the potential educational benefits the site offers, there were a number of potential issues identified in developing the site.
- 4.5 In order to develop the site it would be necessary to undertake significant earthworks, which would involve a cut and fill operation. This would impact on the amount of construction traffic associated with developing the site, which

would likely cause significant disruption and inconvenience to residents, the neighbouring school and the Brackla community. This issue alone would ordinarily be enough to cause concern. In addition, the associated costs and time relating to the groundwork package, contamination, and access road would be substantial.

- 4.6 There would be an extensive requirement for retaining walls throughout the site to create relatively level areas for playing fields, playgrounds and general site circulation and access. Ramps and steps will be prevalent throughout the site to deal with any implications in relation to Approved Document M and the Disability Discrimination Act.
- 4.7 The proposals will generate a significant amount of storm water run-off which will need to be attenuated. There is limited opportunity for ponds and swales, so attenuation is likely to be underground storage, which will create additional earthworks, 'muck away' and associated cost.
- 4.8 Any building constructed would in part need to be split-level. This increases both design and construction costs. The design would need to be bespoke with limited opportunities to utilise previous models and methods of delivery. This form of design would also increase the construction period.
- 4.9 The site investigation survey reported a presence of mercury in the ground across the site, which would have a significant impact on development costs. The topography is such that significant earthworks would be required. As this operation would involve the removal of contaminated material, technical officers have advised that this would significantly increase the cost of earth removal. Shared Regulatory Services has reviewed the site investigation report of the site, undertaken by BCBC's consultant Geocon. Soil samples assessed as part of the site investigation indicate subsurface levels of mercury within the soils range from <0.17-3.22 mg/kg. The consultant's assessment of these levels, compared with the current guidance screening criteria for public open space/ parkland of 30 mg/kg confirms that the level of mercury within the soils are well below acceptable levels therefore are not a cause for concern in relation to current use and users of the site.
- 4.10 The proposed junction configuration off Brackla Way to access the site was also an area of concern among technical officers. It is anticipated that the access and junction arrangement would create significant operational difficulties, which cannot be overcome due to the need to access the adjacent school and the constraints of the site itself.
- 4.11 Despite the aim of only using as much of the site as was necessary for the development of the school, with an area of land being retained for use by the community, there would be a significant reduction in the amount of public open space available on the site.

- 4.12 There was significant representation from the Brackla community during the study regarding the potential loss of the Brackla Hill site and the impact that the loss would have on the well-being of the community.
- 4.13 When considering all these factors, it is the recommendation of the project team that the Brackla Hill site is not taken forward for development of the new school. Alternative site options should therefore be explored.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 An initial screening has been undertaken for the Bridgend North East project, which established that the project is unlikely to impact disproportionately on any protected group. However, the project will be subject to a full assessment, which will be completed in due course.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment provides a comprehensive summary of the outcomes expected from the implementation of the service.

Long-term	Supports the statutory duty to provide sufficient pupil places and promote the Welsh language.
Prevention	The Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are a sufficient supply of school places, and this scheme will safeguard the Council's position in terms of any potential legal challenge in this regard.
Integration	Should the proposal proceed in the future, construction will be competitively tendered, via a mini competition through the South East and Mid Wales Collaborative Construction Framework (SEWSCAP3) or potential future iterations of the framework. This will potentially provide opportunities for local companies to engage with the main contractor for inclusion in their supply chain, via 'Meet the Buyer' events. This would support economic activity in the area. Community benefits will be maximised.
Collaboration	The local authority would work effectively with schools, Estyn and with the Central South Consortium, health, community councils and many internal and external partners to ensure that the building would meet the short-term and future needs of the users and the community, which it will serve.
Involvement	Key stakeholders have been engaged to inform the feasibility study. Should an alternative option proceed, further engagement

with stakeholders would take place. There would be a full public consultation process undertaken, according to the WG School Organisation Code, should Cabinet determine to proceed with the proposal.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 In December 2018, Council approved a programme envelope of £71.3m, covering Band B new school builds of £68.2m and potential highway works of £3.1m (the cost of highway works will have to be met in full by the local authority, as there is no match funding from WG). Following subsequent amendments to the capital programme, the current position is that there are budgets of £49.504m for works and £3.4m for infrastructure within the capital programme, with the remaining schemes funded via the revenue funded Mutual Investment Model (MIM).
- 8.2 £12.6m has been allocated in the Capital Programme for this project and the WG intervention rate is 65%. Contractor inflation and the impact of Covid-19 and 'Brexit' may have a detrimental impact on the budget. However, this would be monitored and reviewed regularly throughout the course of the project.
- 8.3 The cost of the feasibility study at Brackla Hill has been funded from the Band B revenue feasibility funding allocation.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 Cabinet is recommended to:
- note the outcome of the on-site feasibility study in respect of the proposed relocation and enlargement of YG Bro Ogwr to the Brackla Hill site;
 - give approval to discount the Brackla Hill site from any future consideration in respect of YG Bro Ogwr; and
 - give approval to explore alternative options for the replacement school.

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Background documents

None