

## Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) school buildings

To: Assets and Procurement Committee

Meeting Date: 18 October 2023

From: Executive Director Finance and Resources

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2023/055

Outcome: Committee is asked to note the update and findings following the completion of the surveys of School buildings in line with DfE requirements regarding potential safety concerns in school buildings constructed from RAAC.

Recommendation: Committee is asked to:

- a) note the completion of the surveys and the findings;
- b) commend the proactive cross council working within Property and Education teams to be in the position for CCC to report the outcome;
- c) that 268 schools were either assessed or surveyed and no presence of RAAC was found.

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# 1. Background

- 1.1 Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) was used as a construction material in schools, colleges and other types of building, notably hospitals, from the 1950s until the mid-1990s. It may therefore be found in any school and college building (educational and ancillary) that was either built or modified within this time period. The Department for Education (DfE) have published advice to schools and responsible bodies, such as local authorities and multi-academy trusts, to manage the potential risks of RAAC since 2018 by providing guidance and funding. However, more recent research into the product resulted in the DfE being less confident that buildings containing RAAC could remain open without extra safety measures being in place, as was the advice up until this point in time. As a result, on 31 August 2023 the DfE changed their approach and issued new guidance and advised all education settings were required to close any spaces or buildings that are known to contain RAAC to allow them to put mitigations in place. In 2022, the Department for Education sent a questionnaire to all responsible bodies, asking them to provide information to help them understand the use of RAAC across the school estate and make sure the correct support is in place. Recent research suggesting the potential of sudden collapse changed their assessment of the risk that RAAC poses to building safety, hence the change in guidance in August 2023.
- 1.2 Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) construction as stated was used in buildings during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1950s to mid 1990s). It was most commonly used in widespan buildings such as school halls and gyms and hospital operating theatres. It has proved that over time the roof structure can start to fail due to the lack of strength in the product with a potential for sudden collapse, where deterioration and cracking is prevalent usually as a result of water ingress. In the public sector, schools and hospitals were identified as particular areas of risk.
- 1.3 The key risk from RAAC in buildings is a spontaneous collapse. The consequences of this in a space that could be occupied by numerous people is obvious. This paper provides an update on the work CCC have proactively carried out since July 2021 to confirm the presence or otherwise of RAAC in its Estate, with particular emphasis on schools in alignment with the DfE guidance.

# 2. Main Issues

- 2.1 CCC committed to investigating and surveying all the school portfolio of buildings for the presence of RAAC and followed the DfE government guidance on how to approach the identification of RAAC. As the risk has been more widely recognised the DfE have issued further specific guidance on this process and CCC's existing processes followed this and have been updated as further guidance has been issued.
- 2.2 The basic process followed was an initial desktop study of all school sites to determine buildings which were of an age and potential type that fell within the window of time when RAAC was used as a construction material. These buildings were then identified as requiring a physical inspection on site to verify if RAAC is present. This commenced with an initial visual onsite inspection (stage 1). However, in many cases the roof structure was concealed behind false ceilings and other finishes. This is further complicated by the time window involved being one where asbestos was still being used in ceiling boards, artex and

other finishing materials within the construction industry. This meant that where an intrusive survey was required, this may be also intruding into potential asbestos containing materials (ACMs). Therefore, this in turn required specialist asbestos contractors to work alongside the Building Surveyors to undertake the intrusive inspections (stage 2). On the grounds of health and safety it was decided that school sites were unable generally to have intrusive inspections carried out during term time, and therefore we programmed the work to be carried out during the school holiday periods to work within an empty building.

- 2.3 CCC Property and Education Capital procured Pick Everard consulting building surveyors to carry out the surveys on our behalf with a comprehensive programme of work developed and funding provided. There were 268 schools in total with 228 requiring survey as they met the criteria for possibly having RAAC, as they were constructed between 1950 and mid 1990s, with a further 40 schools assessed but didn't require surveying as they were new schools built well after the mid 1990s. In total all 268 schools were either assessed or surveyed. The Director of Education facilitated access to all school sites to ensure any delays due to access issues were minimised.
- 2.4 A number of Cambridgeshire school properties are let on 125 year leases to Academy Trusts. CCC prudently took the decision that to meet its statutory obligations in relation to safety, education and safeguarding that CCC itself should also undertake the inspections at Academy sites that meet the survey criteria. This was for the following reasons:
- i) as the Local Educational Authority, CCC retains a duty of care and responsibility for all pupils attending Cambridgeshire schools.
  - ii) CCC have direct experience of trusts not always having the necessary expertise to manage technical safety matters and we realised the importance of consistency and urgency in carrying out the surveys to understand the position across the whole of Cambridgeshire.
  - iii) as the landlord and property owner CCC retains some legal responsibilities, especially if RAAC was detected it may be regarded as a 'latent defect' under the leases i.e. CCC as landlord may be liable for it and its repair.

This decision ensured that CCC was sighted on the RAAC status of every state school site.

- 2.5 All assessments, Stage 1 and Stage 2 surveys were completed at all 268 schools. The change in DfE guidance on 31 August resulted in a request from our consultant to revisit 7 schools previously surveyed in 2021, to check findings, these were carried out over weekends and brought forward from the October half term to deliver as early as possible.
- 2.6 As a result of the DfE revised guidance on the 31 August 2023 and the subsequent national press interest this generated, the Service Director Education wrote on 3 September 2023 to Cambridgeshire Schools to confirm the position in their school regarding RAAC.
- 2.7 Therefore we can report and give the committee assurance that RAAC has not been found present in any of the 268 schools within Cambridgeshire. These schools are split between:
- Maintained Schools - 114
  - Voluntary Aided Schools - 12
  - Academy Trust Schools - 112

- 2.8 As a note for committee the non school premises within the Council's property portfolio were also assessed in 2021 and five buildings were deemed to require surveying for RAAC. These surveys were carried out and no RAAC was found. We are currently updating and carrying out further desktop investigation within the whole portfolio but have no concern that RAAC is within any of our non-school buildings.

### 3. Alignment with ambitions

- 3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes.

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable.

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.3 Health inequalities are reduced.

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs.

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality.

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised.

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive.

As a result of the survey outcomes children and young people are able to enjoy and be educated within Cambridgeshire school buildings with no risk from RAAC collapse.

### 4. Significant Implications

- 4.1 Resource Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- The cost of carrying out the surveys by the consultant was funded from existing building maintenance budget and has incurred a cost with some invoices still to be presented at circa £95,000.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications  
N/A.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications  
N/A

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications  
N/A

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications  
N/A

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement  
N/A

4.7 Public Health Implications  
N/A

4.8 Climate Change and Environment Implications on Priority

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.  
Neutral Status:  
Explanation: No impact

4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.  
Neutral Status:  
Explanation: no impact

4.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.  
Neutral Status:  
Explanation: no impact

4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.  
Neutral Status:  
Explanation: no impact

4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:  
Neutral Status:  
Explanation: no impact

4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.  
neutral Status:  
Explanation: no impact

4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

neutral Status:

Explanation: no impact

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Stephen Howarth

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial? Yes Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes Name of Legal Officer: Emma Duncan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User? Not applicable Name of Officer:

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications? Yes Name of Officer: Kathryn Rogerson

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Not a local issue. Name of Officer:

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health? Yes Name of Officer: Kate Parker

If a Key decision, have any Climate Change and Environment implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

Not applicable

Name of Officer:

## 5. Source documents guidance

### 5.1 Source document

[Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete Identification Guidance - hyperlink](#)

### 5.2 Location

Government website