

Alconbury Weald Secondary School

To: Children and Young Peoples Services

Meeting Date: 26 November 2024

From: Service Director Education

Electoral division(s): Alconbury and Kimbolton

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2024/060

Executive Summary: This report brings to the attention of Committee the contract required between Cambridgeshire County Council (the Council) and Morgan Sindall (the contractor) to deliver Alconbury Weald Secondary School.

Recommendation: The Children and Young People Committee is recommended:

- a. To approve the Council entering an Engineering and Construction Contract with the contractor for the construction of Alconbury Weald Secondary School in April 2024 on the condition that the contract value continues to stay within the project budget.
- b. To approve that following the completion of a Department for Education's (DfE) risk assessment for sprinklers in schools that sprinklers should not be installed.
- c. To note the cost of, and approve, the installation of a three-ply roofing system rather than the single-ply roofing system which is included in the DfE's standard specification.
- d. To note the risks associated with the successful delivery of this project.

Voting arrangements: Co-opted members are eligible to vote on this report.

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1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

1.1 This report relates to three of the Council's ambitions, with Ambition 7 being the most significant.

Ambition 7: Children and young people have opportunities to thrive.

Ambition 6: Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

Ambition 5: People are helped out of poverty and income inequality.

2. Background

2.1 Following pausing the Alconbury Weald Secondary School project at Milestone 4, as the Engineering and Construction contract sum exceeded the project budget significantly, officers have worked with the Contractor to redesign the scheme within the agreed budget set in the Council's Business Plan.

Following the completion of Milestone 2 the Contractor carried out a full costing exercise and provided a price proposal and associated preconstruction and construction programme to the Council at the end of September 2024.

3. Main Issues

3.1 The current future key delivery dates in the project programme are shown below:

Task	Timings
Milestone 3/4 design period	October 2024 - March 2025
Contractor's proposals/contract sum issued	March 2025
Council to approve Milestone 4 report and contract sum	April 2025
Council and Contractor to sign Engineering and Construction contract	April 2025
Construction to start on site	May 2025
Target handover date	February 2027

3.2 The Engineering and Construction Contract amount has been estimated at Milestone 2. The Council and the Contractor are due to sign the Engineering and Construction contract in April 2025 (until this point the contract sum is only proposed). Currently, the contract sum is within the overall budget as shown in Appendix 1.

3.4 Fire Sprinklers

The Fire Safety Adviser's view is that BS9999 is suitable for adoption on this school, and it will therefore not require the incorporation of a sprinkler system based on risk assessment approach applied under BB100 to satisfy Building Regulations Part B. The Adviser has noted that the Academy Trust will be able to effectively manage the site and building security and their maintenance and fire safety procedures in accordance with the

recommendations of an 'Average Risk' building as detailed within the DfE Risk Assessment tool.

In addition, included in the design are fire protection features such as a roller shutter fire door, built between the kitchen and the dining hall that closes automatically when triggered by the fire alarm sounding. For localised fire protection the kitchen will also have installed a pre-engineered, automatic fire suppression system that can tackle large, hazardous fires without human intervention. This is specifically designed to protect areas associated which contain ventilation, grease extraction and/or cooking equipment; in essence, like a sprinkler system but for commercial cooking appliances and suited to these environments because it utilises a specialised liquid extinguishing agent that attacks burning fat.

The nearest fire station is Huntingdon Fire Station which is approximately 4 miles away by road.

The proposed cost for the addition of sprinklers is £850,000.00 to £900,000.00. In addition, this would add two weeks to the construction programme.

It is recommended that Members endorse the approach to continue the design and construction of this school without sprinklers based on the above risk assessment, the current DfE design guidance and current building regulations.

3.5 Roofing

The Council have previously specified a 'three-ply' system in school construction projects. This was as a result of fabric failures found in the 'single-ply' system and the occurrence of leaks in new and relatively new buildings. It is recommended that the Council continues to use a 'three-ply' roofing system particularly as there is a requirement for more mechanical plant to be sited on the roof space (for example photo voltaic panels and air handling units).

The proposed cost for the use of a three-ply decking system would be a £235,000 addition to the project construction costs. This is included in the Council's policy requirements budget line in the table in paragraph 3.3

3.6 Risks to this project

3.6.1 *Construction/design risks including ground conditions.*

Several risks have been identified on the risk register (and allocated within the risk contingency fund). The main items include for potential issues under the ground, including ground conditions/bearing capacities, contamination and unforeseen obstacles. These items account for between £400,000.00 - £500,000.00 of the total risk allowance within the agreed project budget.

3.6.2 *Gap between project completion and school occupation*

To hold the projected proposed Engineering and Construction Contract sum the Contractor has issued a contract programme that completes in January 2027 ahead of the school occupation date of September 2027. In discussion with the academy trust (DEMAT) the Contractor has priced to extend the school maintenance period by six months from January 2027 to September 2027 at a cost of £152,285.00.

This would offer the Council better value for money than slipping the programme to

September 2027. This option is forecast to cost approximately £760,000.00 (based on the indexation for the mid-point of construction moving back by two financial quarters from 2Q26 to 4Q26).

3.6.3 *Construction and Project Programme Timescale*

Minimal risk to construction and programme timescale due to the lead in timing of the project.

3.6.4 *Cost*

Should the project be delayed than budget inflationary pressures may be sought by the Contractor.

3.6.5 *Design Quality and Planning*

The design of the proposed school meets the aspirations of the overall site master plan and design codes and aligns with Urban& Civic's overall quality aspirations for the Alconbury Weald development in terms of size and massing and meets the requirement for a large boundary edge completing the development's Runway Park.

It has been agreed with planning colleagues that the revised scheme could be considered as a S73 application, that seeks to amend an existing planning consent, rather than a new full Regulation 3 planning application. The project was scrutinised at Cambridgeshire Design Quality Panel on 8th November 2024.

3.6.6 *Pupil Demand*

The catchment forecast suggests that there will be 53 Year 7 aged children living with Alconbury Weald in September 2027. The number of places has been forecast based on the most recent forecast tables produced by the Council's Business Intelligence Service.

Catchment forecast for Alconbury Weald Secondary School						
Academic year	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Total
2024/2025	39	29	25	22	23	138
2025/2026	31	43	32	27	24	157
2026/2027	47	35	46	34	29	191
2027/2028	53	51	38	48	36	226
2028/2029	54	57	54	40	50	255
2029/2030	70	58	60	56	42	286
2030/2031	88	74	61	62	58	343
2031/2032	74	92	77	63	64	370
High catchment forecasts (2023)						

The DfE expects secondary schools to open with a minimum viable number of 120 or 4 forms of entry (4FE). The data suggests that the minimum viable number will not be reached within this forecast period, and so the school's opening will be reliant upon the Trust reaching an agreement with the DfE as an exception to this. This is a significant risk to the successful opening of this school.

The S106 agreement for Alconbury Weald was signed in 2012. Under this agreement the Council is obligated to open the secondary school before 1350 homes were completed. As of April 2024, 1038 homes have been completed on the development.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 Procurement Approach

- 4.1.1 The Council has procured its own two-stage Design & Build (D&B) Contractor Framework model of procurement to deliver its large-scale education capital projects. The D&B framework is divided into various 'lots' depending on the value of the contract. For the larger value schemes, each project detailed above has been advertised within the appropriate 'lot', allowing for framework partners to bid for the delivery of the project. These are in line with the local government procurement rules.
- 4.1.2 All returns through the D&B tender process were evaluated on cost and quality by officers, this process was overseen by the Council's procurement team and Atkins Realis who are providing professional consultancy services on this project. This framework approach provides an alternative to the lengthier individual tender process, on a site-by-site basis, whilst ensuring best value is reached for the Council.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1 The Council has statutory duties with regard to the sufficiency, diversity and planning of places for statutory school age children. The Council is also legally obligated under the S106 agreement to provide a secondary school on Alconbury Weald by the trigger of 1350 homes.

To ensure that it can meet these obligations, the Council must procure services from external providers for the delivery of these places. The award of this construction contract to Morgan Sindall is a key step in this process.

6. Significant Implications

6.1 Finance Implications

The anticipated contract sum sits within the budget line, AC.02.009 and has already been included within the Council's Capital Business Plan. The report brought to Committee in January 24 details the breakdown of the budget for each project including sources of funding (section 106, grant etc). These are in accordance with the framework tendered rates and represent good value for money

6.2 Legal Implications

This contract will be awarded as a call off from the Design and Build Framework. The framework is included on the Council's Contract Register. Pathfinder Legal Services Ltd will be instructed to support and advise the Council in drafting and awarding the call off contract from the Design and Build Framework.

6.3 Risk Implications

There are multiple risks associated with the delivery of any capital scheme. The risks associated with this project are detailed in paragraph 3.6 above.

6.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the project listed in this report. Mitigations have been identified to address any concerns and overall, the project delivery is expected to have a positive impact ensuring fairness and consistency to all children and young people impacted by the additional school places.

6.5 Climate Change and Environment Implications (Key Decisions only)

All projects included within the Capital Programme are subject to a Carbon Calculation assessment. These calculations are detailed within each business case and provide information on the carbon impact of the capital scheme (tCO₂e), the ongoing operational energy use (tCO₂e) and the net revenue cost/(saving) over the lifetime of the building (2081-82). In addition, as part of the council's monitoring process all contractors are asked to provide annual updates to the carbon footprint data.

All projects have been targeted to achieve an 80% reduction in their carbon footprint, and to achieve BREEAM Very Good with ENE01 - 6 Carbon Credits.

All newly commissioned projects have been designed to remove the county council's reliance on fossil fuel using renewable technology in the form of solar panels and either air source or ground source heating.

In addition, the CCC Framework Contractors are providing evidence of the social value and carbon reduction being delivered through the projects we commission. For example, ensuring that all employees are deployed by locality based on miles travelled to the workplace, vehicles including company cars and construction plant that are not reliant on fossil fuels and other such measures. The construction industry acknowledges its overall impact on the generation of carbon and are continuing to work on reducing their carbon footprint on a National and International level.

7. Source Documents

7.1 [Jan 24 committee report](#)