

**ABBHEY COLLEGE, RAMSEY – FEASABILITY OPTIONS**

**To:** Children & Young People's Committee

**Meeting Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019

**From:** Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, Executive Director: People & Communities

**Electoral division(s):** Ramsey & Bury

**Forward Plan ref:** 2019/053      **Key decision:** Yes

**Purpose:** To advise members of the outcome of the feasibility options report for Abbey College, Ramsey and seek views on next steps.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended, as set out in 2.3.4 in the report, that members agree to support the Trust by sharing the feasibility study and condition survey with the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) with a view to securing funding from them for the development of a phased asset management strategy to enable the Trust to address the College's condition issues and maximise use of its accommodation.

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** Abbey College is a large secondary academy located in Ramsey. The College was formed following the decision to amalgamate the former Ailwyn and Abbey Schools. Ailwyn served the 11–13 age range and Abbey 14–18 age range. They closed at the end of August 2006 and the College opened on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2006. The College subsequently converted under a standalone Academy Trust in August 2011. The College site is complex and has multiple leases and landowners. Furthermore, potential development is constrained by restrictive covenants, with many of the buildings to the north of the site being legally protected<sup>i</sup> due to their proximity to the Abbey, from which the school gets its name.
- 1.2** Although the College has capacity for 1940 pupils (including the 6<sup>th</sup> form), the Trust took the decision to reduce the Published Admissions Number (PAN) from 300 (10 forms of entry (FE)) to 180 places (6 FE) in 2016 in response to falling pupil demand at the time and the condition of much of the school's accommodation. Although it increased its intake to 210 (7 FE) for entry in September 2019, they have stated their wish to reduce it again to 180 (6 FE) for future admissions. As parts of the school's catchment are closer to St Ives, there is a long-established trend for parents living in those areas to seek to secure places at St Ivo. This represents around 60 children each year (2FE). To date, St Ivo has largely been able to accommodate those requests.
- 1.3** Forecasts indicate that in-catchment numbers will rise in future years to 281 (9.4 FE). In the coming years there is also likely to be increasing pressure in other secondary catchments which may result in fewer children living in Abbey catchment being able to take up a place at another school. This means there will be pressure on places in the future. As it is not possible to confirm the level of this until planning applications come forward, nor whether established parental preference trends will continue to the same level, the Council has identified the need for the school to be able to accommodate between 240 pupils per year (8FE, plus 6th form) and 300 (10FE, plus 6th form) in the future.
- 1.4** The Trust has been considering options for the future delivery of secondary education and the best use of the site and buildings available for some time, and are committed to work in partnership with the Council to identify and secure a long-term solution. As the Council has a number of interests in and involvements with the school (land owner, sufficiency of school places and champion of children and young people) and the site, the CYP Committee agreed to commission a feasibility study to help fully consider the options available to the Trust and the Council and to ensure future delivery of sufficient secondary places in the local area.

## **2. MAIN ISSUES**

### **2.1 Feasibility Options on the Existing College Site**

- 2.1.1** The feasibility commissioned by the Council demonstrates that there are three potential options for development of the existing College site. A summary of these options are as follows:

- Option 1A provides the school with a new build option to the north of the site (with ability to expand up to 10FE). Anticipated cost to deliver this option is £53.66m, offset by potential capital receipts.
- Option 1B provides the school with a new build option to the south of the site, on the same location of the existing buildings (with the ability to expand up to 10FE). Anticipated cost to deliver this option is £55.83m offset by potential capital receipts.
- Option 2 - Refurbishment of the existing school buildings plus any new build (with ability to expand up to 10FE). Anticipated cost to deliver this option is £47.240m offset by potential capital receipts.

Further details relating to the options are included in Appendix 1. A site plan showing land ownerships is included in Appendix 2.

- 2.1.2 The feasibility included the assessment of potential opportunities to develop housing on the site in order to offset the capital cost of re-building or refurbishing the school. For all options, to meet BB103<sup>ii</sup> external area guidelines for maintained schools for a 10FE secondary school, the amount of land which could be offered for residential development would need to be significantly reduced. As a consequence, the school site would be classified as a restricted school site. This would be mitigated by the fact that the Trust have just had funding and town planning approval for a multi-use games area ( MUGA) on the school site.
- 2.1.3 The land identified for potential residential development (see land marked D3 in Appendix 2) is Council freehold owned playing field land, which is leased to the Trust. Market indications show that this land could yield a return of circa £6.3m. It should be noted that any sale of the land leased to the Trust would need to be in line with the Council's agreed Policy approach to the disposal of land subject to leases granted pursuant to the Academies Act 2010. As a result, the Council would seek a fixed % share of any enhanced value or receipt to be re-invested in wider Council services across the county. In this case, it could be argued that any enhanced value or receipt should be returned to support education provision in the local area. However, this principle would need to be agreed by members.
- 2.1.4 The constraints to the development of the Council leased land for residential development on the College site are as follows:
- The site is currently allocated for Education Use in the Local Plan, which was adopted by Huntingdonshire District Council in May 2019. The Local Plan covers the period up to 2036, so detailed discussions would be required with the District Council in order to establish if a change of use would be acceptable from a policy point of view.
  - The development of the leased land for housing is contingent upon access via Hollow Lane to the south of the site (see Appendix 2, land parcel C). This is in order to prevent all traffic entering the housing development via the existing school entrance and through the school site. The land between the Council leased land and Hollow Lane is owned by a third party, so would be subject to an easement arrangement.

- Local authorities wanting to dispose of playing field land need consent under Section 77 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, and under Schedule 1 to the Academies Act 2010.

## **2.2 Feasibility Options on a New School Site**

- 2.2.1 Due to the high capital cost of delivering school provision on the existing school site, the feasibility also included assessment of the potential for a new offsite campus to incorporate an 8FE Secondary School (with ability to expand to 10FE). A summary of the outcome of this is included in Appendix 1 (Option 3).
- 2.2.2 If this option was taken forward then the potential costs could be offset by capital receipts following the sale of the existing school site. However, even taking account of potential additional receipts from the sale of Trust-owned land, based on the potential values identified for the Council-owned playing field land (circa £6.3m), there would still be a substantial amount of capital investment required to deliver a new school on a new site.

## **2.3 Summary & Conclusions**

- 2.3.1 Options 1-3 demonstrate that the school site provides sufficient area to support up to 10FE secondary (on a restricted site basis). Subject to all necessary consents from the Department for Education (DfE) and planning consent from the local planning authority, the remaining Council owned land could be sold for residential development. Furthermore, the fixed % share of any enhanced value or receipt returned to the Council could be re-invested in secondary provision in the local area. This would be subject to approval from Members and a Funding Agreement between the Council and the Trust in order to secure future secondary school provision when and if required. However, in spite of the potential receipt from land sales for residential development, all options listed above would require a huge amount of additional capital investment.
- 2.3.2 The re-location of the school to a different site (Option 3) is not substantially different in cost to re-developing the school in a different location on the existing site (Option 1A and 1B). However, it could be argued that re-location would have less of an impact on education provision as the school would be able to continue to operate in its current accommodation until the replacement school was available to move into.
- 2.3.3 The existing buildings on the south site are sufficient in size to accommodate up to 8FE and have the potential to expand up to 10FE (Option 2). However, it is accepted that this is not taking into account the fact that some the buildings and rooms may not be suitable for all curriculum activities. A detailed condition survey has been commissioned by the Council to inform the further review of options and associated costs and support the Trust with the development of an asset management strategy.
- 2.3.4 Given the limited financial options available to the Trust and the severe financial constraints of the Council, it seems appropriate for the Council to support the Trust by sharing the feasibility study and condition survey with the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) with a view to securing funding from them for the development of a phased asset management strategy that would enable the Trust to address the school's condition issues and maximise use of the available accommodation. Pursuing

this option would allow time to identify further the potential constraints (e.g. town planning, access to the land via a third party and DfE consents) to the development of the Council leased land.

### **3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

#### **3.1 A good quality of life for everyone**

3.3.1 Capital investment in public infrastructure helps provide employment and supports economic development. Providing access to local and high quality educational provision and associated children's services should enhance the skills of the local workforce and provide essential childcare services for working parents or those seeking to return to work. Schools and early years and childcare services are also providers of local employment.

#### **3.2 Thriving places for people to live**

3.2.1 If pupils have access to local schools and associated children's services, they are more likely to attend them by either cycling or walking rather than through local authority-provided transport or car. They will also be able to access more readily out of school activities such as sport and homework clubs and develop friendship groups within their own community. This should contribute to the development of both healthier and more independent lifestyles.

#### **3.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's Children**

3.3.1 Providing sufficient and suitable school places to match local demand as closely as possible will ensure that services can be more easily accessed by families in greatest need.

### **4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

#### **4.1 Resource Implications**

4.1.1 The feasibility commissioned by the Council has demonstrated that in spite of the potential receipt from land sales for residential development, all options listed in Appendix 1 would require a huge amount of additional capital investment. The Council is not in a position to be able to consider funding schemes of this magnitude, especially given that the cost would need to be met from prudential borrowing. While borrowing costs vary depending on interest rates and scheme length, we could expect borrowing £48m (Option 2, the least costly) over a three year period to result in interest costs of approximately £19.2m.

4.1.2 Members are advised that the Trust is an academy, so the responsibility for the maintenance of the accommodation and site rests with the Trust and the ESFA.

#### **4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications**

4.2.1 There are no significant implications within this category.

#### **4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications**

4.3.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility to ensure that every child whose parents want them educated in the state-funded sector is offered a school place. In addition, it has a duty to secure sufficient and suitable early years and childcare places.

#### 4.4 **Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 4.4.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that children with special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) are able to attend their local mainstream school where possible, with only those with the most complex and challenging needs requiring places at specialist provision.

Any new and/or replacement accommodation provided by the Council would fully comply with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and current Council standards.

#### 4.5 **Engagement and Communications Implications**

- 4.5.1 There are no significant implications for this priority.

#### 4.6 **Localism and Local Member Involvement**

- 4.6.1 Local Members are kept informed of planned changes to provision in their wards and their views sought on emerging issues and actions to be taken to address these.

- 4.6.2 Cllr Costello (the Local Member) has attended a presentation of the feasibility options and outcomes to the Trust.

- 4.6.3 Cllr Bywater and Cllr Downes both attended a presentation of the feasibility options and outcomes to the Trust, and have also toured the College.

#### 4.7 **Public Health Implications**

- 4.7.1 There are no significant implications for this priority.

Implications	Officer Clearance
Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?	Yes Name of Financial Officer: <b>Martin Wade</b>
Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement?	Yes Name of Officer: <b>Gus De Silva</b>
Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by LGSS Law?	Yes Name of Legal Officer: <a href="mailto:fiona.mcmillan@peterborough.gov.uk">fiona.mcmillan@peterborough.gov.uk</a>
Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: <b>Jonathan Lewis</b>
Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?	Yes Name of Officer: <b>Jo Dickson</b>

<b>Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?</b>	Yes Name of Officer: <b>Jonathan Lewis</b>
<b>Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health</b>	Yes Name of Officer: <b>Tess Campbell</b>

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
<i>Commercial &amp; Investments Committee, Agenda Item No 5 – Council approach to development for value of surplus land on Academy sites</i>	<a href="https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/ccclive/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/466/Committee/31/Default.aspx">https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/ccclive/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/466/Committee/31/Default.aspx</a>

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<sup>i</sup> The Ramsey Abbey is a Grade II listed buildings and the site is located in a Conservation Area, so has extra town planning considerations.

<sup>ii</sup> BB103 – Area Guidelines for Mainstream Schools, developed by the EFSA to demonstrate good practice and are based on the department's area and costs standards.