

**Report to Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Cabinet
Member for Finance and Resources**

September 2020

**Woodlands Meed College - Allocation of Funding for Feasibility Study
for Alternative Site at Jane Murray Way**

**Report by Director of Property and Assets and Director of Education
and Skills.**

Electoral divisions: Burgess Hill East, Cuckfield and Lucastes

Summary

Woodlands Meed is a Special School and College for 2-19 year olds in Burgess Hill providing for about 100 15-19 year old pupils. It is significantly below the provision of area based on the Department for Education's Building Bulletin 104. The permanent structures whilst in an acceptable condition are not of sufficient size or capable of adaptation to meet the requirements of BB104. The modular buildings are nearing the end of their life and will need to be replaced.

On 26th May 2020 Cabinet approved the gross allocation of £20m to rebuild the college on the college's existing playing field (Decision reference ([CAB03 20/21](#))).

As the project has progressed and on the completion of the feasibility study it has become clear that, whilst not insurmountable, various issues pose challenges to the delivery of a new building on the playing field site due to constraints and location.

In regular discussions about these challenges between the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the college's governors and head teacher a request was made for the Council to consider alternative sites without compromising the commitment to deliver the new building by May 2023.

Following a review a site with the potential to be developed for a new school has been identified on vacant County Council land in Burgess Hill off Jane Murray Way (JMW) in Burgess Hill and the potential benefits of using this site have been discussed and agreed with the governors and head teacher.

To establish whether a less constrained and impactful build could be achieved as discussed and agreed with the governors it is proposed that a parallel feasibility study be undertaken on the JMW site for a new building to replace the current Woodlands Meed College whilst not affecting the published programme.

Recommendation

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Finance approves the release of up to £0.1m from the feasibility budget for additional feasibility work for Woodlands Meed College rebuild, and
 - (2) That the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills approves the commissioning of a feasibility study on an alternative site at Jane Murray Way Burgess Hill for the rebuild of Woodlands Meed College whilst continuing with the project for a new building on the College's playing field site
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Proposal

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 At its meeting on 26th May 2020 Cabinet approved the allocation of £20m to rebuild Woodlands Meed College on its existing site (Decision reference ([CAB03 20/21](#))). Due to the constraints of the site and the need to avoid disruption to the college, nearby school, neighbouring properties and users the decision report noted the risks and adverse impacts the building project would involve.
- 1.2 As design has progressed and at the completion of the Feasibility Study it has become clear that there are a number of challenges that are specific to the building on the Woodlands Meed College's playing field. These include:
 - Potential conflict between contractors' vehicles and pupils, staff and parents of both Woodlands Meed and the adjoining Birchwood Grove Primary School
 - Access to the site by contractors' vehicles will cause disruption to local residents
 - Disruption to pupils and staff of Woodlands Meed College and Birchwood Grove Primary School during the 21 month construction works
 - Construction challenges to the design and layout of the building due to significant level differences across site and the restricted access for contractors' vehicles.
 - The topography and size of the site drives a layout that is not ideal for a Special School that is intended to meet the educational needs of its pupils.
- 1.3 Subsequent to Cabinet's decision and in light of the constraints and adverse impacts of the planned on-site rebuild the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills discussed with the headteacher and governing body of Woodlands Meed College the issues outlined above. The College asked whether alternative sites may be available which could provide for a similar rebuild without those adverse impacts. This proposal emerged from that dialogue.
- 1.4 Following a review of land holdings in the area Estates Services has identified a potential site adjacent to Jane Murray Way, Burgess Hill. A site plan is attached at Appendix A.
- 1.5 The feasibility study is proposed to review the following:

- Whether the alternative site at Jane Murray Way is sufficient in size to accommodate the Special School to be built in accordance with BB104
- Site constraints, including topographical survey; geotechnical studies; utilities; ground investigations; contaminated land surveys; ecological surveys; highways and travel to school/parking and access etc.
- Any adverse impact on the adjoining St Paul's Catholic College in relation to BB103.
- Any impact on the potential future relocation of St Wilfrid's Catholic Primary School to a site adjacent to St Paul's Catholic College

Risks including financial risks will also be considered including:

- Statutory consents (e.g. Sports England)
- Cost estimate for a similarly specified building of a special school on Jane Murray Way and comparison with current cost estimates
- Programme impact

- 1.6 The benefits of the alternative site are directly related to the risks and adverse impacts of the proposal approved in May and set out above. If it proves to be feasible a build on the alternative site will remove the adverse impacts of the on-site construction for staff and pupils at Woodlands Meed College, at Birchwood Grove Primary School and for their neighbours. The feasibility study will also identify whether there are cost benefits from a scheme on that site which would offset the additional costs from the parallel feasibility work and from the cost challenges of building on the college's playing field site.
- 1.7 The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills proposes that, given the urgency of the project and the potential benefits identified above, the workstreams on both sites should progress in parallel recognising there will be some abortive costs for the project option that does not progress.
- 1.8 The project team will therefore stay engaged on progressing the existing Woodlands Meed College on-site project as agreed by Cabinet (Decision reference ([CAB03 20/21](#))). Costs will continue to increase as this option continues to progress. Upcoming work on this option includes:
 - Engagement with neighbours; staff; governors; planners; Sport England; other stakeholders etc
 - Continuing design development with the professional team and school
 - Further surveys.

2. Proposal Details

- 2.1. It is proposed to undertake a feasibility study on an alternative site as outlined in 1.5 above for the rebuild of Woodlands Meed College. The capital delivery team has confirmed that a draft study will be complete within four months and a final study within six months from instructing the County Council's Multi-Disciplinary Consultant (MDC).

FACTORS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

3. Consultation

- 3.1. The Headteacher and Governors have been consulted on the option to undertake a feasibility study of an alternative site and invited the search for such a site and support the work now proposed. The headteacher and governors have been asked to share this proposal with parents and carers.
- 3.2. The details of the proposal and the reasoning behind it will be shared with the Central and South Mid Sussex County Local Committee Members who include the local Members for both the existing college site and the alternative site.
- 3.3. Good communication to the various stakeholders interested in the current scheme will need to be arranged to allay any concerns regarding delay to the necessary rebuilding of Woodlands Mead College. Depending on the feasibility study conclusions, consideration will need to be made to additional potential stakeholders in the proposal.
- 3.4. Officers in Highways have been engaged to help scope the range of issues to be covered in the feasibility work in relation to any impact on the highway network but also on the arrangements for school transport and parking at the identified site.

4. Project Programme

- 4.1. The feasibility study is to be completed within six months of instructing the MDC. A first draft is expected to be provided within four months.

5. Financial (revenue and capital) and Resource Implications

- 5.1. The costs of the work will be met through the revenue feasibility budget for 2020/21.
- 5.2. Until the feasibility study is completed it is essential that progress on the college's playing field site continues so that, should the alternative site be found not suitable, the completion date of the building on the college's site is not impacted by this parallel work. Should the alternative site be considered a better option following completion of the feasibility study, the ongoing capital design costs for the current site will be abortive, which could be up to £0.5m and would need to be funded through revenue expenditure which would represent an additional budget pressure in 2020/21. Notwithstanding the potential revenue budget pressure, the work undertaken may provide valuable information as to the suitability of the site for future consideration of options. Some costs could be offset by potential savings from the eventual costs of the construction on the alternative site.
- 5.3. Should the alternative site prove more cost effective to develop than the current college site, this could provide opportunities to address other budget pressures.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 Consideration will be given to the current site constraints affecting the piece of land which is the intended site for the new build and whether any restrictive covenants and or third party easements affect the project.

7. Risk Assessment Implications and Mitigations

	Risk	Mitigation
1	Impact on programme completion date and on overall costs and the potential need to undertake maintenance work on the existing college building. There are potential additional contractual costs.	These risks will be managed through the project management process. Entering into a contract is subject to a further Decision.
2	abortive costs of the design for the college site of up to £0.5m. Capital funds spent on design for the College site will need to be funded by revenue.	Feasibility Programme will identify key milestones or gates at which point a decision will be made as to whether to proceed or not.
3	If the feasibility on the alternative site is not pursued, the potential for a less impactful solution will not have been explored	Undertake feasibility study at the earliest opportunity to inform decision making

8. Other Options Considered

- 8.1 Other options are:

- to cease design work on the existing college site until the feasibility on the site at Jane Murray Way is completed. For the reasons outlined in the report this was discounted
- not to undertake a feasibility study of the site at Jane Murray Way and to continue with design work on the college site. For the reasons outlined earlier this option was discounted.

9. Equality and Human Rights Assessment

- 9.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires that public bodies, in exercising their functions, have due regard to the need to (1) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other unlawful conduct under the Act, (2) advance equality of opportunity and (3) foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. This proposal will ensure suitable designs for those with protected characteristics.

10. Social Value and Sustainability Assessment

- 10.1 Not applicable for this specific proposal.

11. Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessment

- 11.1 None

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Appendix A – Site Plan

Background Papers

None