

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

**CABINET EXECUTIVE
8th March 2022**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Phyl Davies
Portfolio Holder for Education and Property

REPORT TITLE: Sennybridge C.P. School Strategic Outline Case (SOC)

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

1.1 This report requests Cabinet approval for the following:

a) To submit a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (formerly the 21st Century Schools Programme) for investment to develop:

- A new 150 place dual stream primary school to replace Sennybridge C.P. School's current building.

1.2 The cost of the preferred way forward is estimated to be £10,254,582 including *8% Risk and 24% Optimism Bias, which is acceptable at SOC stage, and will be mitigated as the business case process continues into the next stages. The funding is allocated for this project in the Council's Band B 21st C Schools Programme.

Welsh Government contribution (65%)	£6,665,478
PCC (35%)	£3,589,104
Total	£10,254,582

1.3 The report is supported by the following appendices:

Appendix A – Sennybridge C.P. School SOC
Appendix B – Integrated Impact Assessment

2. Background

Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys

2.1 On the 14th April 2020, a new Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys was approved by the Leader via a delegated decision.

2.2 The Strategy was developed following extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders during two separate periods between October

2019 and March 2020. The Strategy sets out a new vision education in Powys, as follows:

'All children and young people in Powys will experience a high quality, inspiring education to help develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that will enable them to become healthy, personally fulfilled, economically productive, socially responsible and globally engaged citizens of 21st century Wales.'

2.3 The new strategy also sets out a number of guiding principles which will underpin the transformation of education in Powys. These are as follows:

- *A world class rural education system that has learner entitlement at its core*
- *Schools that are fully inclusive, with a culture of deep collaboration in order to improve learner outcomes and experience*
- *A broad choice and high quality of provision for 14 – 19 year old learners, that includes both academic and vocational provision, meeting the needs of all learners, communities and the Powys economy*
- *Welsh-medium provision that is accessible and provides a full curriculum in Welsh from Meithrin to age 19 and beyond*
- *Provision for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN)/Additional Learning Needs (ALN) that is accessible as near to home as is practicably possible, with the appropriate specialist teaching, support and facilities that enables every learner to meet their potential*
- *A digitally-rich schools sector that enables all learners and staff to enhance their teaching and learning experience*
- *Community-focused schools that are the central point for multi-agency services to support children, young people, families and the community*
- *Early years provision that is designed to meet the needs of all children, mindful of their particular circumstances, language requirements or any special or additional learning needs*
- *Financially and environmentally sustainable schools*
- *The highest priority is given to staff wellbeing and professional development*

2.4 The new strategy sets out a number of Strategic Aims and Objectives, to shape the Council's work to transform the Powys education system over the coming years. One of the Strategic Aims of the Strategy is to *'improve learner entitlement and experience'*.

2.5 In addition, the strategy includes an enabling action to implement *'a major capital investment programme that will ensure that schools in Powys have inspiring, environmentally sustainable buildings that can provide opportunities for wider community activity, including where*

possible childcare services, early years, ALN, multi-agency support and community and leisure facilities.'

- 2.6 The strategy also includes a Strategic Aim to *'improve access to Welsh-medium provision across all key stages'*. Within this aim, the Strategy sets out Strategic Objectives to *'Move schools along the language continuum'*.
- 2.7 In September 2020, Cabinet considered a Programme Business Case which identified a preferred way forward for the Brecon catchment. The Programme Business Case identified a preferred way forward which included providing a replacement school building for Sennybridge C.P. School.

The Case for Change

- 2.8 Sennybridge Community Primary School is located in the village of Sennybridge, which is in the community of Maescar which has a population of 965 usual residents. Maescar has a community council with eleven locally elected or co-opted community councillors.
- 2.9 The school has a strategic location, sitting as an outlier on the Powys border, but within the Brecon catchment area. The school lies 9 miles (14 km) west of Brecon and is close to the border with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.
- 2.10 The main school building was built in 1939 and was designated until the 1980s as Defynnog Primary School. The school was originally constructed as a Secondary Modern school, with a wing of accommodation of one side of the hall for boys and the other wing for girls. Each wing had a separate entrance and toilet facilities. To the rear of the school an extension was constructed in the 1970s/80s. This has subsequently been adapted and now contains the Early years setting alongside an upper-level community gymnasium with a restricted height external store beneath. More recently the school constructed a small conservatory to the north of the KS1 accommodation. A separate canteen building was constructed to the south of the main school, this is believed to be contemporary to the main building.
- 2.11 The case for change at Sennybridge C.P. School is based on the following issues:
- The condition of the buildings at Sennybridge is poor
 - Building accessibility at the school is poor
- 2.12 Sennybridge County Primary school is currently slightly over-subscribed in numbers (hosting 2 more pupils than its capacity). The building is poor (condition C) and is not fully DDA compliant (suitability

condition B/C). There is estimated backlog maintenance required of over £1M.

- 2.13 Substantial issues exist with the site, its access, egress and external layout. Access to the school from Defynnog Road is very narrow. It leads to a recently enlarged car park at the rear of the school but does not allow for passing places. Pedestrian access from the north is via steep and dilapidated steps adjacent to the cattle market. The surfacing of these steps is worn and uneven. Site safeguarding is a significant issue that has been raised in recent Estyn reports. Although the playing field has been fenced recently, the main school entrance is to the south of the building and visitors must cross the school playground to reach it. The entrance is not overlooked by an adjacent staff or administration room and the corresponding lack of supervision remains a significant impediment to the school's operation.
- 2.14 Assessment of the building shows that the current Sennybridge CP School has inadequate spaces for modern teaching. Overall the building itself is not too small, but its rooms are not the right size and they are not in the right place. Both of these issues are difficult to resolve. For example, increasing the size of a classroom by 10m² is disproportionately expensive and massively disruptive. All of the classrooms are either too large or too small. The arrangement of the school along a single corridor also restricts options for re-planning the building, which has resulted in a piecemeal series of modifications.
- 2.15 For Staff and Administration, the total space available is three quarters of the area recommended within BB99. The difficulties caused by this shortfall are compounded when there was an extension to the building, by the switching of the main entrance to the south of the building. The resultant layout meant that there is no adjacent office of staffroom offering easy supervision.
- 2.16 Substantial issues exist with many of the elements of the structure, most notably including:
- Flooring – The original terrazzo flooring and lower wall sections to the main school building have been overlaid with now dilapidated vinyl sheeting. The terrazzo itself is cracked and would require specialist repair if retained. Some areas of the school still feature the original woodblock or quarry tile flooring, which is now de-bonded and requiring replacement.
 - Walls – External walls are uninsulated, and although they are in a generally sound condition the lack of insulation allows surface condensation and promotes mould growth within habitable rooms.
 - Ceilings – Most classrooms have a reduced height suspended ceiling. Inspection has shown that the original cast iron heating panels remain in-situ. The hall ceiling is unimproved, and this contributes to the high reverberation time and poor acoustics.

- Roof Windows – Roof windows are generally original and dilapidated. There are several instances where high level clerestory windows remain as part of the building fabric into rooms where a lower level suspended ceiling has been installed, meaning they no longer provide either light or ventilation to the rooms.
- Electrical Services - The amount of socket outlets distributed around the school is very limited. This leads to the use of extension leads that pose a trip hazard and fire risk. The school is long due a full rewire to bring up to modern standards and to comply with BS7671 electrical wiring regs.
- Heating - The heating system in the main school is generally in poor condition with varying heat emitters and poor controls. All pipework is aged and liable to failure. The system pipe work is in fair to poor condition and is also liable to failure.

The Strategic Outline Case (SOC)

2.17 The SOC has been developed in accordance with HM Treasury's Five Case Business Model. The five 'cases' are:

- Strategic Case (The Case for Change)
- Economic Case (Options to address the issues raised in the case for change)
- Commercial Case (Procurement routes)
- Financial Case (high-level indicative costs)
- Management Case (how the project will be managed)

2.18 A number of options relating to the planned development in Sennybridge have been considered when developing the SOC. These are outlined from page 30 of the SOC, which is attached as Appendix A.

The Preferred Way Forward

2.24 Following an appraisal of options against the identified Investment Objectives and Critical Success Factors, an Economic Appraisal of shortlisted options and a Financial evaluation, the emerging preferred option for Sennybridge C.P. School is as follows:

Option 5: New build 150 place 4-11 dual stream community primary school in Sennybridge on existing site.

2.25 The following table provides a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of the preferred way forward:

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replicates the existing school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger capital investment

<p>size.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a future proofed school, based on current pupil/population forecasts; • Enables the curriculum to be delivered in a continuous and coherent way from the Foundation Stage through to the end of Key Stage 2; • Maintains early year and primary age provision in the local community; • Minimises disruption to Sennybridge pupils, parents and teachers; • Enables wider integration of the school within the community; • Continuation of Welsh Medium Education in the Sennybridge area; • Collocated early years childcare provision on the one site. • Delivers a new build school which extends the time horizon for the requirement for substantial future works into the long term. • Removes backlog maintenance of circa £1.032m. • Will enable energy efficiencies reducing the buildings carbon footprint and ongoing running costs. • Provision of appropriate number of school pupil places. • Addresses condition, suitability and sustainability issues in current school. • Reaffirms the strategy to keep Primary schools in strategic locations. • New building will be condition A. • Meets BREEAM and 	<p>required from an already over-stretched capital budget.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantial noise disruption to existing school setting during building work. • May require temporary relocation of School pupils during building work and associated costs of this.
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<p>environmental building standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially attractive to local community and stakeholders. • Appropriate facilities for teaching and learning for 21C curriculum. • Provides community focussed facilities. 	
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3 Advice

3.1 The advice of officers is that the SOC should be submitted to Welsh Government for approval, to enable the Council to proceed with the project and progress to the next stage of the business case process.

3.2 The Welsh Government's intervention rate for schools within Band B of the 21st Century Schools programme is 65%, which represents good value for money for the Council. Cabinet is advised that there is a significant early stage risk contingency of 25% within the estimated project costs, which is appropriate at a SOC stage. More detailed estimated costs will be confirmed at Full Business Case stage.

3.4 Indicative Timescales

Date	Actions (commencement)
03/2022	SOC to Powys CC Cabinet Submit SOC to WG
05/2022	Complete RIBA 2
06/2022	OBC to Powys CC Cabinet Submit OBC to WG
07/2022	Commence Procurement
09/2022	Award Contract
05/2023	Complete RIBA 3/4
07/2023	Planning Approval

Date	Actions (commencement)
10/2023	Submit FBC to PCC Cabinet Submit FBC to WG
01/2024	Commence Construction
01/2025	New school building open

4. Resource Implications

4.1 Estimated costs are as follows:

Project Costs	
Capital Cost	£7,569,575
Optimism Bias	£1,816,698
Risk	£868,308
VAT (only to be included where non-recoverable by applicant)	N/A
Total Project Cost (inclusive of optimism bias and risk)	£10,254,582
Welsh Government Contribution (65%)	£6,665,478
PCC Contribution (35%)	£3,589,104

4.2 The project can be accommodated within the current 21st Century Schools Programme funding envelope, however there isn't sufficient funding to complete this scheme and the proposed Brecon Primary School so additional funding will need to be found to finance the shortfall currently estimated at £5 million to complete both schemes.

4.3 The Councils contribution towards this scheme will be funded from borrowing as no other funding has been identified. The cost to the council revenue budget as a result of this borrowing is estimated at £160,000 per year for 34 years. This is included in the councils Financial Resources Model (FRM) but there are significant funding shortfalls in future years to close the budget gap.

4.4 The current 21st Century Schools grant conditions allow Welsh Government to claw back grant if the school has over 15% surplus capacity 5 years after occupation of the school. The capacity of the planned new building is higher than the current pupil numbers, so this remains a risk to this scheme.

- 4.4 The attached SOC identifies that from the opening of the new school building in 2025, there will be a small increase in the recurring revenue cost of the school, of approximately £13k per annum. This is due to the additional cost of rates following a move to the new build. Any change to the formula funding provided will impact on the Council's revenue budget.
- 4.5 Development and implementation of the recommendation would require involvement from a number of service areas, including staff from the Schools Service, Finance, Property, Highways and ICT.
- 4.5 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the comments as set out in section 4 above. There is currently a shortfall in the Council's contribution to fully fund this project based on the estimated costs. This shortfall would need to be resolved at the Outline Business Case (OBC) stage. The submission of the SOC is fundamental to gaining the investment from Welsh Government and can therefore be supported.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Legal: the recommendations can be accepted from a legal point of view
- 5.2 The Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: " I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report".

6. Comment from local member(s)

- 6.1 Cllr Edwin Roderick:

'I fully support the proposal to build a replacement school at Sennybridge. The old school dates back to 1938 but has now reached the end of its life and there is an urgent need for considerable investment. There are many issues with the school fabric, heating and electrics and a new school is essential to meet the needs of the new school curriculum together with appropriate sports facilities both for the school use and the local community. The school has traditionally been an integral part of the Community and these links will be further improved by state-of-the-art facilities. Sennybridge school is a dual stream school with a growing number of pupils in the Welsh stream, however I am pleased to note how much incidental Welsh is used as part of everyday school life within the English stream. Although the teaching areas are in poor condition, the school produces confident and mature pupils, a new building will provide a learning environment which will aid pupils educational and wellbeing.'

7. Integrated Impact Assessment

- 7.1 An initial impact assessment of the preferred way forward is attached as Appendix B. The impact assessment considers the project's impact on the Welsh Government's well-being goals, as outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

The summary of the impact assessment is as follows:

'This impact assessment suggests that the impact would be positive. The development of a new building to replace the current Sennybridge Primary School building would address many issues related to the poor condition of the current building, ensuring that future pupils would be taught in facilities that are fit-for-purpose, improving their learner entitlement and experience. The new facilities would be fully DDA compliant, supporting learners with disabilities. Further opportunities for integration between the school and other services, to have a positive impact on the health and well-being of pupils attending the school and their families.'

Should Cabinet approve continuing with the preferred option, the impact assessment will be regularly updated throughout the process to take account of any feedback received.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the following:

To submit a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme for investment to develop:

- A new 150 place dual stream primary school to replace Sennybridge C.P. School's current building.

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