

The Case for the New Build at Stockton Heath Primary School

Vision and Mission Statement

“Warrington Borough Council seeks to ensure that Warrington’s parents, children and communities experience educational provision of the highest possible quality which gives equality of access and opportunity. Raising achievement and attainment for Warrington students is the core function of the Education Department’s work. We seek, through open partnership with schools and the people with whom they work, to contribute positively to the town’s future as a learning community, through education provided now”.

The above vision is at the centre of the proposal to replace the current buildings of Stockton Heath Primary school with a brand new building offering 21st century provision meeting of requirements of the latest DfES Building Bulletin for primary schools to the greatest possible extent.

The DfES aims to ensure that primary schools

- Are fully equipped for 21st Century learning, and
- Occupy a central position at the heart of our communities

This vision will mean that our primary schools will need quality school environments which facilitate personalised learning and enable them to offer a wide range of services to their local communities and contribute to Every Child Matters (as detailed in the Primary Capital Programme (Appendix A)).

The Government’s vision is of a primary school system in which all children, whatever their background:

- Have the support they need to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic and well-being;
- Master the fundamental basic skills of literacy and numeracy;
- Develop as confident and enthusiastic learners, across a broad and rich curriculum.

This document outlines both the process by which we have come to this proposal and defines the rationale which unquestionably points to the **provision of the proposed new building as the only way in which the Council’s vision for Stockton Heath’s parents, children and community can be realised.**

From as early as 2000 the Governing Body of the school has been raising concerns about the continued suitability of the current accommodation for the modern education of the pupils. In particular they have drawn attention to the general small sizes of the classrooms, the unsuitability of the reception classrooms and the particularly poor accommodation for the two Y6 classes. Many of these concerns were supported by the Ofsted report on 19 January 2004 and 5 May 1998. Moreover the official capacity of the school as calculated by the DfES premises formula indicates only 333 places in a school

with 7-year groups of up to 60 places. In 2001, 421 pupils were being educated in those 333 places, and the school continues to have a planned admission number of 60. If the capacity of the school is not increased the school will continue to have to expend resources on the judicious management and use of space which provides a less than ideal educational environment.

The condition of the buildings was also a growing concern. Many of the outer buildings are at the end of their useful life and the Governing Body has increasingly had to confront growing numbers of health and safety issues at the school. Whilst the Governors have been meticulous in ensuring such matters are addressed, addressing them has become an increasing drain on school resources both financial and human.

As a result of these concerns the Council agreed to prioritise Stockton Heath Primary School within its capital programme and submitted a targeted capital funding bid to the DfES in 2003 for a 2FE (form entry) replacement school building, equipped to accommodate 420 pupils. This bid was unsuccessful in 2003 but was approved in late 2004 with a DfES grant of £3.1m to provide 80% of the costs. The announcement of the grant coincided with a strategic review of school places in the area, which confirmed that there was still a need for the school to provide for 420 pupils. Following the review, in early 2005, therefore the Council committed to spending 3.9m (£3.1M of which was DfES grant) to replace the current buildings with 21st century facilities which could accommodate 420 pupils.

A consultation process was begun and it was quickly established that some members of the community were keen to retain the old Edwardian building. The Council responded to these wishes by commissioning two feasibility studies, one for a complete new build and one for a remodelling of the Edwardian building combined with a new intention to provide the 420 places.

The results of the feasibility studies were presented to the consultation meetings of stakeholders in June and July 2005. At these meetings it became clear that

- The new build option met all of the reasonable aspirations of the staff, Governors and partners whereas the remodel option could not because of restrictions imposed by the existing building
- The Governing Body and staff supported the new build option
- The new build option could be achieved from the available resources, whereas the remodel option would cost at least £500,000 more than the resources available
- The new build could begin in July 2006 and complete in summer 2007. Demolition and site works would complete by December 2007. In contrast, the remodel option would begin in July 2006 and complete in February 2008. Site works would complete in summer 2008
- Disruption for the children during the building programme would be greater and take longer if the remodel option was pursued.

At the Executive Board meeting on 12th September 2005 members agreed the following recommendation:

"The evidence from both the feasibility studies and the consultation process now both point to the adoption of Option 1 - To commission the new build option and demolish the old school. Whilst there is a significant desire in the community not to lose the old Edwardian building, it is outweighed by both the practical advantages and general community opinion which favour the new build option.

In proceeding with the new build option, every effort will be made within the available resources to create a design in keeping with the area and to retain appropriate memories of the historic connections the school has with the area".

A planning application was submitted to the Development Control Committee in order to implement this key decision. However, the Development Control Committee on 20 March 2006 refused the application for the following reason:

The proposed development would result in demolition of a building which is included on the local list of buildings which are valued as a result of their architectural or historic contribution to the local scene. The reasons provided in support of the demolition of the existing building and the proposed new development are not considered to clearly demonstrate justification for the removal of the existing structure. Development is thereby considered to fail to meet the tests required by policy BH5 of the Warrington Unitary Development Plan.

The original Executive Board decision still stands, however in the interests of transparency this report sets out the Actions taken since the refusal of planning permission and addresses the issues raised at the Development Control Committee.

Actions taken since 20 March 2006

Following this decision, advice was sought from the DfES on how the scheme might proceed and whether the grant would still be available. (Appendix B)

Following this letter there has been a re-examination of the three options outlined in the DfES letter, namely:

- a) Refurbishment of the existing school and replacement of the separate buildings
- b) Submission of a further planning application to support a new building
- c) Build a new school building on an alternative site in the area

This re-examination needed to consider all the issues raised including consultees concerns that the initial feasibility study did not provide independent advice on the new build and refurbishment options.

In the light of these concerns the following activities were undertaken:

- a) An independent evaluation of the Council's feasibility studies
- b) A questionnaire for all parents/stakeholders
- c) A meeting with local Headteachers to explore the option of an alternative site

Details of Action taken

Independent Evaluation of the Council's Feasibility Studies

Following CABE guidance (Government's Advisors on Architecture, Urban Design and Public Space) a number of companies were invited to evaluate the Council's Feasibility Studies. Latham Education Architects (Derby) accepted the commission to evaluate the two feasibility studies to:

- Ensure the Brief met the requirements of the LA, School and DfES Guidance;
- Assess the feasibility designs in the context of RIBA guidelines;
- Assess the cost estimates for accuracy and reliability;
- Assess the programmes for both options; and
- Any other observations.

The Latham Report suggests that the feasibility studies into both the new build and refurbishment have been developed to a significant level of detail, are based on the DfES guidelines published in Building Bulletin 99 and confirm that the budget for the project is challenging and reductions in the repair/upgrade works for the remodel may have been cut too far.

Questionnaires were sent to 573 stakeholders including residents close to the school, parents, staff, governors, users of the school and interest groups. 150 were returned for analysis.

A meeting with local Headteachers was held in May 2006. Three schools were in attendance.

The outcomes of the summer term's work have been shared with parents and stakeholders by letter. All the letters to parents and stakeholders are available as background papers including the outcomes of the questionnaire and the Executive Summary of the independent evaluation of the Council's feasibility studies. The comments below draw on all this work and on the consultation process of 2005 together with all the responses and objections received in 2006.

Outcomes of Action Taken

Each of the three options identified earlier are considered in the light of the action taken and the further information received.

New building on an alternative site

A new building on an alternative site was not considered suitable in the first instance when notified of the DfES grant because the only available site was located on the other side of the A49, which would have resulted in an imbalance of provision in that area. However this decision was re-examined after the application was refused and discussed at the meeting with Headteachers.

At the Headteacher's meeting concern about the impact on other nearby schools was forcibly expressed. The questionnaire analysis revealed very little support for this option. It is recommended therefore that this option should not proceed as it would have a destabilising effect on neighbouring school communities, it would remove the school from the heart of the Stockton Heath Community and is not an option with any significant support from parents or residents.

Refurbishment and extension of existing school

In the executive summary of their evaluation report (Appendix C) Latham Architects identifies that:

"The budget for the project is challenging given the phasing implications of implementation of either option. In trying to achieve affordable schemes the level of specification has been reduced to the minimum considered acceptable. In the case of the remodel and extend option, repair/upgrade works to the existing building have possibly been cut too far, with a view to their implementation at a later date. This is a significant risk and results in a failure to address poor environmental conditions in the existing building. Allowing for these savings the remodel and extend option is still significantly the more expensive"

It is worth highlighting here some of the factors that had to be cut from the remodelling option. They include:

- ***The replacement of all windows at the school***
- ***The replacement of the roof***
- ***Measures to combat thermal inefficiency***
- ***Plastering and damp proofing reduced to making good as opposed to complete renewal***

Latham also confirms that:

"Both feasibility studies have responded to the brief and subsequent design development meetings with the School and other stakeholders, but only the new build option is shown to be affordable. In both cases the level of detail is greater than would be expected of a feasibility study and suitable for informed decisions".

This adds weight to the practical case against this option. Firstly it confirms that the Council had good reason to indicate to the DfES that "it may not be possible to meet all of the outcomes of the grant within the available resources"

The DfES letter states:

"We appreciate the difficulties you have faced, and in this letter intend to allow you as much flexibility as possible, consistent with you achieving the original objectives set out for the scheme. These are, to provide modern, suitable and sufficient accommodation for Stockton Heath Primary School."

"Given your statement that the outcomes would not be met it would, on the face of it, be very difficult for us to agree for departmental funds to be used for this option. Unless, therefore, you can provide additional funds from the Council's resources which would ensure the initial outcomes set were met, it is unlikely that we could support this option."

The majority of residents who returned questionnaires supported the refurbishment. This has also been evident over the last year when a number of letters and a petition objecting to the planning application were received by the Council. The option is however opposed by the Governing Body of the school and the staff.

It is also clear from the feasibility study and the independent evaluation that to proceed with this project, additional expenditure would be required to meet the original projected shortfall of at least £500,000. The project may also require additional investment to fully address the condition issues of the school. Since the original decision in September 2005, the Council has spent nearly £300,000 on design fees for the new build option. This money has already made a first call on the budget for the scheme. Were a similar amount to be required to be spent on designing the refurbishment option, the funding gap between the two schemes would rise to £800,000 and potentially more if the scheme is to be improved to guarantee meeting the outcomes required by DfES grant. As previously noted earlier, the Latham report raises concerns that repair and upgrade work to the existing building may have been cut too far.

The DfES has made it clear that they will provide no additional resources to those already allocated to the Council. As a result the extra money (at least £800,000) would need to be found from the annual allocations for capital expenditure on schools, which totals approximately £2.8M per annum. The 20% (£800,000) match funding for the grant is already being found from this allocation, whichever option is progressed, to the detriment of other schools in the borough. To allocate a further £800,000 from the money due to be spent on other schools the Council would need to be completely convinced that this option is the best solution and provides excellent value for money.

Submission of a further planning application for the new build option

This is the option favoured by the Governing Body of the school, the staff and the majority of parents of pupils at the school and pre-school. It is opposed by the majority of residents who returned questionnaires. According to the independent evaluation of the feasibility studies:

“only the new build option is shown to be affordable”

Questionnaire respondents were asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = most important) several important issues that the Council should take account of when making its decisions. This produced the following results:

1	Best quality education environment	2.1
2	Health and Safety	2.5
3	Minimal disruption to pupils	3.1
4	External appearance of the school	4.1
5	Retaining existing school building	4.3
6	Shortest timetable	4.9
7	Best value for money	5.2

Do Nothing

There is a fourth option available to members and that is to retain the building in its current condition. It is difficult to envisage any advantages to this option other than the retention of the building in its current state. The education of children would be considerably disadvantaged as they would remain in unsuitable accommodation. The existing HORSAs (prefabricated temporary buildings c.1950) are unacceptable as a modern learning environment. It would not address the issues of capacity. Costs incurred in the design process would have to be borne by the Council. This option is not recommended.

The work undertaken since the Development Control Committee decision has demonstrated that there is no viable way of combining the retention of existing buildings and providing a good educational environment within the resources available to the Council.

The feasibility studies demonstrate that the new build option best delivers the educational aspirations for the school, accords with the budget available and minimises disruption to pupils. The independent evaluation confirms the integrity and accuracy of the feasibility studies. As such it is fair to say that the new build option best meets the top three priority issues from the questionnaire.

Accordingly in August 2006 the new Executive Board considered a further report on the issue. This report demonstrates that the Council has now exhausted the pursuit of alternative options to the new build and demolish options proposed in the planning application.

The design of the new building complies fully with the DfES Building Bulletin Design requirements. It delivers a vision where Stockton Heath “parents, children and communities experience educational provision of the highest possible quality.” In particular, in line with DfES recommendations it provides a building which will inspire and enhance

- Educational performance
- Staff satisfaction
- Pupil satisfaction
- Community involvement

Educational Performance

- Recent research has shown that the improvements to buildings and learning environments can have a significant impact on educational performance (as detailed by the DfES Capital Strategy).
- The formal curriculum will require a range of appropriate, well-equipped teaching spaces to be delivered well, and those are listed in the accommodation schedules. However, an equally important steer to the design can be the approach to more subtle curriculum issues.
- The learning that takes place outside the formal timetable – in the playground, the corridor or during lunch – has been described as the ‘informal curriculum’. The way such spaces are designed and managed

can have a significant impact on opportunities for informal learning. For instance, seating areas and quiet corners encourage social interaction, and easy supervision can reduce bullying

- The message you get as you enter the school – described by the Learning Through Landscapes Trust as the 'hidden curriculum' – is another crucial influence on learning. The presence or absence of enthusiasm and opportunities for learning can be sub-consciously 'read' in the frontage, the foyer or the corridors of a school, as well as in its classrooms. The school should be able to present an individual atmosphere, avoiding an institutional character, through welcoming entrances and interesting display.
- The ICT strategy will differ in each school and over time. As the technology develops, they may move from ICT resources in specialist rooms to ICT that is mobile, wireless and perhaps personally owned and carried around the school by pupils. The primary school exemplar brief is based on an ICT strategy that assumes at least the Government target of one computer to every eight pupils. In line with common practice, the core brief assumes four computers in each classbase and 30 computers in an ICT suite.
- At present, schools tend to be used only during certain times of the day. In the future, ICT will enable the school building to be used more flexibly. Some pupils may learn from home or elsewhere for some aspects of their learning and may not be required to be present in the building every day, so the patterns of access have the potential to change radically.

Staff Satisfaction and the School Workforce

- As well as learning institutions, schools are workplaces and must provide a high standard of working accommodation for teaching and non-teaching staff. A good quality-working environment encourages positive self-esteem, which in turn encourages better performance and promotes a natural sense of achievement at work. It is essential that staff feel their efforts are valued and rewarded, and an excellent working environment supports the school's recruitment and retention strategy
- The core of the school workforce reform agenda is creating capacity for teachers to focus on teaching, and activities that directly support teaching. It is also about enabling headteachers to lead, as well as manage. The central element will be increased numbers (and a wider variety) of support staff undertaking activities that free teachers in particular to concentrate on their core professional responsibilities.
- Accommodation must therefore reflect the implications of more adults in schools. But it must also provide teaching spaces that can be adapted to different models of curriculum delivery and space that enables teachers to get the most out of the time they have for preparation planning and assessment. This will support flexible ways of working and effective teaching and learning more generally.

Pupil Satisfaction

- Pupils' satisfaction with their environment can affect behaviour and self-esteem, and ultimately the willingness and ability to learn. All pupils, including those with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities

should feel that their needs are respected – not only in teaching areas, but also in toilets, circulation and playgrounds

- Pupils will range from those with physical disabilities to the able bodied; from those who are fascinated by new technology to those who excel at sport or the arts; from those with learning difficulties to those who are gifted achievers
- The design and disposition of spaces can be used to enhance and extend the pastoral support structure in order to create a sense of belonging, especially among younger pupils. Even a small primary school can feel intimidating for pupils in their first year. It is therefore important to develop ways for pupils to get to know the buildings and each other gradually. Pupils can be grouped in various ways at the different times, offering them the opportunity to discover new friends, interests and places within the school.

Community Involvement

- (Community use will be a key aspiration of the school for the future). The new building will offer first class facilities for the care and education of children including a private nursery provision. The nursery will operate sessional and full day care. The nursery will be situated on the ground floor of the building adjacent to the Reception classes. An ideal arrangement which will facilitate a smooth transition into school. Community shared spaces are likely to include the main hall, small hall, ICT suite and library area. There is currently and will continue to be out of school care, Stay and Play Link Club offering a before and after school club and a holiday club. Further community usage will be positively encouraged within the new facilities offered.
- It is important to maintain the priorities required for school use, whilst allowing use of the school buildings and site by the community users. Access and security will also be important, (as will the additional cost of maintaining the site out of school hours)
- The architecture of the school may usefully express the value of education in the community and give a positive image of the school.

In achieving these visionary objectives, we have taken account of all the key design criteria recommended by the DfES including:

- Flexibility
- Adaptability
- Access and inclusion
- Safety and security
- Environmental performance

In addition all classrooms in the new building comply with recommended sizes in the DfES Building Bulletin in stark contrast to the classrooms currently afforded the children of Stockton Heath.

Conclusion

The Council's Executive Board committed to submitting a new planning application for a new building to replace all the existing buildings and provide 420 places to accommodate all the foreseeable needs of Stockton Heath Community Primary School as a 2 FE primary school serving the area.

Many of those who object to this proposal do so because they seek to preserve an Edwardian school building that the English Heritage Society do not consider to be worthy of listing '*A 1910 board school, which although locally significant does not possess sufficient architectural quality or innovation of floor plan within a national context to qualify for listing.*' Many of them will argue that the Council should pursue the remodelling option.

These arguments, however, are historic and confuse the issues as it now stands. Having explored all possible options, the new build and demolish option is now the **only** way in which the Council can provide sufficient suitable accommodation for the children of Stockton Heath and its surrounding areas.

There is no longer a remodelling option as

- **The Council does not have sufficient resources to provide such an option as independently verified by the Lathom report.**
- **Even if it were affordable, pursuit of a remodelling option would delay to provision of suitable accommodation by a further 12 months.**
- **The current additional forecast shortfall of £800,000 would rise still further as a result of such a delay, given the current high rates of building inflation.**
- **The Council cannot be sure that the DfES grant would be available to support a remodelling option as it falls short of certain requirements as confirmed by the independent Lathom report.**

Accordingly when considering whether or not these proposals (for the new building for which the Council is seeking Development Control Committee approval) justify the demolition of the locally listed building, members will need to compare the educational vision outlined for the children in the new building with that of the educational detriment of the same children remaining in the existing building.

That is the real alternative that Stockton Heath children will face if this application is refused as there is no other viable affordable option open to the Council despite a lengthy process of consultations and option evaluations. It is therefore clear that the educational advantages of this proposal far outweigh the justifications for retaining a locally listed building. The DfES have enlisted the help of Professor Stephen Heppell for their Building Schools for the Future as they believe him to be "the most influential academic of recent years in the field of technology and education" and in his words "quite simply, we put children's education at risk if we fail to move forward."

Tim Warren
Interim Operational Director of Education
November 2006

Section 1: Executive Summary

1. Latham Architects were appointed by Warrington Borough Council to undertake an independent evaluation of the feasibility studies undertaken for Stockton Heath Primary School. The studies were undertaken between April and September 2005, with a report submitted to the Executive Board of the Council in September 2005. There are two studies: one to remodel and extend the existing building, the second a new build replacement.
2. The brief, which applies to both studies, was prepared in April 2005 and is highly detailed. The level of detail is significantly in excess of that which would be expected for a feasibility study. There are weaknesses with no reference to the LEA strategic vision and only a short section on the School educational vision. However, there is evidence that these were considered in the period prior to the preparation of the brief and were the basis for it.
3. The accommodation schedule and areas given in the brief are based on DfES guidelines published in Building Bulletin 99.
4. Both studies have been developed to a significant level of detail, generally considering all appropriate technical issues for a building project. Both studies have been taken to a level equivalent to RIBA Stage C outline proposals. A feasibility study would generally only cover RIBA Stage A and B.
5. Both studies exceed the building area detailed in the brief, but the limitations of the site and Town Planning restriction have influenced the solutions. The limitations of the budget suggest that area reductions are the main mechanism to achieve cost savings if necessary.
6. The budget for the project is challenging given the phasing implications of implementation of either option. In trying to achieve affordable schemes the level of specification has been reduced to the minimum considered acceptable. In the case of the remodel and extend option, repair/upgrade works to the existing building have possibly been cut too far, with a view to their implementation at a later date. This is a significant risk and results in a failure to address poor environmental conditions in the existing building. Allowing for these savings the remodel and extend option is still significantly the more expensive.
7. Both feasibility studies have responded to the brief and subsequent design development meetings with the School and other stakeholders, but only the new build option is shown to be affordable. In both cases the level of detail is greater than would be expected of a feasibility study and suitable for informed decisions.

Dear Mr Warren

Thank you for your letter of 24 March regarding proposed changes to Warrington Borough Council's (WBC) Targeted Capital Fund (TCF) project, approved during the 2005-06 round.

We appreciate the difficulties you have faced, and in this letter intend to allow you as much flexibility as possible, consistent with you achieving the original objectives set out for the scheme. These are, to provide modern, suitable and sufficient accommodation for Stockton Heath Primary School.

You have set out three possible options which would enable WBC to take this project forward, and ask for the Department's views. I note that we have already allocated you the full funding of £3.2 million, so you are seeking our approval in principle to use the funds for a variation to the original scheme.

Option 1 - refurbishment of the existing school. You state in your letter that refurbishment of the existing school, and replacing the ageing separate buildings, would not meet all of the outcomes of the grant within the available resources.

Given your statement that the outcomes would not be met it would, on the face of it, be very difficult for us to agree for departmental funds to be used for this option. Unless, therefore, you can provide additional funds from your the Council's resources which would ensure the initial outcomes set were met, it is unlikely that we could support this option.

Option 2 - Amend and re-submit your planning application to support a new building. If you can demonstrate to us that this application, if accepted, would meet the original objectives of the scheme, then we would be prepared to fund this option. Accordingly, we would either allow you to retain funds you have already received, or earmark funds to re-allocate to you in accordance with your revised timetable.

Option 3 - Seek alternative sites within the area. This option seems feasible. Again, we would support this option provided it achieves the original objectives of this scheme. I am assuming, when I say this, that relocation of the school to an alternative site would still benefit the children in the original catchment area.

I hope that this letter will enable your authority to make final decisions on a way forward, and to start construction of the school as soon as possible. I look forward to hearing about your council's decision.

When I receive news of your council's decision, we will need to take a look at the funding position and decide what arrangements need to be made. As you can appreciate, from a financial perspective, it is not in accordance with Government's rules that allocated funds should remain idle.

If necessary, we could meet to discuss your preferred option. While Peter Grenville and myself are not able to attend the Design Event on 18 & 19 April, due to other commitments, we could meet at another time. Please call me on 0207 925 6746 or email to Titi.windapo@dfes.qsi.gov.uk to arrange a suitable date and time.

Titi Windapo
Schools Capital Division