

Frequently Asked Question - Proposed New Saddleworth School

Funding

1. How is the School being funded?

The new School would be delivered as part of the Coalition Government Priority School Building Programme (PSBP) which is a Government-managed programme set up to address the needs of the schools most in need of urgent repair. Through the PSBP, 261 schools will be rebuilt or have their needs met. The first school will be completed in 2014 and all schools will be delivered by 2017. Saddleworth School is one of seven schools included within 'North West 3 capital batch'.

2. What properties are included in the North West Batch 3?

Interserve Projects Services have been appointed as the selected construction panel member for the £52 million contract for the North West 3 capital batch which includes 7 schools located at;

- Flowery Field Primary, Tameside
- Saddleworth School, Oldham
- Elton High School, Bury
- Gorton Mount Primary, Manchester
- Stanley Grove Primary, Manchester
- Mesne Lea Primary, Salford
- Broadoak Primary, Tameside

With the exception of Saddleworth School and Gorton Mount School, all replacement Schools would be developed on the sites of the existing Schools.

3. How is the construction of the building being managed?

The construction of the School is being managed by the Education Funding Agency (EFA). A project team for each batch has been appointed by the EFA.

4. Why and how have Interserve been chosen as the contractor on this scheme?

Delivering works through the PSPB Capital Programme is undertaken by the 'batching' of schools as a package of works. Generally, schools within the batch will be in different local authorities and a batch will typically contain between 5 and 7 schools. The batching of schools limits the number of individual procurement exercises that need to take place, thus making the programme more cost effective and with a quicker build programme.

Batches of schools are procured using the EFA managed Contractors Framework. This is a Framework Contract procured by the Department for Education under the EU Procurement Regulations. All contractors on the Framework are invited to tender for each batch of schools and, after an initial submission, are shortlisted to two contractors. Those shortlisted contractors then develop detailed proposals for one of the schemes in the batch, chosen as the 'Sample Scheme'. In the case of the North West 3 Capital Batch, the Sample Scheme was Flowery Field Primary School.

A Contractor is selected for the entire batch based on the following criteria;

1. Design (60%)
2. Delivery (20%)
3. Handover (10%)
4. Price (10%)

5. What is being funded by the Education Funding Agency and how much funding is available?

The EFA manage the £52m contract across the whole North West batch of schools. Consequently, whilst the exact funding for Saddleworth School is not fixed, it is likely that a budget in the region of £17m would be available.

The details of the works to be completed at each school and the associated funding will be determined as part of a feasibility study undertaken by the EFA. The EFA will work with applicants and schools to develop the proposals to address the condition need. This will require searches to be undertaken (for example to determine whether there are any planning constraints on the site), surveys to be undertaken (for example to determine ground conditions), plans to be drawn up and specification for works to be prepared. The EFA will be seeking to determine the option offering the best value for money to the public purse. In the case of Saddleworth School, this feasibility work is currently underway.

The EFA will fund the construction of the new school on the site. Additional works that might be required outside of the site (i.e. highway improvements etc.) would be the Council's responsibility, along with any costs associated with land acquisition, etc.

Site Location

6. Would a replacement school on the Saddleworth School site been considered?

Under the BSF programme, Halliday Meecham, the Council's Technical Advisors, sketched two options for 1350 pupils that did fit on the site. However, in 2008 Halliday Meecham recommended not reusing the existing site due to the constrained nature of the existing access road and the likely operational disruption to the School during the construction works. As a result, the Council's preferred location for the BSF School was on the frontage of the WH Shaws site.

Under the PSPB, whilst 15 sites were considered, the Council and School preferred the land at the rear part of the former WH Shaw site. After appraising this area, the EFA advised that the rear of the site would incur additional costs compared with the frontage plot and therefore, the frontage was chosen as the preferred option on the basis that it represented the most affordable and deliverable option

Nevertheless, as part of its Feasibility Review, the EFA has considered the development of the school on the existing site and have confirmed that this option would exceed the EFA funding envelope and would lead to significant and sustained disruption to the school during the construction process.

7. Have alternative sites been considered?

Since being advised that funding under the PSBP programme had been secured in January 2013, the Council considered 15 sites which included the existing Saddleworth School site and the former WH Shaw Pallet site which was the preferred site under the 2008 Building Schools for the Future scheme.

Whilst the EFA does not determine which site should be chosen, with matters of Saddleworth school location being determined by the Local Authority in consultation with the school themselves, the EFA has a finite amount of funding available, which is a strong factor that must be considered as part of any site selection process, as it may limit the number of sites that are available. The preferred site also has to be approved by the EFA at the feasibility stage and is assessed against strict deliverability criteria.

In 2008, when the Council initially looked at developing a replacement Saddleworth School under the Building Schools for the Future initiative, its advisors under this scheme – Halliday Meecham – concluded that re-using the existing site was not deliverable.

The EFA have confirmed that it is not uncommon for projects in the PSPB to;

- Be built on the existing site.
- Be built on the existing playing fields and for the sports facilities to be rebuilt after the demolition of the current school building.
- Utilise temporary accommodation while the work is being delivered.

However, all schools are assessed on an individual basis and the constrained nature of the Uppermill site means that this approach is not considered to be a cost effective and deliverable solution in the case of Saddleworth School.

8. Would a replacement school fit on the Saddleworth School site?

A new 1500 place school would fit on the existing School site, indeed the initial Halliday Meecham work sketched two options that did fit on the site. However, in 2008 the option of reusing the site was dismissed by the Council's advisors due to the constrained nature of the existing access road and the likely disruption to the School during the construction works.

Work carried out subsequently by the EFA has confirmed that the development of the existing site would be above the EFA funding envelope and, in addition, would lead to significant and sustained disruption to the School.

9. Is it true that the Council have received a plan from local residents showing how the existing site could be developed?

The Council have received a plan from a local architect showing a potential option of how the existing site could be re-used in support of the new school. The School's Technical Group are considering this and whether or not this presents a more affordable scheme in comparison with that previously prepared and costed by the EFA's Technical Advisors.

Both the Council and School are committed to delivering the best solution for the area within the EFA's affordability envelope.

10. What is the size of the existing and proposed Saddleworth School sites?

The existing Saddleworth School site measures 11 acres. This includes the area either side of the existing School drive, i.e. Pickhill Brook which is largely unusable due to its challenging topography. The site at the former WH Shaw site would provide a minimum of 13.31 acres.

11. Is it an EFA requirement that a school of this size is built on a site of at least 13 acres?

The EFA has not specified a minimum size for an overall site area.

12. Why weren't the public consulted on the choice of the Diggle site?

The Council considered a total of 15 sites which were all appraised based on timescales, deliverability, cost, legal, planning, highways and engineering risk. Having completed this process, the only option was part of the former WH Shaw site.

If the Council have advised that there was essentially one option, this would have impacted on the Council's negotiating position and the Authority were keen to obtain the best commercial deal.

Heads of terms were finally agreed on 16 October 2013, the same day that the site was officially announced at a public meeting.

13. Why is the School being developed on the frontage plot at the former WH Shaw Pallet site and not at the rear in order to mitigate its impact?

Building the school at the rear of the site will incur additional costs compared to developing on the frontage. The EFA has therefore adopted the most affordable and deliverable option within the funding available.

14. Are buildings being developed in the Green Belt?

At a public event on the 16 October 2013 when the Council initially presented the "EFA Control Option", it was made clear that this was not a final design and does not necessarily represent what would ultimately be built on the site.

A Control Option is used by the EFA to determine whether it is feasible to build a school on a particular site, taking account results of surveys and searches and site constraints. The final and detailed design of the school however, will be developed by the appointed contractor, Interserve.

The current "Control Option" sites a Sports Hall / sports pitches on the Green Belt land. This is not contrary to Green Belt planning policy. Residents who are concerned at the current proposals would have the opportunity to comment accordingly once a planning application has been made, but the EFA is hopeful that the final plans will allay the majority of known concerns.

The whole of the WH Shaw Pallet site, which includes the land that would be retained by the developer, measures 25.42 acres of which, 9.53 acres (or 38%) is located within the Green Belt.

15. Are the two plots of land which front Huddersfield Road (and located either side of the access road to the former WH Shaw Pallet site) located within the Green Belt?

No. Whilst informally used for grazing purposes, the areas of land are zoned for industrial and business development in the Local Development Framework. The plots are not within the Green Belt and therefore, if the School was not developed on this area of land, there would be little to prevent the land being developed for industrial sheds for example, which would only compound the highway and visual issues raised by residents.

Access

16. Questions have been raised as to whether the highway infrastructure can support a School in Diggle.

The Control Option scheme has been prepared by the EFA to illustrate how a 1500 place school could be accommodated on the preferred site and therefore does not show all the works that would be carried out in the area and does not necessarily represent the final design solution.

In suggesting the use of part of the former WH Shaw Pallet site, it is recognised that there is a need to improve accessibility. Officers have met with representatives from the Highways Authority and a series of works have been suggested that will help mitigate the impact of the School and improve traffic flow for all Diggle residents. Details of these works will be announced once consultation with key stakeholders has taken place but could involve, introducing parking restrictions, the expansion of existing parking laybys on Standedge Road to provide an early drop off, widening the carriageway along parts of Huddersfield Road, widening pedestrian footpaths along parts of Huddersfield Road to ensure that pupils can continue to walk safely from the neighbouring villages and early drop off points and the introduction of a School Zone to ensure that the carriageway widening does not result in traffic increasing their speed. This would be in addition to the parent drop off, bus turnaround etc., which would be included within the site curtilage.

17. What traffic surveys have been carried out?

The Council currently holds slightly historic information which was obtained in 2008 when the Council originally considered the use of the site under the Building Schools for the Future programme.

The planning applicant would have to update this information prior to the submission. This updated survey work would also take into account the planned highway improvement works that would be carried out by the Council in advance of the School becoming operational.

In addition to a Traffic Survey, it is likely that a planning applicant would also need to include a Travel Plan which shows how children would access the School. The Travel Plan would also look at ways in which green and sustainable travel methods could be encouraged to mitigate the amount of traffic generated from the development proposal.

18. If the Council can fund the cost of the highway works for the Diggle site, why can't it fund the additional costs of the School remaining on the existing Saddleworth School?

It is anticipated that the Council will need to invest an additional contribution to deliver the School proposals on any site. However, in respect to the costs of funding works for the School to stay on the existing site, this is likely to be significant. Even if the funding of temporary accommodation etc. was to be resolved, traffic disruption during the build and potential health and safety issues of trying to balance construction traffic, school traffic and pupil access along a lengthy but narrow school drive would be challenging.

The Council is looking to acquire part of the former WH Shaw Pallet site by way of a landswap using the existing Saddleworth School site. The terms are in the process of being independently verified by the District Valuer but, due to the inequality of value in the Council's favour, by proceeding with the swap, the Council would receive a capital receipt that would be used to help fund the highway improvement works at Diggle.

19. What is proposed for the existing school in Uppermill if the replacement school is developed in Diggle?

The existing owner of the former WH Shaw site would acquire the existing Saddleworth School site once it is vacated. The developer would be responsible for demolishing the property and then hopes, subject to obtaining planning approval, to build a scheme of aspirational, family sized houses on the site. This is consistent with how the Council would want to see the site developed.

Design

20. Who is responsible for the design of the building?

The EFA has prepared a 'Control Option'. This detailed design would then be submitted by Interserve as planning applicant on behalf of the Secretary of State.

21. Can the Council / School influence the design?

Interserve have not yet commenced the detailed design of the school. However, both parties can hold discussions with the build contractor following the feasibility review to provide their views on the current proposals and seek alterations that do not increase the overall cost or reduce the specification.

A Technical Group has been setup which comprises Ward and Parish Councillors, Council officers, representatives from the School and members of the public who have offered to provide professional input and assistance. This group will look to work with the build contractor and Council to ensure that the best solution is delivered.

22. How many storeys will the School building be?

The final design solution isn't known although, the Control Option does show a building which takes account of the topography of the site, with a two storey building at the frontage, with a three storey building to the rear of the site (nearest the Brook).

23. Will the building be detrimental to the setting of the Grade II listed clock tower?

The impact of the new building on the setting of the Listed Building will be a planning consideration and something that the applicant would need to address through effective discussions with English Heritage who are likely to be a consultee to the application.

24. Will the Sports Pitches have floodlights

The School are keen to allow the local community to use the facilities onsite. In order to allow this, it is likely that any sports pitches would need to have floodlighting. If this is the case, it is likely that a planning condition would limit the opening hours of the pitches to protect the nearby houses against any noise and light pollution.

The EFA are unlikely to pay for floodlights and therefore, if appropriate, it is likely that the Council would have to contribute to this cost.

Flood Risk

25. Is there a risk of flooding from either Diggle Brook or the nearby Huddersfield Canal?

In January 2010, Oldham Council commissioned JBA Consulting to produce a Hybrid Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. The report advises that, "the Diggle Brook flows through the Diggle School site; however, the risk from this small watercourse is estimated to be low. The sequential approach to development layout should be applied within the site so that the most vulnerable development is located away from the watercourse. Flood depths are predicted to be shallow and flood hazard is considered to be low. Where flood depths are up to 0.6m, this risk can be managed by appropriate access, egress, flood warning and emergency planning procedures."

The report continues to say that "whilst the actual risk to Diggle School from Diggle Brook is low, the residual risk from the Huddersfield Canal is more significant, as it lies on higher ground to the east of the site. This residual risk could potentially cause the greater flood hazard to the school, which is in the Canal Hazard Zone. Subject to the findings of more detailed Flood Risk Assessments, these development sites should manage this residual risk by appropriate access, egress, emergency planning procedures and finished floor levels which incorporate a freeboard allowance for the risk from the canal."

A Flood Risk Assessment will therefore be completed and submitted as part of any future planning application. This may mean that further flood protection or remedial measures are needed to mitigate the impact on the School.

26. Will the development and hardstanding result in increased risk of flooding downstream in Uppermill?

In respect to the development and associated hardstanding, the impact of run off can be effectively managed through appropriate drainage systems. The Hybrid SFRA report itself acknowledged that "all development proposals should look at opportunities to incorporate SUDS to reduce the risk of surface water flooding (Sustainability Appraisal indicator). Surface water run-off from these sites should not increase as a result of development and not discharge into the combined sewer system."

27. What will happen if the Council or School refuse the money available under the PSPB scheme?

If it is agreed that the offer of funding is rejected, then the School will have to remain in its current dated and poor condition facilities. Options would be limited and on a worst case scenario, if the property continues to deteriorate, the school could be closed, with pupils travelling to nearby Schools inside and outside of the Borough instead.

The Council and School are not aware of other funding schemes that might become available in future years.