

Notice of:	EXECUTIVE
Decision Number:	EX48/2023
Relevant Officer:	Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services
Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Young People and Aspiration
Date of Meeting:	11 December 2023

EXPANSION OF HIGHFURLONG SPECIAL SCHOOL PHASE TWO

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To seek approval to proceed with the further development of The Meadow site at Highfurlong School - subject to Planning consent - to accommodate a single-storey hydrotherapy centre extension to the previously approved two-storey extension and associated facilities to ensure sufficient local provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To approve the development, utilising the currently appointed phase 1 contractor (Conlon Construction) who have been appointed following a procurement process via the Procure NW Framework.
- 2.2 To approve the budget of £1.99 million for phase two of this scheme.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 A planning application has previously been approved to develop The Meadow on Garstang Road West to accommodate a two-storey extension with associated facilities to ensure sufficient local provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). A further planning application has been made to incorporate the provision of a hydrotherapy centre (phase 2) into the development of The Meadow.

Following a tender exercise in early 2023 via the Procure NW Framework, Conlon Construction were appointed for the construction of the phase 1 development. Construction works commenced on site in July 2023 and are progressing well. Within the tender process for phase 1, tendering Contractors were made aware of the potential for a further phase 2 project subject to funding and approvals. The most cost effective and time efficient

mechanism for undertaking the phase 2 construction is to instruct these works under the JCT Standard Building Contract with Quantities (2016) that Conlon Construction are currently completing the phase 1 building under.

Highfurlong Special School reached a cohort of over 110 students in the summer term 2022, which is three times the number five years ago. The growing number of pupils in special schools is in part as a result of changes in legislation introduced in 2014, but also due to children surviving with more complex medical needs than historically was the case.

Despite additional building works being undertaken during that time to create extra space at the school, the capacity of the existing building is now over stretched. An independent school capacity report dated March 2022 found that Highfurlong's building has a deficit of space equivalent to four classrooms when compared against current pupil numbers. The school has now saturated its existing footplate and is no longer able to effectively deliver complimentary curriculum activities such as design technology, music and life skills, despite winning the prestigious School of the Year award in 2021.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient suitable places are available for all pupils across the town. The proposed expansion at Highfurlong School would help to ensure that Blackpool Council can meet the needs of children with complex physical and medical disabilities.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 If additional provision is not provided the Council would have to rely on Out of borough SEND provision, including associated transport costs, which is both expensive and not always in the best interests of children and their families.

4.2 The Council could seek to appoint a Contractor separately to undertake the phase 2 project following the completion of the phase 1 by Conlon Construction. However this would cause issues with the operability of the school and could also prove to be a more expensive method of construction.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is: "Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience".

6.0 Background information

- 6.1 Highfurlong Special School benefited from a single storey infill extension in the summer of 2021, which enabled it to continue to meet the needs of their increasing pupil numbers. The school has used its existing space as flexibly as possible and has now reached saturation point of their existing footplate due to the nature of the physical requirements and associated equipment of the current cohort.
- 6.2 Land known as “The Meadow” currently sits unused on the site due to significant level differences. Phase One will see the two-storey extension built, with a covered walkway created to link to the existing site via the top floor of the new building. The ground floor of the new building will comprise facilities for post-16 students, alongside a new kitchen that will serve the whole school (currently facilities are shared with Aspire Academy). There will also be a community café at the front of the school designed for post 19 students to gain valuable employment skills and increase the commercial viability of the venture through improved public access from the main road. The upper floor would comprise classrooms and ancillary spaces for secondary aged pupils. Under the development proposals the existing building would house primary pupils.
- 6.3 Phase two will see the creation of a new single storey fit-for-purpose hydrotherapy suite. The hydrotherapy suite will be constructed in a manner that allows for a second storey to be built in the future should demand necessitate this. Now additional funding has been identified, both phases could be delivered in tandem in order to benefit from cost efficiencies whilst contractors are on site.
- 6.4 Phase 1 commenced on site in July 2023. Subject to relevant approvals, it is anticipated works for phase 2 would commence on site in December 2023 for completion by October 2024.
- 6.5 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? Yes

Appendix 5a is not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. It is considered on balance that the public interest would not be served by publishing information at this stage as this information would undermine the Council’s position in future negotiations and could risk the scheme not being able to proceed.

7.0 List of Appendices:

- 7.1 Appendix 5a – Financial considerations (exempt)

8.0 Financial considerations:

- 8.1 See exempt information at Appendix 5a, to the Executive report.
- 8.2 Children's Services has allowed a budget envelope of £4.8 million for phase one of the scheme, and costs will be contained within that budget. The scheme is being funded from a combination of education capital, including Basic Need, High Needs Provision Capital Allocations, and School Condition Allocations. Alongside other planned capital schemes, reliance is being made on known future allocations of Basic Need funding in 2023/24 and 2024/25, and of High Needs Provision Capital Allocations in 2023/24.
- 8.3 A bid for capital funding to deliver phase 2 of the scheme was submitted as part of the Department for Education's Safety Valve programme and this was successful. The funding for phase 2 works comes entirely from the additional £6.2 million that was allocated to complete these works and additional works within Blackpool schools.

9.0 Legal considerations:

- 9.1 Legal negotiations have concluded with Fylde Coast Academy Trust and the leasehold interest in the land known as The Meadow has been transferred surrendered from by Fylde Coast Academy Trust.
- 9.2 The procurement position has been reviewed to ensure compliance with the Council's procurement process.
- 9.3 The terms of the funding in respect of Phase 2 have been reviewed to ensure compliance with the same.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

- 10.1 Not progressing the proposed expansion would mean the local authority would be unable to meet its statutory duty to ensure that sufficient suitable places are available for all pupils across the town. This would create further pressure on the High Needs budget, as places would need to be secured in more costly independent special schools outside of Blackpool.

11.0 Equalities considerations and the impact of this decision for our children and young people:

- 11.1 Highfurlong Special School caters for the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities. The expansion scheme will ensure that the needs of more children can be appropriately met in local provision, reducing the need for lengthy transport journeys, and enabling children to be part of their local community.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 The scheme at Highfurlong Special School is being developed in line with Blackpool Council's Climate Change Declaration. The scheme will include the provision of air source heat pumps in lieu of conventional gas boilers. Provision will also be made for a number of solar panels to be installed. The scheme is also required to achieve a BREEAM rating of very good.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 Statutory public planning consultation is being undertaken. Information on the proposed development was shared with parents of pupils at the end of summer term 2022, and school employees are being kept updated about progress with the plans. Community information sessions were held during the course of the public consultation period.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 Planning application 23/0607 is available on Blackpool Council's website at [Simple Search \(blackpool.gov.uk\)](https://blackpool.gov.uk)

15.0 Key decision information:

15.1 Is this a key decision? Yes

15.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number: 23/2023

15.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? No

15.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

16.0 Call-in information:

16.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process? No

16.2 If **yes**, please give reason:

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

17.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):

Date informed: 1 December 2023 Date approved:

18.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):

18.1 None.

19.0 Summary of Discussion:

19.1 Mr Chris Coyle, Assistant Director for Children's Services, presented the report to the Executive. Mr Coyle reminded the Executive that when phase one of the Highfurlong development had been approved by Executive the intention had always been the further development of The Meadow site to include a hydrotherapy pool.

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Young People and Aspiration, spoke in support of the application highlighting the benefits for families in providing such needed facilities within Blackpool.

20.0 Executive decision:

20.1 The Executive resolved as follows:

1. To agree that Appendix 5a to the Executive report, the Financial Considerations is not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as it includes detailed costings that enable the scheme to be viable. The publication of such information could prejudice continuing and future negotiations.

2. To approve the development, utilising the currently appointed phase 1 contractor (Conlon Construction) who have been appointed following a procurement process via the Procure NW Framework.

3. To approve the budget of £1.99 million for phase two of this scheme.

21.0 Date of Decision:

21.1 11 December 2023

22.0 Reason(s) for decision:

22.1 A planning application had been approved to develop The Meadow on Garstang Road West to accommodate a two-storey extension with associated facilities to ensure sufficient local provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). A further planning application had been made to incorporate the provision of a hydrotherapy centre (phase 2) into the development of The Meadow.

Following a tender exercise in early 2023 via the Procure NW Framework, Conlon Construction were appointed for the construction of the phase 1 development. Construction works commenced on site in July 2023 and are progressing well. Within the tender process for phase 1, tendering Contractors were made aware of the potential for a further phase 2 project subject to funding and approvals. The most cost effective and time efficient mechanism for undertaking the phase 2 construction would be instruct these works under the JCT Standard Building Contract with Quantities (2016) that Conlon Construction are currently completing the phase 1 building under.

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Despite additional building works being undertaken during that time to create extra space at the school, the capacity of the existing building is now over stretched. An independent school capacity report dated March 2022 found that Highfurlong's building had a deficit of space equivalent to four classrooms when compared against current pupil numbers. The school had now saturated its existing footplate and would no longer be able to effectively deliver complimentary curriculum activities such as design technology, music and life skills, despite winning the prestigious School of the Year award in 2021.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient suitable places are available for all pupils across the town. The proposed expansion at Highfurlong School would help to ensure that Blackpool Council can meet the needs of children with complex physical and medical disabilities.

23.0 Date Decision published:

23.1 12 December 2023

24.0 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

24.1 The Executive noted the two alternative options firstly that the Council could choose not to proceed with the development but this would mean that the Council would have to rely on Out of borough SEND provision, including associated transport costs, which is both expensive and not always in the best interests of children and their families.

Alternatively, the Council could seek to appoint a Contractor separately to undertake the phase 2 project following the completion of the phase 1 by Conlon Construction. However this would cause issues with the operability of the school and could also prove to be a more expensive method of construction.

The Executive agreed to reject both these alternative options.

25.0 Executive Members in attendance:

25.1 Councillor Williams, in the Chair

Councillors Benson, N Brookes, Burdess, Hobson, Hugo, M Smith and Taylor

26.0 Call-in:

26.1

27.0 Notes:

27.1 The following Non-Executive Members were in attendance: Councillors Galley, Hunter, Marshall and M Scott.