

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Bohunt Wokingham School Sixth Form: Options and Recommendations</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday, 28 September 2023
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Services - Prue Bray

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

The report provides an option appraisal, timescale, costs and value for money tests, making recommendations to inform the Executive's decision.

The outcome is that students in the rural southwest (Finchampstead, Arborfield, Swallowfield and Barkham) will be able to take A level courses locally while there will be additional local Year 7 – 11 school places and that the new sixth form will be part of local inclusion system contributing to preparation for adulthood for the SEND cohort, both with and without EHCP.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive

- 1) Notes the additional feasibility work undertaken and the assessment of options to bring 6<sup>th</sup> form education to Bohunt with timescale and costs/value for money tests
- 2) Adopts the recommended option of delivering the provision of 300 sixth form places and 150 extra Year 7-11 school places by the construction of an extension to the existing school building (Option 1), while the new sixth form being part of local inclusion system contributing to preparation for adulthood for the SEND students, both with and without EHCP.
- 3) Approves a capital budget up to £5.25m funded through borrowing towards the school extension, subject to the Bohunt Education Trust (BET) match-funding current cost estimates and sharing risks related to increased building costs and their commitment to the provision of the additional required school places
- 4) Delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services and Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Executive Member for Children's Services and the Leader of the Council, to enter into an agreement with the Bohunt Education Trust (BET) to secure the provision of additional school places and the commitment of match-funding and shared liabilities for the school extension.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Council has been working hard with its school partners to plan and ensure the appropriate level of sufficiency of secondary school places for the next five years. This

level of sufficiency has not yet been secured whilst uncertainty exists in certain schools' offers of extra places. The securing of additional year 7-11 school places at Bohunt, as well as sixth form provision, would contribute positively to achieving the optimum level of sufficiency in secondary school places across the Borough.

On 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022 the Council's Executive approved a proposal to part fund a scheme to create a new sixth form, create additional Year 7 places and enhance inclusion at the Bohunt Wokingham School. At the time, the project was intended to provide a 300 place sixth form, opening in the near future (2022 or 2023) with a total scheme budget of £5.7M. Costs were to be split between the council (£3.7m) and the Bohunt Education Trust (BET) (£2m).

A further report in July 2023 reported that the estimated costs for a school expansion, including sixth form provision, had risen to £10.5M.

In light of these increased costs, and the risks of further cost increase (particularly due to inflationary pressures) WBC are seeking from BET a commitment to the match-funding (50:50) of the budget required to provide the increase floor area to provide sixth form provision and additional year 7-11 places. In addition WBC are also seeking from BET a commitment to the sharing of the risk if prices do increase. Immediately prior to the July 2023 Executive meeting, the BET Board confirmed their willingness to contribute £5M to the project. Whilst this commitment of funds is very welcome and significantly contributes to the required budget provision, it is short of a 50:50 match funded position by £0.25M.

Three options were considered in the July 2023 report as ways of addressing the increased costs and identified funding gap. These were:

1. To maintain WBC's current financial contribution and build a smaller building
2. To increase WBC's financial commitment recognising the decision of the Bohunt Trust to contribute £5m and subject to the affordability of the capital programme
3. To explore alternative existing accommodation to cover the period until the new accommodation is ready or to make it a permanent sixth form site.

This report provides the results of further feasibility work on these options, with an option appraisal, project timescale, costs and value for money tests. Option 1 was discounted following further assessment as the size of building that could be constructed within current approved budgets would not provide the capacity required to accommodate sixth form provision, additional year 7-11 spaces and SEND provision.

Following this further feasibility work, it is recommended that the Council progresses with an extension to the existing school building, as this is the most deliverable plan in the required timescales and ensures that WBC can meet previous commitments given to 6<sup>th</sup> form provision, provide additional capacity in the borough for year 7 – 11 places and provides an opportunity for collaboration between the BET and WBC for the new sixth form to be part of local SEND preparing for adulthood solutions.

## BACKGROUND

### *School place provision*

In planning for secondary school places, the provision of 5% quality school place surplus is considered the optimum level of sufficiency in terms of value for money school place planning. In other words, having a 5% surplus would achieve value for money by avoiding costly last minute crisis management of school place shortage. The Council has been working hard with its school partners to plan and ensure the appropriate level of sufficiency of places for the next five years. This level of sufficiency has not yet been secured whilst uncertainty exists in certain schools' offers of extra places. The ability to secure additional year 7-11 school places at Bohunt, as well as sixth form provision, would contribute positively to achieving the optimum level of sufficiency in secondary school places.

### *Previous approval for Bohunt school expansion*

On 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022 the Council's Executive approved a proposal to part fund a scheme to create a new sixth form, create additional Year 7 places and enhance inclusion at the Bohunt Wokingham School. At the time, the project was intended to provide a 300 place sixth form, opening in the near future (2022 or 2023) with a total scheme budget of £5.7M. Costs were to be split between the council (£3.7m) and the Bohunt Education Trust (BET) (£2m).

In July 2023 Executive considered a report which updated on the proposals for the provision of a sixth form at Bohunt. This report set out that the estimated building costs had increased significantly, reflecting the impact of high inflation rates, the necessity to ensure the building proposals fully reflect the Department for Education premises standards and design, costing, supervisory and project management costs. It was reported that the current expansion option was now estimated to cost circa £10.5m. This is an increase of £4.8m, above the current agreed project budget of £5.7m (£3.7m from WBC and £2m from the Bohunt Education Trust).

In light of these increased costs, and the risks of further cost increase (particularly due to inflationary pressures) WBC is seeking from BET a commitment to the match-funding (50:50) of the budget required to provide the increase floor area to provide sixth form provision and additional year 7-11 places (currently valued at £10.5M total). In addition WBC is also seeking from BET a commitment to the sharing of the risk if prices do increase. Immediately prior to the July 2023 Executive meeting, the BET Board confirmed their willingness to contribute £5M to the project. Whilst this commitment of funds is very welcome and significantly contributes to the required budget provision, it is short of a 50:50 match funded position by £0.25M.

Three options were considered in the July 2023 report as ways of addressing the increased costs and identified funding gap. These were:

1. To maintain WBC's current financial contribution and build a smaller building
2. To increase WBC's financial commitment recognising the decision of the Bohunt Trust to contribute £5m and subject to the affordability of the capital programme
3. To explore alternative existing accommodation to cover the period until the new accommodation is ready or to make it a permanent sixth form site.

Option 3 related to a potential opportunity identified of providing sixth form accommodation in an alternative building adjacent to the existing school, namely the former garrison building, owned by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (part of the Ministry of Defence). The Executive report identified a number of constraints and risks associated with this option, and the Executive requested further feasibility work to be carried out to a conclusion (either feasible and affordable, or not deliverable) and to be reported back to the Executive in the Autumn.

This report provides the results of that feasibility work.

### *Timescales*

The need for certainty on the timescales and deliverability of the option for sixth form provision is a key driver in making a decision on how to proceed. While BET could provide sufficient accommodation for the first year of the 6<sup>th</sup> form in the current facilities, they need certainty over the delivery timescales of an extension to accommodate both the first and second years. Physical provision of additional floorspace for sixth form provision needs to be place and operational by September 2025, to enable 6<sup>th</sup> form entry for the first year in September 2024 within the current facilities.

## **BUSINESS CASE**

Following the July 2023, further feasibility work has been carried out by the Council's Commercial Property Team in conjunction with the Council's Education and SEND Services.

Option 1 "To maintain WBC's current financial contribution and build a smaller building" considered in July 2023 has been discounted, as the size of the extension that could be built within existing approved budgets would not be big enough to accommodate sixth form provision and additional year 7-11 places and SEND provision. This would therefore not represent value for money as the extension would not be fit for purpose.

Therefore 3 new options were considered in this latest round of feasibility work:

- New Option 1: School Expansion  
This requires an extension to existing school building to provide additional floorspace
- New Option 2: Utilisation of MoD building.

The MoD building has outline planning consent for a community use within the outline planning consent for the development. The provision of community facilities within the district centre of the Arborfield development is in line with the Council's Core Strategy (Policies CP18; Appendix 7) and the Supplementary Planning Document for Arborfield, which states the district centre should provide a range of community facilities and services. The current planning application (ref:230872) currently being determined by the Local Planning Authority, includes provision within the MoD building for a community facility which could include Barkham Parish Council offices, community facilities for hire, library provision and a nursery (currently operating from the current Arborfield Community Centre). The planning application is expected to be determined in October 2023.

In discussions with the MoD, they have indicated that they are not willing to make the MoD building available for other uses (including education/6<sup>th</sup> form provision) due to the impact it will have on the delivery of the community infrastructure, and the wider Arborfield Green programme. Unless the Council has a clear and deliverable plan for how the community facilities could be delivered elsewhere within the community then the MoD would retain the building for community uses as per the planning consent and policy requirements.

Therefore as part of this feasibility work, officers have looked at the opportunities and costs for the re-provision of the planned community facilities which could meet the requirements of the MoD for an alternative delivery plan.

The MoD building has a bigger floor area that required for a 6<sup>th</sup> form, but it is not big enough to accommodate both the sixth form and all the community facilities listed above. The design team have therefore looked at potential options and configurations of the building which would be the most efficient in terms of most uses accommodated. Three options have been identified:

- a) Bohunt 6th form only: Refurbishment of MoD building for 6th form use (note this provides an over-supply of floorspace of circa 300m<sup>2</sup> (out of a total floor area of 1600m<sup>2</sup>, building more than what a 6th form requires)
  - b) Bohunt 6th form & community parish office (shared use): Refurbishment of MoD building for educational use & community parish office and self-serve library. Includes remodelling & new side extension and front entrance
  - c) Bohunt 6th form & nursery (shared use): Refurbishment of MoD building for educational use – both sixth form and nursery. Includes remodelling & new side extension and front entrance.
- New Option 3: As a default consideration that WBC do nothing: No further expansion works at Bohunt school funded by WBC.

### ***Option appraisal***

(See table 1 – option appraisal)

**Table 1 – Option Appraisal – Summer 2023 Feasibility Work**

Options		Pros	Cons	Cost to WBC & Value for Money	Timescales
<b>1</b>	Bohunt School expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- meets WBC commitment to build the 6th Form provision. Beneficial for longer term needs</li> <li>- provides additional capacity in the borough for year 7 – 11 places</li> <li>- opportunity for collaboration between the BET and WBC for the new sixth form to be part of local SEND preparing for adulthood solutions                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Within WBC and BET control so deliverable (subject to budget) and will be ready for 2025 admissions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> <li>- Requires additional budget provision from WBC</li> </ul>	<p>£5.25m - Using 50% from WBC= £35k cost per place – (DfE benchmark £26k per place)</p>	<p>Sept 2025</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extension would need to be operational by September 2025 for Bohunt to meet their aspiration for 6th form opening Sep 2024.</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	Utilising the MOD Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- meets WBC commitment to build the 6th Form provision. Beneficial for longer term needs</li> <li>- provides additional capacity in the borough for year 7 – 11 places</li> <li>- opportunity for collaboration between the BET and WBC for the new sixth form to be part of local SEND preparing for adulthood solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Requires new planning approvals (change of use).</li> <li>- Requires identification of and commitment to alternative site(s) and additional capital budget for reprovision of community facilities.</li> <li>- when required community facility reprovision included this option has higher costs than school expansion option (1)</li> <li>- contingent on identification &amp; commitment to alternative site &amp; budget and negotiations with MoD (not in WBC control) so delivery not guaranteed</li> </ul>	<p>Costs (include 6<sup>th</sup> form provision and community facility provision):</p> <p>a) = £6.6m b) = £7m c) = £9.6m</p> <p>VfM (50% from WBC):</p> <p>a) = £44k b) = £46k c) = £64k (DfE benchmark)</p>	<p>Uncertain ( identification of alternative community facilities not guaranteed)</p>

				£26k per place)	
3	Do nothing	- avoids circa £5.25m expenditure	- Fails to secure a 5% quality school place surplus which is considered by the industry as optimum VfM level to avoid costly last minute crisis management of school place shortage.  - Ending of several years' joint endeavours of building a new sixth form carries reputation risk	0	N/A

### **Recommendation**

New Option 1 “School Expansion: 2-storey side extension to existing school building” is recommended.

This option will realise the following benefits:

- additional capacity in the borough for year 7 – 11 places
- opportunity for collaboration between the BET and WBC for the new sixth form to be part of local SEND preparing for adulthood solutions
- value for money if Year 7-16 extra places and SEND preparing for adulthood commitment are secured as well as sixth form places.
- Delivers on WBC commitment to build the 6th Form provision
- Is a deliverable option, subject to budget, as site is within WBC control
- Deliverable within required timescales

New Option 2 “Utilisation of MoD building” is not recommended.

This option is not recommended because it:

- would need new planning approvals (change of use);
- introduces some potential delay and uncertainty while negotiations over the building and its use take place; these affect the delivery of the community facilities as well as the 6<sup>th</sup> form
- would need identification of and commitment to alternative site(s) and additional capital budget for reprovision of community facilities;
- has higher costs than school expansion option and does not represent value for money.

These uncertainties and disadvantages of Option 2 negate the benefit of having a new sixth form in the borough and present a significant risk to the Council’s budget.

New Option 3 “Do nothing and no further expansion works at Bohunt school to be funded by WBC” is not recommended. In planning for secondary school places, the provision of 5% quality school place surplus is considered the optimum level of sufficiency in terms of

value for money school place planning. In other words, having a 5% surplus would achieve value for money by avoiding costly last minute crisis management of school place shortage. Excluding an extension of provision at Bohunt, the current proposals that WBC and other schools have been working on have not yet secured this optimum level of sufficiency for next five years while uncertainty exists in certain schools' offers of extra places. Therefore an option of not expanding Bohunt would not contribute positively to achieving the optimum level of sufficiency in secondary school places within the Borough.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

*The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.*

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
	Option 1 – School extension		
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0.5M	The expenditure would be funded through borrowing	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£3.4M	The expenditure would be funded through borrowing	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£1.25M	The expenditure would be funded through borrowing	

### Other Financial Information

As noted above BET have increased their contribution to £5m. This does not quite equate to a match-funding 50:50 split of scheme costs. This principal will be sought in a formal agreement between WBC and BET. It is anticipated that future running costs of the expanded school will be provided for in line with the current lease arrangements.

Further budget (£0.05M) will be required in financial year 2026-27 for retention monies for the construction contractor.

### Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)

This is matter is within the financial limits of the Executive under 5.1.9.4, and Recommendation 4 is empowered by 5.4.3(a) of the Constitution.

### Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

No consultation required

### Public Sector Equality Duty

Equalities assessment to be appended

**Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030**



The school expansion project will, as minimum, comply with statutory policy requirements regarding energy efficiency.

**Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session**

Not applicable

**List of Background Papers**

Report to Executive on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022 and 27 July 2023

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