

Date 25 October 2012

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Dear Parent or Guardian

New Portobello High School

I am writing to you as a follow-up to my letter of 18 October. Earlier today the full Council considered the report I submitted to them which can be found at <http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/newportobelloschool> and copies are available in your school. I am pleased to advise that Council approved the report recommendations including reaffirming that the site on Portobello Park remains the Council's preferred location for a new Portobello High School.

We will now progress the twin-track approach of which one strand is to pursue legal options to allow us to build the new Portobello High School on part of Portobello Park. However, it is also important that we consider what alternative site options could be available in the event that our preferred approach does not, ultimately, prove to be possible. I appreciate that any alternative site options would represent a significant compromise in comparison with a new school on part of Portobello Park however it is important that we have a **back-up** plan.

As I explained in my last letter we have explored all possible alternative site options in, or around, the catchment area for both schools and the options identified were very limited. An initial assessment has been undertaken regarding the feasibility of each site; primarily to see if a new school could be accommodated on it and if there are any issues relating to factors such as planning consent and accessibility.

A summary of each site option for both schools has been produced and can be found at <http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/newportobelloschool>; copies will be available in your school. Each summary provides the following which we think is important for you to have in considering how appropriate each option would be for a new school:

- The associated pros and cons;
- Where the site is located in the school catchment area including its proximity to the current school population; and

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- An illustrative design showing how the school might be configured on the site.

For options not in Council ownership there are other factors being assessed including acquisition cost and any site issues.

Four fall-back site options for a new Portobello High School have been identified. These are summarised below and compared against the preferred option of building the new school on Portobello Park.

	Site Size	Full-size pitches	St John's Relocation?	Off-site Decant?
Preferred option on Portobello Park	4.7ha ⁽¹⁾	2	No	No
1. New build on existing (extended) site	3.46ha	1	Yes	Yes
2. Phased new build on existing (extended) site	3.46ha	1	Yes	No
3. New build on Baileyfield	3.0ha	1 ⁽²⁾	No	No
4. New build on Brunstane	4.5ha	2	No	No

(1) The site size for Portobello Park above excludes the area of Millennium Planting of around 1ha to the north of the site but includes an area of 0.6ha to the south east which remains as open space.

(2) The illustrative site configuration shows how it could be possible to fit a single full-size pitch on the site however this is tight and any variation in the design required might reduce the actual size of pitch.

Time to Deliver Each Option

If the existing legal impediment could be resolved in around 14 months (by the end of 2013) and Balfour Beatty retained as the contractor the new school could be built on Portobello Park in an estimated 36 months.

Options 1, 3 and 4 above could be completed in between 48 and 54 months. For option 1, this assumes that St John's RC Primary School would not have to be moved prior to the construction of the high school starting; by locating the 3G pitch in the area shown in the study and completing this last, this should be possible.

Option 2 could be completed in a period of around 73 months. This is longer than other options as the site currently occupied by St John's has to be available before construction could start. The time to deliver the high school is, however, assumed to be mitigated to some extent by progressing the project in tandem to ensure construction of the new high school could start when the primary school site was released.

New Option – Phased New Build on Existing Site

The potential for a phased build on the (extended) existing site has now been explored with the conclusion being that such an option is feasible. This was not reflected as an option in the Council report as, at the time of publication, it was still being assessed but has now been added as a new option 2 above.

By using the area occupied by St John's and the area to the east of the high school site (where the all-weather pitch is located) a new teaching block could be constructed whilst existing school buildings remain in operation. On completion of the new teaching block, the school would decant to it allowing the majority of existing buildings to be demolished to allow the construction of a new sports block.

The existing sports buildings would be retained and used by the school until the new sports block was completed following which they would be demolished and the new 3G pitch built. This option does not come without challenges including a longer build period and the school being in very close proximity to a building site for several years. However it would avoid the disruption and significant cost of a decant.

Some options for a new Portobello High School would have a direct impact on the location and/or timing of a new St John's RC Primary School. A number of options have been identified for a new primary school which I have not detailed in this letter but can be found on our website <http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/newportobelloschool>.

Getting Your Feedback

The Baileyfield site is currently being marketed for sale and is one of the options for both schools. If we wish to consider it we need to act quickly. Although the time to do so is short, we want to get feedback from the school communities on the options identified. I hope that the further information above, together with the more detailed summary information now produced for each option, is helpful.

Earlier this week, the Convenor and Deputy Convenor of the Education, Children and Families Committee met with representatives from most of the affected school Parent Councils although not all could attend. The purpose of the meeting was to brief them on the Council report and ask for their assistance in seeking a collective view from their respective school communities on the options identified. I am grateful for their support in doing this in such short timescales and understand they will be in contact with you directly to establish how feedback from your school community can best be provided. We have asked for responses by Tuesday, 6 November to allow consideration in the next report to Council on 22 November which will actually be published on Friday, 16 November.

Although not mentioned specifically above, the option of creating a combined school for Portobello and Craigmillar was considered and two potential sites identified on the Brunstane Estate and in Craigmillar Town Centre. The details are set out in the last Council report at Section 3.6 and in Appendix 5. Any feedback from your school community on such a proposition would be helpful.

Please note that, even if we do decide to purchase the Baileyfield site for either school, a full statutory consultation process would still have to be carried out with the school and local community before any final decision was taken to actually build a new school on the site. This process would take approximately six months to complete and there would be opportunities for detailed feedback at this stage.

I will write to you again in advance of the November Council meeting to advise you of the intended next steps and any associated recommendations.

Yours sincerely



Gillian Tee
Director of Children and Families