

**Meeting date:** 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020  
**Report to:** Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children, Education & Skills  
**Subject/report title:** Free School Development Proposals  
**Report from:** Director of Children's Services and Skills  
**Report author/lead contact officer:** Steve Fenton Head of Access and Development



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**Wards affected:**  All Wards  
**Public/private report:** Public  
**Exempt by virtue of paragraph:** Select an Exemption paragraph from the Quick Parts drop-down list

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## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report presents an update on the development proposals to create a special Free School catering for pupils with Autism and associated high level Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs located in North Solihull.

## 2. Decision(s) recommended

2.1 The Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills is asked to approve the disposal of approximately 1.70 hectares of land as shown on the plan attached to Appendix A to facilitate the development of the school.

## 3. Matters for Consideration

3.1 On the 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020 Cabinet Member received a report on the progress made with the development of scheme proposals for the new Special Free School in Solihull. The report included a request to approve the disposal of approximately 1.44 hectares of land to facilitate the next stages of the development of the Special Free School in North Solihull.

3.2 The DfE confirmed the appointment of Forward Education Trust to run the school in late July. The Trust have determined the school will be called "The Heights". Since August the DfE, the trust and the DfE appointed technical advisers have worked together to develop the final version of the feasibility study and design proposal for the building.

3.3 During discussions with the DfE and Forward Education Trust, Council Officers requested that the building design considers the potential to increase pupil capacity by

16 places (to 116 places), should future demand require it.

3.4 As the revisions to the design have progressed, the DfE have confirmed that additional land on the site is required to deliver a building that fully meets the statutory requirements of the planned pupil cohort that will attend the school.

#### **4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?**

4.1 The proposed design scheme has been reviewed by the DfE Design Advisor. To ensure compliance with the DfE area guidelines for SEND and alternative provision (BB104), the DfE have requested that the proposed boundary of the new school is moved a further 21.9m into the current playing field area. A breakdown of the required additional space is provided below:

4.2 **An additional 5.1m of land** is required for the car park and drop-off area. During design discussions with Forward Education Trust it became clear that a higher number of minibuses will be involved with dropping-off and picking-up pupils. The additional land allows for a footpath to be built to the west of the car park to enable safe movement of pupils from the minibuses to the entrance of the building.

4.3 The larger car park and drop-off area requires a larger proportion of the overall site and has claimed part of the outside space that would have been available for the pupils.

4.4 **An additional 15m of land** is required to ensure sufficient outdoor space for the pupil cohort. This enables the outside environment to be divided appropriately to provide sufficient space for the primary / secondary cohort of pupils attending the school.

4.5 The Heights will have both Junior and Secondary phase pupils. The additional land will be used to create routes for pupils to get access to their respective outside spaces without having to design outdoor corridors or pen like areas. The proposed design will use different habitats to create buffer zones throughout the outside space.

4.6 **An additional 1.8m of land** is required to allow for the option to increase pupil capacity by 16 places (to 116 places), should future demand require this.

#### **5. Reasons for recommending preferred option**

5.1 The revised design has been developed in conjunction with Forward Education Trust and takes into account more detailed thinking as to how the new school will operate. The additional space allocated to the site will create a school that is fit for purpose for the proposed cohort of pupils.

5.2 The additional land required ensures that the building and outdoor space complies with the design requirements of the DfE area guidelines for SEND and alternative provision (BB104).

5.3 There will remain a parcel of land of 0.71 hectares that would remain with the Council.

## 6. Implications and Considerations

### 6.1 How the proposals in this report contribute to the delivery of Council Plan priorities:

Priority:	Contribution:
<p><b>Economy:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Revitalising our towns and local centres.</li> <li>2. UK Central (UKC) and maximising the opportunities of HS2.</li> <li>3. Increase the supply of housing, especially affordable and social housing.</li> </ol>	<p>These proposals seek to create additional specialist school places to meet increasing demand for places for pupils with EHCPs. Demand for places is increasing due to higher levels of complex need, growing school cohorts and families migrating into the Borough through new housing development.</p>
<p><b>Environment:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Enhance Solihull's natural environment.</li> <li>5. Improve Solihull's air quality.</li> <li>6. Reduce Solihull's net carbon emissions.</li> </ol>	<p>By creating additional specialist places in Solihull, more families will be able to access places closer to home and limit the number that have to travel, in some cases significant distances, to access provision outside of Solihull.</p>
<p><b>People and Communities:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Take action to improve life chances in our most disadvantaged communities.</li> <li>8. Enable communities to thrive.</li> <li>9. Sustainable, quality, affordable provision for adults &amp; children with complex needs.</li> </ol>	<p>Increasing the number of specialist places in 'good and outstanding' schools in Solihull will offer high quality school places, close to home, for some of our most vulnerable pupils. These proposals offer a more cost effective method of provision delivery, predicated on a model of creating two places in Solihull for the cost of one place in Independent provision outside of Solihull..</p>

### 6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

- 6.2.1 Consultation with the approved Stakeholder Forum (the Schools Forum) is undertaken on a termly basis in relation to capital works, notwithstanding bi-annual approvals by Cabinet Member.
- 6.2.2 Updates on the development of SEND school places and the progress on the new special free school are shared with parent/carers groups on a termly basis.
- 6.2.3 Local consultation has also been undertaken with site and community stakeholders at earlier stages of this process. The proposed boundary change has been specifically discussed with the key community group, CARS, and no concerns have been identified.

6.2.4 A further round of consultation on the proposal to create the special free school is required as part of the pre-opening stage of the process. Officers will work in partnership with the Forward Education Trust to deliver this.

6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 The budget for the Council's contribution towards this project of £0.850m was approved by the Cabinet Member on 18 December 2019 and remains unchanged.

6.4 Legal implications:

6.4.1 The creation of new specialist provision and the expansion of existing provision is subject to statutory processes.

6.5 Risk implications:

6.5.1 The scheme to develop the new school will not be able to proceed as planned without access to the additional area of land identified.

6.6 Equality implications:

6.6.1 None as a direct result of this report.

## **7. List of appendices referred to**

7.1 Appendix A: Revised site plan showing previous and proposed red-line areas.

## **8. Background papers used to compile this report**

8.1 None

## **9. List of other relevant documents**

9.1 None