

Northfield Primary Schools Feasibility Study

March to June 2023

Initial Information for Stakeholders

Introduction

The Council is carrying out a feasibility study between March and June 2023, to identify potential options for reducing the number of primary schools in the Northfield Associated Schools Group (ASG). To help inform the outcomes of the feasibility study, we are inviting comments and feedback from pupils, parents, staff, community groups and all other stakeholders, on the options available, and the potential impact of these options on individual schools and communities. This valuable feedback will be used to help inform the outcomes of the feasibility study and potential next steps.

This paper provides information for stakeholders on why the feasibility study is being carried out, and what the study will focus on. Stakeholders are invited to submit their comments and feedback about the feasibility study, using our online consultation hub, which can be found here:

<https://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/education-and-childrens-services/northfield-primary-schools-feasibility-study>

Background

Within the Northfield ASG, pupil numbers at Bramble Brae School, Manor Park School, Westpark School and Muirfield School are well below the available space at these schools, which means they each have a significant amount of excess unused space within them. Pupil numbers at these schools are expected to continue to fall significantly over the next seven years, making them inefficient to run.

The Council's School Roll Forecast, which shows the numbers of pupils expected to be attending each school in the city over the next six years, is available to download from the Council's website, here:

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/education-and-childcare/schools-and-education/schools-pupil-roll-forecasts>

In the Council's approved [School Estate Plan](#), the need to reduce the number of primary schools in the Northfield ASG has been identified, to help ensure that our school buildings can continue to be run as efficiently as possible, and to avoid schools having too much unused capacity. Officers have been instructed to carry out a feasibility study, to identify what actions the Council could take to reduce the number of primary schools in the ASG.

Feasibility Study

The feasibility study will be used to identify what options are available to the Council, and it will set out the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Details of what will be covered by the feasibility study are provided in Appendix 1, below. Officers will use the findings of the feasibility study to identify a "preferred option", which will be presented to Councillors for consideration.

As the feasibility study is carried out, we are inviting pupils, parents, school staff, community groups and other stakeholders to comment on the likely options for reducing the number of primary schools in the ASG, and how these options might impact on them if they were taken forwards. Feedback received from stakeholders will be included in the feasibility study and will be considered when identifying a preferred option.

Comments and feedback on the options listed in Appendix 1, and suggestions for any additional options which could be included in the feasibility study, can be submitted via our online consultation hub, which can be found here: <https://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/education-and-childrens-services/northfield-primary-schools-feasibility-study>

The findings of the feasibility study, along with summaries of the feedback received from stakeholders, will be included within an Outline Business Case, which will be presented to the Council's Education and Children's Services Committee in Autumn 2023. The Committee will then make a decision on whether to accept the preferred option, and what action, if any, should be taken next. Any proposal to close a school would require a formal public consultation, before the Council could decide whether to implement such a proposal.

Key Dates for Feasibility Study and Stakeholder Engagement

The intended dates for the Feasibility Study and Stakeholder Engagement are presented below. As the Study progresses, officers will provide regular (monthly) updates for stakeholders, outlining the options which have been considered, any feedback received so far for each of those options, and any further questions which stakeholders may wish to consider.

Monday 27 th March:	Feasibility Study Launched
Monday 17 th April:	Stakeholder Engagement Launched – Information Paper added to Consultation Hub
17 th April to 16 th June:	Stakeholders invited to submit comments and feedback via Consultation Hub
Monday 1 st May:	First Progress Update for Stakeholders added to Consultation Hub
Monday 29 th May:	Second Progress Update for Stakeholders added to Consultation Hub
Friday 16 th June:	Feasibility Study Closes
Monday 3 rd July:	Feasibility Study Report shared on Consultation Hub
Tuesday 12 th September:	Outline Business Case presented to Education & Children's Services Committee

Initial Questions for Stakeholders

We would like to know your initial thoughts on the information presented in this paper, and on the options identified to date, as listed in Appendix 1 below.

Stakeholders may wish to consider the following questions:

- What are the likely advantages and disadvantages of the options which have been identified?
- Are there any other options which should be included in the feasibility study?
- What additional information should the Council consider as part of the feasibility study?
- What questions about the feasibility study do you have at this stage?

Feedback on the above questions, and any other relevant comments, can be submitted via our online consultation hub, which can be found here:

<https://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/education-and-childrens-services/northfield-primary-schools-feasibility-study>

Appendix A – Feasibility Study Brief

Below is a summary of the Feasibility Study Brief. This outlines the objectives of the project, the options to be considered, and what information the final Feasibility Study Report needs to provide:

Project Objectives

To be sure that the feasibility study can meet the requirements set out in the School Estate Plan, the options identified in the study should be aimed at achieving the following:

- A reduction in the number of primary schools operating within the Northfield ASG
- An overall revenue saving in terms of building running costs
- A positive impact on reducing carbon emissions and on the Council's net-zero ambitions
- The remaining primary schools to be maintained at between 80% and 95% occupancy for at least 6 years following implementation, as determined by the most recently available school roll forecast data
- All remaining schools to be below 2 miles' safe walking distance from all homes within the catchment area

Options to be included in the Feasibility Study (not exhaustive)

To achieve the objectives outlined above, the following options will be considered in the Feasibility Study. Within each of the options below there will be several sub-options, which consider the various combinations of schools which could potentially be merged, closed or replaced:

- Option 1 – Close one school, and re-align catchment areas to provide pupils from that school with places at the remaining schools
- Option 2 - Merge two schools together, to form one new school in an existing building, and close the other building
- Option 3 - Merge two or three schools, to form one new school in a new building to be constructed, and close the existing buildings

Additional options may be identified and added to this list as the feasibility study progresses.

Questions to be considered by the Feasibility Study

The feasibility study will address the following key questions, and a final report will be provided at the end of the study which sets out the answers to these questions:

- What are the benefits / dis-benefits of potentially closing each school site?
 - Consider costs / savings, benefits / dis-benefits of closing each site
 - Consider impact on carbon emissions and contribution to the Council's net-zero ambitions
 - How could the existing catchment areas be realigned to maintain reasonable safe walking distances to school?
- Which would be the optimal site to be retained and to 'host' a merger with another school?
 - Consider running costs, carbon emissions, accessibility, sustainable travel
 - Requirements for improvement / refurbishment of buildings
 - Consider forecast pupil rolls and capacity of existing sites to accommodate future pupil numbers
 - Consider benefits / dis-benefits of merging each combination of schools
- Which would be the optimal site for a demolition and rebuild to 'host' a merger of 2 or more schools?
 - Consider size of sites and requirements for a building to accommodate 2 or 3 existing schools
 - Consider impact on carbon emissions and contribution to the Council's net-zero ambitions
 - Likelihood of planning consent
 - Costs vs savings of replacement building
 - Likely timescales for demolition and construction
 - Likely temporary arrangements for accommodating pupils during demolition and construction